Centering Children’s Voices and Cultural Worlds in an Online Writing Club

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Abstract

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For 10 weeks, an online writing club was a place where seven children, ages 5 to 8, came together to co-construct a space for sharing favorite texts and composing practices. This study documents the ways that the writing club offered a space for children to construct shared literacy practices that allowed for new meaning-making, social relationships, and literate identities. As the researcher and facilitator of the writing club, I took up an inquiry as stance position, which provided a generative space for exploring the tensions between practice and theory. Additionally, literacy dig analysis provided an opportunity to understand the discursive elements of the popular culture texts that young children bring into their literacy practices. Taking up sociocultural and critical childhood frameworks as well as multiliteracies and multimodal models of literacy, I explored the following questions: How do young children narrate their identities and social worlds through text? What stories (narratives) and resources do young children value and take up when writing? How do young children take up the space of an informal, online writing group to pursue intellectual, social, cultural, and composing lives?

Over the 10 weeks, the writing club developed into a space where telling jokes, grabbing a notebook to learn how to draw like Dav Pilkey, and creating a plan for surviving "infinity holes" signaled belonging. Children shared interests often deemed inappropriate for school spaces (e.g., consumer culture, violence, and video games) and took up ideas from popular culture (e.g., Minecraft, LOL and Calico dolls, and Captain Cage) in their composing practices. The literacies of the children in this study were mobilized by family participation, the shared and

private spaces in homes, and opportunities to experiment outside of the constraints of school curricular goals and expectations. As the children engaged in transmedia and multimodal composing practices, new literate identities were revealed and established expertise in knowledge of popular culture and digital composing practices helped reposition how children were seen by their peers in the writing club. The social and composing practices of the young children in this online writing club have important implications for the ways we design writing spaces and curriculum for young children that center children's culture, composing practices, and ways of knowing and being as important resources for teaching and learning.

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Dedication

To my parents,

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for supporting me throughout this journey.

And to Chris,

for reminding me to enjoy this process.

Your love and support made this possible.

I love you.

Chapter 1 : Introduction

Background

Six-year-old Jorge is sitting at a table with four of his classmates during writing workshop. He reaches for the black crayon to color in the suit of the Batman character he has drawn on the paper. With an almost uncontrollable excitement, Jorge announces to the table: "I met Batman when I went to Disney World!" Nora, the only child who shows any sign of paying attention, glances at Jorge's paper, nods her head in acknowledgment before quickly returning to her own writing. Undeterred by the lack of response of his peers, Jorge returns to the task of coloring in Batman's suit. Just as Jorge begins to write the words "I went to" on his paper, Kate, his first-grade teacher, pulls up a chair to talk with him about his writing.

"How's it going?" Kate asks. Jorge, happy to finally have a captive audience for his piece, places his writing packet in front of Kate, where she can get a full view of his work. "I'm writing about Disney World! I met Batman!" Jorge tells Kate. Kate looks carefully at the detailed drawing that Jorge has produced. There is a clear representation of Jorge and of Batman standing next to each other. Carefully, Kate begins to ask Jorge about his plans for his writing:

Kate:	*Is this a story about a time that you went to Disney World?*
Jorge:	*Yes, and I met Batman.*
Kate:	*I can see that. What else did you do when you were at Disney World? Can you close your eyes and make a picture in your head of what you did at Disney World?*
Jorge:	*Batman and I went on an adventure!*
Kate:	*You did? [Kate gives Jorge a quizzical look] Is this a true story, Jorge? Remember, we are writing only true stories that happened to us, so that we can have a lot to say.*
Jorge:	*[Quietly taking his writing packet back] It could be true.*
Harrison:	*[Who has been quietly watching the interaction between Jorge and Kate] Disney World doesn't even have a Batman.*
Jorge:	*[Turns his paper over, rendering his composition invisible]*
Kate:	*Why don't you go grab another packet and we can look at your folder for some ideas for a new story.*

What had begun as an enthusiastic engagement with writing for Jorge quickly turned into a moment of frustration and embarrassment when Jorge's piece of writing was exposed for not fitting within the parameters of what counted as personal narrative writing in his classroom community. In Jorge's classroom, stories tended to be about special places, special events like

birthday parties, and everyday events like going to the grocery store or eating dinner. These types of stories were modelled by his teacher, Kate, with special attention given to writing true stories because these stories were deemed easier for young children to write well. Many of Kate's lessons relied on the writer's memory of a particular event, so choosing a true story was essential for producing the kind of writing Kate expected from each child.

Jorge picked up on the simple narrative structure that was expected for writing pieces about visiting a special place, and he carefully began his piece with the familiar sentence stem, "I went to _________." However, as much as Jorge understood the expectations for writing narratives in his classroom, Jorge's choice in topics never quite followed the strict guidelines set forth by his teacher. While this interaction did not provide an opportunity to learn more about Jorge's own goals for this story, or why he was interested in writing about his adventures with Batman at Disney World, it was clear that he was not interested in telling true stories about his everyday life. While Kate's goals for the writing unit were focused on children developing a particular set of writing skills and conventions to produce a predetermined outcome, Jorge's goals centered on proclaiming himself as a cultural being (Genishi & Dyson, 2009), with a desire to belong in a space where his interests and identity were often sidelined or deemed inappropriate within the official curriculum.

I observed the previous interaction in 2016, when I was working as a supervisor to a student teacher placed in Kate's classroom. Kate's school was in the same district I had spent 12 years of my teaching career, and I was very familiar with its reputation as one of the strongest reading and writing elementary schools in the district, if not the city. Kate was a white woman in her mid-30s. Her class of 24 first graders was predominantly white, with five children identifying as nonwhite (Latinx, East Asian, and South Asian). My familiarity with Kate, and the literacy

curriculum we had both utilized, made Kate's classroom an obvious choice as a research site for a pilot study I conducted that year. Jorge, a Latinx boy, sat at a table with the two focal children of my study and, as a result, became a frequent participant in my observations.

Writing time in Kate's classroom was an almost silent endeavor. Independence and quiet were encouraged with consistent reminders to "take care of each other, lower your voices, focus on your work." These were expectations that I was familiar with for they echoed similar norms I had worked hard to establish in my own classroom. While Jorge struggled to find topics for his writing that satisfied both his own goals and those of his teacher, his tablemates seemed to have an easier time. Harrison, a prolific and celebrated writer in this classroom, would often sit down and complete a three-page story in the first 10 minutes of the writing time. This provided Harrison with plenty of time to notice the work of the other children at his table and provide feedback. Harrison's feedback for Jorge, almost always in a quick whisper, focused on the ways in which Jorge's writing did not follow the teaching points Kate had given during her mini-lesson. This was a classroom where evidence of the teacher's teaching could be seen clearly in the writing of all the students and where the expectations and norms were made explicit enough that the children were able to monitor each other's ability to take up these practices. Together, the teacher, other children, and the curriculum set up conditions that limited Jorge's stories—they urged him to tone down on his imaginative adventures, stick to common stories that everyone else told, and, ironically, reveal little about himself in the spirit of "truth telling."

Problem Statement

The first grade (and more recently, the kindergarten classroom) has a long tradition of being the space where children are expected to leave behind playful composing through drawing and dramatic play to take up official schooled literacies. Built on the myth that "school-based

literacy is an exclusive or unalterable pathway to literacy" (Luke & Kale, 2017, p. 14), children like Jorge and his peers are pushed along similar pathways, regulated by universal standards of "good writing" and acculturated into a very specific mode of narrative storytelling.

According to Gordon et al. (2007), narrative is defined as "the way of recounting, constituting, representing, and constructing the story" (p. 326). A common form of narrative writing found in the early childhood classroom is the *small moments* story, which focuses on a single vignette. According to Calkins and Oxenhorn (2003), the small moments narrative structure allows young children to "retell a sequence of events with precise detail, and to write in such a way that a reader could follow those events" (p. v). Choosing a true story allows children to recall the important details and ascribe meaning to these small moments in their lives. Focus is placed on the product—a specific type of writing that is easily identifiable to the audience, and a specific kind of writer—which can be produced through a series of lessons on "author's craft" such as sequencing and "stretching out a small moment and making it big" (Assessment Rubric for *Small Moments: Personal Narrative*, Calkins & Oxenhorn, 2003). They suggest that stories which reflect busy lives—trips to the grocery store or bookstore, walks in the park—are more significant than stories associated with popular children's culture (as in Jorge's adventure with Batman). Importance is conferred on the activities and stories deemed worthy by the teachers, who hold up their own cultures, childhoods, and language and literacy experiences as a template when designing and implementing a writing curriculum (Newkirk, 2007), thus reproducing the "cultural capital of the dominant class" (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 149).

Schooled writing practices are composed of characteristic ways of taking up the identity of a writer and acting on and in the world (Dyson, 2020). Through curriculum (both scripted and not scripted) and cultural norms, classrooms produce values and expectations for what writing

looks like and the kinds of stories that are constructed and shared within official spaces. Thomas and Stornaiuolo (2016) used Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's powerful 2009 TEDGlobal, *The Danger of the Single Story*, to emphasize that issues of power are always present in deciding which stories get told. If stories are told often enough, they can become "sin qua non" (the essential way of being). Children like Jorge actively find ways to bring in unofficial practices during the official composing time. However, these efforts are often ignored or altogether silenced from what is celebrated and made public in these writing spaces.

Children enter school as active participants in the literacy practices of their families, communities, and peer groups. As members of these groups, children draw on shared oral, written, and media texts to participate in making meaning and communicating. Dyson (2016) explained: "children…have needs for making sense and making friends that may lead them down paths not imagined by school" (p. 6). Yet, these experiences and communicative practices are often marginalized by the official curriculum (Dyson, 2008; Yoon & Templeton, 2019). For children like Jorge, whose stories and literacy practices do not fit neatly within the cultural expectations of the classrooms they inhabit, the danger lies in the possibility of their stories (and ways of being) becoming silenced or acculturated in ways that narrow their literate identities (Yoon, 2015).

> It is not enough to simply hear every person's voice in a classroom. It may not be sufficient, respectful, or desirable to solicit personal stories from every student with the assumption that intimacy and connectedness will come from the telling of these stories. Students, particularly those whose backgrounds may vary from the majority of students in the classroom and those who are initially shy or resistant to school, may need new invitations and modes in order to contribute to the classroom discourse. (Vasudevan et al., 2010, p. 463)

Genres are socially constructed and are, therefore, always shifting and expanding as writers construct meanings within new literacies and cultural practices. However, schools often

take up fixed notions of genre, which fail to recognize the multiple ways children engage with literacies and make sense of their own lives. For children like Jorge, who communicates his life through popular culture and fiction, strict adherence to personal narrative genres limits his ability to tell his own stories. Furthermore, there are communities (mostly Communities of Color that are oral cultures sustained through stories across genres), so, inherently, the ways we privilege small moments—true stories or "everyday life" narratives—do not account for the ways that we might use alternate forms to tell these life stories.

Purpose

In this study, I trouble the assumption that young writers must be acculturated into specific genres and structures of writing with explicit features and requirements to be successful at writing. Furthermore, I question the notion that a strict adherence to specific narrative genre structure provides an opportunity for children to find truth in their writing as well as an opportunity for teachers and researchers to come to know these children and their lived experiences. Rather, through this study, I sought to understand what might be possible when young children are viewed as knowledge producers with repertoires of stories and narrative structures inspired from a range of cultural and literacy experiences in and out of official school spaces. I posited that providing children with access to multiple genres for storytelling offers teachers and researchers expanded opportunities to come to know children and their lived experiences as well as their literacy practices. The purpose of this study was to explore what happens when young children are invited to co-create the writing curriculum and choose their own topics, narrative structures, and modes of composing in an informal, online writing community. By examining these interactions, I worked towards uncovering the rich narratives

that children value and the complex literacies that children choose to engage with when given the opportunity to be co-constructors in their own literacy curricula within an online writing club.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following questions:

1. How do young children narrate their identities and social worlds through text?
2. What stories (narratives) and resources do young children value and take up when writing?
3. How do young children take up the space of an informal online writing group to pursue intellectual, social, cultural, and composing lives?

Theoretical Framework

This section looks at the movements and perspectives that have shaped both the practice and research of young children's writing. I begin with the movements that lead to the adoption of process-based writing instruction in classrooms to uncover the beliefs about children and writing that are inscribed in these practices. Next, I demonstrate how sociocultural, multimodal, and critical childhood frameworks offer new possibilities for researching and understanding children's composing practices.

Perspectives on Young Children's Writing and the Evolution of Writing Instruction

In 1966, scholars associated with the National Council of Teachers of English, the British National Association of Teachers of English, and the Modern Language Association met at a conference in Dartmouth, New Hampshire, with the goal of establishing a cohesive definition of the field of English, including the teaching of reading and writing. According to Harris (1991), the conference quickly fractured into two distinct groups, which became known as the American and British positions. The American position focused on *what* the content knowledge of reading

and writing should be, and *how* this knowledge should be translated to students. Inspired by Bruner's (1960) two-step model of education, in which a subject/discipline is first defined and codified before considering how to impart that knowledge to students, the American position argued that it was essential to establish English as a clearly defined subject in order for it to merit a position alongside the "New Math and New Science being taught in American schools" (Harris, 1991, p. 635). Following Bruner's (1960) conception of education, the main challenge of teaching is "one of representing the structure of [the] subject in terms of the child's way of viewing things. The task can be thought of as one of translation" (p. 3). As Boldt (2009) explained, the American model was concerned with "the *making* of an educated and productive citizenry through teaching established literacy skills, core knowledge, and virtues that shaped the abilities and personal characteristics of the students, as well as civilizing them through a shared national culture" (p. 10).

The British position, on the other hand, was concerned with the "lived experience [of the student] and the importance of language in bringing order to that experience" (Harris, 1991, p. 637). It pushed against the American call for teaching writing as a set of skills and structures and, instead, argued for a *growth* model, which honored the child's own uses of language and saw the challenge of teaching as understanding "how one learned to make full and expressive use of language" (p. 638). The role of the teacher in this model was to help nurture the natural abilities of the child; therefore, the curriculum and pedagogy were to be constructed from the interests and lived experiences of the child. According to Harris (1991), proponents of the British model believed that growth in language skills came from the "meaningful practice" (p. 638) of reading and writing, as opposed to explicit instruction in grammar, spelling, and literary structures. Inspired by trends in the teaching of art, which viewed the child as an artist, the

British position viewed children as young readers and writers who came to school with language and literacy repertoires worth exploring and encouraging (Harris, 1991). Therefore, "[p]edagogically, this meant that teachers should solicit, provide time for, trust, and take pleasure in children's writing responses to literature" (Boldt, 2009, p. 10). For those arguing the British position, the goal of teaching reading and writing was to help children develop the ability to mediate between their personal experiences and the social world in which they were immersed. Providing children with opportunities to engage with texts drawn from their own lived experiences was deemed essential to the project and essential for developing emotionally and socially productive citizens (Britton, 1970).

While the Dartmouth Conference ended with what appeared to be two competing and opposing views of the teaching of reading and writing, the ideas discussed at the conference continue to have a significant impact on the field of writing, often being taken up simultaneously in seemingly conflicting ways. This is particularly true within the writing process movement, first made popular by Donald Graves and his associates in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Pushing back against developmental assumptions of the teaching of writing, which focused on a sequential ordering of skills and habits for becoming a proficient writer, Graves put forth that children as young as kindergarten age could engage in writing that was similar in process to that of adults (Newkirk, 2007). For Graves, the process for all writers, regardless of age, should include time to practice, choice in topic and genre, opportunities for feedback and revision, and a space for publishing. As Newkirk (2007) pointed out, Graves's conception of children engaging in the same writing content and practices as adults was in line with Bruner's (1960) claim that "any subject may be taught to anybody at any age in some form" (p. 12, as cited in Newkirk, 2007, p. 539).

Over the years, the notion of patterning children's composing and writing habits after those of adult writers has become a central element of the pedagogy associated with process writing and the writing workshop model, made popular by Lucy Calkins, Shelly Harwayne, Ralph Fletcher, Katie Wood-Ray, Nancy Atwood, Carl Anderson, among others. Viewing themselves as writers first, these educators wrote extensively about their own writing journeys as evidence of "good writing habits" and encouraged teachers to develop their own writing lives in order to immerse themselves fully in the work of real writers: "If we ourselves are immersed in an ongoing way in our own writing, we have a fabulous resource to draw from when we teach" (Calkins, 1994, p. 13). The writing these teachers produced was meant to be used as mentor pieces for the students, providing examples of the kinds of writing they are expected to write—the topics deemed acceptable and the structures to be appropriated—as well as provide opportunities for the teacher to model the process of writing.

Barrs (1983) offered an important early critique of the pedagogy and assumptions around a universal writing process that was becoming a foundational component of the writing workshop. Referencing her own work as a publisher's editor, Barrs challenged the idea that published authors shared similar practices, stating, "I am unwilling to generalize about the right way to teach writing because I know it is not a uniform process but a very diverse, unpredictable and individual one which has a great deal to do with personality and temperament" (pp. 838-839). Importantly, Barrs questioned the premise of studying adult authors to develop writing practices for children. Pointing out that the very physical act of writing—putting words down on paper—is both "slow and laborious" (p. 832) for children, Barrs argued that children's writing can be incredibly powerful in their "economical" length, with carefully chosen words and a deliberate process, in ways that adult writing often fails to achieve:

> This seems to be one important difference between adults and children as writers. Children write to their own length, in their own voices. They are writers, but they are sometimes writers of a different kind from adult writers, with their own problems and their own solutions. It is sometimes valuable, in other words, to extrapolate from the situation of the adult writer to that of the child, and sometimes not. (p. 832)

Perhaps most significant to this study, Barrs (1983) questioned the orthodoxy around placing personal narratives as the most important genre for children to write and assuming that writing fiction would lead to inferior writing products.

Graves and his associates offered a model in which children were encouraged to draw on personal experiences in choosing topics and genres. Both Harris (1991) and Boldt (2009) suggested that Graves was influenced by the British position at the Dartmouth Conference and believed that children should have choice in their topics. Writing about personal events was also deemed helpful in the process of writing because it allows the writer to draw on their memory for drafting, stretching out important parts, adding specific details, and determining significance. In other words, the writing process—collecting ideas, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing—works better when children write personal stories. In Graves's work, children were encouraged to move away from writing fiction stories, in part because fiction was considered more difficult to take through the writing process (Barrs, 1983). One might argue that fidelity to the pedagogy of process writing and the final writing product were ultimately more important than the personal goals of the child and the writing they wanted to produce.

While quality writing was an important goal for proponents of the writing process, so too was producing particular kinds of writers who produce writing with a particular aesthetic. Lucy Calkins, a former research assistant and colleague of Graves, is perhaps the most influential scholar and educator behind the writing process and writing workshop model used in elementary schools today. For Calkins and her colleagues, the writing workshop provides a space for

children to bring their personal experiences into the classroom. The personal narrative, or small moments genre, takes on particular importance for its facility in creating a culture of storytelling and "positioning children to see their lives as full of stories!" (Calkins & Oxenhorn, 2003, p. iv).

As Newkirk (2007) pointed out, the personal narratives encouraged by Calkins and her associates emphasize a particular framing of childhood and what counts as good writing: "Even Calkin's examples of childhood experiences—dog shows, building dams across creeks—seem anachronistic, almost a throwback to an early Norman Rockwell version of childhood" (p. 543). This conceptualization of what a quality childhood entails—children exploring the outdoors, family activities and trips, time with pets—is prominent within progressive education discourses and presupposes the notion of the child as innocent (Canella, 1997; Dressman, 1993; Jenkins, 2007). Calkins and Oxenhorn (2003) drew on the moral panic of parents and educators around consumer culture and the "wholesale destruction of childhood" (Buckingham, 2011, p. 6) to make a case for a writing curriculum that teaches children that their lives are as important and "equally as fascinating" (p. vi) as the stories children are exposed to through popular culture. Citing Bill Moyers, Calkins and Oxenhorn (2003) asserted that children spend the majority of their time at home plugged into "the television, the Game Boy, the VCR, or the computer" and are practically "being raised by appliances" (p. iv); therefore, it is imperative that teachers take on the role of the protector of an authentic childhood. In the writing workshop, teachers can accomplish this through carefully curating the literature students are exposed to and the types of stories the teacher models in their own writing, thus providing an apprenticeship into "school approved literacy practices" (Souto-Manning & Yoon, 2018, p. 182). However, as Newkirk (2007) posited, Calkin's "leaves herself open to the charge that she is superimposing her 'construction' of childhood on children, luring them from their own inauthentic cultural

affiliations to her more authentic ones" (p. 543). It is important to recognize that even though the early workshop model offered more autonomy than previous scripted curricula, the workshop model was still an authoritative model which privileged particular literacies (Siegel & Lukas, 2008).

Towards a Sociocultural View of Writing Instruction

Schooled literacies, which often authoritatively dictate which practices and "which ways with text" count as "real literacy" (Collins & Blot, 2003, p. 3), are frequently derived from "autonomous" models (Street, 1984) of literacy. The autonomous model, as laid out by Street (1984), conceives literacy as a 'universal' set of skills and uses of language, conventions, and practices, which follow a developmental path, and work to both produce and reify dominant cultural ways of being and knowing. Under an autonomous model, the shape of narrative writing—which stories are told, the structures of stories, the composition of stories—is taken up in many classrooms as natural and simply what "good writers" do, as opposed to a set of conventions that have been socially constructed within particular communities with particular cultural practices and ideological stances.

A sociocultural approach to literacy is used to interrogate what "counts" as literacy within particular settings (i.e., the writing classroom) and recognizes literacy as fundamentally ideological (Street, 1995), with multiple purposes, uses, and meanings which vary based on social and cultural values and beliefs and change across time and space (Street, 1997).

Important to a sociocultural model of literacy is the "recognition that how literacy practices are structured and how they provide meaning constructs social relationships among people and social groups, as well as provides social identities to individuals" (Bloome & Enciso, 2006, p. 298). Therefore, everything from the mentor texts, the expectations established for what

writing time looks and sounds like, and the genres included in the curriculum have a material impact on the ways in which children engage as members of a community and how they identify themselves as literate beings (Yoon, 2015). While much of the official writing curriculum is often considered the domain of the teacher, children find ways to bring their own artifacts, tools, and signs, as well as social relationships, into the writing classroom, even if only in the unofficial spaces (e.g., Dyson, 1993, 2001, 2003, 2015, 2018). It is important to recognize that children enter schools and classrooms with language and literacy competencies reflecting the "multiple worlds" (Dyson, 1993) in which they engage. As members of their classroom writing communities, children participate in the production of the norms and expectations for the literacy practices and understandings of what counts as literacy within particular classroom settings.

Children, as well as adults, have goals and purposes situated in social practices for the writing they take up. In the early childhood classroom, these goals are often situated within peer relationships and peer cultures (e.g., Dyson, 1993, 2001, 2003, 2018). In other words, many of the literacy practices children take up are in service of obtaining a "ticket" (Dyson 2003) to participate in the social world of the classroom. For writing in the early childhood classroom, these practices include both the kinds of stories children tell as well as the symbolic processes involved in communicating meaning. Children creatively appropriate signs and symbols from adult writing practices to construct new understandings and uses in their own writing practices, in what Corsaro (2018) termed *interpretive reproduction,* with the purpose of participating in their own unique peer cultures. As Dyson and Genishi (1994) explained, "we evidence cultural membership both through our ways of crafting stories and the very content of our tales" (p. 4). It is through the desire to communicate and participate in shared meaning that children make sense of the signs and symbolic process that make up writing in the early childhood classroom. As

Dyson (1997) explained, “Children’s responses to each others’ [sic] symbolic acts imbue those acts with social meaning, and it is the sense of functional goal—of participating in some social communion—that organizes and drives the symbolic process”
(p. 18).

Lewis and Moje (2003) offered a critical approach to sociocultural theory that provides the opportunity to account for the political, cultural, and institutional systems of power in the production of self and the production of knowledge. *Identity* in this framework is understood as “an enactment of self, made within particular activities and relationships that occur within particular spaces (geographic, social, electronic, mental, cultural) at particular points in time” (p. 1984). Important to this study is the concept that people take their understandings and beliefs with them when they move from space to space and, therefore, are not fully recreated when entering a new space. Because these enactments are “situated in and constitutive of histories and of power” (p. 1984), children and adults enter school and learning communities with subjectivities that will both “fit in” and cause friction within their new communities. Children entering a new writing community will bring with them understandings and practices from previous writing communities in which they have participated.

Important to this study is the notion that children are active participants and producers of culture and not simply the beneficiaries of adult socialization (Corsaro, 2018). Included in this definition of culture are the language and literacy practices in which children actively engage, both in and out of official school spaces. Children come to school with literacies that are often “checked at the door” (Wohlwend, 2010) because they do not fit within the boundaries of what is considered school literacies:

> It is as if the developments in young children's lives outside of nursery and school are occurring within a self-contained, virtual bubble that has little to do with the first years of schooling, which generally continues to focus on phonics, print-based literacy texts, and canonical narratives. (Marsh, 2006, p. 23)

Conceptualizing Multiliteracies and Multimodal Composing

In the 21st century, much of what is checked at the door are the literacies that children have appropriated from engaging with multimodal texts, new technologies, and pop culture (Wohlwend, 2010). Exploring the multiliteracies that students bring to school and multimodalities of texts that can be found in both school and home literacies provides an opportunity to disrupt the normative practices of traditional school literacies.

Multiliteracies, which was originally conceived by the New London Group in 1996, recognizes that shifts in global migration and the proliferation of new modes of communication, including the internet, multimedia, and digital technologies, have changed the ways in which we communicate. The multiliteracies model challenges assumptions of the *autonomous* model of literacy, which continue to dominate schooled literacy practices.

It has been well documented that when literacy is viewed as a neutral technology (Street, 1984) and 'autonomous' literacy practices are implemented, children and families who come with differing literacy practices are viewed from a deficit perspective (Campano et al., 2013; Dyson, 2013; Souto-Manning, 2009). Digital technologies and new media are "one of many mediators available to young children to explore as they make, question, and share meaning within their worlds" (McClure, 2018, p. 157); therefore, space within the official curriculum should be made to include these literacies. Researchers have highlighted the powerful ways that multiliteracies and multimodal pedagogies can create humanizing and empowering practices for traditionally marginalized children and families by providing opportunities for children to

recognize their multiple literacies as valued forms of knowledge and communication (e.g., Campano et al., 2013).

As children engage with the ever-changing new literacies that are deeply embedded in the "techno-territory of family life" (Marsh, 2006, p. 23, quoted in Wohlwend, 2010. p. 145), they are not simply taking up these practices in ways that replicate the ways that adults take up these literacies. Children draw on the communicative practices of the content they consume to "assimilate, rework, and re-accentuate" (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 89) as they create new content and even new "hybrid literacies" (Wargo, 2017).

Reframing Child Writers: A Critical Childhoods Approach

Children enter schools with narrative traditions rooted in family, community, and peer literacy practices (Heath, 1982), yet these conventions are often ignored or intentionally sidelined by the curriculum because they do not fit within traditional notions of narrative and a universal construction of childhood. A critical childhoods framework examines how children and childhoods are constructed by adults and calls for research and pedagogy that explore how children construct and participate in their own social worlds. Pushing back against traditional approaches to understanding childhood, which focus on child development and a model of learning rooted in socialization, critical scholars and educators recognize children as active agents who are capable of contributing to the construction of their own subjectivity.

Critical childhood studies also recognize that classrooms are spaces where the boundaries of children's social worlds are in many ways controlled by adults. In the writing workshop, teachers make decisions regarding which texts and structures are used as mentors, they decide which modes of literacy are deemed appropriate, and they have the ability to provide or deny access to technology as a tool for writing. As Dumas and Nelson (2016) explained, "parents,

educators, policymakers, and researchers are motivated by valid concerns and protecting children, transmitting values and habits, and preparing them to lead productive lives" (p. 33). While these concerns may be valid—there are some topics that most adults would agree are too violent or sexually suggestive for children to consume or produce in school—they are, in themselves, motivated by cultural and ideological understandings of childhood and need to be interrogated as such.

In a time when notions of contemporary childhood are fueled by moral panic around the influences of digital media, there is a desire for adults to protect children by providing opportunities for children to engage in "authentic" cultural practices which represent a more innocent childhood (Newkirk, 2007; Wohlwend, 2010). Children are portrayed as addicted to technology and incapable of making smart choices in what they consume or are influenced by what they consume in ways that are harmful or threaten both their innocence and their potential to be productive citizens. "The overwrought message is that children lack the capacity to choose what is good for them because they have no self-control" (McClure, 2018, p. 154). A critical childhoods approach challenges these assumptions about children, digital media, and technology and calls for "new ways of seeing children" (Wohlwend, 2010, p. 144) to make sense of the ways in which children engage with multiple literacies to construct texts. Literacy scholars maintain that using a multimodal/multiliteracies lens to inform pedagogy will simultaneously provide access to the language of work, power, and community and nurture the critical engagement that is necessary for students to "design their social futures" (Crafton et al., 2007, p. 511). Siegel (2006) reminded us that in the new millennium, language usually works closely with multimodal forms of communication to extend meaning and social relations.

"The meaning-making possibilities we offer children are shaped by the ways that we see them" (Wohlwend, 2010, p. 144). However, it is important to recognize that not all children are afforded the status of child in this country; therefore, not all childhoods are seen by adults. The United States has a long history of denying Black children their childhoods. During slavery, Black children were expected to work as young as 2 and 3 years old and were punished for playing and engaging in childlike behaviors (King, 2005). According to Dumas and Nelson (2016), Black children today continue to be "outside of the public imagination of what childhood means" (p. 30), making it all the more violent when white teachers affix universal notions of childhood with their own cultural affiliations and expect all children in their classrooms to take up their literacy practices and narrative structures. Taking a critical childhoods stance to writing instruction provides an opportunity for Black children, as well as all children marginalized by the hegemonic construction of childhood, to construct their own identities by telling the stories that matter to them.

All children have stories worthy of composing, and while their most valued audience may be their peers, these stories are worthy of being taken seriously by adults as well. Yoon and Templeton (2019) extended the critical childhoods framework as a lens for listening to (and for) the stories that young children tell—the stories that all too often go unheard by adults. The authors argued that "hundreds of children's narrative fragments go unheard by adults" (p. 61). These fragments of stories are often shared with peers and are even nurtured in the unofficial curriculum during play and literacy activities but are largely ignored in the official curriculum (Dyson, 1997; Yoon & Templeton, 2019). Therefore, taking up a critical childhoods approach to writing workshop includes finding space in the official curriculum for the stories children come to school wanting to share. In order to do this, teachers must first learn to listen for these stories

in the unofficial spaces of the classroom, and then invite students to bring their stories into the official writing spaces; ultimately, they must provide opportunities for these stories to be nurtured and to unfold (Yoon et al., 2016).

Rationale and Significance

Traditional process writing spaces seek to provide students with an opportunity to reveal their own truths through "schooled literacies" (Cook-Gumperez, 2006) and schooled genres, such as a focus on *small moments* (e.g., Calkins & Oxenhorn, 2003), in a personal narrative unit. However, the strict enforcing of genres into school-based literacies (e.g., beginning, middle, and end; realistic accounts; appropriate topics) work to privilege racialized and dominant practices, and, ultimately, reify the kinds of writing that are valued as readable in school spaces. At the same time, many writing scholars have articulated that fantasy, speculative fiction, science fiction, and a host of other genres also say something about children's lives and uncover "truths" in profound ways. While children are encouraged to engage in make-believe play and stretch their imaginations beyond the borders of "real" before they enter formal schooling, that same kind of play is often marginalized when children compose texts.

This study adds to the literature on children's storytelling practices, including the ways in which young children engage with texts and genres outside of a traditional narrative writing unit. By designing a digital writing space in which young children are invited to take up composing in ways that are meaningful to them, this study provided an opportunity to examine further the cultural and social worlds of children and the literacies they deem important. Additionally, this study examined the possibilities afforded by flexible writing spaces, co-constructed with young children who tend to be overlooked in the research of independent writing communities. This dissertation study can contribute to the literature by scholars working towards understanding the

ways in which young children voice their social and cultural worlds through composing and engaging in writing communities.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

This literature review provides the reader with an awareness of the diverse perspectives on children as composers in the early childhood classroom. Utilizing sociocultural and critical childhoods frameworks, I aimed to explore the ways in which children and childhoods have been positioned in both traditional and flexible school writing spaces. Drawing on notions of agency and childhood culture, I considered the ways in which children cultivate their own social spaces and develop their own literacy practices within the writing workshop. Ultimately, I explored the ways teachers and children have worked to expand the canon and conceptions of which texts are sanctioned in school literacies.

While school writing spaces taking up a process approach promote student choice in topics as one of the most important tenets of their pedagogy, this "choice" is regulated by an ideology of "truth telling" (Dyson, 2013), grounded in a very particular construction of childhood—a childhood rooted in "nature" and protected from the influences of a mass consumer culture (Buckingham, 2011; Chin, 1999; Cook, 2014; Wohlwend, 2010). These "good choices" are guided by a desire for children to find significance in *authentic experiences*—trips to the park, family vacations, spending time with family, adventures with the family pet—in other words, experiences that have "little to do with the attractions of popular culture or the technological possibilities of visually mediated stories—video games, comics, television, movies, or sports" (Newkirk, 2007, p. 543). As Newkirk (2007) pointed out, "Students were free to make choices, as long as they fit a predetermined definition of 'good choices'" (p. 541).

Strict writing process approach advocates (e.g., Calkins, 1994; Graves, 1983) "have embraced an individualistic, Romantic rhetoric that abstracts writers and their texts from social context" (Lensmire, 1994, p. 381). With a focus on the individual writer, both in terms of finding

one's voice through "looking to your own experiences for what it is you have and you want to say" (Lensmire, 1998, p. 263) and the process of drafting and revising, the writing classroom becomes a place where writing in silence is encouraged, collaboration between writers is dissuaded, and the appropriation of texts is constrained to those texts deemed appropriate by the teacher.

In contrast, language and literacy theorists working with a sociocultural lens "examine children's texts in relation to the social contexts of their production" (Lensmire, 1994, p. 373). Important to this conception of literacy is the understanding that writing is "dialogic" (Bakhtin, 1986) in that texts are constructed in conversation with previously written texts and produced with an audience in mind. Included in this understanding of literacy is the acknowledgment that "stories are specific, rooted in particular cultural contexts, [and] don't tell single truths" (Kamler, 2001, pp. 45-46). For this reason, researchers working with a sociocultural lens have established a tradition of examining the writing of young children utilizing the ethnographic method of a single case study. The majority of the studies considered in this review of literature is made up of single case studies. The studies examined both the artifactual materials of the writing and the local context—most often a single classroom and, sometimes, a local community.

Today's school writing spaces are "situated in a world that is not standardized, a world in which daily life is increasingly crisscrossed with cultural and linguistic diversity and rapidly changing communicative practices" (Dyson, 2006, p. 10); this calls for expanded possibilities of what counts as writing in the early childhood classroom. In classroom writing spaces, in which traditional composing practices emphasize pen-and-paper modes of writing, multimodal theories of literacy have challenged the notion of printed texts as the dominant process for making meaning (Kress, 2010). Scholars have explored the ways children take up multiple modes,

including play, directing, talk, and drawing during composing times (Dyson, 2007; Falchi et al., 2014; Wessel-Powell et al., 2018; Yoon, 2020), thus underscoring "the ways that spoken and written linguistic modes are knitted into semiotic systems that are also visual, auditory, spatial, and gestural" (Falchi et al., 2014, p. 348). Recognizing that individual classrooms hold their own cultural ways of engaging in literacy practices, scholars have highlighted the ways in which signs, symbols, and modalities have been shaped and reshaped by children to meet the needs and demands of their members (Harste et al., 1984; Siegel, 1995, 2006). Multimodal theories of literacy provide an opportunity to explore the modes of communication taken up by children in both official and unofficial classroom composing practices, including digital literacies, which are often required to be checked at the school door (Wohlwend, 2010).

