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Framing Equitable Classroom Practices: Potentials of Critical Multimodal Literacy Research

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Abstract

This article presents an illustrative case study to explore the classroom potentials of critical multimodal literacy. We feature Marcela's multimodal response to demonstrate how she engaged with visual and textual tools for learning. Illustrative cases are especially useful to explore a particular issue and often involve in-depth analysis of qualitative data that represents theoretical constructs or significant findings. Critical multimodal literacy is a framework that we developed from a synthesis of the research literature to describe the ways that children use tools (e.g., sketches, videos) for personal meaning-making, critique, and agentive learning in classrooms. Findings from the critical analysis of a young Latina fourth-grader's multimodal production illuminate our framework, which consists of the following four components: *communicate and learn with multimodal tools*; *restory, represent, and redesign*; *acknowledge and shift power relationships*; and *leverage multimodal resources to critique and transform sociopolitical realities* all seen through an equity lens. We conclude with implications for how this critical multimodal literacy framework can promote equitable classroom practices that expand the literacy learning of all students.

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Marcela, a 10-year-old girl whose home language is Spanish, was sitting at her desk and had focused her attention on the lesson at hand. Marva guided students to reflect on the last few months together where they engaged in multimodal literacy strategies and then instructed them to "draw a picture of something you learned." Marcela immediately began her composing process (see Figure 1) by framing an image within her drawing. She drew a penguin, central to the fourth-grade unit of study, projected onto a screen at the top of the page. Later, she added yet another image within her drawing, which consists of a three-section illustration of her learning, replicating the work she previously created as part of a Talking Drawings (McConnell, 1992; Paquette, Fello, & Jalongo, 2007) lesson (see Figure 2). Talking Drawings is a visual-based literacy strategy that helps students access, build, and reflect on relevant background knowledge. Marcela then added characters, Marva, and herself. She depicted herself as smiling and successful in the middle of the frame and labeled as "me." She paused and took notice of her images and decided to add more. Marcela carefully sketched speech and thought bubbles that showed the teacher directions and her own responses; these reflected her experiences in this lesson. Finally, a callout of a magnifying glass (lower left) was inserted, reminiscent of science textbooks, that provided a close-up view of the work she proudly created.

Marcela admitted that she "felt nervous" at the beginning of the visual-based unit "because I was thinking it was for our report card." However, she soon learned the strategies "help more because you focus on the detail a lot" and "you can express yourself on art and learn by having fun."

This illustration was created at the end of a semester-long research project in a fourth-grade classroom where children engaged with a range of visual resources to demonstrate their learning. We selected Marcela's multimodal response to this prompt to serve as an illustrative case study (Janks, 2013) reflecting the critical multimodal literacy framework that we have developed based on an extensive review of the literature and engagement with data across multiple projects. Critical multimodal literacy includes different ways of learning, emphasizes the importance of social interactions and power dynamics, and provides a framework for understanding how children are designers who create texts, images, and artifacts to communicate (Wiseman, Pendleton, Nesheim, & Christianson, 2015; Wohlwend, 2011). Thus, critical multimodal literacy has the potential to promote equitable classroom practices that are inclusive and expansive for all students.

In this article, we employ multimodal data to illuminate and explicate our critical multimodal literacy framework, which consists of the following four dimensions: *communicating and learning with multimodal tools*; *restorying, representing, and redesigning*; *acknowledging and shifting power relationships*, and *leveraging multimodal resources to critique and transform sociopolitical realities*. Using a critical

