



# Literacies Across the Lifespan

Through the publication of peer-reviewed empirical research, working papers on field-based praxis, and conceptual pieces, *Literacies Across the Lifespan* contributes to ongoing conversations about literacy across learners' lives, from early childhood to adulthood, and in contexts across home, school, and community settings. *Literacies Across the Lifespan* is run by graduate students at UIC's Center for Literacy.

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## EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the third issue of *Literacies Across the Lifespan (LAL)*, a peer-reviewed, graduate student-run journal published by the Center for Literacy at the University of Illinois at Chicago. We are so happy you're here.

*LAL* is committed to sharing research about all forms of literacy, including literacy in its earliest forms. In that vein, this issue begins with a discussion of books with no words. "Between and Within the Pictures: Gaps and Imagination in Comprehending Wordless Books" is a look at how young children make meaning through shapes, colors, and images, but it also reveals a great deal about the magic of reading, in general, as it explores how imagination operates to "fill in narrative gaps." Rong Zhang, Mengying Xue, and Judith Lysaker of Purdue University write about young children "enter[ing] the landscape of character's mind to imagine" worlds, words, and experiences.

This issue also features our first article in Spanish. In "Cuestionando Mitos Comunes Acerca del Bilingüismo: La Importancia de Aprender Español e Inglés Para los Estudiantes Latinos," Norma Monsivais Diers, a Ph.D. candidate at UIC, speaks directly to parents of Latino children to debunk several common myths about bilingualism. We mean this literally: you can listen to this article online if you wish! The article's accessibility expands the way the ways multilingual research can and should be included in academic journals.

Finally, Yuyan Jiao, Olivia Moses, and Lakia M. Scott from Baylor University explore the use of animated film to help students build media literacy skills. Using the animated film *Megamind* as an anchor text, their work shows "that the integration of animated films in media literacy education enhanced students' understanding of media that is relevant to the real world and developed their competency as active agents." Their work is also a reminder of the importance of educating our children to be critical, empowered members of the world around us.

*LAL* is designed as a resource for graduate students at UIC and beyond, as well as a venue for contributing to ongoing discussions in our field about literacy teaching, learning, and practice across contexts, geographies, and lifetimes. The name of the publication reflects our view of literacies as multiple, hybrid, and ever-changing, situated in specific sociocultural contexts, and reflective of readers' unique identities. The literacies that learners practice across their lifespans are vast and rich. From babies to elders, and everyone in between, all learners are engaged in making meaning with various kinds of texts.

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## Between and Within the Pictures: Gaps and Imagination in Comprehending Wordless Books

Rong Zhang, Mengying Xue, and Judith Lysaker

Historically, wordless books have been studied as contexts in which young readers build a repertoire of habits, processes and strategies that will serve them later as mature readers. Wordless books have been important to literacy researchers for their potential as instructional tools, and their impact on young children's literate development (Crawford & Hade, 2000), particularly their interpretive capacities and comprehension (Arzipe, 2003; Lysaker, 2018). In addition to studying what readers do with wordless books, wordless books have been examined and analyzed in terms of their features, resulting in the identification of several characteristics and affordances attributed to their image-based nature (Lysaker & Miller, 2013; Serafini, 2014a). For example, ambiguity, image framing, the use of vectors, positioning, and color are recognized as important features of wordless texts and other image-dominant genre like comic books and graphic novels (Lysaker & Miller, 2013; Kress, & van Leeuwen, 2020; Painter, Martin, & Unsworth, 2013; Serafini, 2014b). Wordless picture books have long been recognized as a medium for development of emergent literacy (e.g., Crawford, & Hade, 2000; Jalongo, Dragich, Conrad, & Zhang, 2002; Lysaker, 2018). Prior to learning and mastering language, children's views and

comprehension of their surroundings are based on their observations and perceptions of the visual world (Terrusi, 2018). Therefore, wordless picture books that use visual texts to reconstruct and restore the world young readers live and observe are more likely to evoke active transactions with the text, engaging their personal experiences and cultural and linguistic backgrounds to interpret and construct meaning (Lysaker, 2018).

Previous studies in which we observed children reading wordless books brought us into close contact with the ways in which they made sense of these visual texts and caused us to consider the unique semiotic landscapes they offer young readers (Lysaker, 2018; Lysaker & Miller, 2013; Lysaker & Hopper, 2015). We are particularly interested in the visual narrative techniques used in such picture books - they are designed as a series of individual illustrations that require readers to fill in the different narrative gaps that exist between each illustration and with each page turn in order to make sense of the whole story. The presence of such narrative gaps adds complexity, dramatic quality, and playfulness to the reading (Arizpe & Styles, 2016). However, few studies have examined how the visual text of such picture

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books creates different types of gaps, and what potential effects these gaps may have on young readers' reading responses.

We argue that gaps in wordless books is a prominent and important quality of such books, and that few studies have explored how gaps in visual texts of such genre contribute to challenge readers to move beyond the role of being readers to that of co-authors through imaginative sense making. Thus, in this study, we used textual analysis to examine the gaps in three wordless books. We also drew on theoretical lenses of landscape of consciousness and action (Bruner, 1986) and Vygotsky's (2004) and Bakhtin's (1981) constructs of imagination and dialogue to ask: What kinds of gaps exist in these three wordless books and how do they contribute to the imagination as part of children's reading of these visual texts?

### **Theoretical Perspective and Relevant Literature** ***Wordless Books and Gaps***

Scholars<sup>1</sup> generally concur that wordless books, by definition, are books without words relying solely on illustrations to tell a story. The dominant status of images in wordless books makes their role drastically different from the ones in picture books. Kress and van Leeuwen (2020) describe the meanings which are communicated and perceived through qualities of image, like color, line, and shape, as an entirely different grammar. Images represent meaning in non-linear and supple ways, standing in contrast to the strict linearity of the written word. One of the goals of written text in picturebooks is to provide transitions, details, and information that go beyond illustrations, to help readers "bridge" the natural gaps of narrative. Wordless books rely solely on images, requiring readers to stitch together meanings during reading without the aid of words, enhancing what is represented in image through imagination, so that sense making can occur fluidly. This

sense-making activity of bridging meanings between images helps readers overcome what Lser (1972) calls indeterminacies and breakpoints. The indeterminacies of text make spaces for readers to bring themselves to the text and build relationships with books during meaning making in particularly agentive ways as they make choices and decisions about the meaning of the narrative they are reading. Thus, readers become co-authors.

According to Lser (2005), gaps are inevitable, as "no tale can ever be told in its entirety" (p. 55). Gaps occur in a variety of ways and can occur in both narrative "landscapes" described by Bruner — those of action and consciousness (Bruner, 1986). In the landscape of action, gaps occur in the passage of time and the setting of the narrative. The absence of written text to provide transitions through temporal markers like "in the morning," or "after school" or space markers, like "in the park", or "at home" enhances the presence of what might be considered common narrative gaps. In the landscape of consciousness, gaps are created by the absences of description about what is happening in characters' inner worlds, their thoughts, feelings, intentions, and beliefs. Not only are these descriptions missing but the connections between thought and action are also unexplained. Without written text, and the use of causal markers like "because" (*He went out the door in a hurry because he was frightened*) information about characters' motivations is absent. In addition to these somewhat pronounced gaps, we noted subtler gaps that occurred as a function of the passage of narrative time. When time progresses in image-only text, readers are challenged to understand the gaps between these singular moments without the familiar linguistic expressions like "the next day" or "later." In a similar way, the relationships between characters develop in visual snapshots. Readers must imagine what happens in the gaps between these snapshots to create relationships between characters.

In addition to the gaps in the flow of narrative images, there are gaps beyond images. Turning pages while reading produces an obvious gap when readers must follow narratives across the actual break of word and image. Bader (1976) notes that the gaps created

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<sup>1</sup> Wordlessness has a range of meanings for different scholars. Some include books that contain minimal words with images, while others consider wordless books to be those in which the narrative is told in images only. We concur with the latter definition, because the presence of any words within the narrative seems to influence how young children go about reading them.

by page turns in picturebooks are often purposely designed to increase the drama of the story and build anticipation in readers. Page turns can disrupt readers since breaks in the narrative occur in real time and space rather than narrative space and time, which can momentarily divorce readers from the story world as eyes leave one page opening and move to another. The moment of page turns creates gaps of narratives for readers to imagine the plots that may be left out by the book authors. Framing images is another way gaps are created in picturebooks and particularly in wordless books. Frames, as Nikolajeva and Scott (2013) discuss, separate images, making them distinct meaning units and breaking the narrative flow. Readers are challenged to re-build narratives to achieve the fluent flow of meaning across images. In addition, gaps can also occur over the gutter in a page opening. Beyond these various locations of gaps, the number and “size” of gaps, and how gaps are designed can change across the course of the book. This variety in placement and size of gaps makes wordless books complex texts that challenge readers’ meaning making capacities and prompts the use of imagination. Multiple gaps in wordless texts, without the mediation of printed words, heighten the role of imagination in reading and comprehending these texts.

imagination are relevant to understanding its role of imagination in reading. To make sense of narrative worlds that are beyond readers’ present realities, readers create connections between those actual realities and the ones that exist in text<sup>2</sup>. Creating these connections between actual and narrative worlds makes imagination critical to the exploration of the different kinds of reality represented in stories. Creating connections also demands moving beyond the here and now, and as Green (2005) suggest, asks readers to mentally transcend time and space to be transported to narrative worlds. In this way, as Zittoun (2017) puts it, imagination is an “excursion” and the expansion of experience (p. 305). When we think about this in terms of reading, the function of gaps deepens. Gaps invite readers into the process of expanding their experience into, and subsequently of, storied worlds through imagination, and in this way working through gaps goes beyond simply “filling” specific perceived gaps with predictable content.