In this chapter, I begin by considering the significance of asking children to share their truth in a writing workshop centered around personal narrative. I then consider studies that demonstrated the possibilities for children and teachers to "unscript" the writing workshop and make space for diverse constructions of narrative and storytelling. Ultimately, I explore ways in which multimodal approaches to the writing workshop have opened up new possibilities for expanding the canon of texts introduced in writing spaces as well as providing expanded opportunities for child-driven authoring practices.

Finding the "Truth" in Narrative Writing

Advocates of the traditional process writing approaches embrace writing "true" accounts of personal experiences and relationships. Early childhood classrooms take up personal narrative genre studies designed specifically to support young children in writing a series of events in sequence and with detail, to capture meaning and importance (cf., Calkins & Oxenhorn, 2003). With the personal narrative genre at the center of the writing workshop curriculum, the goal is to

provide an opportunity for children to have “ownership” over their own writing by having a choice in topic. By instructing students to write “true stories” about their own lives, teachers are supporting students in finding significance in their childhoods and, hopefully, helping children to feel as though their experiences are worthy of documenting and sharing in the classroom space. However, as with Jorge (the student I described in Chapter 1), the commitment to the structures of the true story—a sequential retelling of the events of a real episode in the child’s life—can unintentionally limit opportunities for children to narrate their own childhoods in ways that have potential for producing both new understandings and connections as well as their own version of the truth.

For many educators utilizing the process writing approach, the personal narratives genre has become a writing practice considered to be “inherently good,” without interrogation or consideration regarding the “possible consequences of diverse students’ use of the genre” (McCarthey, 1994, p. 190). McCarthey’s (1994) study of a personal narrative genre unit in a socioeconomically and racially diverse fifth and sixth grade classroom revealed troubling emotional consequences for some students. In the story of one student, Anita, a Black girl from the Bronx, McCarthey drew attention to the ways in which the strict adherence to the “truth-telling” structures of the personal narrative genre limited Anita’s ability to write freely about topics she cared deeply about. Anita had kept a writing notebook as part of her class’s writing routines and, according to interviews, this notebook held special importance for Anita, and she took great pride in writing about the important moments and people in her life. However, when it came to choosing pieces to publish, Anita chose stories which avoided deeply personal issues regarding her family and often ended up writing stories about friendships or class trips that involved fewer risks—topics which in the eyes of her teacher, did not support the same kinds of

opportunities to "reveal something bigger (Calkins, 1991, p. 61). In discussing Anita's tension with the personal nature of true stories, McCarthey noted:

> For students from certain families or cultures, writing about their own personal relationships or experiences may conflict with cultural values and be inappropriate. An emphasis on personal writing may appear to be "culture free" and presumed to be appropriate for all students; however, assuming that "one size fits all" (Reyes, 1991) may disengage students from diverse backgrounds who do not share a value of revealing personal events. (p. 189)

Children like Anita, who may not feel comfortable or safe in sharing their personal lives in school spaces, often find their writing goals in conflict with those of teachers who value the bearing of "personal truth" in writing. Ultimately, McCarthey suggested that teachers should consider opening up the genres available to children in the writing workshop: "Other genres (for example, fiction) may provide students with opportunities to make sense of their lives in a way that does not necessarily require then to reveal deep personal issues or may provide outlets that make them less vulnerable to the consequences" (p. 189).

Peer relationships also play a role in which stories children feel safe sharing in writing classrooms. In an article reflecting on his own teaching and research in a third-grade classroom, Lensmire (1994) challenged the assumption that the "communities students and teachers create for themselves in writing workshops will be supportive and productive *for everyone*" (p. 384). He noted that the "free and familiar" spaces within the workshop, when children had some choice in how they solicited help, gave feedback, and collaborated with peers, reinforced the "stable patterns of peer relations that divide [students], [and] subordinate some to others" (p. 384). In this classroom, children who lived in a local trailer park were often ostracized by the other children, creating a space in which children felt unsafe to write stories which reflected their lived experiences as well as sharing their written work with peers. Lensmire (1994) pointed out that the writing workshop is not always used by participants to "discredit an unjust, official

order, but to reassert and reinforce ugly aspects of exactly the same unjust, larger society" (p. 387). As Lensmire (1994) noted, "we had better pay attention to the communities we create in writing classrooms" (p. 389). It is particularly important to understand how children marginalized by race, income status, and gender are impacted by these writing communities.

'Playing' with Truth and Fiction: The (Re)storying Practices of Young Children

Dyson (2013) pointed out that it is problematic to assign value to truthfulness when it comes to the lived experiences of young children because "cross-culturally, a major aspect of children's *real* life is *pretend play*" (p. 70). Through play, young children make sense of the world and "negotiate their identities" (Yoon, 2014, p. 110). Alongside play, fiction allows children to weave fantasy and make-believe with true life to explore the "things that they are reveling in right now or feeling a need to become more familiar with" (Cooper, 2009, p. 86).

The following studies explored the ways in which children have found opportunities to "restory" (Thomas & Stornaiuolo, 2016) and subvert traditional narratives, creating spaces "to try on more empowered identities, allowing them to experience—and perhaps invent ways out of—the constraints of dominant discourses in school" (Wohlwend, 2010, p. 17), as well as opportunities to (re)invent who they wish to become (Price-Dennis et al., 2017). Drawing on Freire and Macedo, Thomas and Stornaiuolo (2016) characterized restorying as "the complex ways that contemporary young people narrate the word and the world, analyzing their lived experiences and then synthesizing and recontextualizing a multiplicity of stories in order to form new narratives" (p. 317). For young children who may not see themselves in the narratives shared in school—both in read-alouds and the stories written by teachers and peers—and commercial media, restorying narratives provides an opportunity for children to "inscribe themselves into existence in response to efforts to silence, erase, consume, or ventriloquize them

within children's and young adult literature, media, and popular discourse" (Thomas & Stornaiuolo, 2016, p. 314).

In what Dyson (2020) labeled as a "toy box" (p. 37) of popular media—"characters, plots, appealing language, dynamic images" (p. 37)—children have a treasure chest of narratives and literacy practices to appropriate and recontextualize into stories which transform beloved characters into people who look like them. A young boy, wielding a "magic brown crayon" has the agency to transform "his beloved superheroes…identity [to] become Black like him" (Dyson, 2020, p. 37).

Restorying in composing practices can be used to negotiate membership within the peer cultures of their classrooms (Souto-Manning & Yoon, 2018). In her study of a writing classroom built around authoring and performing texts, Dyson (1997) demonstrated how children in one second-grade classroom used superhero play and the construction of superhero texts to gain access to peer circles. In this classroom, ninjas and the X-Men superheroes were "dominant cultural symbols" (p. 48), and both the boys and girls recognized that writing a good superhero text for children to act out was a powerful "ticket to play" (p. 47). Dyson described a classroom where coveted superhero and ninja roles were delegated by race, gender, and social positioning, leaving Black girls with some of the least desirable roles and, at times, completely excluded. For Tina and Holly, two Black girls in the class, this meant constant negotiation and insistence on being included. Recognizing that the X-Men team is made up of a diverse cast of men and women, Holly pushed for her classmates Laurence and Sammy to include more women in their superhero texts. After noticing a list of superheroes that Laurence had compiled, Holly exclaimed: "That's all! *(with exasperation)* You know some other girls in it *(with definitiveness)*" (p. 58). Eventually, Holly and Tina moved from petitioning more representation in other people's

stories to writing their own X-Men stories in which they could take on the most coveted roles. For educators and researchers, “Understanding the imagined identities children portray in play [and writing] may be particularly revealing in terms of understanding how they position themselves in the world” (Kendrick, 2005, p. 5).

In her study of the writing practices of a racially and socioeconomically diverse first-grade classroom, Dyson (2013) illustrated the ways in which children utilize fiction to write themselves into social events they have never experienced in their real lives. The classroom teacher, a middle-class, white woman, shared stories from her own life, including a stay in a hotel, trips to the grocery store, and adventures skiing. The children understood that these were acceptable topics for personal narratives, yet many of the children had never had these experiences themselves due to significant differences in cultural and socioeconomic positions between some students and the teacher. In response, the children “transformed the expected personal narratives into a set of literacy practices” (Dyson, 2020, p. 124) around imaginary trips to the grocery store, birthday parties, and playdates. In doing so, the children were able to imagine themselves (and their peers) as participating in social events to which they may not have had access in their own lives. As Dyson (2020) explained, the writing process itself became an opportunity for children to participate in the social aspect of planning events:

> At school, the children anticipating their birthdays (which sometimes were months ahead) seemed driven by the desire to entice peers who would want to be included in the planned party. Personal narratives thus became collective dreams whose enactment spilled beyond composing time into inside-recess (because of weather); children canvased (and noted on a list) those who would like to come to their party (which was everybody!). (p. 124)

While some stories were clearly fictional replications of the teacher’s stories, as became clear when several children wrote stories about going skiing (prompting a conversation regarding plagiarism), the children also became adept at telling original fictional stories which closely

followed the structures of personal narratives in ways that read as true to both the teacher and Dyson, and, therefore, received less scrutiny from the adults. While narrative content in the form of genres and truth telling dominates the structure of writing, I turn now to the language and literacy structures that also undergird writing in schools.

Multiple Ways with Words

In her groundbreaking work *Ways with Words*, Heath (1983) explored the complex ways language and literacy constructions are situated within the cultural communicative practices of homes, communities, and schools. In a comprehensive ethnographic study of three communities in a moderate-sized city of the southeastern region of the United States, Heath set out to understand how language and literacy practices are socialized and understood within distinct communities, and the ways in which the cultural communicative practices of these communities align or conflict with the communicative and literacy practices found in schools. In highlighting Heath's study, I emphasized the complex storytelling practices of Trackton, one of the communities in her study, to demonstrate the ways in which schools often fail to recognize the diverse literacy practices children bring with them to schools and how these practices offer an opportunity to expand what counts as "truth telling."

Heath (1983) described Trackton as a predominately working-class Black community transitioning from generations of working the land to participating in a changing economy fueled by the growth and decline of local mills and factories and its close proximity to the growing city of Alberta. The neighborhood was made up of two-family houses, which helped create a strong sense of community. In describing a typical Friday in Trackton, Heath noted, "Radios blare and record players are turned up high as separate or joint family activities center around each porch or living room. Occasional shouts across the plaza punctuate the general excited pace" (p. 71).

Heath referred to the front porches and the street as a “stage” on which “Trackton becomes the audience for the joint performances” (p. 72). In Trackton, Heath described a community where everyday interactions were opportunities for storytelling events—a practice children were encouraged to participate in, and a practice that required specific ways with words.

Boutte and Johnson (2013) explained that with Black language and literacy traditions, “There is a strong emphasis on oral tradition and the ability to use the language in a powerful and often improvisational manner” (p. 139). As Heath illustrated as well, storytelling in Trackton was built into everyday conversation in which multiple participants might be competing for the space to tell their story. Young children learned early that they must be “good” at crafting a story “i.e. highly exaggerated [and] skillful in language play” (p. 167), or the audience would quickly move onto another participant. The stories that were shared often included familiar people and events, which allowed the stories to “give all parties an opportunity to share in not only the unity of the common experience on which the story may be based, but also in the humor of the wide-ranging language play and imagination which embellish narrative” (p. 166). Scholars of Black and African American language practices have demonstrated the ways in which children learn how to manipulate and play with language, resulting in alternative meanings for words (Baker-Bell, 2020; Smitherman, 1997).

According to Boutte and Johnson (2013), research on the storytelling practices of Black communities reveals distinctive purposes and themes: “Instead of ‘school-type’ narratives, stories are usually about familiar people and contexts (as opposed to remote, unfamiliar topics)” (p. 139). Similarly, the stories children learned to tell in Trackton were often linked to real-life events, personal “accomplishments, victories over adversity, or cleverness in the face of a mutually recognized enemy” (Heath, 1983, p. 170). Baker-Bell (2020) explained that Black

language practices contain numerous rich rhetorical features, including call and response, cultural references, and linguistic inventiveness (p. 79). Likewise, truth in storytelling in Trackton was not synonymous with an exact or even realistic retelling of events. The children of Trackton took up the storytelling practices of the adults in their community and learned how to incorporate stylistic devices such as characters commenting on events, characters from popular culture, twists in the plot, and an emphasis on the emotions and impact of the story. This was highlighted in the tale 12-year-old Terry Moore told to a group of his peers:

> One day I was walkin' down de hall, now you ain't 'posed to do dat (pause), 'less'n you got a pass, and I ain't had no pass on my ass. And all of a sudden I hear somebody comin', and dere was a feelin' like my ass was caught for sure. And it was Mr. –, and he come roun' de corner like he knowed I was dere. I took out runnin' (pause) now don't ever run 'less'n you don't have to stop. Dat was my mistake. It was good while it lasted. I run all the way down Main, but my feet 'n legs start hurtin' and then I got me a strain, but den a power like spider Man, and I look back, and dis webfall all over Mr. –, and he struggle (pause), and he struggle (pause), and he struggle, 'n den dis big old roach [cockroach] come outta de walls of dem ol' buildings on Main, and that roach start eatin' his head (pause), his fingers (pause), 'n his toes (pause) 'n he holler, 'n he holler, 'n I come to de end of Main and I stop to watch… (Heath, 1983, pp. 181-182)

"Truth" in the Trackton stories could be found in the "universals of human strength and persistence praised and illustrated in the tale" (p. 186). To recognize the truth, "one must have some prior knowledge of the situation being recounted and must accept the ritualized routine of the performance as having meaning in the context of the community life" (p. 174). While these stories were sophisticated in structure, language play, and the ability to entertain an audience, these particular storytelling practices were not valued in the mainstream school the Trackton children attended.

According to Heath (1983), Boutte and Johnson (2013), and Baker-Bell (2020), Black children quickly discover that their ways of telling stories have very little value in the schools they attend. Writing curriculum expects children to tell simple, factual recounts of events with

clear introductions to the setting and characters, all of which are inconsistent with storytelling and language play in Communities of Color. Often, teachers and students from other communities do not understand or recognize the cultural contexts of the stories that the Black children cultivate in familial and communal contexts (Baker-Bell, 2020; Muhammad, 2020). As many literacy scholars have also noted, the inclusion of commercial characters are deemed inappropriate for school writing (Dyson, 1997; Yoon, 2020). Children like Holly who insisted that X-Men characters need more women (Dyson, 2013) or Terry Moore who lyrically improvised and juxtaposed language structures and resources (Heath, 1983) are viewed through a deficit lens rather than seen as sophisticated language users. Schleppegrell (2004) pointed out that language differences are often treated as a deficit by teachers, with detrimental consequences for students.

While Heath's research is still influential and relevant 40 years after publication, critical scholars have pointed out that Heath failed to address issues of power explicitly in her work (Collins & Blot, 2003; de Castell & Walker, 1991; Rosen, 1985). While Heath explicitly identified the race and socioeconomic status of the communities she included in her research, she neglected to unpack how racial and class stratification within communities are dependent on presupposed power relations, which impact the literacies in these communities as well as in the school. Critical scholars (Collins & Blot, 2003; Janks, 2010) argued that it is not enough to acknowledge the multiple ways with words that exist within and across communities; researchers and educators must also examine the ways in which power structures intersect and contribute to how these literacies are constructed and taken up in homes, communities, and schools.

Alim and Smitherman (2012) explained, "White Mainstream English and White ways of speaking become the invisible—or better, inaudible—norms of what educators and uncritical

scholars like to call academic English, the language of schools, the language of power, or communicating in academic settings" (p. 171). Writing workshops operating with white linguistic and cultural norms set up expectations that stories will be told using dominant linguistic structures, in what Baker-Bell (2020) referred to as "white linguistic and cultural hegemony" (p. 16). By normalizing and standardizing white language and literacy practices, the writing workshop becomes a space "that advances the needs, self-interests, and racial privileges of whites at the expense of linguistically marginalized communities of color" (p. 16), including children who speak nonwhite forms of English as well as children who are bilingual and biliterate. The standardization of literacy practices through accepted norms and scripted curriculum provides those with power—from institutions to individual teachers—the ability to decide which literacies count in schools (Lippi-Green, 2012). Baker-Bell (2020) argued that it is not enough to recognize the diverse language practices children bring with them to school; educators and researchers must also interrogate white linguistic hegemony and "provide students with opportunities to experiment, practice, and play with Black language use, rhetoric, cadence, style, and inventiveness" (p. 34).

Similarly, educators and scholars centering the language and literacy practices of bilingual, immigrant, and Native children have called for opportunities for children to use their home languages in school literacies (Ghiso, 2016; Gort, 2019; Moll & González, 1994; Yazzie-Mintz, 2011). By including the multilingual repertoires children bring with them to school, educators can work to disrupt the monolingual and monocultural structures of school literacies and foster more inclusive literacy instruction.

'Unscripting' Writing Instruction

The teaching of writing in American schools is situated within an educational environment of increased accountability and high-stakes testing, which has led to the standardization and proliferation of scripted curricula with a focus on 'autonomous' skills (Siegel & Lukas, 2008; Street, 1984; Yoon, 2013). The emphasis on transmitting particular skills, which can be easily assessed, aligns effortlessly with the construction of the term 'genre' as a "form-based collection of shared and identifiable text features" (Ghiso, 2013, p. 30). Genre-based units of study, in which an established set of characteristics are identified and made visible by the teacher and transferred to the students, have long been an integral part of the writing workshop model and make up the majority of the writing instruction found in published writing process curriculum (e.g., *Units of Study: A Workshop Curriculum*, Calkins et al., 2016). As Calkins (1994) explained, "The emphasis we place on genre is, in fact, one of the distinguishing characteristics of the work we do, one of the things that sets our work apart from other educators" (p. 357). However, as researchers in the field of literacy have documented, "curricular texts are given meaning by the participants who interpret their linguistic features, functions, and communicative intents (Yoon, 2013, p. 150). How curriculum is enacted by teachers is influenced not only by the 'official' discourses of schools (Dyson, 1993), but also by the individual ideological beliefs that teachers hold about the purposes for writing and how writing should be taught (Yoon, 2013). It is important to note that children are also key players in the production of classroom literacy practices in both the official and unofficial curriculum (Dyson, 1993, 2003; Kirkland, 2008; Yoon, 2013). In the following studies, teachers and children negotiate the understandings of what it means to be literate, the uses of artifacts, tools, and signs to construct unique writing communities. As Ghiso (2013) noted, "whom children become as

writers involves positioning them around teachers' invitations to take up these identities as well as children's own social and imaginative worlds" (p. 28).

School writing spaces are social spaces in which children and adults socially construct communities with their own practices and *translations* of curriculum (Yoon, 2013). In a study of a kindergarten writing classroom, Yoon (2013) noted how the teacher and students translated a scripted small -moments curriculum through interactions and the stories they composed. In this classroom, the children were invited to talk and participate during the teacher's lessons, and conversations during composing time were the norm. For one boy named Jamarion, a story about Santa Claus and his reindeer became a collaborative project with his tablemates who provided suggestions and revisions for his drawings, word choice, and storyline. While the unit focused on "true" small moments, stories including elements of fantasy and popular culture were accepted as appropriate topics. The writing practices the children took up, including genre, topics, mechanics, and symbolic representation, "were tied to social intentions and meanings" (p. 148). While seemingly unremarkable, the teacher's willingness to shift the space, materials, and topics of writing to include childhood cultures cultivated the social energy and collaboration described here.

In a study of the authoring practices of a first-grade classroom during a biography genre-unit, Ghiso (2013) examined the possibilities afforded to child writers when teachers open up the parameters of genre and provide opportunities for children to "play with genre in ways that attend[ed] to both social and academic agendas" (p. 35). The teacher, Blanche, and her students approached the process of the learning about and writing of biographies as a series of investigations and interrogations of the purposes of the genre:

> The class's work attends to deep-rooted questions of biographies, such as what it means to represent an individual, what constitutes the range of ways in which data can be gathered, how to judge the reliability of sources, how a wider audience might interpret the work, and the impact of someone's life on the world. (Ghiso, 2013, p. 35)

In this classroom, genre was conceived as a tool for writing, "a lens through which to understand and represent the subject matter" (p. 35), as opposed to a uniform set of structures, text features, and themes.

Ghiso (2013) noted that the teacher's stance of providing children with opportunities to play with genre features and expand the boundaries of what is possible within a genre allowed the students to construct "intimate and agentive interactions with knowledge" (p. 46). Even traditional literacy practices associated with nonfiction genre studies were open for interpretation and appropriation by students in pursuit of their own goals. For example, when the teacher introduced the inquiry technique of formulating questions for further research, one child took the opportunity to address her questions "directly to Benjamin Franklin, asking: 'When did you find electricity, Benjamin Franklin?'" (p. 44). The child's playful engagement with her research allowed her to position herself as a worthy participant in an intellectual conversation with a historical figure, illustrating what is possible when traditional genres are open to transformation.

Unscripting the school writing curriculum to make space for play and multimodal practices offers opportunities to "bring writer's workshop back to life" (Wessel-Powell et al., 2018, p. 323). In a study of a literacy *playshop* curriculum in a K-1 classroom, Wessel-Powell et al. (2018) illustrated the ways in which teachers and young children unscripted a traditional writing workshop space to make room for multimodal composing, including play, the construction of props and setting backgrounds, script writing, acting, and filming. The mentor texts included a range of multimodal media including short films, Readers Theater scripts, and visits from an oral storyteller who shared folktales with the students. The teacher's mini-lessons

went beyond elements of stories, to include lessons on prop-making, utilizing various instruments for sound effects, and operating a digital camera. For one group of students, who affectionately became known as the Zombie Boys, this was an invitation to explore their various media interests. In a "storytelling process [that] was constantly in motion" (p. 316), paper bags became zombie puppets, while Minion characters from the movie *Despicable Me* dropped bombs from overhead as battle scenes were fought, all set to the music of Michael Jackson's *Thriller*.

All of these studies emphasized the critical role of teachers in opening up the school writing space. As upholders of curriculum and gatekeepers of children's entry into literacy, the teachers in Yoon's (2013), Ghiso's (2013), and Wessel-Powell et al.'s (2018) studies destabilized the hierarchies of power that privileged specific genres and texts. Instead, their participation in interrupting specific forms of writing was just as important to dialogic (Bakhtin, 1986), socially negotiated, and culturally mediated (Dyson, 1997) spaces of writing.

Exploring Identities in Independent Writing Spaces

Black and Latina feminist scholars have documented the literacy practices that Girls of Color engage in when participating in collaborative, independent writing spaces outside of official school spaces (Edwards, 2005; Flores, 2023; García & Gaddes, 2012; Muhammad, 2012). The studies highlighted how the independent writing spaces provided opportunities for Black and Latina adolescent girls to engage with culturally relevant texts, explore their identities through writing, and "disrupt the oppressive apolitical contexts and silencing and controlling of bodies and narratives through the act of speaking one's truth orally, in writing, and through drawing" (Flores, 2018, p. 23). This study proposed that young children, and in particular young children of color, who are often denied opportunities to explore their full identities as children in school (Dumas & Nelson, 2016) can also benefit from independent writing spaces where they are

provided opportunities to build community, explore children's culture, and identities through child-chosen texts and composing practices.

Expanding the Canon: Popular Culture and Multimodal Literacies in the Writing Workshop

> How magnificent not to have to depend on the reader's literacy associations—his literary experiences—which can be as much an impoverishment of the reader's imagination as it is of a writer's. (Morrison, 1984)

The mentor text—both published children's literature and stories written by the teacher used to demonstrate writing practices—is an important tool of the writing workshop, and one that is held with a particular reverence by workshop advocates. Calkins (1994) talked about the power of literature to create "miracles" and "change everything in the classroom community" (p. 252). Relying almost exclusively on print-based texts, Calkins called on teachers to choose "books that bring us out, as people, to tell the stories of our lives in all their specificity" (p. 253), and to "read with the same feeling in your throat as when you first see the ocean after driving hours and hours to get there" (p. 252). This practice aligns with the romantic rhetoric outlined by Lensmire (1994), which suggested that children need to be shown how to find meaning in their lives and exposure to the right literature will provide children with the tools to compose meaningful stories and, in the process, discover their own childhoods. While this can be an important segue into the affective resonances of children's lives, literature in a digitally mediated world is one of many resources that *bring people out.*

Alternatively, scholars working within critical childhoods and multimodal literacy frameworks have focused their attention on the resources children themselves choose to take up as mentor texts in unofficial and official school spaces. Recognizing that children regularly engage with a wide range and modes of texts, including community and environmental print

(Larson & Marsh, 2015), popular culture (Dyson, 1997; Marsh et al., 2005; Yoon, in print), television (Jenkins, 2007), and digital landscapes (Marsh, 2016; Wohlwend, 2010), these scholars challenged the notion that the texts most important to children and their composing are the ones that are introduced by adults. Rather, these studies focused on how children frame their own childhoods through the texts they read and the stories they compose.

A significant body of research has been devoted to the ways children take up texts from popular culture in their composing practices through both play and writing (e.g., Dyson, 1997; Jenkins et al., 2002; Mitchell & Reid-Walsh, 2002; Yoon, 2020). As both consumers and participants in popular culture, children play with a "toybox" of textual features, appropriating "memorable characters, bits of dialogue, elements of plots, striking images, and appealing themes" (Dyson, 2008, p. 461) from commercial media texts into their composing. In analyzing the writing practices of two boys, Dyson (2008) demonstrated how the children incorporated their shared knowledge about sports and video games into co-constructed stories about imagined playdates, recontextualizing the texts to meet their own particular communicative ends.

Although not always welcomed, children find ways to bring popular culture into classroom writing spaces (Brownell, 2018; Dyson, 2008). Texts that may not be deemed appropriate or worthy of inclusion in classroom libraries find their way into the official and unofficial spaces of school literacies. In an inquiry study of one boy's use of mentor texts, Brownell (2018) discovered that Jairo, a 9-year-old self-identified Mexican American boy, appropriated elements of story, including accurately portraying the characters, storylines, and settings of the popular television show *Adventure Time*. Upon further investigation, Brownell learned that the television show has a series of spinoff books which the boy utilized in what Brownell termed *play(giarism)*: "an interactive space where children use facets of intertextuality

to bring worlds of play into their writing" (p. 219). While these books were not present in the classroom library, they were very much a part of the textual landscape on which children drew for their writing.

Children have their own agendas when it comes to engaging with texts, which often differ from the "textual imperatives that confront adults" (Jenkins, 2007, p. 163). In an intimate study of a group of kindergartners attending a *Pee-Wee's Playhouse* viewing party on a Saturday morning, Jenkins (2007) examined the ways in which young children socially construct meaning of texts; appropriate content from texts for social purposes (e.g., play and story narratives, jokes, and conversations); and integrate meanings into lived experiences. Jenkins demonstrated how the children showed "little interest in following the plot" and, instead, chose to focus on the "spectacle" and "fun" that the text offered. Similarly, when the children composed stories including favorite characters, the young children's composing practices were focused on "sensation" and the absurd; while at times, the work took up an "adult-like emphasis on linearity and causality," the stories did not necessitate solutions to problems or other adult "sanctioned rules" of narrative storytelling (p. 164).

At the same time, children are adept at finding ways to incorporate popular culture into ways that are palatable to adults and fit the sanctioned rules—the goals of the curriculum and classroom expectations (Yoon, 2021). In a study of the social spaces children cultivate during a kindergarten writing workshop, Yoon described a group of children who took up the practice of trademarking symbolic representations like stars and rainbows. Through social negotiations, the symbols took on meanings and were appropriated by all the members at Table #1. Jolene, the resident expert of making stars, also contributed to the construction of meaning for the popular rainbow symbol, which came to represent a "happy" ending to a story. All of her tablemates took

up this meaning and incorporated rainbows into their storytelling. The rainbow symbol became a tool for making stories built around popular texts like *Halloween* and *Scream*, which included murder and blood, more agreeable for a larger audience. The children understood that a rainbow at the end of their piece had the ability to elicit an "Aw, what a happy ending!" from their teacher (Yoon, 2021, p. 24).

Furthermore, the online media landscape has opened up possibilities for children to engage with texts produced by and for children (Dowdall, 2009). In her work examining the YouTube viewing practices of a young boy, Marsh (2016) explained that children find "affinity spaces" (p. 375) in videos featuring other children playing with popular toys. Marsh suggested that children find a "vicarious pleasure in watching another child" (p. 375) engage in activities they also enjoy. In this way, the video texts "reflect an imagined life back to the child, which is not dissimilar to her/his own" (p. 375). Like adults, this "unboxing" is a social engagement that is also materially and visually a textual experience. As Calkins (1994) described literature as *miracles*, I argue that media clips can also produce similar embodied effects that are felt and experienced by children in the same ways as holding a good book.

In observing the digital and social media practices of another young boy named PB, McClure and Sweeny (2015) found that digital spaces hold opportunity for children and adults to participate in the construction of shared meanings and aesthetics. PB enjoyed watching videos of an adult YouTuber named Jax, who showcased himself hacking LEGO sets to make his own creations. PB used the videos to inspire his own LEGO creations, which he often shared with friends and integrated into his play (McClure, 2018). Noting that adults are often the ones to provide children access to digital media, McClure (2018) argued that "the experience exists

in the collaborative space in-between adults and children" (p. 159), which allows for intergenerational collaboration and social participation.

Kirkland (2008) reminded us that updating the texts used in classrooms is not simply an act of replacing traditional texts; it is also a recognition that the present moment is as significant as the past, and both the choices in texts and the ways that children engage with these texts are legitimate in their own right and worthy of inclusion in school literacy practices. As the above studies demonstrated, children are engaging with popular texts outside of school in complex ways. Rather than simply using popular culture and digital texts in service of traditional literacy practices, perhaps we can use these texts to support children in their effort to "make sense of the world and meaning of their lived situations" (p. 74). Perhaps the affordances of digital literacies will provide spaces of new structures of collaboration between children and adults, which recognize children as co-producers within textual landscapes. The social conditions of digital media provide opportunities for children to engage in new meaning-making practices, including 'restorying' (Thomas & Stornaiuolo, 2016, p. 314).

Guided by the textual landscape of children's lives, I work to expand the composing possibilities of young children. Schools often fail Children of Color and other marginalized groups, not just in the linguistic structures that are valued and assessed but also in the kinds of stories that are publicized and made visible in school. As this literature review demonstrated, young children have rich language and literacy practices shaped by the cultural and linguistic communities in which they participate inside and outside of school spaces, including peer cultures and popular culture. This literature review highlighted a troubling disconnect between the strict adherence to genre and ways of knowing found in many official writing workshop spaces, and the sociocultural resources and funds of knowledge that children draw upon in

unofficial spaces to attend to their own agendas, including the appropriation of popular culture and multimodal composing practices.

With this study, I aimed to add to the literature by examining the possibilities when young children are invited to participate in a digital writing space centered around their own interests and composing practices. By normalizing popular culture and multimodal texts in this writing space, I hope to position the communicative practices, structures of storytelling, and semiotic resources with which children engage in their everyday lives as worthy of inclusion in school literacies.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Through a single-case ethnographic approach (Dyson & Genishi, 2005), this study aimed to capture the rich ways young children take up multimodal composing practices and build community within an out-of-school digital writing club. In the dual role of facilitator/practitioner and researcher, I took up an *inquiry as stance* (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2011) position, which recognized that "working the dialectic" of inquiry and practice provides a generative space for exploring the tensions between practice and theory, as well as the "reciprocal, recursive, and symbiotic relationships" (p. 19) between the two. Qualitative data for this research study were drawn from multiple sources such as participant observations, Zoom recordings of club meetings, artifact and document collection, and a reflective journal. Through this research, I sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do young children narrate their identities and social worlds through text?
2. What stories (narratives) and resources do young children value and take up when writing?
3. How do young children take up the space of an informal, online writing group to pursue intellectual, social, cultural, and composing lives?

This chapter discusses the methodology and methods for data collection and analysis.

The Case Study

In this study, I followed the tradition of ethnographic scholars who are interested in the meaning children make about their own lives within distinct contexts (e.g., Dyson, 1997, 2003; Wessel-Powell et al., 2018; Yoon, 2013). This perspective recognizes that "teaching and learning are complex social happenings" (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 9), which also require analysis of broader political and sociocultural contexts. The case study provides researchers with the

opportunity to explore the "particularity and complexity" of a context, "coming to know its activity within important circumstances" (Stake, 2003, p. xi).

Dyson (2003) stressed the importance of a case in capturing the nuances of children's composing practices within a shared writing community. Using the classroom as a unit of analysis, Dyson spent time focusing on a small group of children as they drew on everyday textual materials and negotiated shared symbolic meanings as part of a writing community. Through audio recordings, child writing samples, and fieldnotes (ethnographic tools), she described how children made sense of writing across time, not just as a set of social practices but also as identities crafted within the social relations of peers, writing, and the teacher.

Yoon (2020b) in her study of civic engagement in school settings used ethnographic methods as a way to understand the political, social, and cultural experiences of children living with the election of Donald Trump. To understand children's social and civic lives, she highlighted the importance of understanding broader local contexts by which larger political issues get situated. That is, what are the local issues embedded in children's schools, communities, and cities that show up in writing and play? Therefore, a case study of a group of children over time allows us to see how particular children are living out the particulars of large social phenomena (Dyson & Genishi, 2005).

To uncover the complexities of young children's composing practices, I drew on ethnographic methods to capture the lived literacy experiences of each participant as they engaged in a digital writing community. With the writing club as the social unit (Dyson & Genishi, 2005), this case study endeavored to gain insight into the ways in which young children construct shared understandings, norms, and expectations for what it means to participate in an online writing community. For this case, the participants came to the study with previous

experience in official school writing communities, both in person and online. Research detailing the social worlds and identities of young children in school writing spaces are limited by the constraints of what literacy means, the writing practices and genres that are valued, and how children are positioned in these spaces. While research has shown that children are able to work fluidly within these spaces (Dyson, 1993, 1997, 2003; Yoon, 2022), for some children, these constraints narrow their agency to engage in meaningful composing practices that provide opportunity for children to craft their social identities. This case study provided a unique opportunity to observe the formation of a new online writing community, separate from the constraints associated with school structures, and with children recognized as co-constructors of practices and norms.

Furthermore, the case study sought to understand how young children make sense of the genres and everyday texts with which they engage and how these texts are taken up in composing practices. The composing practices of the children are situated within a broader context of popular culture and the social and political worlds which the children inhabit. This case study aligned with sociocultural and critical childhood frameworks by "forefronting children's agency, relationships, and practices in the making of their own childhoods" (Yoon, 2020a, p. 141).

Participant Selection

The participants for this study were recruited from Park Elementary School,[1] a local school in which I have a working relationship with the teachers, administration, and children. Park Elementary School is a small, option[2] school located in East Harlem. While drawing many of its students from the local neighborhood, the school also attracts families from across all five

[1] All names are pseudonyms.
[2] Option schools are un-zoned schools open to all children in the city. Families must apply for admission.

boroughs of New York City. The school is both racially and socioeconomically diverse, with 5% Asian, 32% Black, 41% Hispanic or Latinx, 15% White, 3% English language learners, and 28% students with special needs (New York City Department of Education, 2019).

The COVID-19 pandemic changed the landscape of teaching and learning across the world. By April 2021, the country was in the 13th month of the pandemic. The numbers of COVID-19 infections were continuing to swell and ebb as new variants emerged and vaccines became available. After a winter of school closings, including a city-wide shutdown of schools in January 2021, schools were beginning to return to in-person learning. During the 2020-2021 school year, instruction at Park Elementary school had moved from 100% virtual to a mix of in-person, hybrid, and online learning. Families were initially given a choice to enroll in hybrid—3 days in-person and 2 days online—or to continue with exclusively online learning. As the city lifted COVID-19 restrictions, the school shifted to two options for families—fully in-person and fully online, with exceptions made when COVID-19 cases were detected. In-person classrooms moving to online instruction were still common occurrences, and several times during the study, participants shared that they were staying home that week for online learning. Each grade had at least one class designated as a full-time online space. Students enrolled in the online class were given several opportunities to switch to in-person learning, but the majority stayed in the online class for the entire school year.