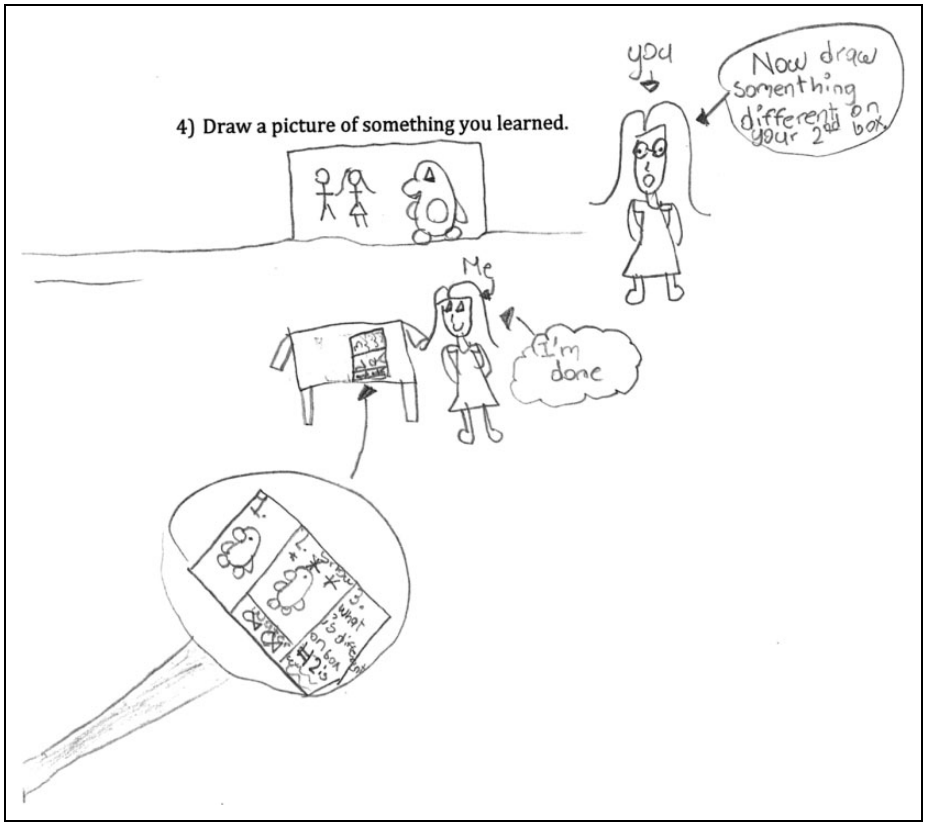

Figure 1. Marcela's multimodal composition.

multimodal literacy framework, we analyze Marcela's multimodal production in ways that allow for the theory and practice to inform our understanding. Our findings provide important insight on how Marcela was able to engage in opportunities to communicate and learn, restory, shift power relationships, and leverage multimodal resources to critique and transform literacy learning in the classroom. Our inquiry, then, addresses this primary question: How does a critical multimodal literacy framework provide a lens for understanding one fourth-grade student's responses to a visual-based classroom curriculum?

Theoretical Framework: Critical Multimodal Literacy

While students' worlds have become increasingly visual, classroom practices and research methods still predominantly focus on text-based or response-oriented data. Marcela's classroom experiences, which privilege visual and multimodal methods of

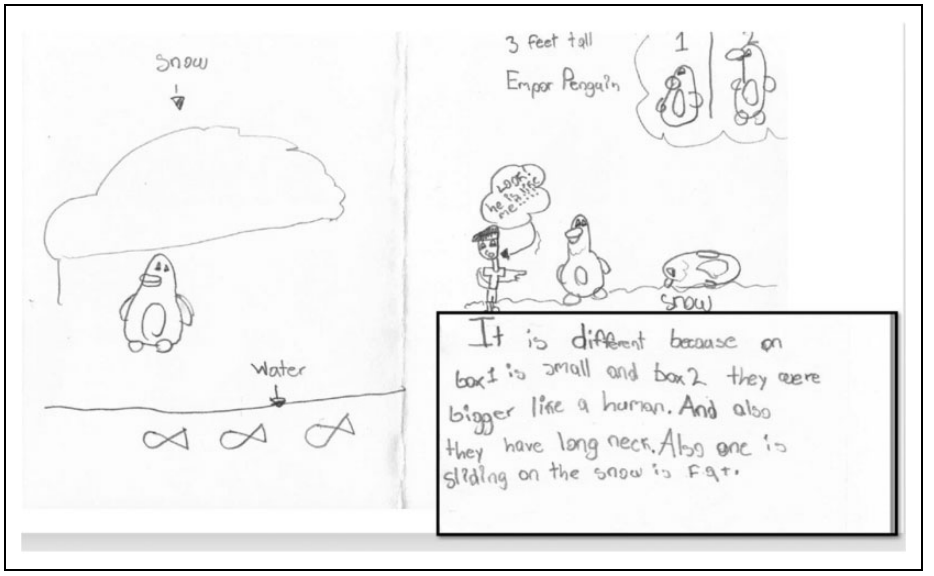

Figure 2. Marcela's talking drawing.

communicating, were part of a project to expand pedagogical approaches in an elementary school. Over the past decade, scholars who engage with multimodal methods of research have demonstrated how research methods that highlight more expansive ways of engaging with literacy practices provide insight on the complexity of students' literacy practices and dismantle deficit perspectives related to students' participation in school learning (i.e., Ajayi, 2015; Kuby, 2013; Wohlwend, 2011). However, the promise and potential of capturing and understanding the complexities of how children incorporate multiple modes, such as visual responses, has only skimmed the surface.