Understanding how gaps invite readers into this imaginative process is critical to understand how readers understand and interpret visual texts. We use Bakhtin’s (1986) concept of addressivity as our theoretical framework, arguing that visual texts with provocative gaps in wordless picture books call out

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### **Imagination and Comprehension**

Rather than a way to create the fantastical, Lev Vygotsky (2004) argues that imagination is a means of making sense of reality. Peleprat and Cole (2011) extend this idea to describe imagination as a “process through which the world is made and at the same time through which the self emerges to experience that world” (p. 399). For Peleprat and Cole, imagination is a process that human beings use to make sense of the gaps that occur in everyday experiences. They argue that imaginative sense making necessitates the movement of self into the world. These ideas about

to readers, “addressing” them and “turning” them to respond. In other words, unlike abstract linguistic texts, the features of pictorial texts are more readily accepted and recognized by young readers, inviting them to interact actively with the text, thus the reading process is like an ongoing dialogue between the text and the reader (Lysaker, 2018). The rendering of narrative in

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<sup>2</sup>This is consistent with Tania Zittoun (2017), who makes the case that imagination is necessary for bridging personal and cultural representations of meaning. See, *Symbolic Resources and Sense-Making in Learning and Instruction, in the European Journal of Psychological Education*, vol. 32, p. 1-20.

image only has the effect of enhancing the addressivity of texts, particularly for children, because characters are made more present as human beings; they have physical appearances like size, shape and color that can be recognized in people in the actual world (Lysaker, 2018). When young readers make “eye contact” with visual texts, it can enrich and enliven their relationships with text making it easier to connect with characters and achieve what Bertau calls describing connections in actual relationships, “sensitive contact” (Bertau, 2014, p.1).

Thus, understanding the significance of gaps in wordless picture books is key to understanding how young readers make sense of visual narratives. We hope that analyzing the characteristics of gaps in such books will help teachers, preservice teachers, and stakeholders further understand their potential as pedagogical tools, especially the potential of such picture book to invite young readers to actively engage in dialogues with the text, which is critical to the development of emerging literacy skills.

## Method

This study is designed as a qualitative study with textual analysis, Multimodal Content Analysis (MCA) in specific, to examine the gaps embedded in three wordless books (Float by Daniel Miyares, Bee and Me by Alison Jay, and The Red Book by Barbara Lehman) that challenge young readers to actively engage in imaginative comprehending activities. Textual analysis allows researchers to gain information from various types of texts, including visual, written or spoken texts to explore how meaning is constructed through languages, symbols and visual elements, and interpretation of the text (Allen, 2017; Frey et al., 1999). In this study, the visual elements presented on book pages and visual designs are analyzed to see how narrative meaning is constructed and inherently interact with potential young readers.

MCA, developed by Serafini and Reid (2019), goes beyond the limitations of traditional quantitative content analysis, which relies on predetermined category and frequency counts as the primary focus of analysis, instead focuses on the subjective

interpretation of content of a text by establishing a systematic classification process that encodes and identifies themes or patterns (Serafini, 2019). Furthermore, MCA expands the boundaries of the qualitative content analysis framework from focusing only on the meaning potential of individual mode, such as linguistic mode, to considering the complex relationships between modes present in multiple modal assemblages (e.g., visual, typographic) (Serafini, 2019).

MCA consists of a systematic classification process including:

- (1) Recognizing an Area of Interest; (2) Developing Initial Research Questions; (3) Constructing the Data Corpus; (4) Defining the Object of Study; (5) Developing Initial Categories; (6) Developing the Analytical Template; (7) Testing the Analytical Template; (8) Applying the Analytical Template to the Data Corpus; (9) Constructing Potential Themes; (10) implications of the analysis; and (11) Dissemination of Findings. (Serafini & Reid, 2019, p.9)

At the outset of this study, all authors were engaged in reading and studying wordless books as part of an ongoing project. Adhering to the MCA procedure, the first author presented the research interests and set the initial research questions. Then, the first author identified six kinds of gaps through reading a set of 33 wordless books that are accessible from local libraries. The six types of gaps were the initial categories of the study based on theoretical perspectives. All authors had multiple meetings to discuss the initial categories, developed a question template guiding further observations and analysis. After that, four books were randomly selected from the 33 books to test the analytical template. Each author read the books using the template, writing research memos and answering the template questions. Then all researchers came together and compared template responses and reader responses, refined the definitions and functions of each type of gap. Finally, through the re-occurring discussions, we refined the initial six categories into two, and reapplied the two categories into analyzing a new wordless book. With a high agreement rate of analyzing the new book, the two finalized categories

were determined as the themes of this study.

Because of space limitations, we only included analyses of three of the books as three cases in this article. They are, *Float*, (Miyares, 2015) *Bee & Me* (Jay, 2017) and *The Red Book* (Lehman, 2004). Each of these three books has unique and illustrative examples demonstrating the two types of gaps. The book *Float* has multiple gaps examples using depictions of character's facial and body actions to invite readers to explore characters' inner world. *Bee and Me* has time and space gaps that are embedded in the interactions of two main characters within a single storyline. *The Red Book* has examples of using vectors in book images as a way of inviting readers to infer characters' inner world. In addition, *The Red Book* also has gaps of time and space when presenting two storylines at the same time. *Float* by Daniel Miyares (Miyares, 2015) is a story about a boy's adventure with his paper boat on a rainy day in the neighborhood, during which he lost his paper boat. The book provides detailed description through images of the boy's joy when playing with the boat, his thrill when chasing the boat, and his sorrow when losing his boat. *Bee & Me* by Alison Jay (2017), is the story of a young girl and her adventures with a bee that she met on a summer day. The bee has human characteristics which are important to the story, as it is the young girl's relationship with the bee, and her growing sensitivity to the bee's vulnerability in the city environment that drives the story. *The Red Book* by Barbara Lehman (Lehman, 2004), is a fantasy story about a girl who gets lost in a magical red book that takes her across cities and oceans to meet a mysterious new friend, a boy. The two main characters live far away from each other at the beginning of the story and end up being together and becoming friends. Using specific page openings to illustrate our analysis, we provide detailed examples of gaps in knowledge about characters' inner worlds and gaps in space and time in the next section. Because we are ultimately interested in readers' interaction with these books. We infer the ways in which gaps function as influences on readers' uses of imagination as part of comprehension.

## Result

Our reading and analysis of these three books led us to identify two themes of gaps. These gaps occurred in each book, though articulated differently by their authors. Readers of *Float*, *Bee & Me* and *The Red Book*, encounter gaps in each of Bruner's landscapes, that of action and of consciousness (Bruner, 1986). In the landscape of action, gaps include changes in time and space that without the explanation of written text are disconnected, unexplained and indetermined. In the landscape consciousness, gaps occur in accounting for characters' s inner worlds, their thoughts, feelings, belief, intentions and relationship building as they change between images. These two types of gaps emerge that challenge young readers' comprehension during wordless book reading.

### *Gaps of Characters' inner worlds*

**Understanding characters' inner world through facial and body actions.** Gaps of Characters' inner worlds were identified in *Float*, where readers are asked to imagine the protagonist, the little boy's inner world as his adventure moves on. The author presents character's inner world gap through depiction of characters' facial expression and body language. Readers are "addressed" by the boy's facial expressions, with what Painter, Martin and Unsworth (2013) call generic style, which allows readers to recognize human facial and actional features that they commonly see in real life. The way of depiction allows readers to use the way they imagine people's minds in the real world to comprehend the boy's thoughts and feelings. For example, when readers see the boy frown his eyebrow, put his hand at forehead, and turn his body left and right, they may realize the boy is looking for something. Further, from this combination of action and facial expression, readers could imagine that the boy is being anxious and worried, because they experience similar scene in real life, for example, when parents are looking for something, they look anxious and worried, just like the boy in the story.