With a dedication to progressive education, Park Elementary's mission statement recognizes the importance of community and a philosophy of child-centered pedagogy. While teachers have significant autonomy in their curriculum and pedagogical choices, Park Elementary utilized the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project as the main resource for the teaching of writing. In the three kindergarten and first grade classrooms that I visited, the

teachers have all taught the *Small Moments* (Calkins & Oxenhorn, 2003) narrative genre unit following the workshop model. The Small Moments unit was designed to support young children to write successfully in the personal narrative genre. The goal of the unit is to teach young children how to write "focused vignettes" (p. v) from their lives, retelling a sequence of events with precise details. Children are encouraged to draw on true stories from their lives to remember the sequence of events and precise details.

I designed a flyer to advertise the free online writing club for "kindergarten, first, and second graders who have big ideas." The title of the club, Camp Writing Club, and the invitation to explore "fun writing genres like comic books, superhero adventures, and video production" were intentional choices to signal that this writing club would provide a different kind of writing space from the traditional writing workshop to which the children were accustomed in school spaces. Recognizing that families were still navigating shifting schedules between hybrid and online learning, my goal was to make the writing club look and feel different from school spaces, both in physical schools and online—which I felt was essential for attracting participants. I was particularly sensitive to families feeling overscheduled with the pandemic (Dávila et al., 2022) and wanted to ensure that participation in the writing club would not become a burden for families. With that in mind, I decreased the frequency of the writing club meetings from twice a week to once a week. Some of the children in the second-grade classrooms remembered me as an instructor at Teachers College, who worked with preservice teachers in their first-grade classrooms. Although this study created a new and unique writing space, some of the children already knew each other and held a shared understanding of school writing practices, which provided an opportunity to observe the ways composing practices exist and are constructed within peer cultures (Dyson, 1997).

The Participants

The participants closely represented the racial make-up of the school from which they were recruited, with two white children, two Black children, two Latinx children, and one mixed-racial (Black and white) child. Four of the participants identified as female and three identified as male. Six of the participants were attending school in-person at least part of the time. Seven families responded to the flyer and enrolled in the writing club study. Four of the children were in the second grade and three were in kindergarten.

Maya and Omar were siblings, with Maya enrolled in kindergarten and Omar in the second grade. Alejandro was the only participant attending school fully online. The participants came from four different classrooms, three hybrid and one online. Mariana and Jabari were in one second-grade class, and Emmi and Omar were in another second-grade class. Katherine and Maya attended the same kindergarten class, and Alejandro as a kindergartner attending school online was the only participant who had never attended Park Elementary School in person. When asked, Alejandro knew of Maya and Katherine from some online kindergarten events, including a weekly sing-along, but had never met any of the other participants in person.

Table 3.1

List of Participants

Name (pseudonyms)	Racial Background	Participant Identified Gender	Grade	Hybrid or Online Schooling
Katherine	White	Female	Kindergarten	Hybrid
Alejandro	Latino	Male	Kindergarten	Online
Maya	Black	Female	Kindergarten	Hybrid
Omar	Black	Male	Second	Hybrid
Lilly	White	Female	Second	Hybrid
Jabari	Black/White (French)	Male	Second	Hybrid
Mariana	Latina	Female	Second	Hybrid

The Writing Club

Responding to the call to "shift our scholarly analysis, our politics, and our practice in ways that respond to children's rights and interests and to listen to what children can teach us about being a child in the world" (Dumas & Nelson, 2016, p. 33), I sought to use this unique writing club as an opportunity to explore the ways in which young children across grade levels build community and take up composing in a digital writing club. Operating as an independent writing club,[3] this writing space intentionally looked and felt different from school writing workshops. The writing club met once a week for 45 minutes, for a duration of 10 weeks during the spring of 2021. Four additional weeks were added during that summer at the request of one of the parents. One participant's afterschool schedule shifted during the study, and the parents requested an alternative meeting time for their child. I accommodated this request, and we met one-on-one for four sessions.

An inquiry as stance position recognizes that the research of educational practice "is not simply instrumental in the sense of figuring out how to get things done"—how to teach children writing online—"but also (and more importantly), it is social and political in the sense of deliberating about what gets done, why to get it done, who decides, and whose interests are served" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2011, p. 20). Noting that as an adult and a former teacher, I held a position of power (Oakley, 1994) as well as a responsibility to ensure that the club remained a safe space for the children to engage with texts (Dumas & Nelson, 2016), my goal was to provide a space that centered the social and cultural interests and composing practices of the child participants. Therefore, the writing club intentionally looked and felt different from traditional writing lessons and assignments. One of the central questions of this study explored

[3] Although the participants were recruited from one school, the writing club was not affiliated with the school or any other institution.

the kinds of stories children choose to compose when not burdened by restrictions defined and imposed by teachers and curricula; therefore, children were encouraged to take up writing projects of their own interest, discover their own mentor texts, and construct a writing community with its own unique culture and norms.

The official writing club meeting ran from 4:30 to 5:15 p.m. on Wednesday afternoons. I logged onto the meetings around 4:00 p.m. and often stayed on until 5:30 p.m. The children logged on at staggered times, with some children logging on before the official start time and other children logging on at 4:30 p.m. The typical meeting included three components: (a) Artifact/Text Share, (b) Composing Share, and (c) Inquiry Time (I describe each component in detail in the next section). The meetings began with children sharing favorite objects and commercial texts. After the share, we talked about the composing projects that children had worked on during the week. During this time, children were invited to share their work with the writing club. The remainder of the time was set aside for inquiry work, in which we explored genres, modes of composing, and favorite authors/illustrators. The amount of time spent on each component was intentionally organic to reflect the interests of the children. For example, the artifact/text share was a favorite for the children, and while intended to be a warm-up activity, the participants requested more and more time to share favorite objects and texts throughout our time together. In fact, there were a few meetings in which the artifact share time took up most of our time together. The participants read aloud books to each other, shared countless jokes, introduced pets, conducted magic shows, and transformed Bakugan and Geogan figures—there was never enough time!

The writing club utilized the digital platform *Seesaw* as a space for sharing composing projects and responses to teacher-initiated provocations. *Seesaw* is an educational platform which

provides a private, secure space for teachers, students, and family members to post assignments, curate a portfolio, and communicate via comments and blogs. Passcode protection ensured that all work was protected, and only the participants and family members had access to the *Seesaw* page. Schools utilize *Seesaw* as a tool for classroom instruction, homework, and documentation of student work. While Park Elementary School did not work with *Seesaw*, I chose to employ the platform because it allowed children to post composing projects in a variety of different formats, including photos, video, audio, and digital links, while also providing multimodal tools for children to create original digital voice recordings, drawings, and texts. Each participant had a folder, which acted as a portfolio to which they were able to upload written work, photographs, and videos. I monitored the folders regularly to check for participant engagement to collect composing artifacts and to plan for future writing club meetings. Each child's folder was private, in that only the child, the caregivers, and I had access to it. A group blog was created to provide a space for the children to share their work openly with the other writing club participants. The blog also provided participants with the opportunity to engage in conversation between the writing club meetings. I encouraged the children to view each other's work and leave comments, with the hope that the blog would become a space to build community and shared writing practices. However, I ended up facilitating the blog far more than I had intended. For the most part, I took on the role of posting the children's composing projects to the blog with their consent, and most of the comments were from me. As far as I could observe, only one participant, Alejandro, actively engaged with the blog, which was evident by several comments he left for his peers.

Artifact Share

The artifact/text share time provided children with an opportunity to explore and share the artifacts and texts that they themselves deemed important in their lives. Included in these artifacts were toys, child artwork, family recipes, favorite books, graphic novels, personal videos and digital content, as well as favorite websites and digital media. One of the affordances of holding the writing club online was the easy access children had to artifacts which represent their lives outside of school, providing an opportunity for children to contribute to the textual knowledge of the writing community and to foster a deeper connection between home and school literacies (Pahl & Rowsell, 2011). In this study, I drew on Pahl and Rowsell (2011), who offered an expansive conception of the use of child artifact shares in school, one which places artifacts as an important component of situated and multimodal literacy practices:

> Artifactual literacy…allows for a much more collaborative and participatory mode of teaching and learning to come into literacy education. Artifactual literacy is about exchange; it is participatory and collaborative, visual and sensory. It is a radical understanding of meaning making in a human and embodied way. (p. 134)

In the fall of 2020, I had the opportunity to observe a kindergarten class during their closing meetings every Thursday on Zoom. While Show and Tell was not an official part of the classroom meetings, many of the children had taken it upon themselves to bring artifacts to the meetings. Alejandro, who would later become a participant in this study, would often bring his Scooby-Doo stuffed animal to the meetings to share Scooby's daily adventures—let's just say Scooby went to the hospital quite often during the pandemic! Show and Tell has long been an esteemed activity in early childhood classrooms. However, in my own classroom as well as the classrooms which I have observed over the years, Show and Tell is a regulated activity steeped in progressive notions of childhood innocence, with toys that are deemed violent, sexualized, and/or focused on consumerism discouraged or altogether forbidden. Then, at the end of the

share, the artifact returns to the backpack—both physically and metaphorically. While Alejandro's teacher provided space for his quick updates about Scooby, no time was built into their busy schedule for us to learn more about the stuffed animal and its importance to Alejandro or to incorporate Scooby into the curriculum.

Ellen Seiter (1993) argued that children learn early which toys are acceptable as part of the official curriculum, placing children who come to school with a familiarity of school-sanctioned toys (e.g., wooden blocks, basic LEGO building blocks, play kitchen sets, realistic baby dolls, etc.) at an advantage:

> Promotional toys, on the other hand, are likely to meet a cool reception by teachers. No Barbies or Ninja Turtles will be among the toys supplied by the school, and some evidence suggests many children will rapidly learn not to talk about their favorite toys with teachers, or about what they have seen on TV. (p. 226)

In the writing club, it was important for children to understand share time as a space where they were welcome to bring artifacts that might not be acceptable in school spaces (e.g., LOL Dolls, LEGO Mario Brothers, Minecraft, etc.). In my role as facilitator of the artifact shares, I was aware of how my own responses to the artifacts would influence which texts children would come to understand as sanctioned in our writing space. Researchers working with young children have noted that young children "are so used to having adults 'trash' their play that there is a built-in antenna which goes up when they appear to be taken seriously around popular culture" (Mitchell & Reid-Walsh, 2002, p. 26). This made it all the more important for me as the facilitator and researcher to monitor how my presence as an adult might be influencing the artifact shares. I made a conscious effort to show genuine interest in all the artifacts, ranging from pet bunnies (in which I had a genuine interest) to LEGO Mario (which required more effort on my part to build interest). Some of the ways I actively worked to build interest included asking the children to share their expertise and knowledge around the artifact; engaging in my

own independent research in what I termed *literacy digs*, which included visiting websites, watching YouTube videos and movies, and listening to songs; and when possible, either purchasing a toy or book that a child had shared.

Ultimately, I ensured that these items were not simply placed back in the metaphorical backpack by providing the time for children to make connections and comment on each other's shares, showing my own interest, and, most importantly, weaving the texts into the composing practices of our writing club. Figure 3.1 illustrates how the space in which I joined the students each week transformed as we engaged with the texts that the children shared during the artifact shares. The Dogman, Star Wars, and Wonder Woman texts became important references and mentor texts for our writing community. The children noticed these texts on my bookshelf, as Omar did in the following exchange that took place several weeks into the study:

> Omar: Hey! You have the same book as me! The *5-Minute Star Wars Stories* book. I have that same book.
> Rachel: You do! So cool. I bought that book because you told me that you love Star Wars, and I thought it might be a good book for use to read in our writing club.
> Omar: Yes! It's a good one. (Writing Club Transcript, 5/19/21)

Figure 3.1

Zoom Screenshots from Writing Club

(Left) First week of Writing Club

(Right) Fifth week of Writing Club

Holding the writing club online, with children joining from the private spaces of their homes—where these artifacts lived—provided an opportunity to observe how artifacts are an integral part of the home literacies of young children and their identities as members of families, school communities, and the writing club.

In this study, the artifact share component of the writing club took on significant importance with the share time often demanding extended time, with some children choosing to join early to ensure extra time to share a favorite artifact. The shares were animated times during the meetings, with children often standing up from their chairs or couches to provide a full view of the artifact and its function or holding the artifact up to the camera for a close-up look. The children observing were also animated during these shares, leaning in close to the screen for a better look or running off to grab a similar artifact.

Composing Share

The composing share was a time set aside each week for children to share their composing projects with the writing club. When I conceived of the composing share time, I hoped that the activity would provide the children with an opportunity to engage in conversation with peers around the writing and composing work with which they were engaging during the duration of the writing club. This included children reading their writing out loud, sharing a video they produced, or simply talking through an idea for a writing piece. However, I discovered that most of the participants were initially reluctant to share their composing work. Few students brought composing projects to the writing club meetings. As a result, most of the composing shares were done via *Seesaw*, through which children were able to view each other's projects via the shared-screen function on Zoom. Some weeks, we took a "tour" of our club *Seesaw* page and looked over all the composing projects that children had posted. During other

weeks, I chose composing pieces to share with the group to highlight composing practices (i.e., videos, comic books, audio recordings, etc.) or to help position a child as an expert. For example, to highlight Omar's storytelling strengths, I chose to share an audio recording of a "Detective Captain Cage" story that Omar had posted to *Seesaw*. The audio telling of his story positioned Omar as a detective story expert and competent writer. Children shared school writing pieces (e.g., small moment stories, poetry, and all about books), and projects that were created specifically as part of the writing club. To highlight a composing practice, I asked Katherine to share her play video in which she enlisted her family members to participate as actors and videographers. The club watched the video, and Katherine shared how she planned the project with a script and directions for each of her crew members. Katherine's play video became a mentor text for the writing club. The following week, both Maya and Alejandro had their own play videos to share with the club.

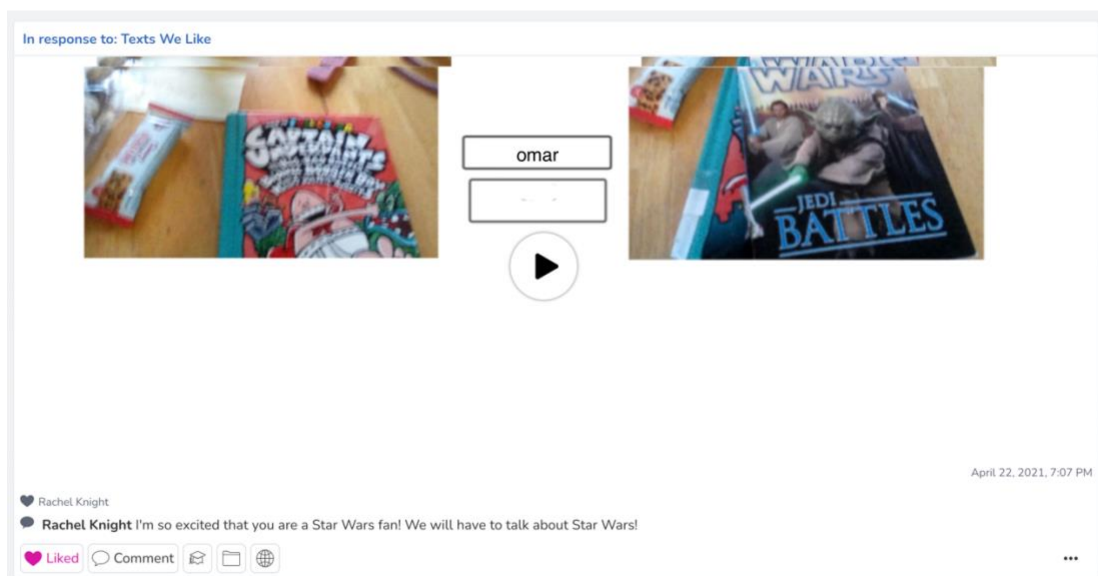
Inquiry

Finally, inquiry time provided an opportunity for participants to explore mentor texts, interests, and play with composing practices. This time was intentionally flexible to provide for a range of possible activities, including watching child-selected YouTube videos, reading written texts (*The Adventures of Captain Underpants*, *My First Wonder Woman Book*, and *Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur* comic books), studying a favorite author/illustrator, exploring a particular genre or mode of composing, and critical conversations about texts. The *what* of this time was negotiated by the children and myself to ensure that the children had some agency in how we utilized our time as a club. For example, Omar expressed an affinity for the graphic novel series *The Adventures of Captain Underpants* (Dav Pilkey, 1997), in both his postings on *Seesaw* and in writing club conversations, and then requested that we read some of Pilkey's books in our club.

In Figure 3.2, Omar has identified *Captain Underpants and the Big, Bad Battle of the Bionic Booger Boy, Part 1: The Night of the Nasty Nostril Nuggets* (Pilkey, 2018) as one of his "Texts We Like." In an audio recording, Omar explained, "I like *Captain Underpants* because it has chapters and because it has disgusting words, and I like it" (*Seesaw* Composing Artifact, April 22, 2021).

Figure 3.2

Omar's Response to "Texts We Like" Provocation



After Googling Dav Pilkey, I discovered the author has a series of YouTube videos with the Library of Congress (2020) focused on how to draw the various characters in his beloved books. Pilkey's books and YouTube videos became important texts in our writing club inquiries, requiring not one but two days of inquiry and exploration. Table 3.2 shows the inquiries the writing club engaged with each week. The Inquiry column names the inquiries. The Child Texts/Artifacts column includes the popular culture texts and artifacts that informed and inspired the initial inquiries. For the most part, these texts were commercially produced. Occasionally, a child's own composing practice inspired an inquiry, as was the case when Katherine's play video

led us to spend an extra day exploring, planning, and enacting play videos. The Facilitator Texts/Artifacts column includes the texts that I, as the facilitator, chose to use as mentor texts for our inquiry studies. Some of these texts were originally shared by the children in the study, and some texts were ones I discovered through my literacy digs. The Provocations on *Seesaw* column include the "activities" posted to *Seesaw*. The provocations provided an opportunity for children to engage with the texts and composing practices that we discussed in the writing club. Children were encouraged to play with the composing provocations but were not required to complete any of the activities. It is important to note that the inquiries were one part of the writing club, and participants engaged with the provocations in a variety of ways, with a few participants submitting many responses (compositions) and some participants choosing to share composing practices in genres and modes of composing that were not highlighted in the inquiries.

Table 3.2

List of Writing Club Inquiry Projects

Week	Inquiry	Child Texts/Artifacts	Facilitator Texts/Artifacts	Provocations on *Seesaw*
1	What are texts?: Expanding notions of texts	Children shared 1-2 artifacts that they brought to club meeting	Introduction to *Seesaw*, including sample Seesaw post	• Texts We Like • Share a Favorite Piece of Writing
2	Comic Books	Texts We Like: Omar-Captain Underpants Mariana-Cat Ninja	• Slide deck detailing structures of comic books, author study of Natacha Bustos • Moon Girl & Devil Dinosaur comic book • My First Wonder Woman Book	• Comic Book Template • Favorite Comic Book Character
3	• What makes us laugh? • Co-composing a story #1	Children shared what makes them laugh	Slide deck for recording "what makes you laugh?" responses and co-composed story	• What Makes You Laugh?

Table 3.2 (continued)

Week	Inquiry	Child Texts/Artifacts	Facilitator Texts/Artifacts	Provocations on *Seesaw*
4	• Co-composing a story #2 • What makes a joke funny?	Jabari-Minecraft, Bakugan, & Geogan Katherine and Maya-Banana jokes Alejandro-Highlights™ Kids	Slide deck for recording co-composed story	Tannerite Video: We watched this Tannerite video and next week we will discuss how to make our own play videos
5	• Author/Illustrator Study: Dav Pilkey	Omar-Captain Underpants	• The Adventures of Captain Underpants: The First Epic Novel by Dav Pilkey • Dav Pilkey: How to Draw Petey video	
6	Play Videos: Day 1	Katherine-Tannerites videos	• Tannerites YouTube Channel • Alex Pretend Play Loose Tooth with Funny Tooth Fairy Pokemon Battle (YouTube video)	Play Videos: Play around and make your own pretend play video
7	• Play Videos: Day 2 • Dav Pilkey Author Study: Day 2	Katherine's Play Video: The Birthday	• Using Katherine's video as a mentor text • Dav Pilkey: How to Draw Dogman video	• Reminder to post play videos • Some of Our Favorite Books • Some of Our Favorite Websites
8	• Artifact Share Day • Impromptu Dav Pilkey Author Study: Day 3	Jabari-Ukulele Lilly-Animal drawing/pet bunny Katherine-Poem Alejandro-Captain Underpants book Omar-Dav Pilkey: How to Draw Dark Night		
9	Co-composing a story #3		Slide deck with story elements for planning and recording co-composed story	
10	Composing celebration		Slide deck celebrating the work of each child	

Data Collection

Data were collected through a variety of modes throughout the study. As Luttrell (2020) stated, "A key tenet of critical childhood studies is to take children seriously as witnesses to their experiences" (p. 24). The data collection methods provided participants with the opportunity to make sense of their own lives as well as agency in what they shared and the stories they told. The children in the writing club were aware that I was conducting research about their composing lives. They were aware when the meetings were recorded and often asked me questions about the video and audio transcripts that I was collecting. At times, the children inserted themselves into the data collection process (Axelrod, 2016) by reminding me to take a screenshot of an artifact that they were sharing or instructing me to review a video from a previous meeting to remember a salient point or story that had been told.

Zoom Meeting Recordings

All writing club meetings took place over Zoom and were recorded. The recordings were date-stamped and stored on my computer with password protection. The closed-caption option on Zoom provided an initial transcript of each session. However, all Zoom recordings were eventually independently transcribed for clarity and validity. The Zoom recordings provided an opportunity to "revisit" the club meetings and child conversations and were used alongside fieldnotes to both support and verify data (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 70).

As I constructed the design of my study during the proposal stage, I anticipated that video recording via Zoom would be less intrusive than setting up a video camera in a classroom setting. As a teacher and literacy coach, I had experience working with a video camera set up on a tripod and found that it was both distracting for the students and the teachers being taped. To capture teaching and learning, the video camera is often set up in spaces that restrict the normal

movement of the children and teachers. Frequent glances into the camera by students and teachers alike seem to suggest that participants are acutely aware their activities are being observed.

For this project, the Zoom platform was both a site for online writing club meetings and a research tool utilized in the collection of video and transcription data. The children in the study had attended online school using Zoom, so the platform was a familiar tool for meeting as a group and for learning. I informed the children that I would be recording the weekly writing club meetings, and the children were aware when the recording icon was red, indicating that the meeting was being recorded. The children were also aware of the closed-caption function which added in the transcription of the sessions. At one point, when I asked Jabari to repeat a story that he had told, he replied, “Why don’t you just watch the video of me telling the story the first time!” (Writing Club Transcript, 4/21/21). The camera became an integral part of how children engaged in the writing club and how they participated as informants. The children were always aware of the camera and often used it as a mirror (smiling and making faces) as well as a personal video camera, showing me spaces and special artifacts in their homes. The participants also utilized the Share Screen function to share digital texts both on their personal computers and on the internet. Captured in the video data were also many of the composing projects that were not posted to *Seesaw* but, instead, shared during the writing club meetings or during one-on-one sessions.

Conducting this research in which young children were effectively holding a video camera or inviting me into their digital spaces required sensitive negotiation. Unlike traditional cases studies in classroom settings, with four walls that function as a physical boundary–

regulating the people and materials present, this digital writing club case study was not fixed by a single physical location.

'Screenshot' Photos

Screenshots were taken of each child's composing and text artifact shares as well as artifacts collected on *SeeSaw.* These photos allowed me to capture an image of the texts children deem important to their lives and composing practices. The artifacts provided insight into children's identities and practices over time, interests, common activities, and literacy development, creating a story of children's social, cultural, and academic experiences (Pahl & Roswell, 2011) and situating them as active in the construction of their own learning. I ensured that I had at least 10 screenshots of each child's artifacts and composing projects. Over the course of the study, a total of 275 screenshots were collected. The number of screenshots taken each week varied based on the number of artifact shares and the composing practices of the children that week. I also tried to capture screenshots of composing projects that were not posted on *Seesaw* but were shared during our writing club meetings. During the analysis process, additional screenshots were collected to facilitate the *mapping of media ecologies* and *literacy digs*, both of which are described in detail in the analysis section. The screenshots were named, categorized by student and date, and kept in a folder on my computer.

Fieldnotes

Fieldnotes were taken both during and directly after each writing club meeting. I also took fieldnotes of the composing practices of the children on the *Seesaw* site, including documenting how children were utilizing the site and modes of composing and engaging with each other's work. Emerson et al. (2011) explained that "doing fieldwork" and "writing fieldwork" are "dialectically related, interdependent, and mutually constitutive activities"

(p. 119); therefore, the practice of taking fieldnotes evolved with time in the field and both were influenced by and influenced my role as the facilitator of the writing club. The notes were both *descriptive* and *reflective* (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007), which allowed for thick description (Geertz, 1993) of the rich details of the participants, interactions, and ways of being in the writing club, as well as space for comments and building theory as the study progressed. The notes included reflections and contextual comments (Dyson & Genishi, 2005) on the participants, the emerging writing club structures, the composing practices of the children, my role as a facilitator, and my role as a researcher. This reflective aspect of the journal provided a space for me to consider issues of power and positionality, which are inherent in the research of children.

Child Composing Samples

Each child was provided with a portfolio space on the *Seesaw* platform to upload and share their composing work. These pieces were both responses to provocations initiated by the facilitator and student products or works in progress. Having access to all of the work of each child, and not simply the pieces the children chose to share, provided insight into the kinds of composing children viewed as important and worthy of an audience, and which pieces were abandoned, obscured, unnoticed, or veiled. These samples were viewed and transcribed in the fieldnotes and the table of contents. Screenshots of the samples were used as data for diagraming during the analysis process.

Composition 'Audiencing'

The concept of composition audiencing borrows from the work of Lutrell (2010) in which the researcher invites children to select photographs to engage in a conversation with the interviewer/researcher. The researcher takes an active role in interviewing the child regarding their intentions, desires, process, and importance. According to Luttrell (2010), the practice

allowed children to set their own agendas and imagine their own audience, which "provided rich insight into their identity work, including how they took charge of the interview (or not), set the pace, asserted their expertise, resisted some questions, played with power" (p. 227). Children have their own ideas of what counts as good stories (Dyson, 2008). When I initially planned the study, I had wanted to have each child participate in two audiencing conversations. The conversations were to take place outside of the official writing club time and be one-on-one. For the composition audiencing, the children would choose several writing pieces they have been working on to share. The conversation, including the questions I asked, were intentionally flexible to allow for the choices made by the child, both in the composition pieces they shared and the ways in which they presented their work to guide the conversation. However, due to the busy lives of families living during a pandemic, families found it difficult to schedule additional times to meet. Two participants scheduled the first audiencing conversations: Katherine and Alejandro. After holding these two audiencing conversations, I made the decision to focus my data collection on the writing club sessions and the one-on-one sessions that organically took place when children logged on early or stayed after the club had finished.

Literacy Dig of Commercially Produced Texts

Data on the children's interests—commercial text artifacts, including toys, books, television shows, videos, as well as popular culture references from both conversations and composing samples—were collected through a 'literacy dig.' Utilizing multiple modes of inquiry including internet search engines, YouTube, TV, and movies, I conducted what I referred to as a 'dig' for information about the artifactual texts (Pahl & Rowsell, 2011) children find compelling and take up in their own composing practices. In what Horst et al. (2010) labelled as "geeking out" (p. 36), I chose topics that interested both the students and myself and utilized the media

resources available to become an expert. This approach allowed me to shift attention to the "crosscutting patterns that are evident in media content, technology design, as well as in the cultural referents that youth mobilize in their everyday communication" (Horst et al., 2010, p. 37).

While I could not engage in a literacy dig for every popular culture text touched on by the participants, I made an effort to choose texts which seemed to permeate the social and composing practices of the children as well as texts which left me wondering, perplexed, and, perhaps, uncomfortable as an adult (Thorne, 2010). As I engaged in literacy digs throughout the study, I transcribed the artifacts I uncovered (e.g., key scenes from television shows and movies or YouTube videos) and captured screenshots of toys, popular characters, and YouTube videos. Transcripts and screenshots of selected texts provided an opportunity to inquire about children's intertextual practices as well as support the work of children in the writing club by centering the textual knowledge of the children in the writing space (Brownell, 2018). See Table 3.3 for an overview of the data collection process.

Organizing the Data

The Zoom video recordings data were organized using a table of contents. Each week, I reviewed the Zoom recordings and corresponding transcripts and highlighted events that stood out. The table of contents consisted of six columns, including the time stamp for the video recording, the activity or text themes that were present in the time period, artifacts that were collected (including screenshots and composing pieces posted on *Seesaw*), initial comments and notes on the events, links and texts that were referenced or included in the activity, and open codes that were collected throughout the process. Figure 3.3 provides an example of the table of contents constructed for each writing club meeting.

Table 3.3

Summary of Data Collection

Data Sources	Description	Frequency
Zoom recordings	All club meetings and audiencing events were recorded on Zoom. The recordings were kept in a password-protected folder.	– Once a week for writing club meetings – Twoo participant audiencing sessions
Fieldnotes	Fieldnotes were taken of the weekly writing club meetings as well as weekly observations of student participation with *Seesaw*. The notes were kept in an electronic notebook stored with passcode protection on the researcher's laptop computer.	– Fieldnotes were taken both during and after each club meeting (once week for 14 weeks) – Fieldnotes of the *Seesaw* site were taken once a week for 10 weeks.
Child-initiated text artifacts (photographs taken by screenshot)	These screenshot photographs of artifacts were shared by the children during the beginning of each writing club meeting.	Once a week for 10 weeks
Child0composing samples	The writing pieces produced by children, including written work, videos, audio recordings, and oral stories.	The number of composing samples varied by child, ranging from 14 to zero submitted compositions
Composition "Audiencing"	In these 30-minute conversations, children chose pieces they composed to talk about.	Two children participated in the Composition Audiencing, each one time.
Commercially Produced Texts	Commercially produced texts (toys, videos, games, comic books, TV, and movies) collected through an internet-based inquiry of child interests.	Ongoing for duration of study
Writing Club Artifacts	These materials were used in facilitating the writing club, including slide decks and co-composed stories	Once a week for 10 weeks

Figure 3.3

Section of Table of Contents from 5/19/21

Time Stamp	Activity/Text Themes	Artifacts Collected	Comments/Notes	Links & Texts	Initial Codes
35:05	Dog Man Read Aloud		Omar continues to join in. It's fun to see how engaged Omar is when we read Dave Pilkey books. He is reading along and points out all the parts that I miss or read with the incorrect inflection.	Kindle Dog Man	Dog Man Dav Pilkey
51:24	Invitation to make play videos	*Seesaw*	Shared *Seesaw* provocation: Play Videos		Composing invitations
52:59	Lilly's "pool party" play scene	Screen Shots of Play scene	Lilly takes us to see an elaborate play scene constructed with blocks, animal figures. This feels significant given Lilly's focus on school literacy practices (highbrow). Kittie, bunny, adult, teen pools.	calicocritters.com	Play, bedrooms, Blocks Storytelling Separate spaces for children, teens, and adults
53:04	Omar Ventriloquist	Screen Shots of Omar	Omar puts on a dog puppet and begins a ventriloquist act. "I'm very good at it." "I'm also pretty good at eating with chopsticks, too." Lilly leaves and comes back with a blue sock puppet.		Puppets Artifacts

Omar and Maya are beginning to have a much bigger presence in the writing club. Focusing on the Dave Pinkey books has made Omar an expert. He has gone from a passive observer to full on participant in the club. It's interesting to observe when Omar leaves his own screen to join Maya. There's something about being in person vs. on the screen. These are the only two who have this option. It's easier for them to participate when they join from separate screens, but something draws Omar to Maya when she is sharing.

Lilly is beginning to share more of her environment and playful side. Her play scene is intricate and orderly. This is a big detour from her usual school literacies. Part of me is surprised to see her playing with blocks and animal figures/dolls. Still, there is a maturity to her play. I wonder if she plays during choice time at school?

Axel has some fun moments of using the camera as a mirror. He is eager to make connections with his peers. Axel's mother makes her first appearance in this session. She can be seen grabbing something from the fridge and Axel mentions that she does not want him to share his screen. I assume that she is sitting at the kitchen table, but she is not visible, and I can't find any indication of Axel and her communicating–no glances or muted interactions.

Katherine is very playful during this meeting. She joins us from the floor and then from her couch. Her head is sideways for most of the meeting and she can be seen making faces at the camera. Like Axel, she is using the camera as a mirror. Her mother comes by and leans over to see Katherine's view on her tablet. She shakes her head and moves on.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process took place throughout the duration of the study (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). While collecting data and facilitating the writing club, I began to identify emerging patterns and themes from the multiple sources of data. This process helped me to make initial interpretations of the data to help direct the study (Corsaro, 2018) as well as guide decisions regarding the facilitation of the writing club.

Thematic and Reflexive Memos

I engaged in the practice of writing conceptual and thematic memos (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) throughout the entire process of collecting and analyzing data. The practice of writing

memos provided an opportunity to both summarize data and begin to build emerging themes and understandings, as well as "time to reflect on issues raised in the setting and how they relate to larger theoretical, methodological, and substantive issues" (Bogdan & Bilken, 2003, p. 165). The practice of keeping a reflexive journal proved to be essential as I moved between the dual roles of researcher and facilitator of the writing club. An inquiry as stance position recognizes that the research of educational practice "is not simply instrumental in the sense of figuring out how to get things done"—how to teach children writing online—"but also (and more importantly), it is social and political in the sense of deliberating about what gets done, why to get it done, who decides, and whose interests are served" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2011, p. 20). For this study, it was important for me to take a reflexive stance (see Knight et al., 2004), in which I engaged in critical reflection on the ways my own values, interests, and beliefs about childhood, literacy, and popular culture were taken up in my role as teacher/facilitator, and, more importantly, how they worked to promote and restrict the literacy practice of the children during the writing club meetings. Figure 3.4 is an example of the reflexive memos that I kept throughout the study. In this reflexive memo, I explored the impact of a choice I made as a facilitator during the writing club. The reflexive journal helped me to acknowledge my own biases and consider how to address any harm I may have caused.

Figure 3.4

Reflexive Journal Entry: Co-Composing Story

Reflexive Memo
Co-Composing Stories: Actions Have Consequences

> Games exemplify social and participatory forms of engagement with texts typical of many contemporary forms. They teach and require collaborative literacy practices and the capacity to weave between on/offline information, action and decision making with others and alone. (Beavis, 2014, p. 95)

Co-Composing Story #1

Jabari took action in his composing turn. He constructed a plot twist that, in his eyes, could not be undone. As the teacher/facilitator, I made a choice that also had consequences. This was an important moment for my role as a facilitator.

On his first turn, Jabari introduced an "infinity hole" that swallowed up the entire world, and in effect, ended the co-composed story after most participants had only one chance to participate. When I set up the activity, I imagined that each participant would have several chances to add to the story. I felt annoyed that Jabari had ended the story, and worried that some of the other children might be upset that all the characters died.