Often learners are limited by a print-centric curriculum in schools despite the many options for demonstrating and making meaning. Inherently, there is a power dynamic in selecting and privileging written texts over other tools to communicate and learn, which neglects the complex ways that students engage in literacy (Smith, Hall, & Sousanis, 2015). Our theoretical framework builds upon and extends the critical literacy model outlined by Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys (2002), who developed this model in K–8 classrooms where students' personal and cultural resources were the starting point for engaging with critical social practices and stances. Comprised of four dimensions, *disrupting the commonplace*, *considering multiple viewpoints*, *focusing on the sociopolitical*, and *taking action to promote social justice*, the Lewison et al. (2002) model offers a rich conception of critical literacy as social practices "needed to enhance both peoples' agency over their life trajectories and communities' intellectual, cultural, and semiotic resources in multimediated economies" (Luke & Freebody, 1999, p. 2).

Drawing from our synthesis of the research literature and engagement with visual and multimodal research in various contexts, we present the theoretical framework of *critical multimodal literacy* to describe the ways that children use multimodal tools such as sketches, photographs, drama, or songs for personal meaning-making, critique, and agentive learning in classrooms (Mills, 2015; Siegel, 2006). In taking the social semiotic turn (Albers, 2014; Siegel, 2006), we are particularly interested in theorizing how critical multimodal literacy opens up equitable learning opportunities for children through a range of visual "resources that make difference visible . . . so that voices that might traditionally be marginalized are heard" (Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2008, p. 33). We see this as an important step toward equity pedagogy, defined by McGee Banks and Banks (1995) as " . . . teaching strategies and classroom environments that help students from diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural groups attain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to function effectively within, and help create and perpetuate, a just, humane, and democratic society" (p. 152).

We turn now to a discussion of the four dimensions of critical multimodal literacy: communicating and learning with multimodal tools; restorying, representing, and redesigning; acknowledging and shifting power relationships; and leveraging multimodal resources to critique and transform sociopolitical realities. In this framework, we bring together theories of critical literacy and multimodality with an equity pedagogy lens.

Communicating and Learning With Multimodal Tools

While visual elements and personal responses exist in children's lives and in many classroom contexts, the printed form is still privileged over all other modes in educational contexts. Privileging text-based responses is connected to "socially constructed epistemological principles" (Street, 2006, p. 1) which are impacted by very specific views of literacy that are not necessarily connected to skills and abilities that people use in their lives. This notion of privileging one form of literacy over others is exclusionary and often a result of the scripted curriculum and high-stakes assessment that is rampant in U.S. educational contexts. A reductionist approach to literacy curriculum has resulted in the narrowing of the classroom instruction, which "has particularly affected students from historically disenfranchised communities" (Ghiso & Low, 2013, p. 27).

Multimodal approaches provide equitable learning opportunities for the classroom (Cappello, Turner, & Wiseman, 2015). As children move toward more multimodal and visual environments, modes of communication provide even more potential for meaning-making and communication (Serafini, 2010), and children have opportunities to express more creatively and with more complexity. When children have the opportunity to respond using multimodal tools, it provides possibilities beyond the printed form (Bazalgette & Buckingham, 2013) and also "build[s] on students' repertoires of literacies" (Callow, 2006, p. 9). We see the importance of allowing students to center their own experiences in the school curricula, including the content area

disciplines, through multimodal tools. Opportunities to mediate understanding using incorporation of multimodal elements—in Marcela's case, visual artifacts—have the potential to expand her literacy practices (Albro & Turner, 2019; Cappello & Lafferty, 2015; Wiseman, Pendleton, Christianson, & Nesheim, 2017).

The intentional integration of multimodal communication provides children, regardless of age, background, language ability, and literacy level, with powerful opportunities to build their understanding through various perspectives and ways of seeing (Albers, 2007, 2014; Mora, 2017; Siegel & Panofsky, 2009). When students have "multiple ways in which to express and demonstrate meaning" (Albers, 2006, p. 75), there is the potential for increased engagement. Therefore, opening up classroom learning to include tools beyond print-based responses allows for possibilities that children can connect their school learning to their out-of-school literacies in that they may be using a wide range of visual tools in their personal lives. Multimodal literacies can provide children with opportunities to represent and communicate their lives and critically engage with the world (Lenters, 2016).