### **Characters' direct contact as invitations**

**to explore inner world.** Sometimes, readers are "dragged" into the story by character's "sensitive contact" (Bertau, 2014). There are places when the boy character addresses readers by breaking the boundary between "there" (the story world) and "here" (the real world). When the boy is immersed in his sadness of losing his boat, he is standing at the door, lifting his hat and looking out of the page at readers as if saying, "I'm so sorry I lost my boat." The moment the boy's eyes contact reaches readers', the invisible boundary between his world and readers' is broken, leaving readers to actively engage in this contact, by possibly responding, "oh, he is being sorry" or "don't worry!" The sensitive contact and addressivity in *Float* increase the level of engagement during reading, which can encourage readers to imagine more of the story. As noted earlier, the absence of written text that might explain what characters are thinking and feeling leaves readers to make sense of this important part through imagination. Understanding characters' inner worlds is not only important to understanding narrative moments but also critical to making sense of the narrative as a whole. The gap of characters' inner worlds can also function as a connection between story plots and help readers to anticipate what happens next.

### **Characters' thoughts and feelings indicated**

**by vectors.** Gaps of Characters' inner worlds were also found in *The Red Book*. During the journey of discovering the mystery of the red book, both characters, the boy and the girl, undergo a series of emotion and location changes. The plot of the dual protagonists being in different spaces and seeing each other through a red book creates the story with multiple plot lines. In order to make sense of the complex story, readers must imagine and construct missing plot elements as well as the thoughts, feelings and motivations of both protagonists.

Vectors (Kress, & van Leeuwen, 2020), usually present as invisible lines which indicates, for example, directional movement of the body or sight, suggesting the narrative nature of the image and the relationship of "doing" or "happening" (Jewitt, & Oyama, 2001, p.141) We found that vectors, as indicators of such gaps

can also draw readers readerxplore the inner world of the character and to speculate on the character's intentions in doing so. In *The Red Book*, when the girl first finds the red book, she is standing on a snow-covered street and looking at a red book lying in the snow. On the page, the girl slightly tilts her body with her eyes looking at the book and her mouth slightly open. This depiction of the girl invites readers to follow the girl's eyes as she attends to the red book and imagines if the girl is surprised to find it. Another example is that when the girl arrives at the classroom and begins to read the red book, she focuses on reading a map of an unknown place in her book. The image of the girl looks very close to readers as if readers are standing beside the girl and reading the map alone with the girl. This close depiction of the girl "addresses" readers by inviting readers to be with the girl and attend to read the map together. Moreover, the two simultaneous readings, the girl's and the reader's invite readers to imagine the girl's thoughts and feelings and promote dialogic transactions between readers and the text.

### **Gaps of Time and Space**

Perhaps the most prevalent and challenging gaps for young readers are in time and space changes which are created by page turns and framing. The presence of this type of gaps enhances the quality of addressivity in texts, as the disrupted images in effect "turn to" readers for their active and imaginative involvement. Jumps between settings, or perspectives on the same setting, as well as unaccounted for passages of time, invite readers to make an excursion into the story, imaginatively create plot elements as part of the landscape of action, and character attributes (thoughts, feelings and motivations) as part of the landscape of consciousness, to overcome gaps and make sense of the narrative. Readers make decisions about what is happening and why as they participate in the unfolding narrative in complicated ways, functioning as co-authors as part of comprehending.

**Time and space gaps with zooming in.** Gaps in time and space were found in *Bee & Me*. For example, after the title page, readers of *Bee & Me* encounter a



cityscape that takes up a full-page opening. Turning the page to the next page opening, readers encounter a close-up of one apartment building in the previous cityscape. The apartment building takes up most of the left-hand side of this page opening. Moving the reader's perspective by zooming in on a close-up of one building on the left page, creates a gap in time (how did we get here looking at a single building) and narrative space (one building instead of a cityscape) inviting the reader to expand the reality of what is represented in the image, to create what is not represented to make sense of this series of images and the unfolding narrative. On the right side of this page spread, Jay zooms in again, this time on one apartment, changing the space in which the narrative is evolving. Now the framed and foregrounded image of one apartment (within the apartment building, within the cityscape) is the narrative context. This shift in narrative space is enhanced by the depiction of several apartment building windows through which the reader sees people inhabiting their separate apartments, one of whom becomes the main character. For the young reader, this first page turn changes the narrative space twice. To make sense of these changes, readers must create connections between the previous image of the cityscape and this new image of people in apartments. The page turn creates a gap that asks readers to keep images in memory and then see this more detailed image as part of the original. Forming connections between images that are not concretely indicated by the author creates a fuller narrative reality through imaginative meaning making.

The gaps in space and time are also evident in *The Red Book* with framed images across pages, and it challenges the reader's imagination even further. The red book in this story resembles a mysterious device that connects the two main characters in different time and space, overcoming the physical distance between them and achieving simultaneity in time and immediacy in communication. One example appears on the page opening when the girl is reading a map in her red book. On the left side of the page opening,

the girl is reading the map, while on the right side, the page is divided into four framed images, suggesting a movable map that zooms into an unknown island, and finally focusing on the boy walking on the beach. There are changes in space and time for readers when reading from left to right of this page opening. For the space change, the story location moves from girl's classroom to the island where boy lives. For the narrative time, it shifts from the girl's winter time zone to the boy's summer time zone. In order to understand this dramatic change within page openings, readers need to keep shifting their reading perspectives, from observing the life of the little through the eyes of a reader to observing the actions of the little boy from the eyes of the little girl; each shift in perspective presents a challenge for the young reader to interpret.

**Various sizes of time and space gaps between images.** The time gaps that occur between separately framed images can vary. A time gap might be only a few seconds, while others could depict the passage of minutes and hours or even days. The inconsistency of these gaps affects the passage of narrative time by making the pace of the time gap in the story different. For example, on another page opening, the girl encounters the rain-soaked bee who has arrived on the girl's window ledge on the left. The right-hand page consists of four separately framed images in which the girl spoon-feeds the bee, blow-dries his body with a hair dryer, sits with him while he recovers, and reads up on bee care. The activities on this page appear to occur within a relatively short period. In comparison, on the very next page, the time and space gap change the pace of time yet again when readers encounter 17 unframed images of the girl and the bee engaging in all sorts of activities from playing chess to bike riding. Among them, three images depict the girl measuring the bee noticing his growth in height. The bees' growth suggests that these activities are occurring not in an afternoon, or even a day but across a much longer period of time, perhaps weeks or months.

In order to understand books like *Bee and Me* and *The Red Book*, where there are various gaps in space

and time in the visual texts without written cues or commentary, young readers must successfully use imagination to expand the meanings offered in image. Gaps of space and time are ongoing and irregular. Readers must enter into that time to make sense of it. The excursion of imagination allows for the connection between narrative time and personal experience of time as part of understanding what happens in the landscape of action. In addition, readers are challenged to understand the inner worlds of the characters in the absence of verbal explanation. Achieving “sensitive contact” with characters through imagination makes it possible for readers to make sense of this landscape of consciousness. To follow these gaps, readers must persevere through a sense of disruption created by gaps and move with the changing rhythms of narrative times and spaces. Readers imagine what time has passed, as well as what might have happened and why during as part of resolving the presence of gaps in stories.

## Discussion

Through the analysis of the three wordless books above, two themes of gaps emerge that challenge young readers’ comprehension during wordless book reading. They are characters’ inner worlds and space-time gaps. Gaps present themselves in the omitted plots and disruptions in visual narratives.

When reading gaps in wordless books, reader’s role appears to be filling gaps, but they are actually “experiencing” a combination of what gaps represent in the story and what they choose to imagine. Thus, just like the tip of the iceberg, the gaps in visual narratives seem to point to something finite, yet depending on individual readers, what is pointed to could lead to something unseen, indeed a whole new playground for meaning making. For example, when reading a sadness face of character, one reader may read, “she is sad,” while another may read, “she is sad because the weather is bad, and it reminds her of losing her boat in a rainy day.” When readers leave their own mind and transit themselves to characters’ minds, they are experiencing the gap that prompted by character’s addressivity, such as facial expressions

and actions. This type of gap allows readers to enter the landscape of character’s mind to imagine. When reading a character’s inner world gap, readers are not totally disconnected from the real world, they are being the character and being the reader at the same time. Imagining the characters’ inner worlds allows readers to bring experiences from the real world to comprehend the gap. The comprehension practice prompted by gaps can also influence real world experience and help readers to learn to understand or empathize with other people.