To address the abrupt ending, I asked the students what they thought of the infinity hole swallowing the world. Lilly responded that the ending made her sad. Katherine indicated that she liked the ending with a "thumbs up" and Mariana shared that she didn't like the part with the Earth making a hole. Lilly suggested that we write a happy ending. At this point, Jabari informed us that the writing club time was up. I think he was hoping that we would run out of time and leave his ending to the story. How much do children pick up from the reactions/actions of teachers? Did my decision to have a "conversation" about Jabari's contribution position Jabari as a child who misbehaved, or who pushed against the expectations of the schooled literacy project of the co-composed story? Did I help to construct Jabari as an outsider in this literacy event?

How did Jabari feel when the other students shared that the hole made them sad and that they wanted to write an alternative ending?

I think it is important for the writing club to have another go at co-composing a story. I will reread the story that we wrote this week and allow for any discussion that naturally arises. I will attempt to sound neutral, if not encouraging of bringing in Minecraft, etc. to our story. Afterall, wasn't that the whole point of the study? I'm almost embarrassed by how quickly I fell into the moral panic mode of teaching.

Co-Composing Story #2

When I asked the children about last week's story, Jabari shared that the big infinity hole was his favorite part, "The big infinity hole! Everything stops and it was so good! This time there will be a Bakugan battle in the hole." Jabari brought back the infinity hole however, this time, Jabari offered an opening for the characters to survive. I wonder if he listened to his peers telling him that they didn't want the story to end with the hole? In many ways, Jabari's contributions were the best part of the story. He added big events that required everyone to think of solutions. Jabari has a narrative in mind (a world) with specific rules and realities. Certain kinds of characters belong– Bakugan and Geogan robots–and others do not–"There are no superheroes in Minecraft!" With the infinity hole, Jabari brought the world of Minecraft into our co-composed stories.

I was surprised when the other children chose to continue Jabari's infinity hole narrative with the second story. Alejandro added to it, and it was Jabari who kept helping the characters survive. It appears that the children were intrigued by the infinity hole narrative and wanted to play with/explore the "scary" storyline. The co-composing activity seemed to be a safe space for the children to be just a little subversive. Perhaps something that they aren't allowed to explore in school. I'm still troubled by my gut reaction to protect the innocence of the children. Was I afraid because parents were watching? It's so easy to avoid messiness. These children were looking for messiness. In video games, turns come to an end. Worlds are destroyed and characters die. That's how it goes. That's part of the fun.

Coding

I engaged with open coding (Emerson et al., 2011) throughout the data collection process. As demonstrated above, open coding was part of the process of constructing a table of contents for my data collection. Once the writing club was complete and all of the initial data had been collected, I revisited my open codes (Dyson & Genishi, 2005), which provided an opportunity to revisit the multiple sources of data—a process of "reviewing, reexperiencing, and reexamining

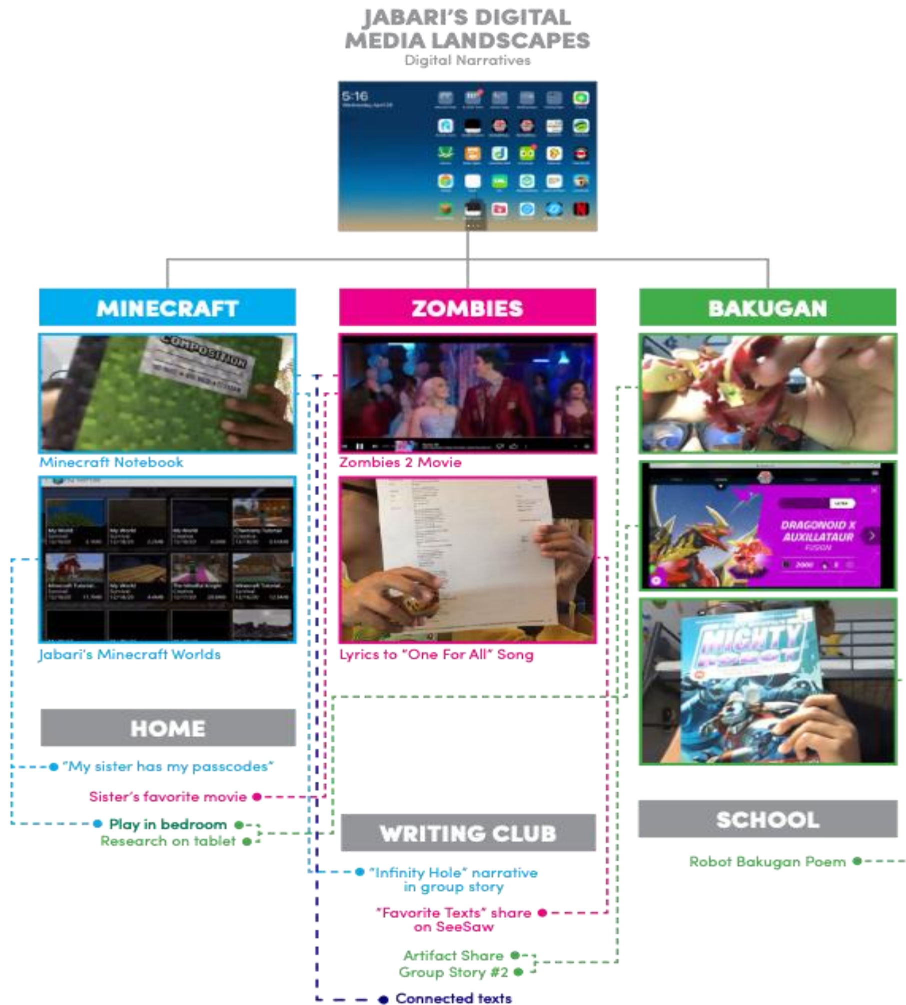
everything" (Emerson et al., 2011, p. 174) to uncover patterns and themes that emerged across data sources. Once the initial open-coding process was complete, I employed deductive coding utilizing sociocultural and critical childhood lenses on literacy, as well as the questions of this study to frame my codes. Some of the categories for deductive coding included family composing practices during the COVID-19 pandemic, popular culture textual practices, and digital literate identities.

Mapping Media Ecologies

Borrowing from Medina and Wohlwend (2014), mapping the sites of engagement with media and popular culture allowed me to understand the complexities of the ways in which meaning and knowing are negotiated across many places, texts, and practices. Practices across home, school, and the internet can be put into conversation with each other. This process drew on the work of scholars (e.g., Medina & Wohlwend, 2014; Mitchell & Reid-Walsh, 2002) who emphasized the importance of "mapping the media landscape in relation to children's social, commercial, and political desires" (Yoon, 2020a, p. 145) in an effort to better understand how children take up popular culture, as well as "what popular culture *does* for children as they negotiate a place for themselves among peers and in the world" (p. 146). Figure 3.5 provides an example of mapping digital ecologies from this study. In this analysis, I mapped Jabari's digital worlds to better understand how the popular digital texts that Jabari shared were connected to each other and the spaces Jabari inhabited. Important spaces in Jabari's life at the time of the study included the writing club, home, and school. Important digital worlds included Minecraft, Bakugan, and the movie *Zombies 2*. Mapping these spaces and digital worlds allowed me to see how narratives moved (and in the case of school, rarely moved) across spaces, showed up in Jabari's composing practices, and positioned him with both his sister and the club members.

Figure 3.5

Jabari's Digital Media Landscapes



Literacy Dig as Analysis

The literacy dig is an inquiry process which centers the commercially produced texts children take up in their own composing practices as an analytical tool to understand the discursive elements of genres familiar to children (Yoon, 2021). The process included researching, watching, and engaging with toys, media, journals, books, and fan sites in which children participate, to better understand how children make sense of these practices and understand the social affinity built around these shared interests (e.g., Gaudette, 2018; Marsh,

2016; Stratford, 2016). As part of the analysis process, chosen texts were transcribed and/or captured via screenshots and then analyzed next to the composing samples of the children (e.g., Brownell, 2018). As an iterative analysis process, the data set and the additional analytic texts inform each other in ways that generate new meanings that may not be revealed with initial coding (MacLure, 2013).

Positionality of the Researcher

As a teacher and literacy coach in New York City for almost two decades, and now a doctoral student and teacher educator, I have experienced how my own beliefs and understandings of literacy have been positioned and repositioned as they were situated within the various discourses of the schools in which I taught and the educational communities in which I engaged as well as social media and my own education. I am aware that I bring to this research my own subjectivities and beliefs when it comes to literacy and child composing practices (Peshkin, 1988). As a white, middle-class woman, adopting the writing workshop model was a natural fit with the progressive educator I imagined myself to be. I took the curricula to be neutral and believed that all my students benefited from the structures and genres I taught. In my final years as a teacher, when the Common Core Standards were adopted by my school system, I experienced how institutional and political forces restricted my agency in producing and enacting literacy curriculum constructed by the lives and interests of my students. Moreover, while my colleagues and I found places to push back against the reforms, there were many places where the reforms were integrated into the existing curriculum with little resistance, with profound impacts on the educational experiences of students, and often leading to literacy practices which worked to further privilege white students and marginalize Black and Brown students.

My work as a teacher provides me with a historical, political, and practical experience to consider myself an insider to the ways that learning spaces; however, I also understand that "all constructions of identity happens within a situated context" (Reagan, 2002, p. 44). Therefore, within the particular context of this study, I was both a newcomer as a participant and researcher and an insider as the facilitator of the writing club.

During my time as a doctoral student, I have conducted two pilot studies in classroom spaces. These studies provided me with an opportunity to explore my positionality as a researcher of children. In both studies, I went into the research projects expecting to take on a nonobtrusive role as an almost invisible observer, who might blend into the background (Dyson, 1997). Instead, I found myself becoming a participant observer (Angrosino, 2007), very much involved in the goings-on in the classrooms. I attribute this to my identity as a former teacher and the collaborative relationship I have developed with both teachers and children, as well as my commitment to taking responsibility not only for uncovering and describing education problems but also for engaging in the process of solving them.

For this study, I hoped to disrupt the usual power dynamics of school writing spaces by centering the interests and composing practices of young children. However, I also recognized that my position as an adult and a former teacher placed me in a position as someone with knowledge and authority (Thorne, 2010). For this study, it was important for me to take a reflexive stance in which I reflected on the ways in which my own values, interests, and beliefs about literacy and popular culture are taken up in my role as teacher/facilitator and, more importantly, how they might potentially influence the social and cultural worlds of the child participants. As Luttrell (2000) argued, "I don't believe that researchers can eliminate tensions, contradictions, or power imbalances, but I do believe we can (and should) name them" (p. 500).

For four semesters (2019-2020 and 2020-2021), I collaborated with Park Elementary School, which the participants in this study attended. In the role as a teacher educator, I brought my graduate students in an elementary literacy course to work with the teachers and children in two first-grade classrooms. Through working with these teachers and children, I was able to observe the literacy curricula, pedagogy, and cultural norms particular to Park Elementary School. Significantly, I was able to build relationships with several of the participants (Alejandro, Jabari, Lilly, Mariana, and Omar) in their classrooms prior to the study. Each of my graduate students worked closely with one child, observing and engaging in literacy engagements throughout the semester, and ultimately producing a case study book in which they highlighted the literacy practices of the child with whom they worked. I had an opportunity to meet some of the parents during end-of-semester celebrations, and the families were familiar with my university's partnership with the school. These relationships were essential in building trust with both the families and the children and positioned me as someone who valued the child-centered and social justice commitments of the school.

Validity and Trustworthiness

In this qualitative case study of a digital writing club, the findings were based on a particular group of children, during a particular historical moment, and therefore will not be immediately generalizable to a larger population. As Dyson and Genishi (2005) stated, "It is the messy complexity of human experience that leads researchers to case studies in the qualitative or interpretive tradition" (p. 3). To capture the complexity and nuances of the social and cultural practices of a digital writing club, I employed multiple data collection and analysis methods (e.g., observation, composition audiencing, artifact collection, literacy digs, and collaging),

which cut across both my perspective as a teacher/researcher and the perspective of the child participants.

Limitations and Dilemmas

This study took place during a worldwide pandemic, which placed it in a very particular historical context. The pandemic temporarily changed the way children attended school and had a very real impact on the way children and families lived their everyday lives. At the time of this study, 70% of New York City students attend school entirely online. While this study has implications for school writing curriculum and pedagogy, it is important to recognize that it took place outside of an official school space and official school practices. While constructing a writing club without any of the restrictions of school-sanctioned practices regarding curriculum and pedagogy provided an opportunity to explore what is possible, the study might not be replicable in official school spaces.

Digital conferencing platforms offer a unique opportunity for researching the mobile and digital literacies of young children and their families. The share “my screen” function on Zoom allowed children to provide me with guided access to the digital content with which they engaged, both on their personal computers and online. The children controlled my access by choosing which files and applications to open as well as which online sites to visit during these digital literacy walks. As the children led me around these digital spaces, I was acutely aware of the potential for ethical issues to arise. While vigilant in my role as teacher, I felt confident that I would be able to avert the digital literacy journeys from venturing into spaces that would place the children in compromising positions or reveal personal information. Parental controls on tablets and computers, password-protected apps, and regulated and supervised access to the

internet meant that the mobile literacies of the young children in this study were already limited by adults.

Digital conferencing platforms also offer a unique opportunity to observe children's homes, including private spaces and family members who are in the view of the Zoom camera. Had I fully anticipated all of the affordances of the Zoom platform for children to provide access to their homes and for family members to engage in the writing club, I would have included all of the family members in the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process. At certain points in the study, I contemplated amending my IRB protocols to include interviews with the parents. However, my commitment to honor the voices of children led me to trust that children are the best informants for telling their own truths.

Presentation of the Findings

Chapter 4 next explores the use of literacy digs as a tool for examining the discursive elements of genres familiar to children. Chapter 5 considers the digital worlds of two participants, Alejandro and Jabari, and examines the interrelationships between digital practices and the construction of literate (and social) identities. Chapter 6 explores the unique literacies that are cultivated at home, mobilized by family participation, (in)visible spaces of home life, and opportunities to explore genres that may not be sanctioned in school spaces. In the final chapter, I discuss possible implications for future research and practice.

Chapter 4: Digging for "Infinity Holes": Literacy Dig as Analysis

Figure 4.1

Co-Composed Story #1

Co-Composed Story #1
Week 3: 4/21/21
Composed by: Rachel, Lilly, Jabari, Katherine, & Mariana

Rachel:	Felix and Sophia walked outside. Felix looked up and saw…
Lilly:	some birds flying, and Felix started chasing them.
Jabari:	And he stopped chasing the birds and he went to his mother and ate breakfast.
Mariana:	He ate breakfast and said, "Yuck! I do not like that!"
Katherine:	When the mom opened the window all of the sudden the birds flew in. The kids got their brooms and they started mopping the birds off the floor. The birds were napping on the floor and they didn't want feathers on the floor so they mopped them outside and the birds took a nap outside.
Lilly:	And then Sophia tried to taste the breakfast and she said, "These are yummy eggs!"
Jabari:	They stopped everything. The Earth had a new hole.[1]
Lilly:	[Ending #1] They start to add some dirt to the hole and in no time they have it all cleared up.
Jabari:	[Ending #2] A big infinity hole. It swallowed everyone up.

The writing club co-composed the story above during our third club meeting. I initially conceived of the co-composed writing activity to build community and explore the possibilities for expanding collaboration in the composing process. In this activity, I began the story with the first line: "Felix and Sophia walked outside. Felix looked up and saw…" I then invited the children to take turns adding to the story. I imagined the exercise to be low-stakes, with the potential for creative play with characters and plot lines. When Jabari wrote, "They stopped

everything. The Earth had a new hole. A big infinity hole. It swallowed everything up" (Writing Club Transcript, 4/21/21), he essentially ended a story that the writing club had just begun. When the other children attempted to "fix" the story so that the characters would survive, Jabari insisted that "there is no way out from an infinity hole!" When I suggested that superheroes might be able to help save the world, Jabari informed us that "There are no superheroes in Minecraft!" Jabari explained that infinity holes are from Minecraft, and he had learned about infinity holes from watching a YouTube video.

Beavis (2014) posited that young children who play video games develop an understanding of narrative structures that is, in part, formed by the kinds of narratives found in video games. For children growing up in a 'postdigital' world (Pettersen et al., 2022) in which digital practices are a part of everyday life, it makes sense that digital narratives would permeate the social worlds and composing practices of the writing club. Therefore, as I analyzed Jabari's contribution to our co-composing activity, it felt important to examine the infinity hole narrative from Minecraft through a literacy dig.

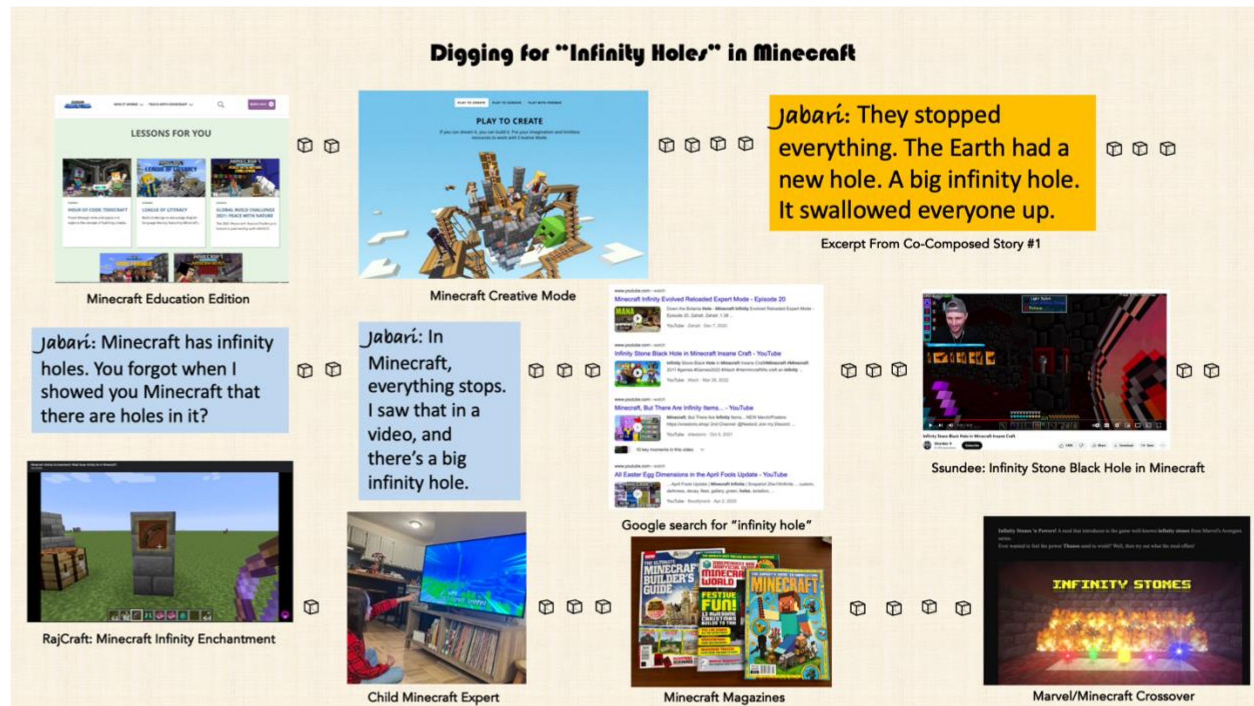
The literacy dig is an inquiry process, which centers the commercially produced texts children take up in their own composing practices, is an analytical tool used to understand the discursive elements of genres familiar to children (Yoon, 2021). The process includes researching, watching, and engaging with toys, media, journals, books, and fan sites in which children participate, to better understand how children make sense of these practices as well as to identify the social affinity built around these shared interests (e.g., Gaudette, 2018; Marsh, 2016; Stratford, 2016). As an iterative analysis process, the data set and the additional analytic texts informed each other in ways that generated new meanings that may not have been revealed with initial coding (MacLure, 2013).

Part of understanding children's literacy tools means digging into where, when, and how children accumulate this knowledge. Inevitably, literacy is not isolated to alphabet, print, and the reading/writing children acquire at school. Rather, there are ideas and elements of literacy that children acquire and employ from popular culture—video games, toys, popular media, commercial texts, and so on. While scholars place importance on expanded notions of texts (Beavis, 2014; Brownell, 2018; Lensmire, 1994; Marsh et al., 2005; Wohlwend, 2010), as did this study, I argue in this chapter for researchers and educators to engage deeply and fully in understanding and analyzing these texts as a way to situate children's identity and literacy practices. In this chapter, I map out the path of one literacy dig as I attempted to learn about the world of Minecraft, uncover the Minecraft narrative around "infinity holes," and understand how Jabari was taking up Minecraft narratives and video game genre structures in our writing club co-composing practices. Figure 4.2 illustrates the path that the literacy dig took both during the writing club and during the analysis process.

I begin by situating Minecraft as an important cultural phenomenon in children's culture. I then document how utilizing the literacy dig as an analytical tool helped me to understand children's engagement with participatory culture and digital mediascapes in deeper ways that helped facilitate more meaningful connections with the children and their intertextual and transmedia practices.

Figure 4.2

Minecraft Literacy Dig



Situating Minecraft

Minecraft is a 'sandbox'[1] video game that has attracted young children and adults alike since its initial release in 2009. Minecraft players take on an avatar as they construct a world using digital LEGO-like blocks (Mavoa et al., 2018). The game is inherently multilevel as players can begin by building simple structures and move on to more complex builds as they acquire materials, knowledge, and skills for building and surviving. Minecraft allows for significant agency for player-avatars. The game has several modes of play including Minecraft Creative and Minecraft Survival, and an ever-expanding assembly of modifications ('mods') created by Minecraft, independent companies, and players that can be downloaded and integrated

[1] "A 'sandbox' is a style of game in which minimal character limitations are placed on a gamer, allowing the gamer to roam and change the virtual world at will" (Rouse, 2022).

into play (Mavoa et al., 2018), including Marvel and Bakugan mods. Minecraft Creative allows players to build with few limitations and dangers. In the Creative mode, players have access to unlimited building blocks and do not have to engage in any survival tasks or role-playing, nor do they have to worry about protecting their avatar and structures from hostile monsters or 'mobs.'[2] However, players in Creative mode can also visit other players' worlds and co-construct worlds with other players. In Survival Mode, players enter the role-playing dimension of the game. While building is still the main goal of Survival mode, players are now provided opportunities to engage in storylines, complete tasks for enhanced tools and weapons, and introduce mods to challenge avatars and their structures.

Minecraft has developed a reputation as a video game with educational value (Haxton, 2015; Ito, 2015; Mavoa et al., 2018). Like LEGO, Minecraft is considered to teach children important cognitive, creative, and social skills as they interact with others in multiplayer worlds, solve building challenges, and develop knowledge in a vast Minecraft ecosystem of YouTube, fandom magazines, and social networks of players. Parents and educators have received the game as an educational tool for building digital and collaborative skills (Dezuanni, 2018; Mavoa et al., 2018). Minecraft Creative is an especially popular mode for young children because parents perceive the restrictions to be "safer (with regard to violent imagery) and more educational" (Pettersen et al., 2022, p. 13). Additionally, Minecraft Education is a version of Minecraft that was developed to be used in classroom settings. Teachers can create interactive lessons for students to engage with in their play; utilize additional features, such as border blocks, to control movement and access for classroom use; and utilize documentation elements like a camera function and quill and notebook for recording information during play.

[2] Mob is short for "mobile entity" (Minecraft Wiki).

Literacy Dig Part I: Playing Minecraft

My literacy dig into the world of Minecraft began prior to the co-composed story when Jabari shared his Minecraft worlds with me in a one-on-one session after the first writing club meeting. Jabari began by telling me about the Education version that was installed on his iPad. "You see it is educational," Jabari stated as he clicked on the Minecraft Education app (see Figure 4.3). "Minecraft is cool 'cause you learn to build and there's even books that you can write in" (Writing Club Transcript, 4/7/21).

Figure 4.3

Screenshot of Jabari Showing Me How to Create a New World in Minecraft Education Edition

Interestingly, Jabari understood that Minecraft held some educational properties that made the game acceptable to adults and felt it was important to convey that to me from the start. The "books that you can write in" that Jabari referenced are a special feature of Minecraft Education Edition, intended to link the game to educational goals (Mavoa et al., 2018). Jabari's strong interest in Minecraft encouraged me to set up my own Minecraft account and begin the construction of my own Minecraft world.

Dezuanni (2018) claimed that playing and building in "Minecraft is simultaneously material, discursive and performative" and, therefore, "an understanding of literacies associated with digital making needs to move beyond text and knowledge-centric approaches to include performativity, or 'doing and actions' in digital contexts" (p. 247). For the first stage of the literacy dig, I focused on the performative nature of video games, which included creating an avatar-player and "playing" in the sandbox. With my avatar, BlueNite95, I set out to begin the process of building a world. In my first attempt, I chose to build in Survival mode. I was a complete novice other than watching Jabari and other children in my life play on their tablets. The first thing I discovered was that I needed to collect some wood by finding trees and hitting them with my ax. Figure 4.4 shows the wood that I was successful at collecting in the first minutes of play.

Figure 4.4

Minecraft Play: Collecting Wood for Building

As I continued to collect wood, I explored the world and began to learn how to navigate the space and manipulate the digital tools and environment. However, before I discovered how to go about building, my screen began to flash red hearts. Having no idea what this meant, I moved my avatar around to see if I could determine what was happening. With my own heart racing, I found my avatar face to face with a Zombie 'mob.' Before I had a chance to react, my Minecraft world disappeared, replaced with a dark red screen and the words "You Died! Player was slain by Zombie" written across (see Figure 4.5).

Figure 4.5

Minecraft Playing: You Died! Player Was Slain by Zombie

In all, my first game lasted less than 4 minutes. Surprisingly, I did not feel defeated. The surprise Zombie attack was exciting and challenging in a way that made me want to learn how to be a better player and, most importantly, how to survive the next Zombie attack. Dezuanni (2018) described children "experimenting" and "taking risks to see what can and cannot be

assembled in the space" (p. 243) of Minecraft worlds, including testing what happens when a character dies. This inquiry provided me with an embodied experience of what it means to play in the spaces of video games, to reveal in the emotions that are elicited from narratives over which I had seemingly both control and no control at the same time.

Marsh (2019) and Pettersen et al. (2022) wrote about the ways the digital "permeates young children's lives" (Pettersen et al., 2022, p. 7) in ways that expand into non-digital spaces, such as playgrounds and classrooms. Jabari's Minecraft play transcended the boundaries of the digital game to become part of the composing practices of the writing club. Jabari's performative move of having the world swallowed up by an infinity hole stopped our play. This liminal movement from one textual plane to another textual plane brought a different set of practices to our composing project (Rowsell & Harwood, 2015). In that moment, Jabari (and the rest of our writing club) was forced to reassess the situation of the characters and determine, within the rules of the plotline, what could be done. For Jabari, who was operating in the world of Minecraft narratives, the story (game) was over. However, the co-composed story was a multiplayer story (game), and the other players had their own ideas and solutions for the new development. In multiplayer games, performative play has consequences for all players involved. Players provide feedback to each other as they visit and co-construct worlds together. In their feedback to Jabari, Lilly, and Mariana both expressed that Jabari's ending made them sad. At the time, Jabari was insistent that the story had to end because of the infinity hole. However, in a later co-composed story, Jabari appeared to have listened to the feedback and suggested that the characters could find ways to dig themselves out of the hole.

Immersing myself in the play worlds of children opened up new possibilities for understanding how children take up popular culture in their social worlds and literacy practices.

Play offers opportunities to be spontaneous, chaotic, subversive, and joyful all at once. In my Minecraft play, I came to understand the draw of engaging in participatory and performative literacies, where learning the narratives of the game provided opportunities to accomplish new goals while experiencing the chaos and joy that came with the play. Jabari and the other children in this study played with narratives in their composing to make sense of the media material in their worlds. For these children, an important goal for playing with narratives was to elicit emotional responses and admiration from peers. As Dyson (1997) explained, "Children's responses to each others' [sic] symbolic acts imbue those acts with social meaning, and it is the sense of a functional goal—of participating in some social communion—that organizes and drives the symbolic process" (p. 18). Jabari enjoyed the space of chaos and the joy of watching his peers react to his narrative choices. In bringing infinity holes into the co-composing practices of the writing club, Jabari was able to translate the textual joy he experienced while playing Minecraft to his composing practices and invite his peers to partake in the meaning-making experience.

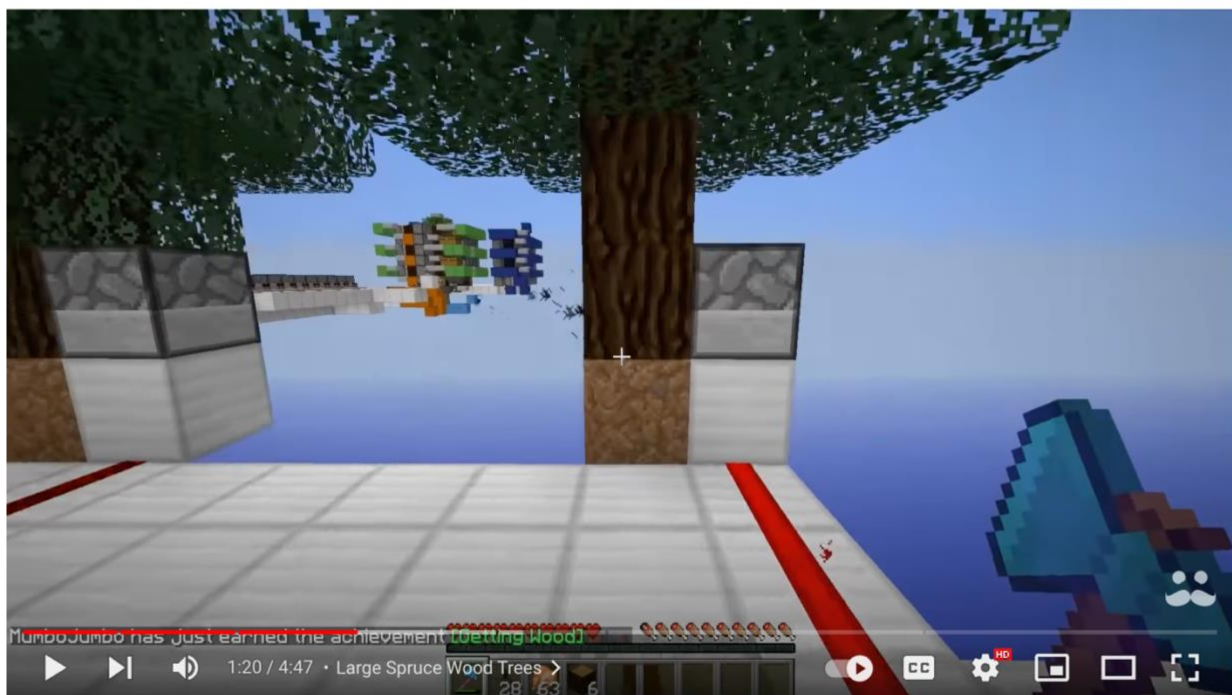
Literacy Dig Part II: Building Knowledge from Experts

I quickly learned that playing Minecraft requires research beyond playing. Within the first 5 minutes of play in Survival mode, my avatar had been slain by a Zombie, and I had yet to discover how to use the wood I had collected to build a structure. I turned to YouTube to learn from the expertise of skillful players. I began by searching for YouTube videos on how to collect wood and build structures, the two most basic skills required to begin constructing one's own world in Minecraft. I discovered several videos and quickly got lost in the world of watching other players manipulate the Minecraft environments: collect multiple types of wood, plant forests for future lumber needs, and begin to build with the wood in their inventory. Figure 4.6

shows a screenshot of a tutorial on how to cut wood from the *Mumbo Jumbo* (2016) YouTube channel. Mumbo Jumbo has over nine million followers who utilize his videos to learn basic and advanced skills for building and surviving in Minecraft. While watching the videos gave me ideas, I still had a steep learning curve to overcome before I could consider myself a successful builder in Minecraft.

Figure 4.6

Screenshot of Mumbo Jumbo YouTube video: What's the Fastest Way to Get Wood in Minecraft?



What's The Fastest Way to Get Wood in Minecraft?

In a study of young children's engagement with Minecraft in a preschool setting, Pettersen et al. (2022) found that young children often brought knowledge gathered from fan-made YouTube videos into their talk around Minecraft. For Jabari, watching Minecraft YouTube videos was an important part of his identity as a Minecraft expert. Telling others about the YouTube videos that he had watched positioned him as a serious apprentice and a member of a wider community who not only played Minecraft but also worked hard at building knowledge

and skills. Furthermore, engaging in conversations around Minecraft YouTube videos was an important way to be a participant in the social world of Minecraft fandom.

Young children take up popular culture as a serious intellectual pursuit, worthy of researching and building a community of fellow investigators and collaborators. In recent years, YouTube has become a popular way for children to engage in research of popular culture (Marsh, 2016). Children watch YouTube videos as a means of building their own knowledge and as a way to make social connections. Video game players with large YouTube followings invite other players to join their social worlds by creating shared artifacts and norms that help elucidate what it means to be a member of the community. With YouTube videos, children are able to participate in affinity spaces through viewing alone. Rather than participating directly in online social spaces, the young children in this study utilized the knowledge that they collected from watching videos to leverage their positions within their own peer social worlds.

Literacy Dig Part III: Digging for Infinity Holes

When Jabari brought "infinity holes" and the world of Minecraft into the co-composed story narrative, I decided that this was a good opportunity to learn more about the narratives that make up the world of Minecraft. Jabari had told me that he learned about the infinity holes in Minecraft by watching a YouTube video. Although he did not remember the specific video he had watched, I was confident that I would be able to find a link through a Google search. I began my search by typing "infinity holes in Minecraft" into the search engine. The search results were initially disappointing with no direct matches. It was clear that "infinity" was an important device in the world of Minecraft as the search revealed links to "infinity stones," "infinity enchantments," and "infinity items," but there were no links to "infinity holes." At this point, I decided to watch any videos of expert players that had the word "infinity" in the title. I was

hoping that the videos would give me an idea about what "infinity" means in the world of Minecraft. One video on YouTube, *Minecraft Infinity Enchantment: What Does Infinity Do in Minecraft* (Rajcraft, 2020), explained that the "infinity enchantment" gives a bow (or other tools) and unlimited arrows if you have at least one in your inventory (see Figure 4.7). While this video corroborated "infinity" was part of the Minecraft world, it did not fit with how Jabari was using the term in our co-composed narrative.

Figure 4.7

YouTube Video: Minecraft Infinity Enchantment: What Does Infinity Do in Minecraft?

I decided to ask some of my kid friends, who happened to be Minecraft experts, if they had ever heard of infinity holes. Walton, a kindergartner, emphatically declared that there is "no such thing as infinity holes in Minecraft" (Personal Communication, 7/3/22). Brothers Oscar, age 6, and Hudson, age 10, also confirmed that they had never heard of infinity holes. They acknowledged there are "black holes and worm holes, but nothing called an infinity hole" (Personal Communication, 5/28/22).

At this point, I was pretty much convinced that infinity holes do not exist in the Minecraft universe. At first, I was frustrated with my Minecraft research skills and inability to find the infinity holes that Jabari was referencing. Then, I began to understand that I did not need to find the infinity holes in Minecraft to make Jabari's narrative real. In his imagination, infinity holes exist, and they can have the effect of ending the world. When I asked my partner, Chris, if he knew anything about infinity holes in Minecraft, he responded, "No, but 'infinity stones' are a big part of the Marvel Universe. Do you think Jabari is drawing from both of those narratives?" (Personal Communication, 8/21/22). Sure enough, when I Googled "infinity stones in Minecraft," a link to a site for learning how to access the "Infinity Stones from Marvel" appeared in my search. I was excited to learn that someone had designed a 'Marvel Superheroes Mod' that introduced characters from the Marvel Cinematic Universe as well as the comics to Minecraft. It turns out that there *are* superheroes in Minecraft.