Restorying, Representing, and Redesigning

The process of restorying, or (re)designing dominant schooling narratives, is an important aspect of our critical multimodal literacy framework. Thomas and Stornaiuolo (2016) propose the notion of restorying as a way to understand how children "resist a single story" (p. 314) and use multimodal tools to represent their own identities, roles, and trajectories within the dominant narratives circulating within schooling and other societal institutions. Wiseman (2015) documents how a photography unit helped two third graders redefine the "struggling reader" narratives that positioned them within their classroom. By working with her family to take photographs in her community, Ellie, an African American girl, confidently shared images and coherent understandings of her community with her teacher, peers, and the researcher, and she ultimately evolved into a stronger writer. As he collaborated with a classmate, David, a Latino boy, used visual images and other multimodal artifacts (e.g., drama/skit, writing) to make meaning of a sophisticated proverb. Although David's knowledge was still developing, both he and Ellie disrupted dominant "struggling reader" narratives and restoried themselves as engaged learners through the use of photography and as more competent learners who successfully accessed a wide array of multimodal resources to create new understandings.

Relatedly, Turner and Albro (2017) found that children's career dream drawings served as a multimodal tool for restorying powerful narratives about college and career readiness. Students often receive messages that teachers and schools are the authorities on workforce preparation, yet many children perceive classroom literacy skills as disconnected from their lives. Multimodal productions (e.g., drawings) enabled 24 children from diverse racial backgrounds (i.e., Black, White, Latinx, Native American/Pacific Islander) to visually represent their own career dreams, the roles that they perceived literacies would play in their professional work, and the

people who would help them to achieve their career and literacy goals. Visual analyses of 72 career-oriented images revealed how children (1) aspired toward meaningful and rewarding professional work, (2) envisioned complex literacy repertoires that promoted professional communication and productivity, and (3) identified their families and communities as crucial supports for college and career preparation. Drawings, then, served as spaces for restorying, where children sketched themselves into imagined career futures in ways that reconfigured dominant college and career readiness narratives. By utilizing multimodal tools, the children re/positioned themselves, their families, and their communities as knowledgeable experts on their own postsecondary preparedness and designed their own career pathways and trajectories through the multiple literacy practices, skills, and resources that they deemed relevant for future success.

Acknowledging and Shifting Power Relationships

Understanding the social practices and power relations of children's responses is important in classroom contexts (Bazalgette & Buckingham, 2013; Rowsell & Pahl, 2007). Several multimodal features are particularly useful for examining power relationships. For instance, gaze, the directional orientation of the character defined by head positioning and eye placement, can articulate power relationships (National Center for Research Methods, n.d.; Norris, 2004). When characters in an image look out at the viewer, they assert power (demand), and when characters look away from the viewer, they are placed in a more passive position (offer; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Likewise, salience, or the relative size of objects and/or characters within the image, represents relationships of power and authority. Callow (2013) notes that salience is "what attracts viewers' attention" (p. 18), and as a result, it is a multimodal feature that demonstrates power within an image.

Multimodal responses can shift power and transform the curriculum when children incorporate their perspectives and knowledge about racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity into composing processes (Streelasky, 2017). For example, first graders leveraged their collective curricular experiences and textual materials (e.g., classroom read alouds, social studies lessons) alongside their own personal experiences (e.g., religious teachings, family beliefs) to compose their own book about the arrest of Rosa Parks in Alabama (Kuby, 2013). Noting how the children's illustrations evoked strong affective responses to racial bus segregation, Kuby (2013) asserted that "children's images can be a window into their experiences and ways of being that inform our understanding of how they are processing social injustices" (p. 294).

Similarly, Zapata and Van Horn (2017) found that two Mexican American third-grade boys made their own picture books using multiple modes, materials, resources from Latinx children's literature, and languages (e.g., Spanish, English) to communicate their personal (e.g., making a do-rag) and community literacies (e.g., rapping). These studies highlight the importance of teachers who provide powerful opportunities for children to engage with multimodal tools in the classroom, so that "material

intra-actions could emerge and students' lived realities could be performed" (Zapata & Van Horn, 2017, p. 298). In both studies, multimodal composition provided possibilities for children to take a lead role in learning using their social and cultural resources. This is a shift from traditional teacher–student dynamics where the student follows the curriculum with minimal choices about how they learn.