When readers are reading the visual narrative with time and space change, the omitted information and hidden plots between images become noticeable. When imagining the story, like a movie, readers need to create a reasonable explanation of how the scenes between different images are connected. With imagination, readers come up with story details and extra information in order to create a coherent narrative. Often, these imaginings are built upon the comprehension of previous story plots and background knowledge of coherent narrative. When filling gaps, readers are composers. They create “mini stories” between the changes of space and time. Time and space gaps can be extended to various possibilities and reader’s agency is to decide the “size” and “depth” of the gap. The challenges of reading gaps make wordless book reading a mixture of comprehending and composing. The cycle of comprehending and composing is like a dialogue between the book and the reader. Readers are no longer passively decoding visual information but creating their own narratives; and in new narratives, they see not only the authors, but also themselves. The imaginative practices when solving gaps can benefit readers in the future as mature readers and writers, as imagination is critical for both.

## Conclusion

Multiple gaps in these three wordless books make them rich dialogic objects that address readers and invite responses. When reading wordless books like *Float*, *The Red Book*, and *Bee & Me*, readers experience a cycle of encountering and resolving gaps as they expand the story through imagination to make

meaning. The ongoing addressivity of these wordless texts, created by multiple, varying and sometimes unexpected gaps, invites readers into a dynamic and challenging dialogue, which can enhance the reader-text transaction for engaged, imaginative and flexible young readers. Working through gaps with imagination can bring readers a sense of accomplishment as well as a sense of expectation as they anticipate future gaps, and a sense of confirmation when they regard previous reading. In addition, rich illustrations, especially of characters and settings, challenge readers to imagine and make connections between real-world knowledge and story world experience. The imaginative construction of these connections contributes to comprehension. Visual designs such as, framing and focalizing broaden the possibility of imagining and presenting gaps.

The specific characteristics of wordless books we identified point to particular ways in which imagination and comprehension are jointly engaged in wordless book reading. Analyzing gaps that readers encounter in these texts highlights the ways in which text characteristics invite readers to use imagination as a necessary part of deep comprehending. Resolving gaps is sophisticated comprehending activities, which young children are readily engaged in. Indeed, wordless books might be considered as a special kind of complex text, and one of whose complexities is represented, in part, by the challenges of gaps within image-rendered text worlds. More generally, the role of imagination in children's reading lives, and specifically as a contributor to comprehension, is undervalued. Examining wordless books with an eye for what prompts imaginative activity is one way to move imagination into a conversation about emergent comprehension. Characteristics of wordless books depend on the reader's use of imagination as a primary contributor to sense-making. In addition, this text analysis has implications for the analysis of picturebooks as well, and the role of imagination in children's comprehending of that text genre.

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## Cuestionando Mitos Comunes Acerca del Bilingüismo: La Importancia de Aprender Español e Inglés Para los Estudiantes Latinos

Norma Monsivais Diers

*Escucha este artículo [aquí](#)*

Estimados padres, madres y tutores de familia,

Mi nombre es Norma Monsivais Diers. Soy estudiante de doctorado en el programa de Leer y Escribir, Lenguaje y Cultura en la Universidad de Illinois Chicago (UIC). Fuí estudiante y maestra en los programas de educación bilingüe en las escuelas públicas de Chicago y de Cicero. He sido mentor y he dado clases en la universidad a futuros maestros(as) que van a obtener la certificación bilingüe o de inglés como segundo idioma. Como parte de mi tesis doctoral estoy haciendo una investigación dirigida a padres, madres o tutores Latinos(as) acerca de los programas bilingües que existen hoy en día.

El propósito del artículo es compartir información acerca de algunos de los estudios pedagógicos que se han hecho acerca del bilingüismo, que raramente llegan a los oídos de ustedes: padres, madres o tutores de estudiantes bilingües. Este escrito resalta los múltiples beneficios del bilingüismo y trata de aclarar dudas y mitos acerca del bilingüismo.

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### Los beneficios del bilingüismo

Los estudios pedagógicos describen varios beneficios de ser bilingüe:



Fig. 1

#### Capacidad para Aprender

- Flexibilidad mental
  - Mejora la habilidad para la toma de decisiones
  - Aumenta aptitudes para resolver problemas o superar obstáculos
- (Adi-Japha, Berberich-Artzi, y Libnawi, 2010; Bialystok y Craik, 2010).

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### Académico

- Mayor rendimiento académico
- Facilita la adquisición de más idiomas
- Acceso a el Sello de Bilingüidad<sup>1</sup> (Bialystok y Feng, 2009; Lindholm-Leary y Block, 2010).

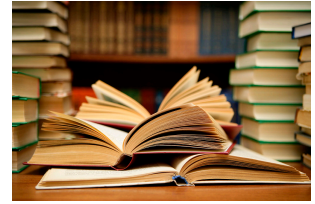


Fig. 2

<sup>1</sup> El Sello de Bilingüidad es un reconocimiento otorgado por el distrito a graduados de preparatoria que demuestren alta capacidad en inglés y otro idioma. La bilingüidad es la habilidad de hablar, escuchar, leer y escribir en dos idiomas a nivel académico.



Fig. 3

### Económico

- Ventaja competitiva en la economía global
- Mayor oportunidades de empleo (Hernando-Lloréns y Blair, 2017; Saiz y Zoido, 2005).

### Capacidad Sociocultural

- Apreciación lingüística
- Crea una conciencia y comprensión de otras culturas (Dworin, 2011; Merisuo-Storm, 2007).



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

### Lazos Sólidos a la Familia y a la Herencia Cultural

- Apoya las conexiones con la familia y la comunidad
- Acceso a la sabiduría de sus culturas patrimoniales
- Fortalece el orgullo de sus raíces y confianza en sí mismo (Block, 2011; Block 2012).

Para nuestras familias latinas todos los beneficios del bilingüismo son esenciales para un futuro prometedor. No obstante, el beneficio que está más cercano a nuestro corazón es el de establecer un lazo sólido con la familia y de retener nuestra herencia cultural. Parte de mi trabajo es entrevistar a padres, madres o tutores y cuando les pregunto acerca de cómo se sentirían si sus hijos llegaran a perder el español, por lo general hay una pausa seguida por un suspiro. Sus respuestas reflejan un dolor inmenso de sólo pensar que eso sea una posibilidad. Un sentimiento de fracaso y de frustración. Sin embargo, este mismo sentimiento evocaba una resistencia. De los entrevistados, participaron más mamás y ellas comunicaron que iban a hacer todo lo posible para que el español no desaparezca de sus familias. Todos los padres entrevistados saben y entienden la importancia de que sus hijos hablen y dominen también el inglés. La mayoría de las familias latinas que entrevisté desean el bilingüismo en la vida de sus hijos.

Aun conociendo los beneficios del bilingüismo en ocasiones nos dejamos llevar por rumores o mitos. En mis casi veinte años como maestra bilingüe, mentor de maestros y ahora como investigadora educativa he aclarado los mitos acerca del bilingüismo a padres, madres y futuros maestros bilingües. Aunque existen varios mitos acerca del bilingüismo, en el artículo mencionaré algunos de los más comunes que he escuchado a lo largo de mi carrera educativa.

## Cuestionando Mitos Comunes Acerca del Bilingüismo

**Mito:** Aprender dos idiomas va a agobiar y a confundir a mis hijos o los va a retrasar en su adquisición del inglés.



Fig. 6

¡Esto es todo lo contrario! Los estudiantes que crecen en un ambiente en donde se hablan dos idiomas, aprenden los sonidos y las palabras en ambos idiomas. Sus mentes tienen flexibilidad mental (primer beneficio bilingüe). Esto mejora sus habilidades de decidir y reconocer qué idioma (inglés o español) deben usar dependiendo del lenguaje de la persona con la que están hablando (Kuhl, 2004 en Espinosa, 2008) (primer beneficio bilingüe), ahora piense ¿qué idioma usaría su hijo(a) cuando hablen con sus abuelos que solo hablan español?, ¿qué idioma usarían con sus primos o amigos que son bilingües?

Es típico que los estudiantes bilingües mezclen los dos idiomas que están aprendiendo en una oración y, en una palabra. Sucede con todos los idiomas, no es que su hijo(a) este confundido(a), tampoco es mala gramática, flojera o incorrecto, ni va a retrasar el aprendizaje del inglés. Los niños simplemente están usando todos los recursos lingüísticos que tienen disponibles para entender, aprender y comunicarse. A este proceso se le conoce como Translingüismo o Translenguaje (Ada, Campoy y Baker, 2017; García, 2009).

De hecho, la mezcla de los idiomas es un talento ingenioso y demuestra alta capacidad mental y de astucia lingüística (Potowski, 2010) (primer beneficio bilingüe). Un niño bilingüe, al no saber una palabra o sonido en un idioma usa la palabra o sonido del otro idioma. Por ejemplo, un día que iba de salida con mi sobrina, que en ese tiempo tenía tres años, y me preguntó si había visto su “shoepato.” Creativamente combinó dos palabras, una en inglés (shoes) la otra en español (zapato), para formar una sola palabra y poder comunicarme lo que quería. Mi sobrina buscó una forma de superar este obstáculo (primer beneficio bilingüe). Piense en una ocasión en la que su hijo(a) haya mezclado ingeniosamente el inglés y español. ¿Qué trataba de comunicarle? ¿Cómo supero ese obstáculo? Los lingüistas, son los que estudian los idiomas y han estudiado este tipo de fenómenos, de acuerdo con sus teorías de gramática, la combinación de sílabas o palabras que usan los niños bilingües concuerda y fluye y es científicamente válida. Con el tiempo y a medida que van aprendiendo los idiomas, ellos empiezan a notar la estructura y forma de cada idioma (Ada et al., 2017).