It became clear that Jabari was building a narrative taken from multiple media universes. After all, he *is* a kid with a vast knowledge of many texts and media ecologies, and like the creators of the popular 'mods' in the Minecraft universe, Jabari's imagination allowed him to build worlds that connected narratives across media landscapes. Moreover, infinity holes had personal meaning to Jabari, and incorporating them into the co-composed story allowed him to contribute a narrative that held importance to him. Importantly, Jabari's use of infinity holes in his composing suggested that rather than looking for "truth" in children's composing, it was perhaps more valuable to consider how children play with ideas through textual remixing (Yoon, 2021) to make sense of their popular digital/media worlds.

Conclusion

As an adult researcher, I was humbled by the knowledge that exists in the online and offline worlds of fandom (Minecraft and others). Within the scope of this study (or as a facilitator of a writing club), I could not hope to scratch the surface of these mediascapes by playing a few games and spending a few evenings watching YouTube videos. However, through conducting the literacy dig into the world of Minecraft and infinity holes, I was able to better understand the complex narrative structures that Jabari was introducing to our writing club.

Corsaro (2003) argued that “to learn about kids’ culture from their perspectives, we need to shed our adult point of view and get inside the children’s worlds” (p. 5). Through playing Minecraft myself, I better understood the performative nature of the literacies involved in the game. As I attempted to manipulate the Minecraft environment, I experienced the agency that players have in deciding how to build their worlds, the ways in which they engage with other players, and the ‘mods’ they include in their play. Importantly, I found myself forming a new understanding of the violence found in video games. My avatar’s quick demise by the hand of a Zombie ‘mob’ did not feel violent within the space of the game. Instead, it felt like a challenge that required me to build my knowledge and skill level. Analyzing Jabari’s use of the infinity hole narrative with this new understanding produced new ways of thinking about Jabari and his goals as a writer and contributor to our co-composed stories. I began to see Jabari as a child who likes to play with surprising narrative plots and challenge himself and others to find solutions. Violence, gore, sabotage, and even death can elicit joy and excitement in playful composing practices, and when understood as such, educators can refocus their attention from moral panic to a place of wonder and interest.

Exploring the world of YouTube videos provided me with a deeper understanding and appreciation of video game fandom, the level of expertise that goes into being a strong Minecraft player, and the importance of the social and cultural components of playing the game. Like Jabari, I engaged with YouTube videos to learn about the game, to acquire the norms and practices required for cultural membership (Dyson & Genishi,1994). Furthermore, watching the YouTube videos gave me an entry into conversations with other Minecraft players, as I referenced the videos frequently when I spoke with friends (including my kid friends) about the game. In fact, as a novice player, most of my knowledge about the game came from watching videos.

During the writing club, I shared with Jabari that I had set up my own Minecraft world and was watching some videos on YouTube. While I did not go into full detail of my literacy dig, I told him that I was learning about Minecraft because I knew how important it was to him. Jabari expressed excitement in our shared affinity for the game and found ways to integrate Minecraft into our one-on-one conversations throughout the study. As an adult, playing Minecraft provided me with a "ticket" (Dyson, 2003) to participate in the social world of Jabari (and the children in my life). In the social world of Minecraft, Jabari was the expert, and I was the apprentice.

The literacy dig is a valuable tool for researchers and educators to situate children's identities and literacy practices, as well as build relationships with children around their interests and cultural practices. While time was a factor that limited my ability to engage in literacy digs around all the interests of the children, I did engage in several others that had important implications for the writing club and the study. Literacy digs into the *Tannerites*, a family-run YouTube channel, and the Captain Underpants series led to the design of two inquiry projects for

the writing club. As discussed in this chapter, the literacy digs provided me with important insider information about the digital and media worlds of the children in the study. This information not only supported my understandings of children's identity making and composing practices, but it also provided an important way to show children that their interests and culture mattered in our writing club.

Chapter 5: World Making in Digital Mediascapes

"I think I kinda want to share my screen so that I can share some LEGO Mario with you," declared Alejandro during our one-on-one composing share conversation (Alejandro Composing Share Transcript, 5/5/21). We had been meeting for just over 10 minutes, during which time I had barraged Alejandro with a number of questions about his composing practices and the composing pieces he had posted to our writing club *Seesaw* page. While Alejandro had dutifully answered my questions regarding his composing practices, it was clear that he was far more interested in teaching me about LEGO Mario than talking about his latest writing pieces. Once Alejandro had found the LEGO Mario set that he wanted to share with me on Amazon, his excitement was discernible in the ways his face lit up, the speed with which he clicked from image to image, and how his voice raised at least an octave as he exclaimed, "Isn't that so cool?!" (Alejandro Composing Share Transcript, 5/5/2).

At the time of the study, all the writing club members were still in possession of the tablets that had been distributed during the initial lockdown, and most of the children continued to utilize the devices for both school and personal use. The Zoom *Share Screen* function made moving between material and digital shares an organic and common occurrence in our writing club, providing the children with an opportunity to share their digital worlds with their peers and with me. These shares proved to be important literacy events in which children shared 'salient' (Kress, 2002) digital texts that are often forbidden in school spaces. As the writing club progressed, these digital media texts took up importance in the social worlds of the children and their literate identities, and they became prominent mentor texts in the formal and informal composing practices of the writing club.

In this chapter, I highlight the digital literacy practices of two participants, Alejandro and Jabari, which illustrate central themes and understandings from across the data set. Alejandro and Jabari often logged on earlier than the other participants or stayed after everyone else had logged off. These were times when one child would share the screen on their tablet and take me on what I began to call a "digital walking tour." Rowsell and Harwood (2015) posited that "children slide into a different way of being and different knowledge-making/brokering when they have a tablet in their hands" (p. 142). These digital walking tours were often fast-paced as Alejandro or Jabari led me (and, at times, other club members who had also logged on early or stayed after) from site to site, pointing out and clicking on the salient features of each text before moving on to the next site. At times, these interactions were emergent and ephemeral as they moved between digital sites with little interaction. At other times, the sites became opportunities for Alejandro and Jabari to share their knowledge about a particular toy, a video game, or a favorite video, movie clip, or song. In these moments, the reading and composing moves of the one sharing the screen were made visible as they brokered the meaning-making for those they led on their digital walking tours.

Alejandro: Connecting Worlds Through Digital Play

Alejandro, a kindergartner at the time of the study, was the only student still attending school entirely online. Alejandro and his parents had moved to a neighboring state to live with his uncle at the beginning of the pandemic, while Alejandro's father continued to work in an afterschool program in the city, commuting back and forth each day. For most club meetings, Alejandro joined us from his uncle's kitchen, where he had a tablet set up at the kitchen table. Occasionally, Alejandro logged onto our Zoom club meetings from the car. These were usually days when Alejandro joined his father at his job in the city. As with many families dealing with

disruptions to work schedules and the added demands of living with the pandemic, Alejandro's family relied on a network of family members for childcare and supervision during virtual schooling. Alejandro's tablet allowed him to "take" school with him when the schedules of adults required that he be on the move. Alejandro's use of the tablet went beyond attending school online and school literacy assignments to include a wide range of playful reading and composing practices, providing opportunities for Alejandro to make connections with his peers virtually and establish himself as a member of the writing club and his wider school community. The writing club was an important social time for Alejandro, when he was able to interact with children of his own age, learn about the interests of his peers, and join in the construction of shared meanings and cultural understandings.

Reading Digital Texts

As I observed the children share a range of digital sites (e.g., Amazon, Minecraft, YouTube, Bakugan, and Highlights™), I became increasingly aware of the embodied way that children were reading these multisensory digital texts. This was observable in the ways that children moved their whole bodies—standing to emphasize excitement, leaning in to read the tablet screen, and even pushing back in their chairs in wonderment—and in the small movements of eyes zeroing in on a graphic and darting to another area of the screen, or small fingers tapping on the tablet to pull up a text or image. As Rowsell (2014) explained, "When you 'read' an iPad, you enter into the world of programmers and interface designers who are not thinking about how a reader decodes words, necessarily" (p. 122); therefore, beyond reading words, reading an iPad requires spatial awareness, the ability to decode sign systems, and an understanding of haptic feedback. In recent years, researchers have argued that the proliferation of tablet use among young children, including infants, has shifted our understandings of children as passive receivers

of texts to those who produces as they consume (Beavis, 2014; Rowsell & Harwood, 2015). Children working with tablets show remarkable originality and productive power as they consume media texts, while simultaneously transforming and personalizing those texts (Rowsell & Harwood, 2015).

Narrating a Reading Event

"Am I the first one here? Is it time for more of this?" Alejandro asked as he logged on and began to share his screen (Writing Club Transcript, 5/5/21). Before I could answer, Alejandro was pulling up a Google page with LEGO Mario. Alejandro and I had met an hour earlier for his Composing Share, and in the time between our one-on-one meeting and the official writing club, he had continued to explore the links of the LEGO Super Mario Google page (See Figure 5.1). Alejandro, a kindergartner, was exceptionally adept at navigating the Google search engine. As soon as he began typing the letters l-e-g, "LEGO Mario" showed up as a possible match, "Ah, that's the one I want to show you," he stated as he clicked on the correct search term. Once on the Google search page, Alejandro immediately began scrolling down the page with his finger. "Almost there," he assured me, and then, once he landed on a section with links to YouTube videos, he stated, "Here we are. I think you're gonna like this one."

Figure 5.1

Alejandro's LEGO Mario Google Search

When analyzed as a reading event, this interaction shows the complex understandings that are involved in reading a digital text. Alejandro, an emergent reader, and writer was able to use the words, images, and spatial organization of the Google page to support his meaning-making as he read. Having spent significant time on this page, as well as other Google searches, Alejandro knew where to find images, how to scroll down, click on links, and in this case, where to find the videos that he wanted to share with me. As he read the page, he narrated his movements, highlighting what he was looking for and how he was going to find it. The narrations helped organize Alejandro's reading moves, and while these narrations supported me as a fellow traveler on this digital walk (and as a researcher), I have a feeling they were for Alejandro as much as for me. Importantly, these narrations helped underscore the agency that Alejandro demonstrated in his reading of these digital texts. By scrolling and clicking, Alejandro was able to produce a reading experience that met his needs. Alejandro chose which parts of the page to read and what he could ignore, and ultimately, when to leave the page for a new digital text (when he clicked on the Super Mario YouTube video). Once he was content with the media he had consumed, he was quick to move onto a new website or app on his computer.

Digital Artifact Shares

The artifact share time took on a special importance in the writing club. The eagerness to share toys, books, pets, magic sets, musical instruments, homemade lemonade, etc., was matched by the desire to share digital media texts (websites, videos, and apps), digital representations of toys (e.g., Super Mario LEGO sets for sale on Amazon), video games, and digital texts the children composed, themselves. While stored on a computer or accessed via the internet— as opposed to the physical spaces of bedrooms, living rooms, and kitchens—the digital artifacts embodied the interests, identities, knowledges, and experiences of the children sharing them in

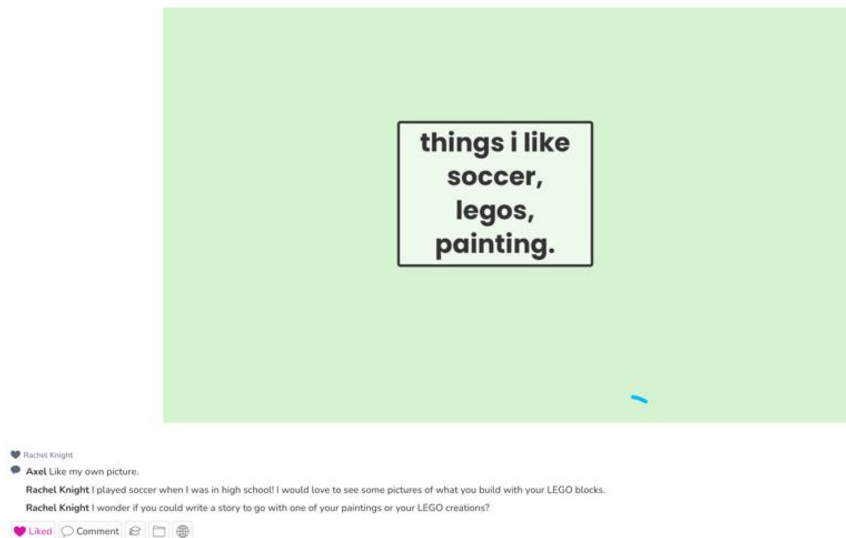
much the same way as physical objects. Ultimately, the digital artifacts proved to be integral to the cultural and social worlds of the children and the writing club.

Alejandro was an active participant in the artifact share time of the writing club as both one who shared artifacts and one who enthusiastically engaged when other children were sharing. Alejandro was a keen observer of his peers in the writing club and would often "research" and find digital texts related to the interests of the members to share with the club.

The majority of Alejandro's physical artifact shares revolved around his multimodal composing practices, including a painting of a video game, a jar of pencils from his make-shift online schooling space at his uncle's kitchen table, and a glass of lemonade that he had made from scratch, which included a detailed description of his "secret" recipe. Unlike the other children in the writing club, Alejandro rarely shared physical toys, perhaps because he and his family were living with his uncle at the time and the majority of his toys remained in the city. In an effort to contribute to the world of toys, collecting, and expertise, Alejandro utilized his tablet and Share Screen function to share digital representations of the toys that held special interest for him. As has been illustrated above, LEGO Super Mario was an important multimedia franchise in Alejandro's world. Alejandro often mentioned his love of LEGO in both writing club shares and in his *Seesaw* posts (see Figure 5.2). The digital shares of LEGO Super Mario sets provided an opportunity for Alejandro to demonstrate and display his membership in the 'affinity space' (Gee, 2005) of LEGO and Super Mario, in the absence of his having the physical toys and video games.

Figure 5.2

Screenshot of Alejandro's "Things I Like" Post on Seesaw



Alejandro, and the other children in this study, appeared to be particularly drawn to digital texts that featured children of a similar age. Marsh (2016) posits that young children find a "vicarious pleasure in watching another child" (p. 375) engage with toys and popular culture in ways that they can imagine themselves engaging with in their own lives. For Alejandro, this was evident in the videos of young children playing with LEGO Mario sets that he shared with me and the writing club, as well as the *Highlights*™ *Kids* page that became a consistent stop on his digital walking tours.

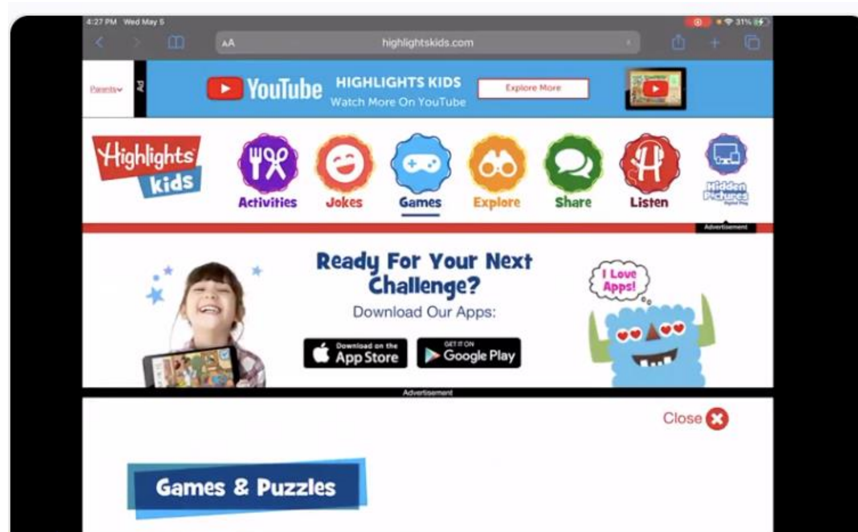
When Alejandro shared a YouTube video of two children playing with a LEGO Mario starter set, he exhibited both joy in watching the children play, and an intellectual interest in the new information that could be acquired about the world of Super Mario from the video. Alejandro commented throughout the viewing in much the same way that he did during one of his digital walks. This was Alejandro's artifact share, and Alejandro understood that the practice of sharing artifacts required providing commentary and providing his audience with the

significance behind the object. His comments ranged from, "Doesn't that look fun?" to "Look, that's how you get coins" (Writing Club Transcript, 5/12/21). Alejandro explained that he watches videos to learn about Super Mario when he cannot play the video game. Significantly, Alejandro neither mentioned a desire to purchase the LEGO Mario sets he shared nor talked about having his own LEGO bricks. For the purpose of these shares, he appeared content to consume the video as the product (Marsh, 2016) and share the video as the artifact.

The first time Alejandro took me to the *Highlights™ Kids* page, he informed me, "I want to show you *Highlights™ Kids* because you know that I love jokes" (Writing Club Transcript, 5/5/21). *Highlights™ Kids* is a website that offers free digital access to many of the features of the popular *Highlights™ Magazine,* including Hidden Pictures™, Jokes and Quizzes, and Activities (see Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.3

Screenshot of Highlights™ Kids Website Shared by Alejandro

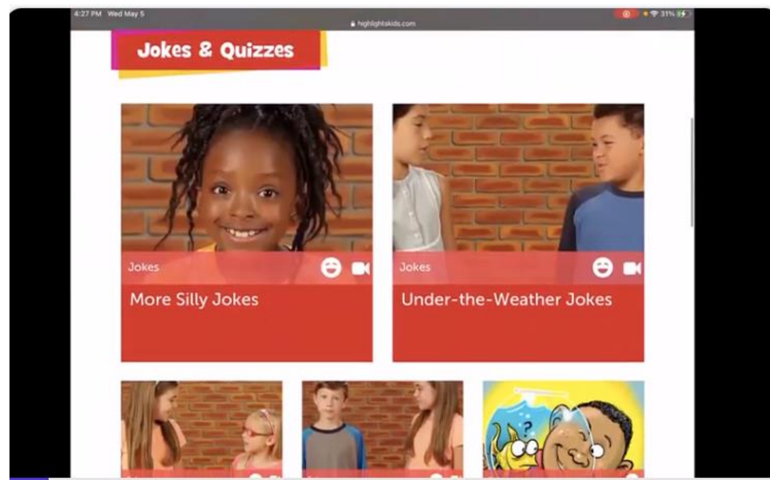


While Alejandro occasionally clicked on various activities and puzzle options, including Hidden Pictures™, he focused primarily on the videos featuring children. "Better get your laugh

track ready," Alejandro exclaimed, as he clicked on a video of two children telling jokes (see Figure 5.2). As an only child, he has spent much of his time surrounded by adults and alone with his tablet. The videos with children playing provided an opportunity for Alejandro to engage with other children and their cultural practices, even if only as a voyeur. In the writing club, Alejandro leveraged these videos to gain social status with his peers.

Figure 5.4

Screenshot of Jokes & Quizzes from Alejandro's Video Share



A few weeks before Alejandro shared the joke videos from *Highlights Kids*™, the genre of jokes had become a popular share in the writing club. The jokes had begun when Katherine and Maya both posted banana jokes on *Seesaw* as part of the provocation: "What makes you laugh?" Maya explained that kids at school were telling banana jokes during recess. Jokes became popular texts in our club, and the children began to bring new jokes to each club meeting. While Alejandro's status as an online learner denied him access to the social world of children telling jokes in the schoolyard and the status afforded to those who could retell the schoolyard jokes in the writing club, he was able to participate in the circulating literacy practice (Vasudevan et al., 2010) by sharing videos of children on the internet telling similar jokes. His

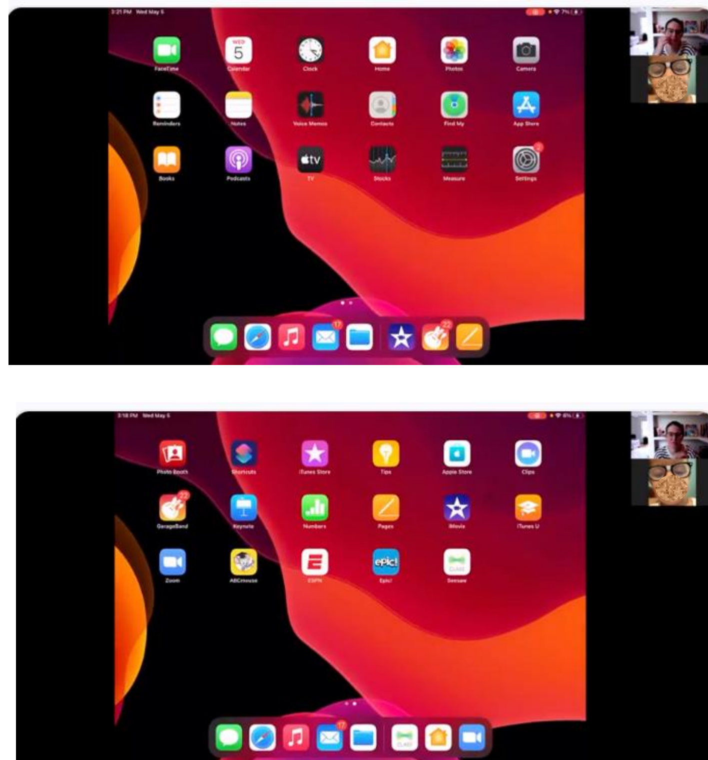
desire to be a part of the joke-telling community was evident in his invitation, “I have some really funny videos of kids telling jokes for anyone who is here. I think you will like them” (Writing Club Transcript, 5/5/21).

Playful Composing with Apps

Alejandro’s digital pursuits went beyond the digital media worlds of *LEGO Mario* and *Highlights™ Kids*, to include playful engagements with the pre-installed digital apps that he discovered on his iPad (see Figure 5.3for screenshots of the apps found on Alejandro’s iPad). During one of his digital walks, Alejandro took me from app to app to show me his digital compositions. The iPad apps afforded Alejandro opportunities to explore a range of multimodal composing practices and offered a space for him to play creatively with his identities as a digital composer and (imagined) member of the digital communities he observed online.

Figure 5.5

Screenshots of Alejandro’s iPad Apps, Screens 1-2



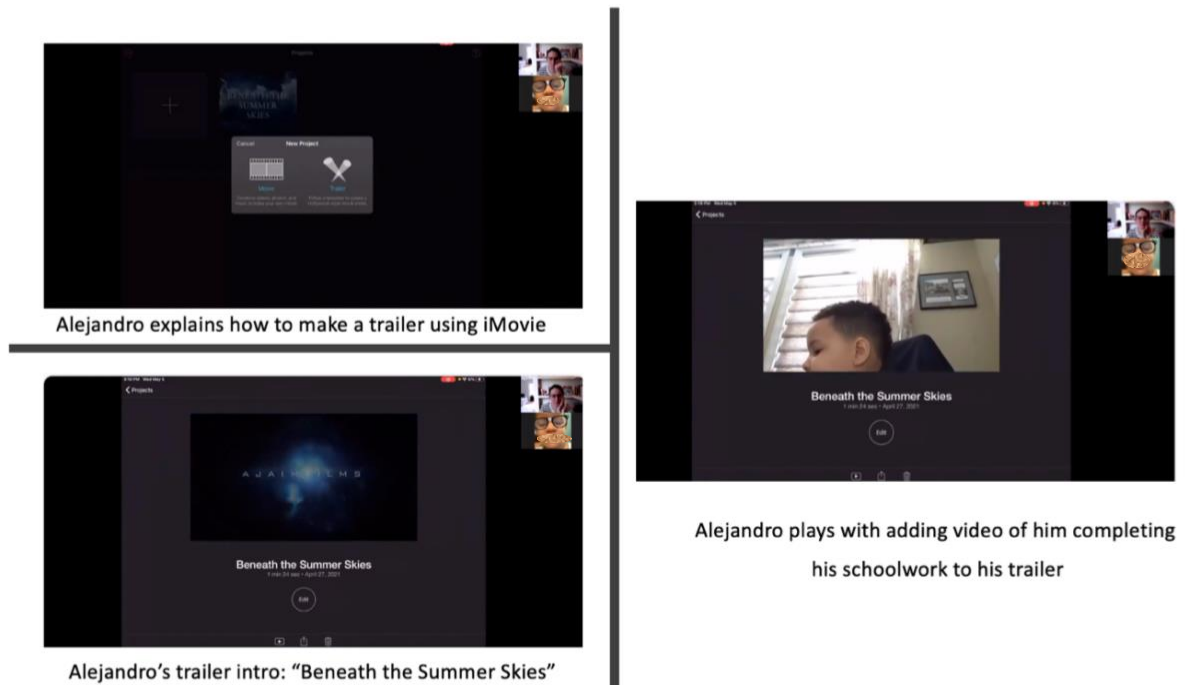
Alejandro's digital walking tours provided me with an opportunity to observe some of the digital composing work he engaged with outside of school and without any of the parameters enforced in school digital practices. In these "natural and unbridled sense-making" (Rowsell & Harwood, 2015, p. 137) engagements, Alejandro demonstrated his creative ability to apply different modes of representation in his composing practices based on the varying affordances of each app. Drawing on the work of Kress (1997), Rowsell and Harwood (2015) argued, "what drives meaning-making for young children involves *interest*, *motivation*, and, we add, *meaning fulfillment* (i.e., does the mode do the job?)" (p. 14, emphasis in original). For Alejandro, playing with and exploring the possibilities of the various modes of composing offered by the apps was as much a part of his motivation for meaning making as producing a final product.

In the iMovie app, Alejandro brought me to the trailer templates, which allow users to customize their own movie trailer by creating a title and credits and uploading video clips and photos. Each template comes with a pre-recorded music score that matches the template. Alejandro demonstrated how he created his own trailer by pulling up one of the templates and guiding me through the beginning steps. "First, I went to trailer," he explained, pointing to the "Trailer" image on the New Project window. "Then, I went to this one," he continued, clicking on the Romance template. "And then I recorded my own thing and did my stuff and I recorded myself doing my [school] assignments and I was putting them in [the trailer]" (Alejandro's Composing Share Transcript, 5/5/21) (see Figure 5.4 for Screenshots of Alejandro's trailer demonstration). Alejandro never showed me his complete trailer. As happened often on these digital walks, he moved on after giving me a quick glimpse at the trailer he had composed. What I saw was the opening credits with his name and the title, "Beneath the Summer Skies." Alejandro cut off my viewing as soon as a video of him at his uncle's kitchen table appeared on

the screen. As a researcher, I wanted to see the entirety of Alejandro's trailer composition, but his agenda focused on showing me all the different ways he played with his tablet, so we moved on.

Figure 5.6

Screenshots from Alejandro's Demonstration of iMovie Trailer

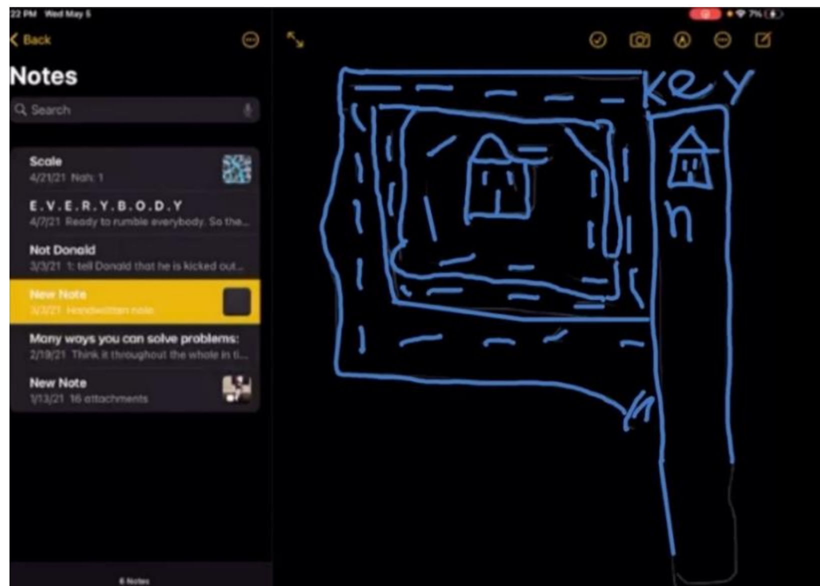


Alejandro took me to his Notes app—a productivity app that is commonly used for making lists and taking quick notes; however, it has also, in recent years, taken on new popularity for its drawing and voice-transcription capabilities. It was clear from the notes that Alejandro shared that he understood the multiple uses for the Notes app. The notes Alejandro shared included a variety of lists on a range of topics as well as a digitally drawn "map to nowhere." However, Alejandro's notes were also unique in that his notes were rarely written as reminders for himself; instead, they were written for an imagined audience. Importantly, Alejandro's notes were written for readers to engage with. The notes were both playful and provocative.

As Alejandro invited me to view his map in a note he had named “Handwritten note,” he explained, “This is a map that will lead you nowhere” (Alejandro’s Composing Share Transcript, 5/5/21). The map was hand-drawn in the Notes app using the Markup button, which is available on devices with haptic touch, including iPhones and iPads. Alejandro included a Key with the map, indicating that the object at the center of the map was a house. Surrounding the house, Alejandro included an intricate maze of alleys (see Figure 5.5). Laughing, Alejandro traced the alleys on the map, demonstrating that each alley led to dead end. “You see, if someone uses this map, they can’t get anywhere because all the alleys lead to nowhere!” he pointed out. Alejandro found humor in creating a map that would fool his fellow travelers.

Figure 5.7

Screenshot of Alejandro’s Hand-drawn Map on the Notes App (Traced by Author)



Included in his lists, Alejandro had the beginning of a list of advice for those in need of solving a problem and a list of things to do for Donald Trump. Donald Trump was the President of the United States at the time of the study and a divisive figure in both political and social arenas. The children in this study were acutely aware of his presidency and the negative impacts

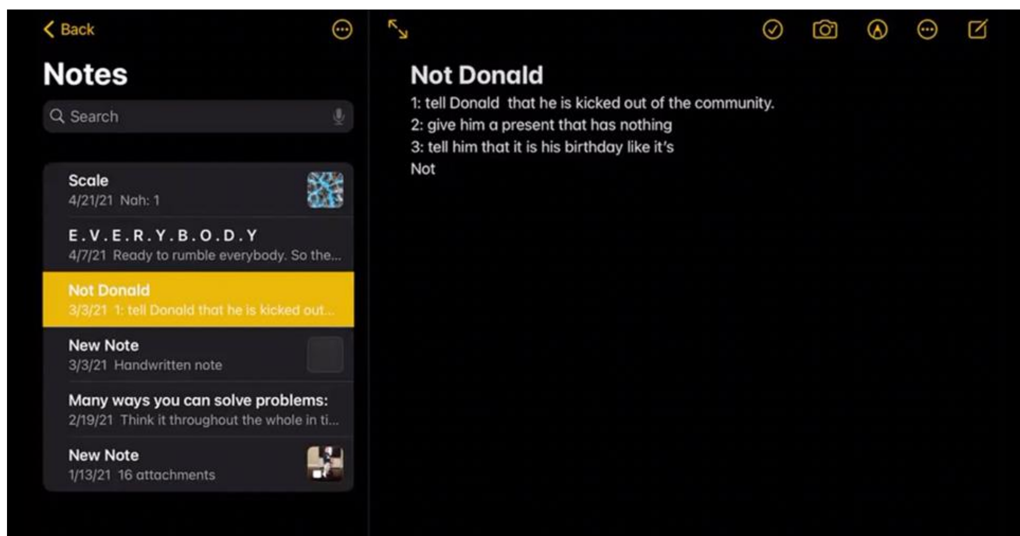
of his policies on the communities in which they lived. The school they attended was a space where classroom conversations about racial and social justice were encouraged, and Black Lives Matter posters adorned the walls of the first-floor hallway. Alejandro's "Not Donald" list included:

1. tell Donald that he is kicked out of the community
2. give him a present that has nothing
3. tell him that it is his birthday like it's Not (Fieldnotes, 5/5/21) (see Figure 5.6)

While the list offered playful ways to deal with Donald Trump by tricking him or hurting his feelings, the sentiment behind the list pointed to the deep damage that Trump had inflicted on Black and Brown communities around the country and in the tri-state area. When Alejandro read me the list, he was laughing. Humor is an important tool for Alejandro in how he presents himself to the world. However, he is also a child with great empathy and serious ideas. There was no mistaking the serious nature of the list: "It's a list about bad things that you can do to Donald Trump," he told me.

Figure 5.8

Screenshot of Alejandro's "Not Donald" List on the Notes App



Alejandro's desire to be a member of digital (and in-person) communities was evident in many of his digital composing practices, including the Notes app. "This is for a video game that I have on my tablet," Alejandro began, as he pointed to a note with the title "Scale" (see Figure 5.7). "It's for celebrating in the comments. A person can use the [the scale] to tell which game mode they like" (Alejandro's Composing Share, 5/5/21). With a rating system from 1-5, the scale read as:

1 for Nah,

2 for Meh,

3 for Okay,

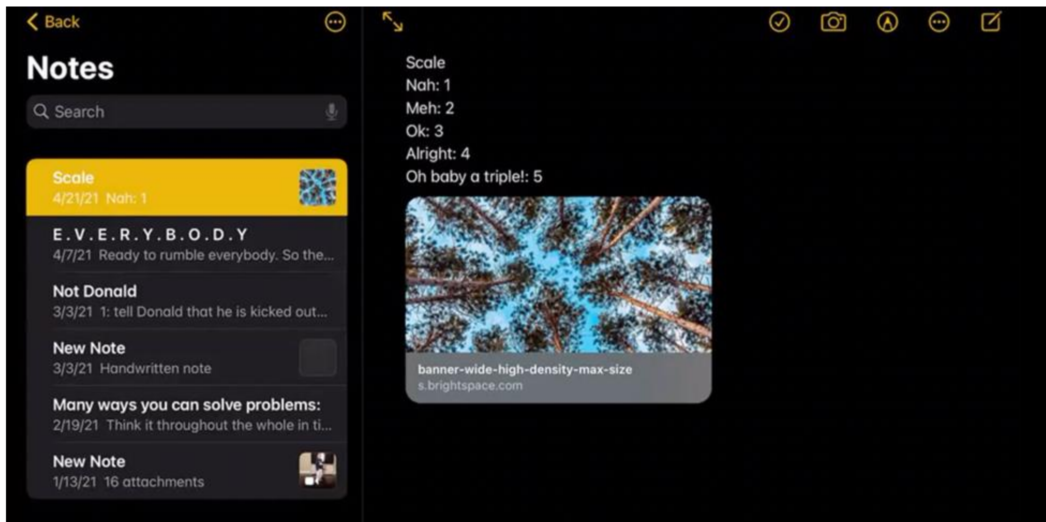
4 for Alright, and

5 for Oh baby a triple!

Alejandro had created the scale as a tool for participating in the online practice of gaming commentary, in which prominent gamers post videos of themselves (often to YouTube) and comment as they play (or watch others play) video games. The commentary often acts as both a review of the game and a how-to guide for gamers who want to improve their play and learn insider tips for mastering a level. Alejandro informed me that he had created his own video of him playing a video game, but he was waiting for his mother to edit the video before uploading it to YouTube. Most likely, the video was never posted to YouTube as most of Alejandro's app play stayed as documents saved to his personal tablet and did not have an audience beyond his family and, occasionally, our writing club. Like imaginative play, Alejandro's digital app play provided him with an opportunity to try on new identities (Wohlwend, 2010) and explore the worlds of the online communities of which he imagined himself to be a member without actually engaging in those online spaces.

Figure 5.9

Screenshot of Alejandro's "Scale" for Rating Video Games on the Notes App



Importantly, the playful composing on the apps revealed small snippets of Alejandro's "truths." Alejandro was a boy looking for connections and ways to engage with his peers and adults. For Alejandro, one way to do this was through learning about popular culture and media so that he could one day be a member of these social worlds. Alejandro utilized his digital apps as not only rehearsals for this future version of himself, but also as a way to legitimize his place in these worlds in the present, as a 5-year-old. Alejandro was also a boy growing up during a worldwide pandemic, in a climate of political and social unrest, with political figures leveling daily attacks on Black, Brown, and immigrant communities. In his digital apps, Alejandro found a place to explore this truth in his own way, with his pointed humor and imagination.