Leveraging Multimodal Resources to Critique and Transform Sociopolitical Realities

Freire's (1985) metaphor of "reading the world and the word" serves as a powerful reminder that the purpose of education is to provide students with the literacy practices necessary for making meaning of their own experiences and critiquing and transforming the world around them. Critical knowledge is a source of hope, for critique enables us to move toward change and to propose new solutions that we would like to see take hold in the world (Freire, 1985; Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002; Luke & Freebody, 1999). Building on these ideals, Mora (2017) explains that multimodality offers students (e.g., second language learners, novice learners) more expansive communicative repertoires to engage with broader social issues and propose new visions of socially just communities and practices. When used as a tool for raising students' critical consciousness, multimodality functions as a resource that leverages "the power and potential of semiotic forms of meaning-making as the basis of critical praxis" (Mora, 2017, n.p.).

Several research studies demonstrate how multimodal artifacts can open up the curriculum to invite students' critique of their school learning experiences and sociopolitical realities. For instance, Martinez-Roldán and Newcomer (2011) demonstrated how children drew their own immigration experiences in response to Shaun Tan's (2006) *The Arrival*. In this study, one student used "performative narratives" to create dialogue and "adopt the protagonist's perspective, imagining his thoughts and words" through her own lens of experience (Martinez-Roldán & Newcomer, 2011, p. 195). More recently, Albro and Turner (2019) found that inviting African American engineers (a male professor and two female undergraduate students) from the local community to talk about engineering as a career helped children of Color, especially the boys, to see themselves as future engineers. Through a highly engaging multimodal presentation (e.g., watching video, discussion, designing/sketching, building structures), the engineers inspired several boys to later envision their own futures as engineers, disrupting stereotypical narratives that boys of Color are not intelligent nor motivated enough to pursue Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) careers (McGee, 2015). Collectively, these studies suggest that approaching classroom instruction from a critical multimodal literacy perspective provides insight on the complexity of students' literacy practices, dismantles deficit perspectives related to students' participation in school learning, and opens new spaces for students to critique social issues and transform the lifeworlds that they care about.

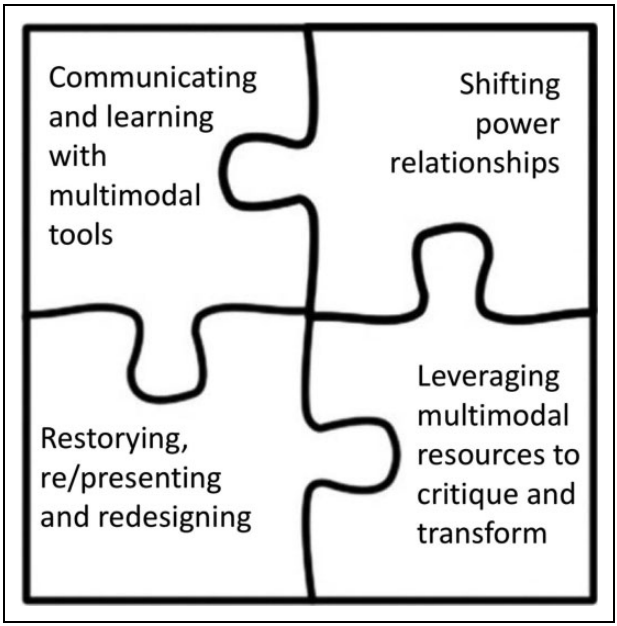

Figure 3. Critical multimodal literacy framework.

To summarize, we offer a critical multimodal literacy framework (see Figure 3) that allows us to see how children center their own experiences in the curriculum and restory or represent their own experiences. Analyzing visual texts (i.e., drawings) designed by children affords new opportunities for understanding the complexity of image-based interpretive work alongside exploring youths' personal representations of race, gender, literacy, and identity through multiple modes (e.g., color, perspective, sign systems). Furthermore, as literacy educators and researchers, we posit that studying children's multimodal productions provides insight into their perceptions and interpretation, promotes social and personal critique, and allows for diverse and expanded possibilities for learning within the classroom. We turn now to our analysis of Marcela's multimodal artifacts to concretize the four dimensions of our critical multimodal literacy framework.

Method

In this article, we feature Marcela's multimodal response as an illustrative case study (Janks, 2013) to show how she engaged with visual and textual tools for learning. Illustrative cases are especially useful when "researchers are looking for insight into an issue" (Barone, 2011, p. 9) and often involve in-depth analysis of qualitative data that represents theoretical constructs or significant findings. Marcela became our focal

student because she articulated the importance of using multimodal strategies and clearly demonstrated complex understanding through her use of images, texts, and language. Informed by a critical multimodal approach, we were able to consider how Marcela leveraged multimodal resources to communicate complex ideas with tools, restory her experiences, shift power relationships, and critique the sociopolitical realities of classroom learning. Focusing on her learning opportunities within the classroom allowed us to explore possibilities for equitable learning practices. In this section, we provide information on the context and data sources, methods of analysis, and collaborative research process.