Recientemente nuevos estudios pedagógicos de neurocientíficos (Kuhl, 2004 en Espinosa, 2008), quienes estudian el sistema nervioso y de los psicolingüísticos, quienes estudian los aspectos mentales del lenguaje y del habla, reafirman la inmensa capacidad de aprender dos idiomas desde la infancia (beneficio académico). Sin embargo, es esencial que se apoyen los dos idiomas, ya sea hablando, escuchando, leyendo y escribiendo (Espinosa, 2008).

**Mito:** Si los estudiantes no empiezan a aprender los dos idiomas desde la infancia, nunca van a dominar el segundo idioma



Fig. 7

El mito refleja algunas de las opiniones que tenemos acerca de la edad óptima para aprender un segundo idioma sin tener acento. Según los académicos existe un periodo óptimo para que los estudiantes pequeños adquieran otro idioma, y su pronunciación exacta. Pero los académicos aún no se han puesto de acuerdo, si el periodo óptimo es antes de los 6 ó 10 años (Ada et al., 2017; Renaissance, 2021). Debido a esta creencia de la edad óptima, creemos

que los estudiantes pequeños tienen menos dificultades para desarrollar su bilingüismo, pero la respuesta es mixta. Si es cierto que los estudiantes pequeños adquieren un idioma rápido y la pronunciación exacta, para ellos es como cuando aprenden a correr y a saltar o por el hecho de relacionarse con las personas (Ada et al., 2017; Espinosa, 2008; Renaissance, 2021). Ellos aprenden un idioma sólo para poder comunicarse, no toman en cuenta el vocabulario o hablarlo correctamente. A esta edad los estudiantes producen el lenguaje naturalmente, “no es un proceso de aprendizaje sino de adquisición” (Ada et al., 2017, p.40). No obstante, el proceso de aprendizaje tiende a ser lento en comparación, con un estudiante mayor o adulto, quienes suelen aprender un segundo idioma mejor que los estudiantes pequeños. Si nos referimos a el tiempo como una medición de eficiencia, los estudiantes jóvenes y adultos tienden a aprender un segundo idioma mejor con más rapidez que los estudiantes pequeños (Ada et al., 2017).

La velocidad de aprender variará y dependerá del tiempo, la práctica, la facilidad, la actitud, la motivación, el primer idioma ya establecido y la persistencia que le dediquen al segundo idioma (Ada et al., 2017). Usualmente, en el estudiante mayor o adulto se le notará la entonación (acento) del primer idioma, cuando habla el segundo. Es mejor enfocarnos en la capacidad del dominio del nuevo idioma, que en el acento. En si, todos tenemos cierto acento, debido a la entonación de nuestras voces o a la región en donde crecimos o vivimos. Lo que importa es que los estudiantes bilingües se puedan comunicar con cualquier audiencia y sobre cualquier tema. Por ejemplo, el famoso periodista y autor, Jorge Ramos, aunque se le escuche la entonación del español, no hay duda de que tiene el dominio del idioma inglés en su profesión (beneficio económico) (Ada et al., 2017; Renaissance, 2021).

**Mito:** La mejor manera de apoyar la literacidad del inglés es sumergir a los estudiantes a la enseñanza sólo en inglés.

Comúnmente se cree que entre más escuchen y hablen inglés, los estudiantes bilingües lo aprenderán más rápidamente. Quizás esto sí ayude a adultos o estudiantes mayores que ya tienen su primera lengua bien establecida. También es cierto que para aprender y tener fluidez en un idioma hay que practicar tal idioma. Algunos maestros(as) piensan que es necesario enseñar sólo inglés a los estudiantes, por miedo a que se retrasen o impacte su habilidad de literacidad<sup>2</sup> (Espinosa, 2008). ¿Le ha pedido o aconsejado un maestro(a) de su hijo(a) que debería leer, o hablar más en inglés en casa?

Sin embargo, estudios pedagógicos contradicen estas creencias. La evidencia sugiere que, si los estudiantes pierden la habilidad de comunicarse en su primer idioma, y empiezan a preferir el inglés van a tener problemas comunicándose con su familia y experimentarán bajos logros académicos en inglés (Block 2011; Block 2012; Hakuta en Espinosa, 2008). Los maestros(as) deben reconocer todas las habilidades que traen al salón de clase los estudiantes. Por eso es esencial evaluar a los estudiantes bilingües, en los dos idiomas, y no nada más en el inglés. Sí solo evalúan sus habilidades en inglés, solamente están reconociendo parte de la capacidad del estudiante (Mahoney, 2017). Por ejemplo, cuando evaluaba a mis estudiantes en la lectura, lo hacía en inglés y español. Sí solo me hubiera enfocado, en evaluar el inglés, no me hubiera dado cuenta de sus habilidades en el español, y no podría haber usado estas habilidades para hacer conexiones a la lectura en inglés.

Es mejor apoyar la literacidad cuando se combinan las oportunidades ya sea al hablar, escuchar, leer y escribir en los dos idiomas tanto en el salón como en la casa (Espinosa, 2008; Mahoney, 2017). Además, algunos estudios sugieren que dar apoyo a la lengua materna, ayudará al estudiante a adquirir el inglés y desarrollar su bilingüismo. Esto incluye a estudiantes diagnosticados con discapacidades de habla o aprendizaje (Mahoney, 2017; Martínez-Álvarez, 2019). Así que siga hablándole, leyéndole, y cantándole a su hijo(a) en español (Espinosa, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Literacidad es la habilidad de hablar, escuchar, leer y escribir a nivel académico.



Espero que el artículo le haya informado y aclarado dudas que tenía acerca del bilingüismo. Deseo que se sienta seguro(a) y confiado(a), primordialmente para que pueda advocar por los derechos lingüísticos de su hijo(a). Como académica, es esencial que comparta los estudios pedagógicos que benefician a su hijo(a). Es parte de nuestra responsabilidad y debería ser una prioridad para todos los educadores académicos asegurarnos que los hallazgos de estos estudios lleguen a sus oídos y a nuestra comunidad Latina (Domínguez-Fret, 2021).

## Recursos de Internet Relacionados

Beneficios del Bilingüismo	Mitos del Bilingüismo
<p><i>Documentos</i>  <a href="#">Las Ventajas de ser bilingüe</a></p>	<p><i>Posteo de blog</i>  <a href="#">Mitos sobre el bilingüismo: Bilingüe en casa</a></p>
<p><i>Página de perfil</i>  <a href="#">10 Ventajas de ser bilingüe</a></p>	<p><a href="#">Mitos sobre el bilingüismo: Enseñanza bilingüe</a></p>
<p><i>Video y documento</i>  <a href="#">Los beneficios de un cerebro bilingüe</a></p>	<p><i>Página de perfil:</i>  <a href="#">7 mitos y realidades sobre el aprendizaje del idioma en niños bilingües</a></p>

### Pase la Voz

- Comparta este artículo con otros padres, madres o tutores de estudiantes bilingües.
- Platíquelo a un amigo(a), vecino(a) o pariente algo que no sabía o le pareció interesante sobre el bilingüismo.
- Platique con su hijo(a) acerca de los temas discutidos en el artículo.
- Observe a su hijo(a) usando el bilingüismo.

#### Créditos de Imágenes

Figura 1 "Human brain on white background" por \_DJ\_ CC BY 2.0"

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Figura 3 "Gisel Ruiz of Walmart Selected as LATINA Executive of the Year 2010" por Walmart Corporate CC BY 2.0"

Figura 4 Por Monisha.pushparaj CC BY 2.0

Figura 5 Adaptado del Directorio del Distrito Escolar Unificado de los Ángeles

Figura 6 Por Openclipart CC BY 2.0

Figura 7 "Unbalanced Scales" por Atón CC BY 2.0

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## Fostering Media Literacy Skills among Middle School Students through Animated Films: A Case Study in a Children’s Defense Fund Freedom School Program

Yuyan Jiao, Olivia Moses, and Lokia M. Scott

In the highly technologized 21st century, students have more readily available access to various media information. It is essential that popular culture and media messages are included in the official curriculum to make the learning developmentally responsive to students’ lived experiences, social needs, and academic needs. A case study was conducted in a Children’s Defense Fund (CDF) Freedom School program during the summer to explore the potential of media literacy education to enhance young children’s critical understanding of media messages. The animated film *Megamind* was utilized in the lessons, which centered on deconstructing media messages and stereotypical representations of characters and constructing students’ media products. The study found that the integration of animated films in media literacy education enhanced students’ understanding of media that is relevant to the real world and developed their competency as active agents. In this sense, media literacy education shows the potential to promote civic learning among adolescents.