Jabari: Composing a Literate Identity with Digital Narratives

Jabari was a second grader at the time of the study, living with his mom, dad, and older sister in Harlem. I first met Jabari when he was in the first-grade classroom that was paired with my graduate students enrolled in a reading and writing methods course. Jabari worked one-on-one with one of my graduate students for a semester, during which time I was able to observe

him interact with the adults and children in the room. Jabari had a large presence in the room and was often the center of attention in what could be described as a bustling room filled with movement and activity. For Jabari, a child with strong individual desires, deep sensitivities, and a longing to be heard, raising his voice and taking a physical stand were common means for Jabari to demand attention. As a result, Jabari spent a lot of time with an adult or in a quiet corner where he was instructed to calm himself. At the time of the study, Mariana and Jabari were in the same second-grade classroom. Mariana often reported back to me what Jabari was up to in school. These reports included an incident in which Jabari had been involved in a fight during recess, and several times Jabari had “gotten in trouble” for “fooling around” (Mariana Writing Club Transcript, 5/7/21) and making too much noise during writing time. In his first years of schooling, Jabari had been positioned as a troublemaker (Shalaby, 2017) by both adults and children. Furthermore, Jabari’s interests in Zombies, Minecraft, and Bakugan had little place in the official curriculum, providing him with little opportunity to exhibit his identity as an expert in these domains.

Jabari’s strong desire to share his expertise and interests was evident in the writing club. In our first writing club meeting, Jabari stayed logged on after everyone else had signed off. He had more literacy artifacts to share with me, and he seemed determined to take advantage of the opportunity to have the sole attention of a teacher who showed a genuine interest in the texts that mattered to him. Jabari quickly discovered that I also logged onto the club early, and he began to take advantage of these one-on-one times as well. In these one-on-one moments with me, Jabari took the lead. He excelled in these moments when he had agency and the full attention of an audience. Through digital shares and shared writing club compositions with digital narratives,

Jabari took on new literate identities and slowly began the process of (re)positioning himself as a digital-media expert among his peers.

On Being an Expert

The children in the study utilized digital media to both extend and introduce new understandings when sharing physical artifacts and texts in what Kinder (1991) termed as "transmedia intertextuality" (p. 3). As David Buckingham (2018, as cited in Thomason et al., 2018) explained in his foreword to the book *Researching Everyday Childhoods: Time, Technology and Documentation in a Digital Age*:

> For most of us, media are an inextricable part of the texture of our everyday lived experience: we live with and through them, moment by moment. They are fundamental to how we communicate, how we represent ourselves to others, and how we understand the wider world. (p. ix)

Jabari moved seamlessly between sharing the material objects found in his bedroom (books, notebooks, toys, and digital devices) and the digital media to which he had access on his devices. During one of our club meetings, when he had logged on earlier than the rest of the children, Jabari pulled out a Bakugan action figure and held it up close to the Zoom camera, adjusting it ever so slightly to bring it into focus. When I asked Jabari to tell me about the toy, he held the object closer to the screen, as if offering me a chance to identify the artifact on my own. Completely at a loss, I ventured a guess:

> Rachel: Is it a dragon?
> Jabari: It-it's [Jabari pauses as if he is contemplating my answer] Yes.
> Rachel: Wow!
> Jabari: I'm gonna show you the Bakugan app. This is a Bakugan, there's a Bakugan app. (Writing Club Transcript, 4/28/21)

Jabari shared his screen, revealing the home screen of his tablet with a Bakugan app link. After several seconds of waiting for the app to load, Jabari took me to the Bakugan Battle Planet website (https://bakugan.com/en/home). The Bakugan franchise began as a Japanese animé

television show in 2007 and quickly grew into a multimedia ecosystem with trading cards, action figures, board games, and video games. The Bakugan franchise has proven to have significant staying power, with the Cartoon Network relaunching the popular television show, *Bakugan: Battle Planet* in 2018.

At the time of this study, Jabari was an avid collector of Bakugan figures. While he did not actively play the video or board games, Jabari took his identity as a collector seriously, which meant "studying"[1] the powers and factions associated with each character. In an effort to show me his knowledge of the Bakugan figures—their strengths, powers, and alliances—Jabari took me to the *Bakulog,* a space n the website where all the characters are listed by factions.

> Jabari: Look! You can press on them [hovers arrow over one of the Bakugan characters]. I want to show you my favorite one. I'm going to take you to the Pyrus version [faction]. See? This is the dude I just showed you [Jabari presses on one of the characters, opening a screen with an image of the same Bakugan figure that he had in his bedroom. The text reads: 'Dragonanoid X Auxillataur.']
> Rachel: Cool. "Dragonanoid."
> Jabari: Auxillataur. Do you see how much B-Power he has?
> Rachel: What is B-Power?
> Jabari: That's how much strength it has.
> Rachel: Oh, wow.
> Jabari: You see the 5 with the punch? That's how much power that it has. I have a favorite one in Ventus [Jabari clicks on the link to the Ventus Faction and then clicks on Hyenix]. It's the strongest one. You see the 4,500? The B-Power is 4,500! (Writing Club Transcript, 4/28/21)

While Jabari did not take his peers on a journey into the digital world of the Bakugan website, he did share the knowledge that he had researched online——their powers and factions—during our club meetings. Being an expert of all things Bakugan was an important part of Jabari's identity in the writing club, particularly with the boys. Both Omar and Alejandro showed a deep interest when Jabari shared his Bakugan figures with the writing club, and Jabari took notice. Jabari

[1] The *Bakulog* page of bakugan.com invites Bakugan players to "Know thy Bakugan! Study the legion of Bakugan before you meet on the Hide Matrix! Learn their powers, Fraction and more, then battle your way to victory!"

frequently held a Bakugan figure in his hand during our club meetings and would carefully position the toy in his Zoom square to grab the attention of his peers. During one meeting, Omar could be heard asking his mom to bring him one of his Bakugan figures. When Jabari announced that he was going to drop his Bakugan "bomb" on the floor (an action that transforms the Bakugan from a ball to a robot figure), Omar pushed his chair from his table and exclaimed, "No you didn't!" (Writing Club Transcript, 5/5/21). Jabari reveled in the attention of his peers, and Omar's reaction brought pure joy to Jabari's face.

Digital Narratives

> Digital texts and imaginary worlds are part of the everyday stuff of children's imagining, woven in and out of 'real world' play and part of that bigger exploration of self and the world that texts of all kinds enable and are used for by different readers in different ways. (Beavis, 2014, p. 92)

In recent years, haptic touch, which allows for swiping and clicking on images and text, has made navigating technology accessible to young children long before they can read or write words (Rowsell, 2014). Children enter school with a wide range of experiences reading, consuming, and actively participating in the production of digital texts. These digital texts are linked with children's identities and the construction of being "a certain kind of person" (Hannaford, 2012, p. 31). In light of the prevalence of digital texts in children's lives, Beavis (2014) argued for a reframing of what counts as a 'literary' text in the school curriculum. Drawing on Mission and Morgan (2006), Beavis proposed a shift towards the 'aesthetic' quality of a text—"the care taken in its shaping and the capacity of the text to enlarge understandings and enrich reader's (viewers', listeners') lives" (Beavis, 2014, p. 91, brackets in original)—as a path towards expanding the texts utilized in school curricula to include a wider range of digital and multimodal texts.

***On Belonging:* "One for All"**

One of the first texts that Jabari shared with the writing club was a printout of the lyrics to "One for All," a song from the Disney musical, *Zombies 2* (Anotonina et al., 2020). Jabari proudly shared with the club that "One for All" was his "favorite text" (Writing Club Transcript, 4/7/21) (see Figure 5.8). The song "One for All" includes the following lyrics:

> There's something here that's magic
> Let's dance until dawn
> The feeling is automatic
> It's where we belong
> We're so unique, we're not the same
> Yeah
> And that's what gives us all our strength. (Armato et al., 2020)

Figure 5.10

Screenshot of Jabari Sharing "One for All" Lyrics from the TV Musical, Zombies 2

Given Jabari's own desires to be seen and accepted in school, this text felt especially poignant. Jabari shared that the movie was about "zombies and werewolves being friends and not fighting [just] because they are different" (Writing Club Transcript, 4/7/21). The movie's narrative of teenage zombies looking for acceptance in a world—in this case, their school—where they were often disciplined by a misguided principal, including being banned from going to prom because of the community's fear of zombies, was a narrative to which Jabari could

easily relate. The zombies were just subversive enough (eating bone and worm ice cream and sporting neon green hair) to be exciting for a 7-year-old, who enjoyed the occasional playful act of shocking an adult and his peers. During one of our one-on-one sessions, Jabari shared a video clip from the movie, in which the cast of zombies and werewolf characters are singing the song. The zombies and werewolves have come together to throw an alternative prom where all are accepted. Jabari moved between pointing out important moments in the narrative and singing along with the cast. Jabari made sure to point out when one of the human characters tried the bone-flavored ice cream: "Did you see that? She's eating bone ice cream!" he exclaimed (Writing Club Transcript, 4/21/21). It was important to Jabari that I appreciate the full spectacle of the zombie world that he had introduced to me.

During our one-on-one conversation, I promised Jabari that I would watch the movie, *Zombies 2*. I wanted Jabari to know that the texts he shared with me were valued as legitimate texts within the context of the writing club. I think he was surprised a few weeks later when I informed him that I had, indeed, watched the movie. "You did, you watched the entire movie?" he asked. I explained to him, "When you tell me about something you like, I like to go look and find out about it." Jabari smiled and then challenged, "But you don't watch Bakugan!" (Writing Club Transcript, 5/5/21). While I had some work to do in terms of showing a genuine interest in Bakugan, it struck me how important it was for Jabari to have a teacher figure take an interest in the texts that matter to him. This interaction was not a one-off for Jabari and me. Jabari began to hold me accountable for learning about the texts he introduced to me, and I understood that showing a genuine interest in his texts required spending time with those texts and, importantly, engaging with the texts in the same ways that Jabari engaged with them (i.e., watching movie clips, researching Bakugan powers, and creating Minecraft worlds).

Jabari's engagement in narrative and textual worlds online was characterized by considerable intertextual movement between online and offline texts and multiple mediascapes. When Jabari first shared the video clip of the cast singing "One for All" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q5Zi8srra8o), he wove the conversation between the storyline of *Zombies 2* and the wider world of zombie narratives. Drawing my attention to the movie clip, Jabari explained, "[t]he zombies can transform into humans like you saw" (Writing Club Transcript, 4/7/21). Jabari was referring to the zombie characters in the movie who, despite being zombies, lived fairly normal teenage lives (attending high school, dating, and desiring to attend prom). This zombie narrative of zombies desiring to live in harmony with humans is a break from traditional zombie narratives, in which zombies are the mortal enemy of humans with only one goal: eating and turning humans into zombies (e.g., *World War Z* and *The Walking Dead*). However, for Jabari, it was the zombie attributes of the characters that interested him the most: "[W]e saw their veins!" he stated, tracing imaginary veins on his face with his fingers. "And they eat brains! That's why I play a game called Minecraft, they kill me because they want my brain," he added, laughing. Jabari was drawn to the shocking and outlandish death and destruction narrative of the zombie genre—something that carried over to other genres, including video games like Minecraft.

The video game, Minecraft, was an important text for Jabari. On several occasions, Jabari attempted to take me into one of the worlds he had created in his Education Edition of Minecraft, but technical issues—excessive downloading times and Jabari forgetting his log-in passcode—created barriers to our access. In one attempt, Jabari opted to show me the process of creating a world in "creator" mode: "I'm going to show you something. I'm gonna show you inside Minecraft. And you can go create it [a world], that means that you can't be killed when you're in

Creative" (Writing Club Transcript, 4/7/21) (see Figure 5.9). In all, we spent just over a minute of time in the game of Minecraft. However, creating worlds in the game was only one component of Minecraft that captured Jabari's attention. Jabari also cared about the narratives that were played out in the game—the narratives that Minecraft players must know in order to build and interact successfully in Minecraft worlds.

Figure 5.11

Screenshot of Jabari Demonstrating How to Create a New World in Minecraft

According to Beavis (2014), "For many children, some of their most satisfying and engaging experiences of narrative and of the making and playing of stories come through computer games and/or their playful involvement with others in online virtual worlds" (p. 93). In the following interaction, Jabari shared the Minecraft narrative elements that excited him:

> Jabari: There's lava. There's even Creepers that explode and-
> Rachel: Oh, wow. Really?
> Jabari: And skeletons that shoots arrows. And the Ender Dragon [pause]. You know what the Ender Dragon is? It's super not nice.
> Rachel: Really?
> Jabari: He throws dragon breath, and it kills you.
> Rachel: Fire?
> Jabari: No, it's purple stuff that is super strong. And then when he puts it somewhere, it doesn't go away. So, if you walk in it, you die.

Rachel: Oof!
Jabari: And that's why there's armor that can protect you and apples that protect you too and there's food. (Writing Club Transcript, 4/7/21)

For Jabari, it was the menaces—the lava, Creepers that explode, and the Ender Dragon—that were important to know about. Playing video games requires knowing a significant amount about narratives and how stories play out in the world of gaming. As Beavis (2014) explained, "They [the players] may need to remember the back-story, for example, know what sort of action and scenarios to expect, to have a fair idea of what characters are typically like and what they do" (p. 94). While Jabari collected these narrative structures for future use in creating and expanding his Minecraft worlds, he also drew upon complex intertextual understandings of similar narratives and generic knowledge that he carried over into his multimodal composing practices.

Enacting the Narrative

Video games have storytelling structures that are specific to the genre. One significant difference between video games and traditional storytelling formats (books, movies, television shows) is that video games require the player to take part in the construction of the narrative. In other words, the actions of the player of the game forward the narrative and lead the character towards their fate. In the case of many video games, including Minecraft, this fate is often the character's demise. The player of games must move between the fixed narratives that have been authored by the game makers and the flexible narratives that can be shaped by their own actions. As Galloway (2006) explained, "Their foundation is not in looking and reading but in the integration of material change through action—the action of the change through action—the action of the machine is just as important as the action of the operator" (p. 3). Game narratives are also participatory as gamers play with other players, discuss play strategies with friends (and

siblings), and engage with other players online, including watching other players play via YouTube and other streaming sites. Beavis (2014) argued that games embody social and participatory forms of engagement: "They teach and require collaborative literacy practices and the capacity to weave between on/offline information, action and decision making with others and alone" (p. 95).

Given Jabari's interest in video games, it is not surprising that Jabari would bring narrative structures of video games into his composing practices and the co-composing practices of our writing club. The participants in the writing club co-composed three stories during our time together. Initially conceived as a composing activity that would allow the club members to consider narrative structures—including character development, setting, and plot—in a collaborative format, the co-composing practice was structured with children taking turns, adding to the story where the last person left off. During the first co-composing activity, Jabari transformed a story about children eating breakfast and chasing birds out of their house with brooms, into a doomsday scenario in which an "infinity hole" opens and swallows the entire Earth. With his very first contribution to the co-composed narrative, Jabari effectively ended the story. Jabari's abrupt ending to the story initiated a conversation about possible new endings, or ways to help the characters out of this new scenario. Lilly suggested that the characters "dig themselves out of the hole" (Writing Club Transcript, 4/21/21), and I suggested that superheroes could come save the day. For Jabari, these narratives were unacceptable. He explained that infinity holes are from Minecraft and are "too big to be filled with dirt"; importantly, "there are no superheroes in Minecraft." In Jabari's understanding of video games, and more specifically, the world of Minecraft, actions have consequences that cannot be altered. When the infinity hole appeared, the narrative was over, and there were no actions to be taken. Game over.

Jabari continued to bring video game narratives into our next co-composing event. In the second co-composed story, Jabari brought back the infinity hole. This time, he appeared more open to the possibility that the characters could find a way out of the perilous situation. Rather than have the infinity hole end the story, Jabari modified the infinity hole to have it cover half the Earth and then crossed over to another digital franchise, with the addition of Bakugan and Geogan robots emerging from the hole. Jabari's actions offered his co-composers opportunities to explore how the characters would survive. Interestingly, Alejandro had the two main characters fall into the hole on his next composing turn, and Jabari had the two characters find a tree to help them survive. Jabari seemed determined to find a way to have the characters survive this narrative. The game continued.

Summary

Young children are growing up in a world where digital texts permeate all areas of life (Marsh, 2019; Pettersen et al., 2022), yet school literacy practices provide little opportunities for children to share the digital texts that hold meaning for them or engage in meaningful digital composing practices. The children in this study were looking for opportunities to share their digital worlds with their peers and with me. When opportunities to share in the online writing club were less than adequate, Alejandro and Jabari asserted themselves into the data collection and shifted the time schedule by logging on early and staying later to take me on digital walking tours.

Both Alejandro and Jabari demonstrated complex understandings of how to read digital texts and compose in digital spaces. Both utilized their school-issued tablets to explore and find digital texts related to interests (e.g., LEGO Mario and Bakugan), to participate in online worlds (e.g., Minecraft), and to play with composing apps (e.g., Notes, iMovie, and Voice Memo). In

observing Alejandro and Jabari, it became evident that young children take on "different ways of being and different knowledge-making/brokering" (Rowsell, & Harwood, 2015, p. 142) when they are working in digital spaces. When working on their tablets, Alejandro and Jabari became deeply engaged in intellectual pursuits as they scrolled and clicked across texts. They made decisions about what to read based on the text features (and content) that interested them, and they discovered new texts through exploring search engines.

Through their experiences exploring digital spaces, how Alejandro and Jabari understood texts was multimodal and participatory. The genres they explored like video games and tutorial videos encouraged active participation as both consumers and producers (Beavis, 2014). As Jabari demonstrated in the co-composed stories of the writing club, young children are increasingly engaging in transmedia literacies, in which stories and information flow across multiple modalities (Beavis, 2014). With 'infinity holes,' Jabari brought in a narrative that was remixed from multiple digital mediascapes. Like video game narratives in multi-player games, Jabari's plotline required his co-composers/players to collaborate and negotiate a solution for the characters.

For Alejandro, who was still attending school exclusively online at the time of the study, sharing his digital artifacts with me and his writing club peers was an opportunity for him to connect his digital worlds—where he spent much of his free time—with a school community he so much wanted to be a part of. For Jabari, a boy who struggled to be seen as a serious scholar in school spaces, his knowledge of popular culture and digital literacies positioned him as an expert worthy of both admiration and emulation. Of all the participants in the club, Jabari's shares produced the most emulation, in both obvious—like someone sharing a toy from the same

franchise (e.g., Omar shared his Bakugan figures a week after Jabari first shared his)—and subtle ways (e.g., children taking up robot and zombie themes in their writing).

Discussion

This study is unique because it relies entirely on young children as informants. Most studies of young children engaging with digital literacies in the home rely on adult surveys and interviews, in which caregivers provide their interpretations of how their children engage with digital devices, apps, and the internet (Pempeck & McDaniel, 2016; Plowman et al., 2010), videos of children using digital devices captured by parents (Palaiologou et al., 2021), and home visits in which the child caregivers are actively involved in the observation process (Chaudron et al., 2015; Geist, 2012; Harrison & McTavish, 2018). Inherent in these types of methodologies are adult biases, as parents interject their own beliefs about children and technology, as well as their own understandings of how children use technology and for what purposes. In this study, the child participants were the only informants. While I occasionally interjected questions about the digital spaces or asked the participants to take me to a site that they had mentioned previously, the digital walks were almost entirely initiated and led by the child participants. As a result, the children shared digital practices that were relevant to their own interests and identity making. For example, Alejandro showed me small snippets of playful composing on apps that could easily be ignored by adults or considered inconsequential for their incomplete nature. Furthermore, the digital walks that Alejandro and Jabari guided me through provided insight into how children make connections across texts and across home and school boundaries. In the following chapter, I highlight the ways in which the young children became important informants of complex literacies mobilized by the intimacy of the home and family participation.

Chapter 6: At-home Literacies: (In)Visible Spaces for Children's Composing

The online writing club provided a unique vantage point for examining the private spaces and everyday lives of the children and families in this study. Through the cameras on children's tablets and computers, I had a line of vision into the spaces where children and their adults were living, working, and, in some cases, attending school online. The cameras revealed literacies and parts of literacy identities that are often rendered invisible in school spaces (Moll et al., 1992). Made visible were the intimate ways that children engaged in play, composing practices, and digital devices (including apps) in living rooms, bedrooms, and even hallways. Entangled in these literacy practices were parents and siblings, who provided new understandings of how families support children at home (Heath, 1983) and how the home literacy practices of children are mobilized by family participation, intimate spaces, and the freedom to experiment outside the confines of schooled literacies. These literacies are made possible by the intimate spaces that make up a home.

While the home literacies and digital practices of young children have been well documented (Chaudron et al., 2015; Harrison & McTavish, 2018; Heath, 1983; Marsh et al., 2018; Moll et al., 1992), few studies have relied on children as the primary informants. In this chapter, the data highlighted were collected through the Zoom cameras of the children. Holding their tablets, the children had an opportunity to show me their home literacies through their own perspectives.

Family Participation in Writing Club

The Zoom cameras offered glimpses of the rhythms of everyday life (Lefebvre, 2004) during the waning months of the COVID-19 pandemic, when many public institutions were still closed or only partially open, and the "ways of being" (Pink, 2012) of children and their families

reshaped and transformed to accommodate the expanded roles that domestic spaces were required to take on due to restrictions and regulations. In many ways, these accommodations were magnified by wider housing constraints and inequalities that urban geographies produce—small living spaces and lack of private outdoor spaces—requiring working and middle-class families to transform apartments into sites of labor, school, play, and recreation. Most of the children joined the writing club from shared-living spaces—living rooms and kitchens—where adults were present and available to offer technical support and encouragement, and, at times, even observe and engage with the writing club.

Maya and Omar: "Ways of Being" and Everyday Literacies During the Lockdown

Maya and Omar (siblings) were aged 5 and 7 at the time of the study and living with their parents, Tanya and Derrick, in an apartment in Harlem. Maya and Omar joined the writing club from the family's living room, a space that had been reshaped as a site for adult labor and children's schooling while still holding on to its original purpose as a leisure and play space. Omar logged on from a small desk set up along a side wall. On the wall were several school charts, including spelling patterns, word lists, and story elements, as well as a few math charts with the steps for long division and parts of fractions. Tanya constructed this space during the lockdown when Omar and Maya attended online school. Omar's teachers supplied the charts, like those found on many second-grade classroom walls, to support his learning (see Figure 6.1). While Omar and Maya had already returned to in-person learning, the online schooling space remained a part of the shared living room. It is unclear whether the charts were a relic of online learning that will eventually be taken down or evidence of a shifting use/practice for this space that will continue to inform the placemaking of the living room.

Figure 6.1

Omar's School Learning Charts

Maya joined the writing club from a small table set up along a long wall perpendicular to Omar. On Maya's left, and occasionally in the view of the camera, sat her father at a small desk with a laptop. While Maya and her father worked side by side, they rarely interacted beyond Derrick occasionally supporting Maya with technology (see Figure 6.2). On Maya's right, out of the camera's view, was a compact workout bench with free weights and a pair of adult sneakers.[1] Behind Maya, in the corner, sat a desk with a desktop computer. Directly behind her was an oversized black leather couch with a matching reclining chair and two floor lamps. In front of the couch, a partially deflated "smiley face" balloon can be seen lying on the floor. The multiple workstations, comfortable couch, workout equipment, and single-deflated-balloon revealed the many purposes that shared living spaces took on during the pandemic and the ways that the labor and leisure spaces of children and adults were merged and reconstructed.

[1] Maya's play video provided expanded views of the living room.

Figure 6.2

Maya and Her Father Working Side by Side During the Writing Club

The living room also played an important role in the multimodal composing practices of Maya and Omar. In one of Maya's composing videos, the couch and area rug were transformed into a site of play, where two of her dolls competed in a dance competition and toys were spread out on the carpet. In the video, Maya can be seen selecting toys for her play scene from a blue plastic bin. The bin allowed Maya to transform the living room temporarily into a play space. On the couch lay a Dav Pilkey book (one of Omar's favorite authors). Once the play commenced, Maya's toys could be returned to the bin, and the living room could return to a space defined primarily by adult artifacts and materials (e.g., books written for adults, workout equipment designed for adult use, a television intended for family use, and the four desk/table stations constructed for schooling and labor). The errant smiley-face balloon lying on the floor, just visible behind Maya, signaled that the living room was also a place, if only temporary, for mementos from celebrations and/or play (see Figure 6.3).

Figure 6.3

Maya's Play Video, Filmed in Her Living Room

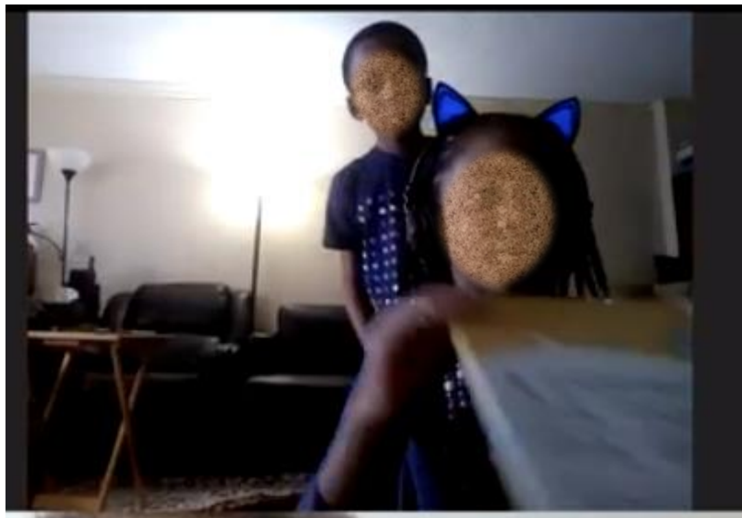
Maya and Omar often logged on to our writing club a few minutes after the meeting had started. Tanya apologizing for their lateness by explaining that the family "has a lot going on and too many schedules to coordinate" (Informal Conversation, 5/12/2021). Like many families during the COVID-19 pandemic, Tanya and Derrick were navigating increased caretaker responsibilities and shifting work schedules (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). While "overextended," Tanya felt it was important to assure me that the writing club was a priority for their family. Tanya confided in me that the writing club provided opportunities for "family literacy activities" that were fun for both her and the children. In fact, Tanya was the first parent to request additional writing club sessions for the summer month. For Tanya and Derrick, this meant not only ensuring that Omar and Maya logged on to the club on time; it also meant remaining present and engaging with Omar and Maya throughout the club meetings.

Lefebvre (2004) explained that "everywhere there is interaction between a place and time and an expenditure of energy, there is a rhythm" (p. 15). During the writing club, the rhythm of Maya and Omar's living room centered around the literacy work of the two siblings. Tanya and Derrick helped Maya and Omar log on to the writing club, set up audio and video functions, and adjust headphones. Once Maya and Omar were set up to participate in the writing club, Derrick returned to his laptop, engrossed in his own work beside Maya. In contrast, Tanya moved in and out of the camera view, always on her feet and often acutely aware of what was happening in the writing club. During one writing club meeting, when Maya was watching her classmate, Katherine, share a Mo Willems' *Elephant and Piggie* book, Tanya called out from beyond the Zoom camera view: "You have those books!", only to appear moments later with a copy of one of the *Elephant and Piggie* books for Maya to share with the club. On another occasion, Tanya helped Maya adjust a book as she held it up to the Zoom camera.

The living room was a space of movement, loud exclamations, and shared joy around participating in the literacy practices of the writing club. Tanya's participation and enthusiasm for the "going-ons" of the writing club were encouraged by Omar and Maya's engagement. The siblings dashed around, grabbing writing materials or artifacts to share. When Maya shared a favorite book or artifact, Omar would come running from his desk to stand behind her, placing himself in her share (see Figure 6.4). The first time he ran over to stand behind Maya, Omar exclaimed, "Look! We are in the same place!" (Writing Club Transcript, 5/5/21). Although the two siblings always joined from the same living room, the act of being in the same Zoom square was significant and worthy of announcing to the rest of the club members.

Figure 6.4

Omar Standing Behind Maya as She Shares a Book



During one writing club session in which the inquiry time was focused on learning to draw like Dav Pilkey, Omar called out for me to stop the video: "Press pause! I need to grab my drawing pad!" Both Omar and Maya could be seen leaving their Zoom spots and running across the living room, then out of the view of their Zoom cameras, returning moments later with notebooks and pencils. Minutes later, Tanya handed Maya some crayons to complete her drawings. Tanya was not only aware of the work that Maya and Omar were doing in the club meetings, but she was also anticipating their needs and ready to support them in their literacy engagements.

Katherine: Families as Writing Club Partners

Katherine was one of three kindergartners in the online writing club. A white, middle-class girl, Katherine navigated school literacies with ease (Heath, 1983). Her identity as a strong kindergarten writer prompted her teacher to recommend the writing club as an opportunity for Katherine to further pursue her love of writing. Katherine often joined the writing club from the comfort of a couch in the main living space of the apartment that she shared with her parents,

Allison and Jonathan, and younger sister, Cassie. In the background of Katherine's Zoom square, the open-floor layout of her apartment was made visible, with the kitchen behind her and dining table to the side. Katherine's home was a busy one, with adults and a toddler carrying about their daily lives while Katherine attended our writing club meetings.

For the first four sessions, Katherine had a parent sitting next to her. While her father stayed mostly out of the Zoom frame, her mother moved in and out of the frame and occasionally stepped in to assist Katherine with technology issues related to Zoom or added details to Katherine's composing shares (see Figure 6.5).

Figure 6.5

Katherine with Her Dad Sitting Outside of the Zoom Frame

On the third week of our writing club, I asked Katherine to share a writing piece that she had posted to *Seesaw* in response to a comic book inquiry the club had engaged in the previous week. At first, she was a little resistant but then ran off to fetch her writing (see Figure 6.6). Turning to her mom, Katherine declared, "Okay, I'm going to do this!" Holding her comic book up to the screen, Katherine began an animated reading of her text:

Figure 6.6

Katherine's "Dogs" Comic Book

Katherine: I have a thing and it says—Ah! It's supposed to go this way [Holds comic book close to the screen with the letters A.h.h.a written in a comic book sound effect template]. This part is supposed to go here, but it says it the wrong way. It's supposed to say "Ahhh!" because the dog's chewing on the couch and when the mom comes back from her room, she's like, "Ahhh!" She's like, "My couch!" And the mom was so mad that she put the dog in his cage, and she put a lock on it, and she fell on the ground and then she was happy, and the dog was scared. Look, you can see closely [holds page up close to the camera] but then—he's scared, because he thinks that the mom with the key is gonna pinch him, but she's really just trying to undo the lock. And so, she can get him out, but he's really scared and sad. And it says the name of the dog is Snowy, Snowy Dog. And this is—the mom's name is Barbie.

Rachel: How did you come up with the names?

Katherine: I don't know. Actually, I do. [Runs to grab a Barbie doll] I have a Barbie doll and stuffed dog named Snowy, but he's in my backpack. [Now, returning to her text] And the mom is sitting on the bench at the couch and then the owl flies by and says "Whoo" and then the dog gets scared again. [Shows page from comic book] And that's the end.

Rachel: Oh my gosh! So that dog had a lot of adventures. A lot of scary things happen to the dog that day.

Katherine: Yeah.

Rachel: Where did you get the idea for the owl?
Katherine: [shrugs]
Rachel: Something that a dog could see out the window?
Katherine: [looks to her mom and shakes her head, no] (Writing Club Transcript, 5/21/21)

Katherine's mom stepped in and began to explain how when she read Katherine's comic book the first time, she misread Katherine's intended word "phew" as "who," prompting Katherine to change her story to include an owl who says "whoo!"

Katherine's mom was able to participate in her daughter's share, and Katherine was able to include a personal artifact (her Barbie doll) on demand because they were participating in the writing club from their own home. The online writing club provided Allison with an opportunity to observe "school literacies" in practice. Because the writing instruction was made visible, she was able to support Katherine's composing practices with multiple modalities and genres.

Families as Composing Partners

The writing club was designed to be child-centered, meaning that there was no expectation for guardians/parents or siblings to participate in the club meetings or in the composing projects. Therefore, the participation of family members in the composing practices of the young children can be considered organic. In other words, it was the result of family members being present during the writing club meetings, and, most importantly, it grew out of the multimodal composing practices of the children.

Child and adult collaboration were most evident in the play video and audio composing practices of the children. While Lilly and Alejandro demonstrated that videos can be constructed solo, with the child taking on multiple roles as videographer and actor or narrator,[2] while the

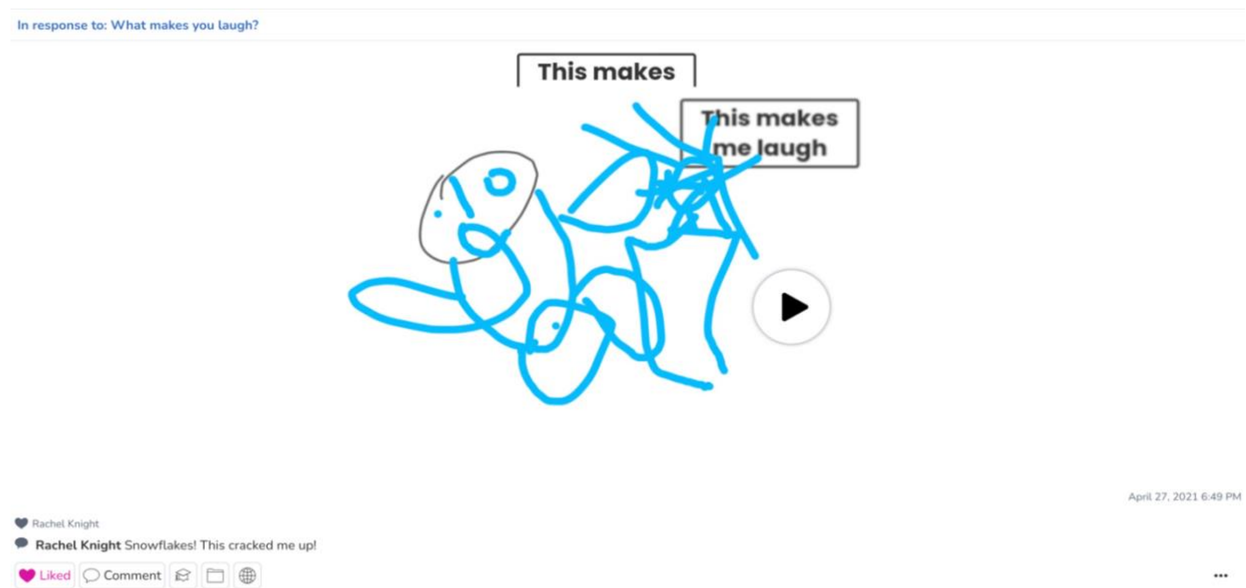
[2] Alejandro composed a short play video in which he pretended to lose a tooth. Lilly composed an all-about-bunnies video and a how-to-care-for a bunny video. In all three videos, the children utilized a tablet as a video camera, which they operated on their own.

video and audio modes of composing afforded genuine opportunities for collaboration and group work. In constructing their video and audio composing projects, Katherine, Omar, and Maya enlisted their families for support and collaboration.

Omar and Maya took up several multimodal composing practices during the writing club. Omar utilized the audio recording option on *Seesaw* to share his favorite commercial texts and his own composing pieces. Omar's written compositions exposed challenges with fine-motor skills and labored process for writing and drawing. The audio recording mode of composing proved to be a powerful way for Omar to express himself and develop sophisticated narratives without the strenuous process of writing with pen and paper. Figure 6.7 illustrates how Omar integrated voice recordings into his drawings. The "play" icon in his post linked to a voice recording of Omar telling a joke: "What does a snowman eat for breakfast? Snowflakes! Get it? Snowflakes!" (Omar's "This Makes Me Laugh" post to *Seesaw*).

Figure 6.7

Omar's "This makes me laugh" Post to Seesaw



In his audio storytelling piece, “Captain Cage Is Trying to Crack a Code in His Man House,” Omar read from a partially written script, from which he improvised, adding more details and richer storytelling devices as he narrated the story. Through the mode of audio storytelling, Omar demonstrated his rich usage of storytelling language: “His team busted in and one of them said that they have bigger problems than trying to crack a code!” (Omar’s Audio Storytelling post on *Seesaw*).

Maya experimented with both audio and video recording. In her play video, Maya can be seen playing with her LOL dolls in her living room. Maya’s preparation for her play video can be compared to how young children prepare for imaginary play. Maya organized her props (the LOL dolls) and established the settings (the rug on her living room floor for the home of the two doll characters and her couch as the site for the Winter Ball), and she established a storyline for the play (the dance competition at the Winter Ball). Once the video recorder started, Maya improvised as she played with the dolls and composed the story.

A constant in each of Omar and Maya’s audio and video compositions was Tanya’s voice. At times, she could be heard informing Omar or Maya that the recording has begun, indicating that Tanya was holding the recording device. At other times, Tanya was heard supporting Omar and Maya by redirecting them or reminding them to include an important detail in their storytelling. In Maya’s play video, Tanya took on the role of camera operator as she followed Maya’s play action move between the rug and the couch. At one point, Tanya directed Maya to hold the dolls in the camera’s shot after Maya moved the action to the couch. While Tanya was involved in their composing practices from inception to production, her role was limited to supporting her children with the technical facets of the multimodal composing

process—operating the audio and voice recorders. Importantly, the content was conceived and produced by the children.

Katherine composed two play videos, which she posted to her *Seesaw* page. In each video, Katherine utilized her family members as actors and videographers. Katherine developed her play video scripts, creating actions, dialogue, and directing prompts for her videographers. Each person in her family had a role. The first video depicted a birthday scene in which Katherine's sister's birthday sign falls, almost ruining the big day, until their mother reminded them that there were still presents to be opened (see Figure 6.8). In the video, Katherine is heard directing—reminding her actors of their lines, prompting her father to make the "Happy Birthday" sign fall, and giving her sister acting cues: "Act sad" (Katherine's "Birthday" play video, posted on *Seesaw*).

Figure 6.8

Katherine's "Happy Birthday" Play Video

In Katherine's second play video, Katherine established that it was "Yes Day," when her mom must say "yes" to all her requests. The video shows Katherine and her sister sitting at the kitchen table. Katherine's "Yes Day" requests are for three special snacks: Animal Crackers, Pirate Bootie, and seltzer. Katherine's mother, who is out of the camera shot, hands Katherine and her sister the snacks (see figure 6.8). The video ends with Katherine reminding her mom that she is in charge for the rest of the day, to which her mom responds, "Oh no! I don't know if I can take it—" Katherine, in director mode, motions to her mom to throw her arms in the air and cues her for the last part of her line: "for the rest of the day!" (Katherine's "The Only Yes Day!" play video, posted on *Seesaw*). It is clear that Katherine was the one in charge of this production.

Figure 6.9

Katherine's "The Only Yes Day" Play Video

The parents of Omar, Maya, and Katherine were present for many of the writing club meetings, which allowed for them to observe the inquiry process and to hear the children and me discuss the provocations. While I cannot say for sure, I believe that this informed their participation and engendered a child-centered approach in which the children were positioned as

the composers and the parents understood their role as assistant or collaborator. Collaborating on the composing projects proved to be a rewarding endeavor for the parents and siblings. In a private conversation, Tanya confided, "We love these writing activities. They really have been so much fun for our family" (Informal Communication, 6/2/21).

Siblings

The online writing club provided an opportunity to observe the shared literacy practices of the participants and their siblings. Siblings became both important co-participants in the writing club meetings and composing partners in the construction of multimodal texts. With the writing club meetings beginning at 4:30 p.m., a time when children were returning from school, older and younger siblings were often visible in the spaces where the participants were joining the writing club. At times, siblings joined in the "going-ons" of the writing club, stopping by to say "hello" or to support their sibling with an artifact share. Siblings also showed up in the digital composing practices of the writing club participants, often taking on supporting roles as actors and assistants.

Siblings as Writing Partners

Lilly attended all 10 of the official writing club meetings, and she was the only member who joined all four additional meetings during July and early August. During these additional meetings, Lilly's brother, Hudson, joined as an active participant. Initially, I assumed that Hudson, a rising fifth grader, joined us out of convenience or even boredom during the long summer vacation. However, after reviewing many hours of video footage captured during the 10 weeks of the official writing club meetings, I discovered that Hudson had been present for most, if not all, of our meetings. His presence was often out of the camera's view or just visible in Lilly's Zoom square, as captured in Figure 6.9. When I actively looked for Hudson's presence in

our writing club meetings, I found numerous moments when Hudson supported Lilly's participation in our meetings. For example, when Lilly shared a story about her bunny, Latte, Hudson can be seen in the background leaving their kitchen and then returning with Latte several minutes later.

Figure 6.10

Lilly's Brother Brings Her Pet Bunny to Share

Hudson's participation in the writing club went beyond supporting Lilly's shares. Lilly was the only writing club member to show up for two of our summer meetings. On these days, Hudson stepped into the view of the Zoom camera and joined Lilly as an active participant. Lilly and Hudson brought their writer's notebooks to the writing club on these days. Lilly's writer's notebook was a tool that connected her summer writing to the writing she had worked on during the school year. The first sections of her writer's notebook were filled with personal narratives and poetry she had written in school. Lilly was using the remaining empty pages to compose new writing pieces at home. According to Lilly, she had already written three stories, each four pages long, as well as several poems. While Lilly was sharing one of the poems she had written about bunnies, Hudson stepped directly into the camera view for the first time and motioned to Lilly's writer's notebook:

Hudson: You should read that story to Rachel [Hudson pointed at a story as Lilly turned the pages of her notebook].
Lilly: [Directed to me] Is that okay?
Rachel: Yes! I'd love to hear your story. Is this one that you have been working on this summer?
Lilly: Um, yeah. I'm still working on it. (Writing Club Transcript, 7/12/21)

Lilly read aloud her story about a girl and her pet cat. On the surface, the topic of a girl and her pet supported an early analysis of Lilly's literacy identities and practices—one in which Lilly's interests focused on animals (e.g., her pet bunny Latte, the Calico Critters, owls, and birds in the park) as well as high-brow literature (e.g., *The Jabberwocky*), and her preference for riddles over jokes (as discussed in Chapter 4). However, these private sessions with Lilly and her brother revealed a far more complex literacy identity that included experimentation with new genres and modes of composing, requiring me to re-assess my previous analysis.

In school writing, Lilly had been exposed to two genres for narrative writing: personal narrative and realistic fiction.[3] In these two school genre studies, children are expected to draw on everyday experiences to compose stories that sound and feel realistic (Newkirk, 2007). Fiction genres, like fantasy and horror, are considered either too difficult to write well or are discouraged for their propensity for including violence. In the privacy of their home, Lilly and Hudson experimented with new genres that subverted the school-sanctioned narratives they were required to write during the school year. Trying out themes and structures of horror and fantasy, Lilly's story incorporated important features of the horror genre, including a menace that is threatening (Carroll, 1990). In Lilly's story, the cat continuously bites the girl. The cat is so menacing that the girl begins to bleed and feel pain in her leg. Following the structures of psychological and supernatural thrillers, Lilly created a sense of fear in the reader (Lovecraft,

[3] The second-grade writing curriculum at Park Elementary School includes the following units of study: Personal Narrative, Realistic Fiction, Nonfiction Informational Books, Reviews/Persuasive Writing, and Poetry.

1927) by setting up the cat as a stalker. She further positioned the cat as a menace by having the cat repeatedly "meow" at the characters to establish its dominance and the potential of another cat bite at any moment. Eventually, after a series of cat bites, the girl tells her mother that she needs to go to the hospital. However, the hospital does not offer the happy solution to the young girl's problem. When the doctor insists that the girl stay over in the hospital, we learn that the young girl does not like her doctor or the idea of staying over in the hospital. Instead, the young girl announces to her mom that they are going to have to take the cat to Asia. Lilly leaves her story off with the girl ordering the cat to get in the car, setting up the next act of her story.

Lilly's summer writing practices were deeply entangled in the writing practices of her brother and the writing club. Our two private sessions (when Lilly was the only writing club participant to show up) organically turned into writing workshops, in which Lilly and her brother moved between writing, sharing their writing, providing feedback, and writing again. My interactions with Lilly and Hudson during our private sessions revealed a close writing partnership between the two siblings. Lilly and Hudson were deeply familiar with each other's writing pieces and stepped in when they had questions about the development of a storyline. Although Hudson was the older sibling, and arguably the more sophisticated writer, he treated Lilly as a worthy collaborator, asking her for advice and posing questions to support Lilly's writing rather than telling her what to write. In the following exchange, we see how Hudson supported Lilly's writing, making sure that she included important information for the reader and encouraging her to stay true to the horror genre:

Hudson: Lil, can you whisper to me why the cat's biting her?
Rachel: Can you share that with me? That's such a good question that your brother had.
Lilly: [Reluctantly] Uh, I don't know. But I'm going to put that later in the story.
Rachel: Okay.
Hudson: She does know, but she doesn't want to tell you, I guess…

Lilly: [Interrupting Hudson] No, no, no. Her cat wants to kill her, but there's a reason why…
Rachel: Oh.
Lilly: …in the story. It's a bit of a mystery that you will find out later. (Writing Club Transcript, 7/12/21)

This piece of horror writing was a departure from the typical topics and genres of writing that Lilly had shared in previous writing clubs. Lilly tended to be rule follower in the presence of teacher figures, and she was well-aware of the expectations for school writing. I could sense that Lilly was reluctant to share details of her story that were violent or pushed against school-sanctioned narratives with me—an adult in a teacher role. I believe Hudson also sensed Lilly's reluctance, but he seemed determined to let me in on their writing project, even if that meant exposing the subversive nature of their composing.

Hudson was eager to share his writing with me. For months, Hudson had been a silent and mostly invisible participant in the club, and now he had a chance to engage as a full participant. Like Lilly, Hudson was writing a narrative with both horror and supernatural conventions. Hudson explained that he was writing a story about a haunted house with ghosts, that borrowed a plot structure from the popular Marvel television series, *Loki:*

Hudson: Have you seen the new Disney show, *Loki*?
Rachel: The *Loki* series? Yes.
Hudson: Okay. Did you see how the girl Loki enchants someone's mind? Basically, that's what the ghost is doing to his [the kid in Hudson's story] mind…and making him think things. (Writing Club Transcript, 7/12/21)

As a fourth grader, Hudson's writing was far more sophisticated than the kindergarten and second grade composing of the official writing club members. However, Hudson appeared to appropriate some ideas for his writing from the other members of the club. For example, Hudson's haunted house piece included a detective named "Captain Cage," which is the same name that Omar chose for the detective in one of his compositions.

As sibling writing partners, Lilly and Hudson were able to create a small "pocket of resistance within and against a larger space of quality culture" (Mitchell & Reid-Walsh, 2002, p. 15) that was perpetuated in both their school and their home. Lilly and Hudson experimented with popular culture, themes of death and murder, fear, and the thrill of being scared in their writing. It is unclear if they were writing these stories for a wider audience or if the completed pieces would stay in their writer's notebooks, only to be shared with each other. Like play, children's composing is not always produced for adult consumption. The privacy of the home offered possibilities for children to explore genres and writing structures that are often contested in school spaces. Much of this writing is rendered invisible to teachers (and parents).

Siblings as Experts

Jabari's sister, Emile, made several appearances during our writing club meetings. As a fifth grader, Emile's age set her apart as an older child with authority and expertise. Jabari clearly looked up to his sister and often announced her presence when she returned home or walked by his bedroom. During one meeting in May, Jabari showed up to our writing club with a magic wand. Jabari seemed eager to share his artifact during our share time and could be seen waving his wand around as other children shared. After several minutes of waving the wand around, Jabari brought our attention to his Zoom name, which he had updated:

Jabari: Look! I have a new name.
Rachel: Mr. Smith? You are going by Mr. Smith today?
Jabari: Yep.
Alejandro: That's funny. Mr. Smith! Mr. Smith has a stick!
Jabari: Mr. Smith has a magic wand!
Rachel: Oh, is Mr. Smith your magic name?
Jabari: Yep. (Writing Club Transcript, 5/12/21)

Jabari had come to the writing club with his magic wand and his magic persona, Mr. Smith. However, Jabari seemed reluctant to tell us more about his magic until his sister could

join the writing club meeting. Although the writing club was no longer focused on Jabari's magic persona, Jabari held onto his magic wand, waving it occasionally, and he kept his Zoom name as Mr. Smith as the writing club moved from the share time to an inquiry of jokes and riddles. When Emile appeared next to Jabari, he interrupted our inquiry to proclaim, "After this, I have something to say." Once he had our attention, he added, "My sister is here and I want to share this." Jabari pointed to a box labeled "Magic Kit" and stated, "You see this? With stuff in here, I can make magic" (Writing Club Transcript, 5/12/21).

Jabari waited until his sister was ready to support him in his share, telling us several times "hold on" and "we are almost ready." Once Jabari and his sister agreed on a magic trick to present, Jabari explained that his sister had already performed these tricks, once again positioning her as an expert. Jabari and Emile chose a broken rope magic trick in which a piece of rope is fed into a box that appears to cut the rope into two pieces and then magically repairs the rope to complete the trick. Emile coached Jabari as he performed the magic trick, stepping in when Jabari forgot to set up his magic trick with what magician's refer to as the "pledge" (when the magician presents an ordinary object for the audience to inspect): "Wait! You have to show them the rope before you place it in the box." Jabari was an eager apprentice. It was clear that he wanted to learn how to perform the trick correctly. It was also clear that Jabari took pride in sharing his sister's expertise as a magician with our writing club. He listened intently as his sister reminded him of the important structures of a magic trick. After laughing off his mistake, Jabari stated to the group, "This is take two!" He then held the rope up to the camera for his audience to inspect and began the magic trick: "Look at this rope. It is one piece." With Emile's help, Jabari was learning the particular practices required for being a magician (see Figure 6.11).

Figure 6.11

Jabari Performing a Magic Trick as Emile Holds His Magic Wand

(In)Visible Spaces for Home Literacies and Composing Practices

The literacy and composing practices of the children in this study were deeply entangled in the spaces of their homes. These spaces—bedrooms with personal artifacts and beds for hiding, living rooms with the stuff of everyday family life, kitchens with snacks and lemonade, and family pets—help cultivate particular literacies that take place in the home. In this section of the chapter, we see how children utilize these spaces in their composing practices and how the intimacy of (in)visible spaces of the home provided children with opportunities to explore literate identities that are often hidden in school spaces.

Bedrooms

Children's bedrooms are entangled in notions of "good parenting" and contemporary debates around childhoods. The furnishings and artifacts that make up childhood bedrooms are often "repositories" for what parents want for their children (Mitchell & Reid-Walsh, 2002, p. 123). According to Mitchell and Reid-Walsh (2002), the concept of the children's bedroom as a place for more than simply sleeping took hold during the first two decades of the 20th century,

when the concept of the "compassionate family" (p. 121) was emerging in the fields of childhood psychology and childhood studies. Anxieties around the growth of consumerism and shifting patterns in leisure time provided childhood experts with a framing for promoting reimagined domestic spaces that centered particular kinds of play. As Jacobson (1997) explained:

> Extolling the virtues of active play over passive spectatorship, child experts urged parents to provide children with adequate play space within the home and educational toys which simulated the imagination. Together with interior designers, they advised parents how to transform frumpy homes into enticing play sites equipped with playrooms and backyard swing sets. Although psychological theories propounding the virtues of play informed these domestic reforms, the new understandings of play were also tied to the perils and possibilities of a consumer society. Revitalized play environments, experts believed, would help elevate children's taste and arm them against the sort of passive consumption that made them vulnerable to the attractions of mass culture. (Jacobson, 1997, p. 582, cited in Mitchell & Reid-Walsh, 2002, p. 121)

While the bedrooms of young children are highly regulated by adults—adults conceptualize the use of the space, are responsible for purchasing furniture, and may or may not consult children in design choices—Mitchell and Reid-Walsh (2002) posited, "the notion of the bedroom space is still the one which offers the greatest possibility for children-in-control" (p. 114). Therefore, positioning children's bedrooms as a valuable text for researchers of contemporary kids' culture and literacy practices.

Jabari and Lilly were the only participants to join the writing club from their bedrooms. In New York City, where space is limited, individual bedrooms for siblings are often considered an upper-middle-class luxury and often associated with socioeconomic status (Mitchell & Reid-Walsh, 2002, p. 122). During the COVID-19 pandemic, upper-middle-class children were more likely to have bedrooms that were large enough to take on the expanded roles of schooling and primary play space for children when access to public spaces were restricted.

Jabari's Bedroom: The Artifacts of a Literate Identity

Jabari's bedroom is a small space with multiple purposes, including sleep, play, and schooling—both online and homework. He was the only child to have a designated space for schooling in his own room. On the first day of the writing club, Jabari joined the club from his desk, which was set up on the opposite wall from a black metal bunkbed. After several minutes, Jabari's mom could be seen entering his room. She walked behind Jabari to turn on a desk lamp, checked his keyboard and headphones, and then handed him a marble notebook and pencil. Finally, she whispered something to Jabari in French, as she kissed him on the cheek and then exited the bedroom. Jabari's bright red keyboard, yellow headphones, and writing notebook positioned Jabari and his mom as serious about schooling and school literacies. This was an especially important positioning for Jabari, who was often positioned as a troublemaker (Shalaby, 2017) in school, according to his teachers and peers.

Figure 6.12

Jabari's Mother Helping Him Get Set up for the Writing Club

Note: In the background, Jabari's bunkbed is visible.

At the end of the first writing club meeting, Jabari stayed logged on after everyone else had signed off, announcing: "I don't want to go! I need to show you something" (Writing Club Transcript, 4/7/21). This was the first of many times when Jabari would either sign on early or stay after the club meetings to show me the worlds of his bedroom and the digital spaces he visited. In these times, Jabari became an essential informant of childhood culture and literacy practices. Jabari took the lead during these sessions. Utilizing his tablet as a video camera and the Share Screen function on Zoom, Jabari seamlessly moved between sharing material artifacts that lived in his bedroom and digital artifacts found on his tablet.

During our first after-club meeting, Jabari held up a writer's notebook to the camera to reveal a page with writing:

> Jabari: My first chapter.
> Rachel: Oh! Can you tell me what it's about?
> Jabari: It's about my birthday.
> Rachel: And what happened at your birthday? What are you going to write about?
> Jabari: Well, it's fake. It's a fake one, but I already wrote it and there's 13 chapters. You know that's the one [Chapter One].
> Rachel: It is 13 chapters? So, it sounds like a lot happens at that birthday. Can you tell me about what you have written?
> Jabari: You like my bird? [Holds up a drawing of a blue bird on a loose sheet of paper] It's a blue jay. I copied it from this book [Holds up a scientific book about birds] (Writing Club Transcript, 4/7/21)

In this interaction, Jabari was eager to show me that he was engaging in writing. The birthday piece that he shared is a common theme in the school narrative genres: personal narrative and realistic fiction. This quick share of an artifact was representative of how Jabari held up items in his bedroom, gave a short explanation, and quickly moved on to the next item. My questioning occasionally elicited more information but more often was ignored when Jabari's attention was brought to a new artifact to share. As a researcher with an agenda and a former writing teacher, I found myself wanting to redirect the conversations back to his writing pieces and artifacts. I

wanted to know more about his composing practices, including how he came up with ideas for his narrative writing and how the artifacts connected to his literacy identity and practices. However, Jabari had his own agenda during these sessions, and when I gave Jabari the opportunity to direct my gaze and control the shares, his enthusiasm for sharing artifacts and quick supporting descriptions and storylines provided a far more intimate understanding of his worlds and the narratives that mattered to him than any formal questions I could have asked.

Jabari began by showing me artifacts that were closely related to school literacies, as illustrated above with his share of a writing piece in his writer's notebook. Jabari explained that his mother had purchased the notebook for the writing club. Writing notebooks are a ubiquitous tool for traditional writing workshop that are often introduced in the second grade and, importantly, go between school and home: connecting school and home literacy practices. It was, therefore, not surprising to see a child show up to the first writing club meeting with a brand-new writer's notebook. Although my goals for the writing club did not require that the children keep a writer's notebook (in fact, I was hoping to encourage new ways of composing that went beyond the traditional practice of keeping a writer's notebook), I still wanted Jabari to know that I recognized the writer's notebook as an important tool for writers. When I commented on how excited I was that he had a writing notebook, Jabari stated, "Well, my mom said that this is a writing club, so I need to have a writing notebook!" (Writing Club Transcript, 4/7/21). It was evident that Jabari understood that his mother's goals for the writing club were entangled with school literacy practices.

After showing me the blue jay that he had copied from a book, Jabari drew my attention to the wall opposite his desk, where his bunkbed was located. "Look at all the books!" Jabari stated as he pointed his tablet camera at a small bookcase with three shelves overflowing with

children's picture and early chapter books (see Figure 6.12). "Look at all the ideas I can have," he continued, as he panned the camera across the bookcase. Earlier, during our club meeting, I had invited the children to post the texts that mattered to them on our club *Seesaw* page, explaining that I would use their responses to help plan for the types of composing we would explore in future writing club meetings. Perhaps Jabari wanted me to know that he had many texts available to him in his bedroom, once again positioning himself as a legitimate writer.

Figure 6.13

Jabari's Bookshelf

Artifacts of a Digital Identity. Jabari's bedroom held the vernacular technology for schooling: desk, tablet, keyboard, and headphones. The bright colors of his accessories signaled that his parents had taken care in purchasing fun and high-quality technology for Jabari's learning. As discussed above, Jabari took pride in sharing these technologies and associated them with his literacy identity. He seemed to understand that these types of technology are sanctioned in school spaces and, therefore, can be openly shared, while other types of technology are expected to stay in the proverbial "backpack." For Jabari, the forbidden label that was attached to certain technologies did not deter him from wanting to share these items with me (and his peers).

During our first writing club meeting, Jabari held up a Nintendo Switch to the camera. He held it there for a minute or two, as if hoping to garner my attention or the attention of his fellow club mates. I am not sure if I noticed this interaction at the time (it was difficult to monitor all the interactions taking place in the individual Zoom squares during the writing club meetings), but after watching the Zoom recording, it was clear that Jabari had attempted to showcase his Nintendo Switch several times throughout the meeting. This was something that Jabari pointed out to me during our one-on-one time after the club meeting:

> Jabari: [Leans in close to the screen and whispers] I need to tell you a secret.
> Rachel: What's that?
> Jabari: Well, I buy my own Nintendo Switch. 200 dollars!
> Rachel: What? Wow!
> Jabari: I wrote that in the chat! You didn't see that?
> Rachel: You wrote it in the chat? I must have missed it. Thank you for sharing it with me now. It must be pretty special to you if you bought it with your own money.
> Jabari: [Smiling and shaking head in agreement] And I have, well I already have an iPhone 5, but it's broken because the screen is open and I can't play no games. Only Netflix—Netflix and Tetris—Mmm. That's all that works, and YouTube music. (Writing Club Transcript, 4/7/21)

In the above interaction, Jabari pointed out that he had used both the Zoom camera and the chat function to draw attention to his Nintendo Switch. While I had not intentionally ignored Jabari's attempt to share his Nintendo Switch, my inaction (or failure to notice) had kept the device from becoming a part of our club discussion and, in effect, relegated the popular gaming device to the backpack. It made sense that Jabari would preface the share of the Nintendo Switch as a "secret" object that could be found in the private space of his bedroom. The Nintendo Switch would become an important digital reference in later writing club meetings, with both Omar and Alejandro showing interest in Jabari's device and the games he played. While neither Omar nor Alejandro appeared to have their own Nintendo Switch devices, both boys demonstrated

extensive knowledge of the games available for such devices, positioning the device as an important object in their social worlds.

The iPhone 5 was also an important digital artifact in Jabari's bedroom. The iPhone 5 was first released in September 2012, making the device almost 10 years old and incompatible with the present-day operating systems of Apple products in 2021. The iPhone 5 was most likely handed down to Jabari from one of his parents after they upgraded to a new phone. While his device was capable of functioning as a screen for access to YouTube and some video games when connected to WiFi, it no longer carried cellular service or functioned as a phone. Jabari had a tablet and a Nintendo Switch, both of which provided the same functions (and a lot more) as his iPhone 5, yet the iPhone 5 held special importance for Jabari. Like most 7-year-olds, Jabari did not have his own cell phone. However, his possession of an iPhone positioned him as a kid with access to coveted technology—a technology that is often relegated to older children and adults.

Lilly's Bedroom: Intimate Spaces for Composing

Lilly's primary residence was with her mom and her brother, Hudson (a fourth grader), in an apartment in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Lilly joined the writing club either from her bedroom or a table in her kitchen. When Lilly joined from her bedroom, she often used a filter—a picture of her Bunny—so her bedroom was rarely visible. When Lilly had the filter turned off, a mostly plain white wall and a double set of closet doors were visible behind her, with a single piece of school writing paper taped to the wall. Both the illustration and the writing were mostly illegible from the camera's view. During one session, a white bunkbed with a bed on top and a small desk below were made visible just long enough to be captured by Lilly's tablet camera. Along the wall of the bunkbed, child-made drawings and handwritten signs were taped to the wall.

Mitchell and Reid-Walsh (2002) explained that beginning in the mid-1920s, childhood experts promoted the belief that children need their own space to develop their individuality; thus, the "contemporary Western bedroom has come to be associated with individual expression" (p. 122), especially for middle-class, white families. Missing from Lilly's bedroom was any evidence of technology, other than the school-issued tablet that Lilly used to log onto the writing club. The blank white walls that lack any of the commercial decorations marketed for children's bedrooms are in keeping with perceptions that access to popular culture, technology, and "commercial media make it difficult for young people to have an authentic identity or sense of self" (Fisherkeller, 2002, p. 3). In contrast, Lilly's own drawings, signs, and writing compositions taped to the walls provided an impression of child agency and individual expression in this space (see Figure 6.14).

Figure 6.14

Drawings and Signs on Lilly's Bedroom Wall

While Jabari was eager to share his bedroom space with me and his writing club peers and frequently used his tablet as a video camera, Lilly utilized her tablet for this purpose far less often, choosing to share only one area of her bedroom with the writing club and only on one occasion. In the sixth week of the writing club, Lilly invited the writing club members to view a play scene that she had constructed in her bedroom. This was significant for several reasons.

First, up until this point, Lilly had not shared any of her composing projects with the club. While Lilly was an active participant in the club meetings, she did not post her composing to *Seesaw*, so we had little opportunity to explore her work as a club. Second, her choice of presenting a play scene was surprising, given that Lilly's previous participation in club activities and composing practices was closely tied to school literacies and texts that might be considered high culture. When Maya and Katherine shared their play videos in previous weeks, Lilly had commented politely on the videos but had given no indication that she shared an interest in pretend play. Even in her first-grade classroom, where I had an opportunity to observe her with peers, Lilly had rarely chosen to play in the dramatic play or block areas when writing or drawing were an available option. Therefore, I interpreted this as a vulnerable moment for Lilly, in which she was sharing a part of her identity that was, for the most part, relegated to the privacy of her bedroom.

The play scene that Lilly shared was of a pool party, constructed out of colored blocks and *Calico Critters* (see Figure 6.15). *Calico Critters* are small animal dolls that are branded as "classic toys that delight children and promote wholesome family values" (calicocritters.com). As part of the Calico world, children are encouraged to buy *Calico Village* sets to create "a happy place, surrounded by all the beauties of nature" (calicocritters.com/en-us/parent/). *Calico Critters* fit into a notion of childhood that requires adults to protect the innocence and creativity of the child. If urban children are confined to a restricted access to nature, the *Calico Critters Village* can provide children with opportunities to construct a play world that offers a simpler time and place to counter the corrupting influences of popular culture and technology.

Lilly found ways to subvert (if only marginally) the narrative of wholesome family values by creating a scene where teenagers were having a pool party separate from the adults.

When I asked Lilly why the teenagers had their own pool, Lilly responded, “They are teenagers and they need their own space to do teenager things” (Writing Club transcript, 5/19/21).

Figure 6.15

Lilly’s Pool Play Scene

Lilly showed me several videos that she had created using her school-issued tablet. Lilly confided that she and her brother sometimes made concert videos for her stuffed animals to watch. Her stage name in the videos was “Leila Cosmos,” and sometimes she made the videos as birthday presents for her family members. Interestingly, Lilly inquired whether I thought the videos were “make-believe” (Writing Club Transcript, 7/7/21). Lilly appeared interested in defining what qualifies as make-believe. In the following exchange, Lilly parsed out what make-believe meant in her own composing practices:

Lilly: We like to do make-believe games. Do you think the concert games are different?
Rachel: I’m sorry, do I think it’s a…
Lilly: A different kind of game? A make-believe kind of one?
Rachel: Hmm. It sounds like that could be a make-believe game.
Lilly: Yeah, in make-believe, we do concerts.
Rachel: So, what makes something make-believe?
Lilly: Um, well, we can pretend certain stuff is food. Then we can make food with paper.

Rachel: Yeah. So, when you make something, like you make an object into something else, it's kind of make-believe?
Lilly: Yeah. Like when I make videos on my iPad, and Leila is like a make-believe character.
Rachel: So, is your horror cat story a make-believe story?
Lilly: Not really.
Rachel: So, what's the difference between playing make-believe and writing stories?
Lilly: I don't know. They are just different. (Writing Club Transcript, 7/7/21)

For Lilly, make-believe was deeply entangled in traditional play. Her video composing practices included make-believe only when the videos captured her in play—playing with her dolls and singing in character. Traditional school literacies did not include make-believe, even when the genres were subverted, as in the case of her horror story about a biting cat.

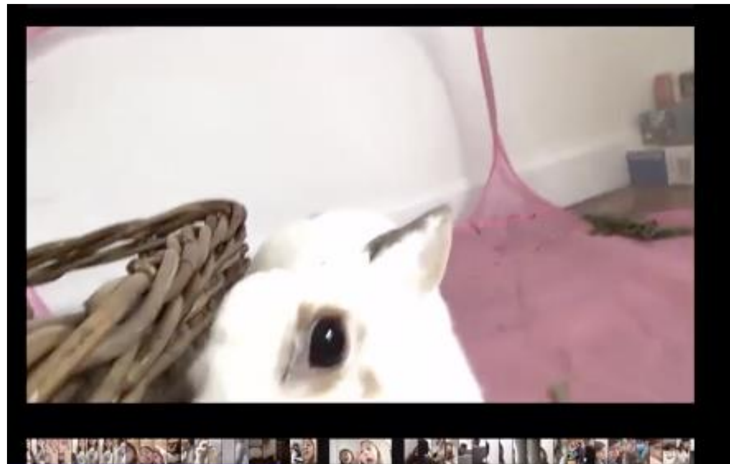
Lilly composed two "episodes" of a vlog focused on her pet bunny, Latte. Latte was a common visitor to our writing club, making appearances on a number of occasions. Lilly also used a picture of Latte as her Zoom background filter, so it was not surprising to see some of her composing projects feature her beloved pet. Lilly's vlogs drew on two common school writing workshop genres: all-about-books and how-to books. These genres, respectively, provide children with an opportunity to share their knowledge and teach others about topics in which they consider themselves experts. Traditionally, these composing projects are produced with pen and paper and are completed in the classroom. Children working on projects with topics that are related to out-of-school are required to draw on their memory as they write and illustrate their books. Working with video and in her own home afforded Lilly new possibilities for her composing project.

In her "How To Care for a Bunny" video, Lilly can be seen showing how she feeds her bunny and where her bunny sleeps, and giving a tutorial on how to get a bunny off the bed. Lilly utilized the video mode of production to enhance her composition. With her bunny and *Calico*

Critters bunny doll as props, Lilly provided her audience with live images of her engaging in the tasks (see Figure 6.16).

Figure 6.16

Latte Makes an Appearance in Lilly's "How to Care for Bunnies" Video



The narration of Lilly's videos drew from both the school nonfiction genres of all-about and how-to books as well as YouTube vlogs. In describing her inspiration for the videos, Lilly shared that she got the idea to compose her own vlogs from watching YouTube: "Well, I saw some bunny episodes, like, things they hate, things they love, and they make, like, cute bunny videos" (Writing Club Transcript, 7/7/21). Drawing from the genre of YouTube videos, in which the host addresses the audience, Lilly opened her how-to vlog with "Hello, welcome to the first episode of, I forget what it's called. But anyway, we're going to be learning about how to care for bunnies. Today, I have for you Latte. We will be meeting her, she's my bunny" (Writing Club transcript, 7/7/21). Later in her video, Lilly reminded her viewers that there are 10 rules to follow to care for a bunny. These "rules" can be compared to the "steps" that are a common structure in the school how-to genre. By drawing on the YouTube genre of pet videos and the school genre of information and how-to books, Lilly created videos that allow her to demonstrate both her knowledge and her playful personality.

On Playful Hiding Spots

Classrooms have norms that regulate how children's bodies move within the space. During writing workshop, young children are often expected to sit at a table, where they can focus on correct posture for penmanship and remain focused on their writing. For the first few meetings of the writing club, the participants appeared to have designated spots for logging on. These spots were often desks or kitchen tables where the children were able to set up their tablets and writing materials. For most of the participants, these spots were established during the lockdown, when their homes were sites for official schooling. However, as the writing club progressed, some of the children began to abandon these spots constructed for schooling and joined from a variety of spaces, including hallways, bunkbeds, couches, the floor, and even under a bed. Not only did the types of spaces expand, but so did the ways in which children moved, providing opportunities for children to engage in embodied literacies that were shaped by intimate relations with the space.

The week after the writing club officially ended, I received an email notification that Katherine had joined the meeting. I logged on with the intention of informing her that our writing club had ended the following week. As we were talking, Lilly also joined the meeting, making it official that we were going to have an impromptu club meeting. While telling me about her day at school, Katherine crawled under her bed.

Rachel:	Oh, it looks like we have someone who is hiding!
Katherine:	[Smiling] I'm under my bed.
Rachel:	I can see that. Are you hiding?
Katherine:	Well, I would be on top of my bed, but they can see me if I'm on top of my bed.
Rachel:	Who are you hiding from?
Katherine:	I'm hiding from the bad guys. My dad told me a scary story about skeletons, and now I'm scared. I used to not be scared of animal bones and people bones, but now I am. If I wasn't scared of anything, I would be on top of my bed, but I am [scared], so I am hiding under my bed.

Rachel: Under the bed seems like a safe place to hide.
Lilly: The closet is also a really good hiding place.
Katherine: Yes, but if I'm on a meeting, they will hear me. They can't hear you because I have my headphones on, but they can hear me when I talk.
Rachel: Hmm…That's true. You have to be very quiet if you are hiding. The closet is also a very good place to hide.
Katherine: I wouldn't want to hide in the closet, though. The closet is where my make-believe skeletons come out from, so I wouldn't want to be in the closet.
Rachel: Yeah, it's probably not a good idea to hide in the same place that the scary things are hiding [laughing].
Katherine: [Shakes head] No.
Lilly: [Shakes head in agreement]
Rachel: This would make a great play video. I'd love to see a video about skeletons in the closet and your hiding places.
Katherine: Um, yeah, it could be a play video. (Writing Club Transcript, 6/16/21)

In this play scene, Katherine was reconstructing the "monsters in the closet" narrative that her father had shared with her. This narrative is also found in many children's books (e.g., Mercer Mayer's series, *There's a Nightmare in My Closet*, *There's an Alligator Under My bed*, *There's Something in My Attic,* and *There's Monsters Everywhere*; and Amanda Noll's series, *Are You My Monster?*, *How I Met My Monster*, and *I Need My Monster*). Zoom not only allowed me to witness this play scene that was taking place in her bedroom, but it also became an important component of the play narrative, as Katherine wove the writing club meeting into her play. The meeting became a liability for Katherine in her story and talking to *us* put her in "pretend danger" of compromising her hiding place.