Scholars have emphasized the need for media literacy education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In this information-rich age, students must develop critical thinking about the abundant amount of information that bombards them every day (Beatty, 2019; Breivik, 2005; Kellner, 2007; Ptaszek, 2019). Likewise, students should learn to employ appropriate mediums to develop their voices and be actively engaged in the construction of democracy (Burch, 2020; Kubey, 2004, 2005; Martens & Hobbs, 2015). In other words, the purpose of media literacy education should go beyond cultivating students with technological proficiency (Domine, 2011) or multimodal competency (Morell, 2018). It should aim at helping students use multimodal meaning-making tools to develop critical habits of mind and inquiry about media interpretation and production. It should also develop students’ ability to “recognize and engage with the social and political influence of media in everyday life” (Hoechsmann and Poyntz, 2012, p. 1) as critical consumers and producers of various forms of media. In this sense, media literacy education can

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contribute to civic learning in school (Chamberlin, 2021; Domine, 2011; Media Literacy Week, 2021).

To gain an in-depth understanding of students' experiences with media literacy and of how media literacy skills can foster civic learning among children and young adults, we conducted a case study in a Children's Defense Fund (CDF) Freedom School in a southern state of the U.S. in the Summer of 2018. The CDF Freedom Schools program is one example of an alternative program that utilizes culturally responsive teaching practices with students in a classroom setting (Hale, 2011; Scott, Renbarger, and Laird, 2020).

In our case study, we used the MediaLit Kit as the framework of the lesson plans. MediaLit Kit was developed for K-12 educators by The Center for Media Literacy (CML), an organization that provides educational resources in media literacy education in the U.S. and around the world (CML, 2022). This framework contains educational tools that "reflect a philosophy of empowerment through education and articulate the key components of an inquiry-based media literacy education" (CML Framework). This framework was most appropriate at the time of this study because few research studies explored media literacy practices in middle schools.

In addition to describing how the adolescents in the study experienced exposure to media messages, this case study also explores an alternative pedagogy that can be developmentally responsive to young adolescents' academic and civic learning. The following research questions guided this case study:

- (1) What are the experiences of adolescents when they are learning about media literacy through an animated film?
- (2) Within the context of media literacy education, what processes facilitate the deconstruction and construction of media messages?

## **Literature Review**

### ***The Expanded Understandings of Literacy***

Many scholars have advocated a broader understanding of literacy from the sociocultural perspective: literacy as multiple or multimodal socially

and culturally constructed meaning-making practices (Bezemer and Kress, 2008; Cope and Kalantzis, 2009, 2018; Gee, 2004, 2009; Kress, 1997, 2001, 2009; Miller, 2007; New London Group, 1996; Street, 1997). Reconceptualization of literacy means the potential of diverse semiotic resources in meaning-making has been widely recognized, for example, in the realms of the visual, the audio, space, gesture, and so on (Alvermann, 2002; Kress, 1997, 2001, 2009; New London Group, 1996). In the age of technology with an increased focus on diversity, literacy should no longer be understood in the traditional sense, that is, linguistic systems as the only medium to make meaning in the form of written or oral texts (Cope and Kalantzis, 2009, 2018; Miller, 2007, 2015). Instead, literacy involves interpreting and constructing multimodal print and nonprint-based texts. In addition, in the "post-truth era" (Higgins, 2016), scholars broadened the understanding of literacy with the introduction of critical literacy and critical pedagogy (Bacon, 2017; Janks, 2014; Luke, 2012). Literacy has expanded to include the use of multimodal communication to "analyze, critique, and transform the norms, rule systems, and practices governing the social fields of everyday life" (Luke, 2012, p. 5). A broader sense of literacy also involves recognizing students' autonomy and making "a shift in the balance of agency" (Cope, Kalantzis, and Smith, 2018, p. 9) through multiple ways of meaning-making.

Freire (1985) said that writing and reading is an artistic event. This is especially the case in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As viewed from the sociocultural perspective, "literacy is aesthetic, material and multimodal" (Rowse and Pahl, 2015, p. 1). Reconceptualization of literacy means the disruption of monomodality that has dominated Western culture and the extension of the scope of literacy pedagogy and transformation of literacy practices (Rowse and Pahl, 2015). In other words, diversity as a pedagogical asset requires the inclusion of diverse social semiotic symbols in knowledge construction. The purpose of integrating multimodal literacy practices in literacy learning is to disrupt the centrality of linguistic symbols. Various semiotic systems, such as visual or audio presentations of artistic work, numbers, body languages, popular

culture, etc., intrigue students and allow them to use their imagination to communicate with others and develop their voices in the dialogue through their artistic expression works. They are no longer passive receivers of official knowledge but active creators of their own knowledge. They also disrupt the existing power relationship of the social contexts they inhabit. In this sense, literacy is more than the capacity for cognitive development of linguistic skills; it also refers to empowering people through dialogue and creation.

### ***The Broadened Understanding of Media Literacy and Media Literacy Education***

The reconceptualization of literacy and the emergence of media literacy education have also generated a broader understanding of media literacy. Media literacy is no longer associated with the ability to assess, understand, analyze, and evaluate media messages in multimodal meaning-making tools; rather, in an era of technological revolution, it is often related to the ability to interpret and analyze the technology-mediated messages (Diergarten, Mockel, Nieding, and Ohler, 2017; Domine, 2011; Hobbs and Moore, 2013; Kellner and Share, 2005). Besides this, media literacy has broadened its purpose and includes the capacity to critically weigh media information and use reasoning to think and act according to ethical standards (Domine, 2011). In this sense, media literacy aims at empowering people by encouraging them to be critical thinkers and creative producers of media messages.

Recent decades have witnessed a critical turn in media literacy and media literacy education at all levels (Marlatt, 2020; Stoddard, Tunstall, Walker, and Wight, 2021; Trope, Johnson, and Demetriades, 2021; Walker, 2021). The focus of media literacy activities is no longer limited to utilizing multiple modes of meaning-making to produce media messages. Instead, these activities also aim to use these multimodal media as powerful tools to frame the issues related to bureaucracy, marginalization, or injustice in order to demystify the normalcy concealed in media messages and to disrupt the dominant ideologies and the social structure of power (Chamberlin, 2021; Funk, Kellner, and Share, 2016; Hobbs, 2020). In this sense, the broadened

understanding of media literacy includes the competencies that empower people by helping them develop “the habits of inquiry and skills of expression that they need to be critical thinkers, effective communicators and active citizens in today’s world” (National Association for Media Literacy Education, 2020).

Domine (2011) points out that the “primary challenges of education in the United States are not technical, but rather social, political and economic in nature” (p. 8). Therefore, the introduction of media literacy education in education, in school or outside of school, is conducive to civic learning. When students can produce and reproduce their own media messages, they can engage in hands-on and minds-on practices. Because in this learning process, students are not only playing with media (hands-on) but also working with ideas (minds-on) and thinking about what they are doing and learning (Hobbs, 2016). The act of media making and sharing leverages creativity and imagination and gives students space and opportunity to present their opinions. That is why media making and sharing, according to Trope, Johnson, and Demetriades (2021), is a necessary form of civic engagement. In addition, media making motivates students to imagine a better world, which requires them to examine the civic issues, conflicts, and opportunities (Stoddard, Tunstall, Walker, and Wight, 2021), and this aligns with the purpose of civic education (Carretero, Haste, and Bermudes, 2016).

### ***Media Literacy Education and the Educational Standards***

Media literacy education was introduced in the K-12 classrooms in the U.S. throughout the 1990s (Hobbs, 2004). Its significance has been recognized in educational standards at various levels. Take Common Core State Standards as an example. Developed by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) to center on students’ college and career readiness, Common Core Standards were adopted by 41 of 50 states in the U.S. in 2010. Within the framework of English Language Arts (ELA) of Common

Core Standards, media literacy is implicitly or explicitly mentioned. For example, the *Speaking and Listening* section of the standards for second grade implies media literacy practices: it says students should be able to “recount or describe key ideas from a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media” (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.2.2). The *Writing* component for fifth grade explicitly addresses media literacy knowledge:

With some guidance and support from adults, [students should be able to] use technology, including the internet, to produce and publish writing as well as to interact and collaborate with others; demonstrate sufficient command of keyboarding skills to type a minimum of two pages in a single setting” (CCSS.ELA-LITERATURE.W.5.5).

Similarly, in the Texas Education Knowledge and Skill Standards (TEKS), the official standards adopted by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) for the state of Texas, media literacy objectives are also explicitly stated at each grade level. Most of these objectives align within the ELAR framework, such as ELAR Standard 110.12 (b) 12A, which focuses on cultivating abilities to analyze advertising techniques’ positive and negative effects. All these statements in the various educational standards suggest that media literacy education for young children has been recognized.

Nevertheless, even though “all state curricular frameworks now contain one or more elements calling for media education” (Kubey, 2004, p. 75), most children are not media literate because many schools still concentrate solely on the study of conventional forms of literacy. However, in the 21st century, traditional training in literature and print communication is no longer sufficient in developing students’ critical thinking about the media students are exposed to in their daily lives, such as advertising, comic books, and animated films (Kubey, 2005; Marsh & Millard, 2000).

### ***The Use of Animated Films in Adolescent Learning***

Multimodal communication is complicated by the development of technology in the digital age and globalization. However, it also suggests the opportunity

to introduce multimodal literacy into classroom teaching, for example, animated films. Animated films should be considered a valuable teaching resource because of their entertainment and educational value (Asseel, 2020; Champoux, 2012; Turkman, 2016). Animated films depict a form of life humorously and joyfully through moving images, colors, and sounds, which mesmerizes young children (Turkman, 2016). Moreover, this can be an entry point for learning in different disciplines. In the mixed-method study of a social studies course, Fidan and Ay (2016) find that operational environmental literacy activities organized around different media, including news stories, documentaries, cartoons, films, and animations, helped enrich students’ environmental literacy and shaped their perceptions of environmental responsibility. Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, and Morris (2008) discover that in literacy education, the connection between the Japanese animated cartoons and the reading of manga shaped how young people read and write print and other symbols.

However, there are controversies over the use of animated films. One of the concerns is that animated films may misrepresent the world. For example, humor hides violence (Turkman, 2016), or euphemism disguises the ideological and power issues through animated films (Asseel, 2020). Moreover, it is uncertain whether animated films can enhance young children’s cognitive and logical reasoning (Turkman, 2016). Research has found that children may find it hard to distinguish fiction and fact at a young age, which will increase their vulnerability to the fictional life presented in animated films (Turkman, 2016).

There has been recognition of the impacts, positive or negative, of animated film on children because of its manipulative and interactive nature (Asseel, 2020; Attard & Cremona, 2021; Huang, 2016; Middaugh, 2019). For example, Brocato, Gentile, Lacznik, Maier, and Ji-Son (2010) examine the effects of cartoon programming on children in their study. Their study points out shows like *Scooby-Doo* and *Looney Tunes* display mild to extreme forms of violence that encourage negative behavior among young children. Although there is a growing number of studies that have explored

integrating films into media literacy education among students at different levels (Dehart, 2020; Domke, Weippert, and Apol, 2018; Hobbs, 2007; May, 2007; Stuckey & Kring, 2007; Vandermeersche, Soetaert, & Rutten, 2013), not enough attention has been given to the role of media literacy education in empowering children through animated films. Considering that around age ten, children have already developed the ability to understand such abstract ideas as morality, ethics, civic action (Diergarten, Mockel, Nieding, & Ohler, 2017), adolescents must be equipped with media literacy knowledge and skills and learn how to take a critical stance at the media messages that they are exposed to in their daily life.

## **Methodology**

### ***The Overview of the CDF Freedom School Program***

Established in 1995, the Children's Defense Fund Freedom School program has had 182 program sites across the U.S. and has reached more than 150,000 children (K-12) (Children's Defense Fund, 2021). CDF Freedom Schools partners with local congregations, schools or school districts, universities, community organizations, and juvenile detention facilities to provide a summer and after-school literacy enrichment program for children and young adults (known as *scholars* in the CDF Freedom Schools) in communities of need with the purpose of empowering them so that they can "excel and believe in their ability to make a difference in themselves and in their families, schools, communities, country, and world with hope, education and action" (Children's Defense Fund, 2021). This program's academic and social learning is realized through the research-based, multicultural Integrated Reading Curriculum (IRC). This learning not only stems from summer learning loss but also fosters these scholars' civic engagement (Children's Defense Fund, 2021), that is, the way the scholars participate in public life and improve conditions for the common good (Adler and Goggine, 2005; Martens and Hobbs, 2015).

### ***Research Context and Participants***

This case study was conducted at a middle school in Central Texas. The participants were in a Freedom

School program sponsored by a local university and school district. The seven-week-long Freedom Schools program is a literacy enrichment program aiming to prevent summer learning loss and provide culturally relevant teaching practices to foster academic motivation and engagement among participants.

The qualitative research design of this study utilizes a narrative case study methodological approach. Case study research is a form of interpretive research (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995). Narrative inquiry is a methodological approach informed by Plokinghorne (1995)'s concept of narrative inquiry that "uses paradigm thinking to create descriptions of themes that hold across stories or taxonomies of types of stories, and narrative analysis" (p. 31). Based on the premise that one builds meaning through social interactions, experience, and a story, narrative inquiry concerns the participants' lived experiences, perceptions, and interpretations. Grounded in hermeneutic and phenomenological contexts, this type of qualitative research seeks to examine how a story is constructed, by whom, and the discourse of the experience. In this case, a narrative inquiry was most appropriate for this study because it provides a detailed account of participants' experiences, harnessed in understanding how they constructed their own stories around the experience.

This case study focused on the lived experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of the student participants in the Film Studies afternoon activity. Convenience sampling was adopted in the case study because of the time, availability of the research site, and participants (Merriam, 2009). Fifteen students were chosen, and consent forms were given to the parents/guardians. Of the fifteen consent forms received, six were determined to be the final participants of the study. These six students were all local and came from low-socioeconomic families: five Hispanic/Latinx ethnic origins and one Caucasian. Of the six students, four were identified as male and two as female.

### **Research Design**

The CGI animated film *Megamind* was chosen for this study. It was produced by DreamWorks

Animation and released in 2010. It tells the story of an alien supervillain, Megamind, and his nemesis. There are three elements in this film that make it ideal for this case study: villain as the protagonist, emotional backstory, and redemption. The film *Megamind* puts the villain front and center as the main protagonist and narrator, and the events are portrayed through his perspective. It is an uncommon choice in animated films because the narrator offers a counter-cultural perspective of good and evil. While it's possible that the mixed message about good and evil conveyed in this film may arouse people's concern, we must realize that the artistic presentations of these mixed messages, for example, humor and irony laced with the counter-cultural belief of good and evil, are used to balance out the dissonance. This element provides opportunities for students to develop a critical understanding of the presentations of media messages, including why the choices were made, how they affected people, and who can benefit from these choices. Students became aware of how complex and controversial themes are presented in a film, even a funny animated film, during the analysis process. The element of redemption in this film is especially worth studying. It can provoke students' thinking about obligation, justice, and consequences of one's behaviors. In a nutshell, each of these three elements in *Megamind* can inspire students' critical thinking about the values and viewpoints depicted in the film.

The two primary instruments used for data collection were surveys and lesson plans. In a 90-minute session, informal interview questions that we composed according to the research questions were asked to help us assess students' prior knowledge about media literacy. After participating in the seven lessons and activities designed to help them understand more about media literacy skills, students took part in a post-survey in a 90-minute session to assess their learning growth and the effectiveness of the lesson plans (See Appendixes). Brooks and Brooks's (2004) five principles of implementing constructivism in the classroom were applied to the design of the five lesson plans in this summer program. To elaborate, (1) posing problems

that were relevant and student-focused; (2) structuring learning opportunities around primary concepts; (3) seeking and valuing students' perspectives and points of view; adapting instruction to address student needs; and (5) assessing student learning in the context of teaching; remained the focus and modifications were made based on the deep alignment of these guiding principles (Brooks & Brooks, 2004). Using CML's MediaLit Kit as the framework, the lessons started with a question that guided students' discussion in their exploration. The researchers took field notes and made memos of students' participation and interactions. Changes were made to the lesson plans according to students' progress and interest. After each lesson, the researchers documented reflections on the process.

All five questions that guided the lessons were centered on the discussion of *Megamind*. There were different discussions: think-pair-share, a yes/no paddle name, and direct questioning. Establishing their answers to the discussion questions is a constructivist activity that allows students time and space to construct different products based on their shared opinions and explicit information. Table 1 examines the lesson plans and the activities designed for them. For the final lesson, a concluding survey aimed to understand whether students had increased media literacy skills and knowledge.

After the data was collected, it was coded and categorized according to a qualitative study protocol. CML's MediaLit Kit was used to identify responses by themes to address the research questions during the categorizing process. In utilizing the survey instrument, most frequent responses were noted and were organized to form sub-categories, categories, and more significant themes. Lesson plans provided overarching questions to be answered, so these questions (and the frequency in types of responses) guided the organization of findings, and peer debriefing sessions allowed for inter-coder reliability and saliency of the themes presented in the study.