Jenkins (1988) explained that "Play refers to the young child's activities characterized by freedom from all but personally imposed rules (which are changed at will), by free-wheeling fantasy involvement, and by the absence of any goals outside of the activity itself" (p. 163). In my teacher mode, I directed Katherine to turn her fantasy play narrative into a composing project and, in doing so, imposed adult rules onto her play. My goal for Katherine producing a product—something tangible—altered the play and disrupted my ability to both participate and listen to the

play narrative that Katherine was inviting us to co-construct in the space under her bed and through Zoom. As a researcher, I am left wondering how often my presence shifted the play and composing practices of the children during our writing club meetings.

Discussion

The participation of families opened new possibilities to both expand and constrain the ways literacies moved in our club. With some parents more visible than others, I began to wonder how parent involvement was influencing how I planned for the weekly club meetings, and how the literacies of some students were being taken up and privileged over others. In traditional literacy research studies that take place in classrooms, once parents have signed consent forms, parents have very little interaction with or knowledge of what takes place during the research study. When the study takes place over Zoom, parents can observe the curriculum, the teacher, and the children as well as the researcher. While all the interactions that I had with the parents were overwhelmingly positive, I knew that I needed to interrogate what it meant to be observed in both my teacher and researcher roles.

Throughout the 14 weeks, the writing club engaged in several mini-genre inquiries. As the facilitator, I intentionally chose genres that I observed in the texts that students shared, including comic books, joke writing, and a genre we named play videos. Katherine was one of the most prolific posters to our *Seesaw* site, and the texts she shared were often taken up and used as mentor texts in our genre inquiries. I chose to focus on a play video inquiry after Katherine introduced us to the Tannerite YouTube channel, where a family has posted numerous scripted play videos of children acting out scenarios like trying to wake up a brother who is sleep walking or calling the “Koo Koo Vet” when the stuffed animals are acting crazy. The videos

have a silliness steeped in childhood innocence and middle-class values. I used the Tannerite's videos along with *Alex's Pretend Play Loose Tooth* (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= A_NNR3u5KKU) as mentor texts, knowing that parents would be comfortable with the content in the videos.

In contrast, with parents close by, I felt reluctant to highlight the potentially controversial narratives of Minecraft out of our writing club inquiries. I was excited to learn about Minecraft from Jabari and enjoyed when he took me into the creator mode of the worlds that he and his sister were building through the game. However, I never considered Minecraft as a text to be shared in the club meetings. When Jabari introduced "infinity holes" that swallowed up all the characters into one of our group composing projects, I was alarmed by the violent turn in our group story. In that moment, I became acutely aware of the parents who were present, including Katherine's mom. I worried about how the parents would react to the violent content of the text that the children and I were co-composing and the possibility of parents pushing back against the inclusion of popular culture in the writing club space. My response was to attempt to shift the narrative by suggesting that an infinity hole did not have to mean an end to our story. I suggested the possibility of superheroes coming to save the day, to which Jabari correctly stated, "There are no superheroes in infinity holes!"

This interaction left me deeply troubled as I began to recognize the ways that I was reifying the very structures I had hoped to dismantle. To protect the innocence of some children, I was denying Jabari a chance to have the texts he values become a part of our writing club. After reflecting on this incident, I decided to reshare the story in the writing club the following week to spark a conversation around infinity holes. To my surprise, the children all agreed that the infinity holes were a "really cool" addition to the story, and Alejandro, who was very impressed

with Jabari's knowledge of Minecraft, reminded us that there are "no superheroes in infinity holes." With Zoom, the private worlds of children's homes intersected with the online writing club, opening possibilities to theorize how literacies move between home and school and then work across multiple generations. Notions of care (Ghiso, 2016; González et al., 2005; Moll et al., 1992) were made visible as Zoom captured parents and older siblings adjusting headphones, checking connection statuses, delivering snacks, and fetching toys, books, and pets. In these homes, the writing club was taken seriously, and the literacy practices were regarded as important and worthy of their time and participation. Holding the writing club over Zoom allowed parents an opportunity to observe "school" literacies in practice. Writing instruction was made visible to parents as they experienced it firsthand, participated, and engaged with the composing practices.

Summary

Family members were important composing partners and collaborators for the children in this study. Both parents and siblings took part in the creation of video and audio recordings. These media offered children opportunities to take on multiple roles as producers, directors, writers, and actors. Unlike pen-and-paper composing, where young children are often considered to be novices in need of correcting (spelling and grammar), video and audio production provides a space where young children can take on the identity as an expert—one who needs little support from adults. When the children in this study asked for adult support, it was because their projects required multiple people (actors, videographers, etc.), not because they required an adult's expertise. Collaborations with siblings showed that children across ages shared interests in composing practices and genres.

The writing partner collaboration between Lilly and her brother, Hudson, revealed the creative ways that children explore “forbidden” genres in the invisible spaces of their homes, opening up new understandings for the literacies that young children reserve for spaces outside the gaze of adults. In bedrooms, living rooms, and kitchens, the children in this study engaged in literacies that were entangled with the people and spaces of their homes. A bed became a sanctuary from monsters in the closet, kitchens were utilized for making lemonade and constructing stories around snacks, a living room transformed into a dance competition for LOL Dolls, and a bedroom was a safe place for children to continue to play with dolls when doll play was no longer deemed socially acceptable. In the spaces where they live, the young children in this study were able to share parts of their literate identities that are rarely made visible in school spaces.

The playful “forbidden” literacy practices that these young children took up in their homes were deeply linked to their own truths. The fear of a monster in the closet, brain-eating zombies, and teenagers self-isolating during parties are all very real phenomena in the cultural worlds of young children. Young children play with truth through fiction in their pretend and digital play and through their composing practices. These fictional compositions are very much about finding truth for these young children and must be acknowledged as such by adults.

Chapter 7: Conclusion and Implications

Conclusion

For 10 weeks, the online writing club was a place where seven children, ages 5 to 8, came together to co-construct a space for sharing favorite texts and composing practices. The online writing club quickly became a space of joy, silliness, and intellectual pursuits. The children and families in this study took the writing club seriously, finding ways to make it a part of their busy schedules during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study documented the ways that the writing club offered a space for children to construct shared literacy practices that allowed for new meaning-making, social relationships, and literate identities. In the following sections, I discuss the findings from this study, its present limitations, and implications for future research and practice.

Narrating New Identities and Social Worlds Through Multimodal Texts

The writing club was a space where young children actively took up multiple modes of production in their composing practices, including video and audio recording, digital drawing, pen and paper, play, and performing (e.g., jokes and magic shows). In these composing projects, children found space to play with their identities and make sense of their social worlds. The children co-constructed a space in which telling jokes, grabbing a notebook to learn how to draw like Dav Pilkey, and creating a plan for surviving "infinity holes" signaled belonging. Children shared interests often deemed inappropriate for school spaces (e.g., consumer culture, violence, and video games) and took up ideas from popular culture (e.g., Minecraft, LOL and Calico dolls, and Captain Cage) in their composing practices.

Digital texts and composing practices provided spaces for children to build knowledge and expertise of salient texts in their social worlds. As they engaged in transmedia and

multimodal composing practices, their expertise helped reposition how they were seen by their peers in the writing club. For Jabari, a child who signaled in many ways that he wanted to be taken seriously as a literate being, the writing club provided a space to take on new literate identities as an expert on Bakugan and Minecraft (among other media) and a storyteller with exciting plotlines full of adventure. Alejandro, a child whose only experience of school was in online spaces, leveraged his digital literacies to build connections with his peers by researching jokes online to bring back and share with the writing club.

Multimodal tools for composing opened new possibilities for children to explore new genres and composing practices. For example, Omar played with detective stories, inserting the popular comic book character, Captain Cage, as his main detective. Through an audio telling of his story, Omar was able to draw from a favorite media text and take risks in trying out a new genre. Omar's confidence in his storytelling grew when working in the detective genre, as he was already an "expert" in detective stories from reading comic books and graphic novels. Furthermore, the multimodal options for composing opened up new possibilities for young children to tell stories beyond paper-and-pencil tasks. Through use of audio recording, Omar was able to construct narratives with far more complex storylines than what was reflected in his written texts and take on the identity of a competent storyteller.

Popular Culture and the Resource(fulness) of Young Children's Composing

Popular culture permeated the spaces of the online writing club. Artifact shares were filled with toys, books, and digital texts drawn from popular media and culture. The children took up these texts in their composing practices throughout the writing club time, demonstrating creativity, knowledge of popular narratives, and distinct purposes for writing. In my dual role as facilitator of the writing club and researcher, I engaged in literacy digs to deepen my own

knowledge and understanding of the popular culture the children brought into the writing club both through artifact shares and composing practices. The literacy digs provided new opportunities to understand how children were taking up popular culture in their composing practices.

Popular culture texts became mentor texts as children took up and remixed narrative structures from favorite YouTube videos, video games, and comic books. After an inquiry study of play videos, Katherine and Alejandro composed play videos that took on elements of the popular YouTube videos produced by the Tannerites and Toys and Colors YouTube channels. A literacy dig into these YouTube channels revealed common themes that Katherine and Alejandro borrowed from the professional videos, including “Yes Day” and pretending to lose a tooth. For these children, popular culture was a serious intellectual pursuit, worthy of researching and building a community of fellow investigators and collaborators. Children shared their knowledge with each other and found online sources to deepen their knowledge. For example, in Chapter 5, I documented how Alejandro utilized Google to search for information on LEGO Mario; his searches led him to toy sets and videos of children playing with the toys.

Children incorporated popular culture into their composing practices as a means for social connection and belonging. In the writing club, knowledge of Minecraft, Bakugan, and LEGO Mario positioned children as members of social worlds that were important to the writing club members. Finding ways to bring these popular media into composing practices was another important way to signal membership and elicit responses from peers. Jabari played with Minecraft and Bakugan narratives in the co-composing stories as a means to produce a particular response from his peers. As I detailed in Chapter 4, my literacy dig into the world of Minecraft revealed new understandings of video game narratives, participatory literacies, and the ways

children play with/in violent themes like death and destruction. This dig allowed me to understand Jabari's contribution of "infinity holes" to make sense of the media material as well to produce a new and exciting challenge for his collaborators.

Space and Composing Practices

The literacies and composing practices of young children are inextricably linked to the physical and relational spaces they inhabit. Demonstrated in this study are the ways in which particular literacies were cultivated at home. These literacies were mobilized by family participation, the shared and private spaces in homes, and opportunities to experiment outside of the constraints of school curricular goals and expectations. Popular media culture, toys, and digital artifacts all made their way into the composing practices of children in these spaces.

Throughout the study, Zoom cameras captured the shared spaces of homes (kitchens and living rooms). In the waning months of the COVID-19 pandemic, these spaces still reflected the reality of lives altered by shutdowns and online schooling. School and work literacies took place side by side as parents and children worked in shared spaces. Parents moved between work and supporting their children's learning. These spaces were filled with movement and activity as families went about their daily lives: preparing dinner, working at a computer, talking on the phone, and assisting their child with the writing club. As a result, parents and siblings participated in tangential and proximate ways.

The literacy practices of the children were intra- and intergenerational as children took up composing projects with siblings and parents. The literacy engagements showed young children and adults working in collaborative partnerships, with children leading the projects. For example, in the making of her play videos, Katherine employed the help of her parents and younger sister to take on roles as actors and production assistants. Older siblings were both collaborators and

mentors in the composing practices of the young children. With the help of his sister, Jabari took up magic and learned the language and gestures required for performing a magic trick like a true magician. Throughout the study, young children and older siblings found shared interest in popular culture, genres, and composing practices. In their kitchen, Lilly and her older brother formed a writing partnership, in which they took up writing horror stories, a genre that interested both but is often prohibited in school spaces.

In Chapter 6, I documented how bedrooms are private spaces where children are able to play with their identities and take up composing practices that focus on their own truths outside of the gaze of adults. Lilly made playscapes for her Calico Dolls, a practice that she relegated to home because of the negative social pressures associated with older children playing with dolls. Bedrooms were spaces of transmedia literacy practices as children moved easily between playing with material artifacts and digital spaces. Jabari's room was a space that was both filled with official school literacy artifacts (a bookcase overflowing with chapter books; a desk with his notebooks, pencils, and school-issued tablet) and artifacts that related to his personal interests. When Jabari first gave me a tour of his bedroom, he focused on the artifacts that represented school literacies; however, as he became more comfortable, he began to reveal his great pleasure in popular culture and digital worlds. In these spaces, literacies and parts of literate identities that are often rendered invisible in school spaces were made visible.

Limitations

This study took place during the waning months of the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, university research in public schools was significantly limited, making it difficult to secure IRB approval for research with young children. As a result, I shifted my study to an independent online writing club outside of a school setting. Additionally, I took on the role as the facilitator of

the writing club, which included designing the structures of the club meetings and planning the curriculum for each week's sessions, while doing my best to align the goals of the writing club with my research goals.

The online writing club provided an unanticipated opportunity to observe children's everyday lives and home literacies each week. However, this access was limited to what I was able to view through the line of vision granted by the cameras on Zoom. While no research can claim to offer a complete story of the lives of children and families, it is important to recognize that this research captured small moments of family life, when families knew that they were being recorded. My analysis was limited to these observations and cannot claim to capture a complete picture of the literacy and composing practices of children and families in these spaces.

This access to the homes of young children revealed that literacy is, in fact, a familial practice. Family members (across generations) observed and participated from the periphery and were active participants in composing practices of the young children. Missing from this study was an opportunity to observe and interview family members to build a deeper understanding of family life as well as family language and literacy practices. Specifically, this study demonstrated a need to better understand the ways that families engage in multimodal and digital composing projects with young children. Omar and Maya's mother shared that her family enjoyed the composing projects but provided very little information about what made the projects meaningful for their family. Additionally, this study documented the shared literacy practices of siblings that take place in the home. Including parents and siblings in the research would have provided insight into these family literacy events and how families took up the multimodal composing practices.

Another limitation stemmed from the structure of the online writing club and my oversight in failing to include a dedicated time for composing in the shared space. Dyson (1997) and Yoon (2021) have demonstrated the rich opportunities for documenting the ways children negotiate shared symbolic meanings, play with multiple identities, and story narratives during the official composing times in classrooms. With shared composing time limited to three co-composed stories and a few drawing sessions with Dav Pilkey as our guide, I had few opportunities to observe children negotiate shared meanings as part of the composing process. In their article detailing a collaborative writing space during the pandemic, Shimizu and Santos (2022) documented how Zoom breakout rooms and Google Doc spaces provided opportunities for children to engage in textual interactions as children composed in a third-grade online writing workshop. While the online spaces were not without their challenges as children learned to negotiate new online tools, the authors found that the children adapted to the online spaces and "invented new ways of interacting as they engaged in the [online] writing process" (p. 45). Including more time for composing time in the writing club would have provided an opportunity to see how young children navigate composing in shared online spaces.

A related limitation was in the decision to use *Seesaw* as a space for building community around composing practices. *Seesaw* provides educators with useful tools for posting assignments and creating portfolios for student work. Additionally, some of the children in this study utilized the digital tools to explore video, audio, and digital drawing modes of production. However, I was disappointed that, for the most part, the children did not take up the *Seesaw* space as a place to engage in conversation around composing practices. *Seesaw* has a blog setting which made students' work accessible to all in the writing club. Children can view and comment on each other's work in the space of the blog. While it is possible that children and family

members viewed each other's work, Alejandro was the only child to utilize the blog independently as a space to interact with the work of his peers. In response, I dedicated several composing share times to highlighting the student work I had posted to the blog. I demonstrated how to comment on the blog and encouraged the children to visit the blog to find ideas for their own composing. These efforts, ultimately, did not produce the results I was looking for, and the *Seesaw* page failed to produce the collaborative composing space I had imagined.

Finally, my role as a facilitator of the writing club was deeply entangled with my role as a researcher. At times, my goals as a researcher governed how I engaged with the children and how I facilitated the club. To learn everything that I could about each child, I frequently caught myself in interview mode, asking children multiple question in a row, turning the club meetings into a back-and-forth between individual children and myself. As I reviewed the writing club videos as part of the analysis process, I was struck by the overwhelming presence of my voice and the number of times that the children were talking directly to me as opposed to each other. I also came to recognize that my choices in where to lead composing inquiries were fueled by a desire to observe particular literacies (e.g., play videos and comic book writing). While I attempted to interrogate this entanglement through reflective memos, I recognize that my goal of creating a truly child-centered writing space was hindered by my role as researcher.

Implications

This work contributes to the research of the social worlds and multimodal composing practices of young children. Building on the previous section of limitations, I discuss the implications that this study has for research and practice.

Implications for Research

Independent writing spaces provide a valuable opportunity to examine the social worlds and composing practices of young children outside of the constraints of school, where children are often regulated by narrow conceptions of what counts as literacy (Luke & Kale, 2017), which writing practices and topics are valued, and what ways are characteristic of taking up literate identities (Dyson, 2020). This single case study of a co-constructed, independent, online writing club with young children paid particular attention to the ways young children construct social and literate identities through multimodal and digital composing practices outside of school. Below, I discuss implications for future research of young children's multimodal/digital composing practices and literate identities in online spaces. Particular attention is paid to the affordances of Zoom as a tool for hosting online writing spaces and as a tool to help children participate in the research process.

It is important to consider the role of adult facilitators and researchers in children's co-constructed writing spaces. Building any new community takes time and patience for authentic relationships and structures to develop. Educators and researchers looking to create co-constructed spaces with young children must be keenly aware of their roles as adults, facilitators, and researchers, and how each of these roles impacts the progress of the co-constructed space.

At the beginning of this study, I leaned into my role as facilitator, unilaterally establishing the club routines and making decisions regarding the literacies/texts with which we engaged. I took on a teacher voice, which established me as the authority and dominant voice in the club. Fostering authentic relationships that provided the children with autonomy and agency in the club took time. The children needed to trust that their literacies, interests, and ideas not only mattered but were worthy of becoming a genuine part of the writing club curriculum. For

example, highlighting the drawing videos of the author Dav Pilkey signaled to Omar that his interest in the Captain Underpants series was valued in the writing club. Immediately, Omar went from a passive participant to an active contributor to the content of the writing club, including audio recordings of him reading aloud chapters from a Captain Underpants book and numerous original story compositions. As the writing club progressed, my role as facilitator diminished as the children began to assert their own agency and desires for texts we should engage with and how the writing club time should be structured.

Providing children with autonomy and agency in the research process requires flexibility on the part of the facilitator and researcher. As I began to let go of some control as the facilitator, my research goals needed to adjust to the goals and interests the children brought to the writing club. As a researcher, one of my goals was to research the multimodal writing compositions of the children in the writing club. As the study progressed, I found my research attention drawn away from analyzing the composing products uploaded to *Seesaw* and redirected towards a focus on the children's digital and multimodal composing practices. This was a direct result of their inconsistent participation with *Seesaw* and their enthusiastic desire to share their digital literacies with me through child-initiated digital walks and artifact shares in the official and unofficial spaces of the writing club.

Ultimately, time allows for relationships to form and a true writing community to be established around shared literacy practices. Researchers working within a sociocultural framework are concerned with the ways in which the structures of literacy practices and their meanings construct social relationships between people (Bloome & Enciso, 2006, p. 298). This requires thoughtful attention to the literacy practices introduced (by adults and children) as well as time to allow for practices to be established. The writing club in this study was established

over time as children were provided the space to share their interests, texts important to them, and artifacts from their lives.

The Zoom platform offers new possibilities for on-line research**.** For this study, the Zoom platform was both a site for online writing club meetings and a research tool utilized in the collection of video and transcription data. Unlike traditional cases studies in classroom settings, with four walls that function as a physical boundary—regulating the people and materials present—this digital writing club case study was not fixed by a single physical location. People moved and flowed, environments shifted, material objects appeared and disappeared, and literacies were widely distributed and connected through both emerging and waning networks (Stornaiulo et al., 2017). In the case of our online writing club, the Zoom platform opened new possibilities for children to engage in mobile practices as they utilized their cameras to share physical artifacts and the Share Screen function to invite fellow participants and the researcher to view their digital literacy practices, both on their private computers and in online spaces. This study documented how young children inserted their own agendas into the data collection process by sharing their screen and taking me on digital walks. Researchers can utilize Zoom as a tool for centering children's agency in the research process by encouraging children to take the lead in sharing their at-home and digital literacy practices. Future research can examine the complexities of children and adult researchers collecting data together via Zoom, including looking at the role of the Share Screen function and the tablet as a video camera.

Holding the writing club online also opened possibilities for parents and siblings to become proximate participants and informants. The parents and siblings in this study demonstrated the multiple ways that families engage in family and school literacies at home. For example, the parents of Katherine and siblings Maya and Omar were frequent observers of the

writing club and participants in the composing projects of their children. Jabari's sister and Lilly's brother were both present for many of our writing club meetings. Their peripheral participation in the writing club carried over into the home literacy practices of Jabari and Lilly. Future research can invite family members and caretakers to become official participants in the study of young children's composing practices. This study demonstrated that researching family engagement in school literacies does not need to take an intervention stance to elicit meaningful participation from families. In fact, researching how families organically participate may foster new understandings of the intergenerational literacies and composing practices that young children engage with in their homes and away from school.

Throughout the study, matters of accessibility, positionality, and reciprocity exposed the complexity of researching young children's literacies when Zoom is a tool for both literacy practices and research and data generation. Researching the mobile literacies of young children in a digital age requires special attention to the ethical challenges and dilemmas that arise when people move and literacies are widely distributed between physical and digital spaces (Stornaiulo et al., 2017). It is essential that researchers working with Zoom and other digital communication platforms consider the possible ethical dilemmas associated with the disproportionate access to digital and private spaces of young children and their family members afforded by digital platforms like Zoom. As the children in this study became more comfortable with the writing club community, they naturally wanted to share the private spaces of their homes—their bedrooms, closets, and, on one occasion, a bathroom that had been repurposed as a storage room for toilet paper and paper towels. As a researcher, I grappled with the access that children were granting me and the other children in the club, especially when the caretakers had not explicitly provided permission to see these spaces. Therefore, it is important to establish clear

communication with parents to agree upon protocols and set up clear expectations of how children will operate and move with portable devices.

Furthermore, researchers working with digital conferencing platforms need to consider the ethical dilemmas that can come with researching the digital literacies of young children, especially when they are moving between online sites and communities. In this study, I was fortunate that the children chose relatively safe digital spaces to share with me. For the most part, the children took me to downloaded apps that existed on their own digital devices. The only online engagements consisted of visiting *Highlights™ Kids*, Google searches for Bakugan and LEGO Mario, and music videos from the movie *Zombies 2*. However, I was vigilant whenever a child shared a screen and took me into digital spaces, whether on the internet or on personal devices. The safety and privacy of the children and families were my primary concerns. Ultimately, researchers should work with their IRB teams to establish protocols for digital literacy walks to establish clear goals and guidelines.

Important to this study is the notion of the child as a knowledgeable participant and a knower in the research (Ghiso, 2016). As Luttrell (2020) affirmed, “A key tenet of critical childhood studies is to take children seriously as witnesses to their experiences” (p. 24). Therefore, children are not just subjects for observation, but are also regarded as important informants, directing the gaze of the researcher towards the literacies that matter to them (Luttrell, 2020; Templeton, 2018). In this study, the Share Screen function on Zoom allowed children to direct my gaze to the texts and composing practices that mattered to them.

Listening to children and allowing them to take the lead are not always easy, especially when one has a research agenda. Letting go of my initial protocols for interviewing (the ‘Composing Audiencing’ Protocol) allowed me to begin the difficult work of listening for the

narratives and narrative fragments (Yoon & Templeton, 2019) that children were eager to share with me. The 14 weeks I spent with these seven children provided an opportunity to collect the small snippets of narratives that are not always collected in formal interview protocols. In this study, the moments when the children inserted themselves into the data collection, ignored my questions, and took me where they wanted to go were the most revealing moments.

All this takes time, patience, and opportunities to observe and talk with children over multiple meetings. Jabari, Alejandro, and Lilly taught me the importance of taking the agenda of children seriously. Each of these participants had texts and composing practices that they wanted to share with me. For Alejandro and Jabari, the writing club failed to provide enough time for their digital shares, so listening required finding new spaces outside of the official schedule. It also meant finding time to engage with the narratives that children shared, as in the literacy digs as a means of demonstrating that what children share is important. Jabari was amazed that I had played Minecraft and watched *Zombies 2*. Similarly, Omar was excited to discover that we had some of the same books and surprised when I told him I had purchased the books after his text share. For Lilly, it took time for her to open up and share her literacies that adults often look down on in school spaces. Each of these children found agency in the one-on-one time that they had with me. Observing the children in both the online writing club and one on one, I was able to build new understandings of their literacies and literate identities.

The narratives that the young children shared were not always linear, told in sequential order with precise details, or connected to an overarching theme (a theme that I, as the researcher, usually introduced). Instead, the narratives were often a mélange of facts and feelings about a topic, accounts of how they became experts about a topic (e.g., watching YouTube videos, playing with a friend, sibling, or parent, school), quick tutorials, and the sharing of

related artifacts. In other words, the children had many ways of sharing their truthful accounts with me. For researchers of young children, part of the job is listening for the narratives that show up in multiple forms (talk, gestures, the media texts children share, and their own textual artifacts). Alejandro's composing practices with digital apps is a reminder of the ways that children's "truths" are often revealed in playful acts of composing that happen in unofficial spaces. Alejandro's iMovie trailer about "doing school" at home offered a small glimpse into the reality so many children were experiencing during the COVID-19 pandemic. His rating list for participating in online video game spaces pointed to his desire to be a member of these communities. Furthermore, his "No Donald" list of ways to make Donald Trump feel bad revealed that the political climate had a very real impact on his life and ways of being in the world.

There are important implications for researching the connections between young children's digital reading and composing practices. In Chapter 6, I documented the digital worlds of two focal children, Alejandro and Jabari. As the children took me on digital walks, I observed how their readings of digital sites were performative and directed by their interests and intellectual pursuits. This research adds to the literature on how young children read and navigate digital spaces. A number of studies have included observations of the ways that young children's digital and nondigital play converge in what Herr-Stephenson et al. (2013) termed 'transmedia' play (also see Marsh, 2017; Marsh et al., 2018). However, there is less research on how children's digital play converged with digital (and nondigital) composing practices. Future research can deepen the understandings of children like Alejandro and Jabari, who utilize digital spaces to apprentice, build new understandings, and play in spaces of production.

Implications for Practice

The young children in this study demonstrated rich digital and multimodal composing practices that were cultivated in their homes and through the online writing club. In this section, I discuss how educators can explore and incorporate young children's use of multimodal and digital texts/composing practices into their curriculum and instruction.

School writing spaces should include digital texts and composing practices**.** Beavis (2014) argued for the inclusion of digital texts and stories in the reading curriculum:

> In a time when digital texts and stories are a vivid and pervasive part of young people's worlds, the opportunity is here for literature that includes digital texts to take its place alongside other forms—picture books, novels, poems, plays and the like—to be an integral part of curriculum; that is, to be approached in ways that enhance and deepen pleasure and appreciation, children's understandings of texts and how they work, and their understandings of the nature of reading, of themselves, and of the world. (p. 88)

This study demonstrated that there is also a place to include digital texts in the literature that classrooms use as mentor texts for composing. Digital forms of narrative, including video games, should be analyzed by teachers and children and incorporated into writing lessons. Teachers and children can examine digital texts to identify the various modalities, structures, and story elements to understand how they work and how best to utilize those structures in their own composing practices. This work should also include opportunities for teachers and children to examine digital texts with a critical lens to identify values and assumptions and understandings of how they see themselves and the world.

The children in this study demonstrated diverse multimodal practices that included use of apps on tablets as well as digital composing tools such as video and audio recording. Omar's use of audio recordings to compose his stories illustrated how access to multimodal composing practices provides opportunities for young children to build their storytelling skills without the arduous labor of pen and paper. When young children have access to tablets, digital technologies

can be a stimulus for imaginative composing practices. One aspect of multimodal composing that was particularly salient in this study was the way in which children playfully experimented with technology to explore the features and modes. The children in this study utilized the school-issued tablets that were provided during the pandemic beyond their intended uses for online learning. The children employed the tablets as tools for play, research, and independent composing practices. Schools can encourage this same kind of composing play in the classroom and at home by ensuring that each child has access to a tablet in school and at home.

The digital literacies of the young children in this study were playful and full of movement as they scrolled through and dipped in and out of digital sites. As the children read digital content on sites, they engaged with images and texts to form new understandings. Each interaction sparked new goals and purposes for their reading. The digital texts allowed for research goals to shift as children collected information, found new links to explore, and made connections to other interests. In school settings, this type of reading is often discouraged for young readers. Teachers provide children with decodable texts and leveled readers, and the expectation is that children will read one book at a time, cover to cover. In these school spaces, the adult goal of reading is to decode text and make sense of the author's message. Observing children engage with digital texts reminds us that children have their own goals for reading and their own strategies for collecting information and making sense of text. Early childhood spaces can benefit from providing children with opportunities to engage in reading experiences, with both digital and traditional books, in ways that are authentic to their own goals and in ways of reading texts and making sense of the world. Adult goals for children's reading, including decoding and identifying the intended meanings of a text, are important learning goals for emergent readers; however, time should also be allotted for children to pursue their own goals as

readers as well as their own ways of obtaining those goals. Early childhood classrooms should provide time for children to compile their own sets of texts, including multiple books in a variety of genres, magazines, comic books, and digital resources. Rather than telling children to read one text at a time, educators should notice the intentional ways that children pop in and out of texts as they make their own meanings.

The ways that young children read digital texts are inextricably linked to the ways that children engage in informal digital composing practices. In Chapter 6, I detailed the performative nature of reading digital texts, as Alejandro moved about digital spaces. His movements dictated which features he read and, in turn, directed his research. Information that did not fit his own goals was ignored or passed over for features that sparked interest and met his needs. In video games, children both consume/interpret and produce text. In playing Minecraft, Jabari relied on both his understanding of the narratives of the game and his skills in constructing content in that particular mode of production. Jabari's video games were also participatory and revolved around constructing spaces and narratives with his sister and friends through his Education version of the Minecraft app. As with reading digital texts, young children's digital composing practices are often playful and ephemeral, as children take up modes of production to meet their needs. In informal digital composing, children explore new ways of expressing ideas and understandings. These digital compositions hold particular meaning for the child producers but are not necessarily intended for a public audience.

In contrast, composing practices in schools are often comprised of assignments that require children to produce texts in genre and topics directed by teachers. Composing time is in service of producing a final project with structures that have been imposed by the teacher in order to meet particular curricular goals. Here, I argue for providing open time for children to

engage in composing (both pen and paper and digital) that focuses on playing with practices, including trying out multiple modes and story ideas, abandoning ideas that do not work or no longer hold interest, and finding authentic audiences (including oneself) for texts. This time should also allow for participatory and collaborative composing practices for children to co-construct meanings through text.

School writing spaces should make curricular space for children's cultural resources. While *Show and Tell* has long been a staple of early childhood classrooms, this study demonstrated that expanding share time to include digital shares and home composing projects opens up opportunities for children to share literate identities that are often left at home. In this study, the digital shares highlighted rich literacy practices and expertise in cultural worlds, including video games, LEGO, and zombies. The children were able to position themselves as members of affinity groups and as experts. Teachers can leverage these shares to position children as experts and to validate the cultural and social worlds of children. Through providing time for children to share these practices, the rich literacies that children engage in away from school are made visible. Furthermore, these literacies can be taken up and encouraged as part of the writing curriculum. Here, I imagine a teacher highlighting Alejandro's composing practices using apps, Notes, iMovie, and Voice Memo, and inviting children to try out their own composing projects using the apps.

Providing space for children to curate and utilize their own text sets and digital resources as mentors in their composing practices is a powerful way for educators to make space for children's culture in the writing curriculum. From Katherine's use of the Tannerite's YouTube videos to Alejandro's multiple collections of digital resources, including videos of children playing with LEGO Super Mario, children telling jokes, and the composing apps on his tablet,

the participants in this study demonstrated that young children naturally utilize texts that matter to them as mentors in their play and composing practices.

It is important to recognize that including children's cultural resources as part of the curriculum requires thoughtful negotiation and research on the part of the teacher. Teachers have a responsibility to make decisions of what kinds of narratives are appropriate and how popular culture should be taken up in school spaces. For example, in my own research of the Tannerites videos shared by Katherine, I discovered that the Tannerite family has been critiqued for exploiting their children in the development of media content and accused of educational neglect (Ulatowski, 2022). Moreover, the content of their videos reflects white Christian values that could be problematic in a classroom space that values diversity. As a result, I searched for alternative videos of children playing and presented those as mentor texts for the writing club. This scenario also offers opportunities for teachers and children to interrogate the growing industry of child influencers that permeate the cultural worlds of young children.

Furthermore, as Seiter (1993) explained, "different children have different things to win or lose when they take pleasure in peer-oriented mass culture" (p. 234). The popular culture of middle-class children is often considered more highbrow than low-income and working-class children (e.g., Lilly's Calico Dolls are marketed as wholesome and innocent) and the popular media that boys play with is often deemed violent, positioning children differently when they bring their interests into the school. However, children's popular culture also presents opportunities for critical engagement, reflection, and resistance (Dyson, 1997), as well as opportunities for the (re)construction of texts.

School and independent writing spaces can benefit from online learning. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the mainstream media focused on the harmful effects of school closures

and the learning losses experienced by young children during online learning (e.g., Dorn et al., 2021). The overwhelming impression was that online learning did not provide the support that young children need to learn to read and write. Furthermore, educators and parents worried that online spaces were failing to provide the social interactions that are so important for young children's development. While these concerns are legitimate, this study highlighted some of the affordances that online spaces can provide teachers and children.

The online writing club opened up opportunities for parents and siblings to engage in the literacies of the children. With the writing club taking place in shared family spaces, parents and siblings were able to observe the club meetings and participate in meaningful ways. This participation created a space in which parents and siblings were able to participate in the literacies of the young children, including taking on roles as collaborators in composing projects. Online spaces also offer an intimate way for children to share their cultural and social worlds with classmates through artifact shares that take place in the home. When children share from home, family members and pets become part of the worlds they reveal. Shares can be a toy, an activity (e.g., magic show or making lemonade), or a digital walking tour. While this is not an argument for online vs. in-person learning, it is worth considering how schools can find a way to reimagine intervention and enrichment programs to include online learning spaces that allow for family engagement.

It is important to recognize creative spaces for all young children as an issue of equity. In a time when schools are moving towards scripted literacy instruction that focuses on universal standards, there appears to be a proliferation of private afterschool companies offering children opportunities to engage with digital literacies (including coding and gaming), maker spaces,

board games, and creative writing workshops.[1] These spaces offer children an opportunity to explore creative endeavors that are less and less a part of the school curriculum. The sheer number of these programs speaks to the importance that society places on creativity and the desire of parents to provide these opportunities for their children. However, these companies charge a considerable fee for participation, placing a barrier on who has an opportunity to engage in creative pursuits and creating a divide in who gets to be "creative." This study illustrated the importance of providing spaces for all young children to explore their creative interests and composing practices. While we advocate (and wait) for schools to offer all children opportunities to explore their creative identities, it is worth considering how independent spaces can provide free access to creative composing and play as a matter of equity.

[1] A quick Google search for afterschool companies in Park Slope, Brooklyn, produced over 20 independent afterschool and summer programs for one neighborhood.

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