**Table 1. Lesson Plan Study Schedule**

<b>Lesson</b>	<b>Focus Question</b>	<b>Activities</b>
1	Who created this message?	Students engaged in discussion, an internet search activity, and a group poster project to answer this question about <i>Megamind</i> .
2	What techniques are used to draw your attention?	Students participated in an analytical discussion of scenes from <i>Megamind</i> and recorded short videos based on an assigned emotion.
3	How might people understand this message differently than me?	Students participated in discussing and analyzing movie reviews written by various individuals with opposing opinions on <i>Megamind</i> . Students then wrote and recorded their reviews of the film.
4	Why do people create media messages?	Students participated in a discussion and game about representation in <i>Megamind</i> . We determined whether certain people and views were represented or omitted in the film. Students then created their characters, specifically persons whose viewpoints were not represented in the film.
5	Why do people create media messages?	Students participated in the discussion and a writing exercise. We then began a final video project which spanned one additional meeting.

**Findings*****The Role of Children's Prior Knowledge about Popular Culture and Media in Media Literacy Education***

Marsh and Millard (2000) state that children's experience with popular culture outside the classroom has been ignored in the official curriculum because parents and teachers are often concerned about sensitive topics such as sexism, racism, violence, and commercialism. Our case study confirmed their point that children in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are exposed to popular culture via various forms of media. Their experiences with these cultural texts can be navigated into the official curriculum and contribute to children's development.

Our pre-survey showed that before our media literacy lessons, all student participants but one had viewed the animated film *Megamind* when they were significantly younger- some as young as five. Their

parents/guardians/caregivers independently decided that this film was an appropriate media act even though the reasons remained unknown. This finding supports the idea that popular animated films are part of children's culture, and their integration into the official curriculum should be considered.

***Media Literacy Knowledge & Skills and Expansion of Children's Understanding of the Society & Themselves***

Lesson Three in our study was designed to stimulate students' understanding of the value of various perspectives. Students worked independently to write their own movie reviews and then with a classmate to film their movie reviews. By reading movie reviews of *Megamind* by very different people with very different opinions, students learned to analyze and compare the perspectives with their own. They were also challenged to explore the impact of media on their perspectives.

Students were asked to reflect on their perspectives displayed in their analysis of *Megamind*. During our case study, students realized how the media influenced societal perspectives. This resembles the findings of Boske and McCormack's (2011) study, in which high-school Latinx students were tasked with analyzing different societal perspectives displayed in the animated film *Happy Feet*.

Students in our study also learned to think critically about the representations in the film and the intentionality of the message presented. After watching clips from *Megamind*, students were tasked to create a character that was not represented in the film, drawing it on a piece of paper and writing 2 or 3 sentences about this character. Later, they were asked to make a video introducing their character. When doing so, students learned to develop a critical understanding of the figures in the films and make connections to the experiences of minority populations. Their commentary

everything needed in the scene was visible. Most of the tasks were in the form of group work. In other words, teaching activities in our study facilitated the construction of new knowledge based on prior knowledge in a socially constructive environment and aligned with the characteristics of constructivist teaching (Brooks & Brooks, 2020; Domine, 2011; Sjoberg, 2007).

However, the purpose of media literacy education goes beyond that. Media literacy should also involve critically analyzing and deconstructing media messages (DeHart, 2020; Hobbs, 2007; Kubey, 2005), a call of digital citizenship in the highly technologized 21<sup>st</sup> century (Buchholz, DeHart, & Moorman, 2020). In our study, students learned to identify the lack of representation in the animated film. It is a starting point to develop a critical awareness of biases seldom covered in the official curriculum. Students also began to appreciate different perspectives and made their

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*Our study proved that media literacy education could be helpful not only in enhancing their literacy learning but also in civic education [...] Students became active agents when employing media literacy knowledge and skills to construct their own media products.*

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on the inclusion of Hispanic characters in *Megamind* brought forth modern and even personal concerns about society. As Kubey (2004) argues, students who want to participate and make change within the political sphere must be given maximized instruction on ways of communication. Student participants in our study gained opportunities to analyze the misrepresentation and lack of presentation in media when deconstructing the existing media messages and constructing their own media messages. In this sense, media literacy lessons helped develop children's critical understanding of society.

## **Discussion**

In our study of students' experience with media production and media analysis, participants showed increased competency for filming by initiating retakes, being precise about the angles, and making sure

media messages by constructing their media products. In this sense, media literacy education could contribute to the civic education of young children by integrating popular culture and media into the official curriculum.

## **Implications and Recommendations**

This case study sheds light on the media literacy education facilitated by the integration of animated films. It could help to understand the experiences and perceptions of middle school students, who are at a critical stage of learning to develop critical thinking. Our study proved that media literacy education could be helpful not only in enhancing their literacy learning but also in civic education. During the deconstruction process, students learned to appreciate the different perspectives. Moreover, they learned to identify the unrecognized biases in the media messages and develop critical thinking about stereotypical

representations in popular culture. Students became active agents when employing media literacy knowledge and skills to construct their own media products, “articulating their problems, competence of understanding, explaining and changing communities for the better” (Ivanovic, 2014, p. 442). This finding aligns with what McArthur (2016) says about media literacy as a means of activism.

Therefore, teachers could consider integrating animated films into the official curriculum. Media literacy curriculum is a great way to facilitate learning new skills. It provides students with opportunities to explore multimodal literacy practices, including editing, filming, and other aesthetics, rhetoric, and strategic ways of communication. In short, conventional forms of literacy learning are expanded. In addition, when it comes to applying media literacy knowledge, students learn to use different media to make critical reflections on their experiences with media and develop a critical understanding of the media messages. In a nutshell, in this highly technologized 21<sup>st</sup> century, media literacy knowledge and skills are necessary for studying different subjects.

### Limitations

There were a few limitations in this study. First, the study was conducted in a Freedom School program instead of a traditional school or educational context. It is a summer literacy enrichment program that subscribed to differences in pedagogy and practice with lesson plans created with a traditional school environment in mind. It was not a disadvantage to the design of the lessons but might impact the implementation of the lessons. Specifically, some techniques and philosophies structure Freedom School, which were not considered during class. As such, student demographics and overall curricular and instructional approaches were modified completely – all of which could have drastically impacted the outcomes of this study.

Secondly, this study followed the principle of convenience sampling to select the participants during the summer months. Students have had disinterest and/or increased interest regarding the content and

topics. This consideration also shaped the intended outcomes of the study.

Finally, middle school students were utilized as participants due to the parameters for recruiting and sustaining participants throughout the study. In this regard, the limited range in the youth demographic should be noted as a possible study limitation.

### Conclusion

The study of media literacy is becoming more important as access to various forms of media becomes more readily available for students at different levels and different ages. Popular culture and media messages should be included in the official curriculum to make the learning developmentally responsive to students’ lived experiences and academic and social needs. Our case study revealed the motivating potential of students’ prior experience with media on their learning of media skills and participation in civic education as active agents. The study also implies the potential of media literacy education in developing young children’s critical thinking and understanding of the media messages relevant to the real world.

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## Appendix A: Pre-survey Questions

1. Have you ever seen the movie *Megamind* before tonight?
2. What did you think of the movie?
3. What did you like about the movie?
4. What did you dislike about the movie?
5. Do you think the creator of the movie was trying to tell you something?
6. What do you think the creator of the movie was trying to tell you?

## Appendix B: Post-survey questions

1. Have you ever seen the movie *Megamind* before we watched it as a class?
2. What did you think of the movie?
3. What did you like about the movie?
4. What did you dislike about the movie?
5. Who created *Megamind*?
6. What techniques were used to attract your attention?
7. How might different people understand this message differently than you?
8. What lifestyles, values, and points of view are represented and omitted in *Megamind*?
9. Why was this message, *Megamind*, sent?

The lessons for the unit can be provided by request.

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## UIC CENTER FOR LITERACY

The UIC Center for Literacy works with families and communities to promote educational equity through multi-generational literacy programming, research, and advocacy.

The CFL was established in 1991 through a joint effort by the University of Illinois at Chicago and the City of Chicago to build a partnership that serves racially and linguistically diverse families through research-based multigenerational literacy education that is asset-based and culturally relevant. Since its founding, the CFL has had a strong partnership with Head Start programs and the Department of Families and Social Services.

The CFL is known for its rootedness in the community it serves; many staff are former volunteers and/or participants in the programs. The CFL is also recognized as a distinguished center for research application and evaluation and has published numerous scholarly work that has been translated to practical community applications.

Each year, we serve over 5000 Chicago families in the South and West sides through a range of programming, including Family Start (FAST) parent workshops in financial literacy and digital literacy, GED courses, ESL classes, teacher and volunteer training, and support for families of children with autism and developmental delays.

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