Setting, Participants, and Data Sources

Marcela is a fourth-grade student at a school site where her teacher was one of three who agreed to participate in a collaborative visual literacy curriculum across the disciplines and research project designed by Marva (Cappello & Walker, 2016, 2019). Set in a large, urban K–8 school near the United States/Mexico border, 88% of students were labeled as low socioeconomic status and qualified for free and reduced lunch. In addition, 58% of the students were designated English learners, including Marcela.

The larger study involved data collection from October to December and included 73 participants in Grades 4–6 who engaged in three cycles of intentional visual-based instruction through visual responses and thinking strategies. Each cycle of instruction lasted about 4 weeks and included opportunities for Marva to model strategies and coach participating teachers as they gained confidence using new teaching methods. Marva collaborated with the teacher participants to find the most effective places to integrate the visual-based literacy lessons into their already developed long-term plans. Most often, instruction took place in the literacy block, but there were also times when students engaged with visual texts in science, social studies, and mathematics. Elementary students had three opportunities to try each strategy: Visual Thinking Strategies (Yenawine, 2013), Talking Drawings (McConnell, 1992; Paquette et al., 2007), and Prove-It (Cappello & Walker, 2019). Approximately 700 multimodal artifacts were generated as part of this study.

We selected Marcela as a focal student for three main reasons. First, she was an English learner who typically struggled communicating her curricular understandings through writing assignments. Even visual-based strategies that called for written responses were challenging for Marcela. For example, after a 20-min discussion of an image from *Tuesday* by David Wiesner (1999) using the Visual Thinking Strategies protocol (Yenawine, 2013), Marcela's text was still confusing, unstructured, and provided little evidence to support claims. She wrote (errors remain intentionally), "Maybe a wind came and wring the leaves and it rain or the leaves were wealth. And because their were to much leaves they have a hearth attack because he loves leaves and the mean said what happen." Second, Marcela was initially reluctant and "felt nervous" when asked to engage with drawing and multimodal compositions. Finally,

we chose Marcela because of the relationship she established with Marva. Marcela sought Marva's approval and made sure there were opportunities for conversation whenever she visited the classroom.

Our analysis focuses on an exit ticket Marcela created at the end of the semester after multiple opportunities to engage with multimodal-based activities in social studies, science, mathematics, and language arts. Marcela and her classmates created exit tickets as a tool for reflecting on their learning. Research demonstrates that children from high-poverty schools and in English language programs often do not have the same access to engaging and creative lessons; instruction that emphasizes simplistic, skills-oriented tasks does not build on their academic potential (Lesaux & Harris, 2015). Given the rich opportunities for learning situated within the visual curriculum that Marva implemented, we were particularly interested in examining Marcela's exit ticket and the ways that it revealed her thinking processes and new understandings from an antideficit perspective.

Researcher Collaboration

Our own collaborative process began through data sharing, research discussions, and joint presentations at the Literacy Research Association where we shared insights across our own research with elementary students. Marva, Jennifer, and Angela have been participating in research analysis regarding multimodal and visual analysis together for 5 years (i.e., Cappello et al., 2015; Cappello, Wiseman, & Turner, 2018), employing multimodal and visual methodologies that demonstrate how different forms of multimodal texts (e.g., drawings, photographs, media) provide children with more expansive options for expressing their understandings of the world. We have analyzed our research and co-constructed our understandings in many ways collaboratively, including synthesizing research methods used in elementary classrooms, applying a specific method across our own research projects, using one set of data and applying various methods, and, now, collaboratively analyzing one project while developing a theoretical framework. Our collective insights were crucial because "the interpretation of visual images as data in literacy research requires a *collaborative* and hybrid approach to . . . uncover nuances of practices that were not visible through linguistic modes alone" (emphasis added, Kendrick, 2015, p. 629).

Data Analysis

We engaged in a collaborative analytic process that emphasized multiple readings of Marcela's drawing using qualitative research methods designed for visual images and multimodal ensembles. We used an analytic framework that utilized three dimensions of visual interpretation, adapted from Serafini's (2010, 2014) work on multimodal analysis. His framework is comprised of three components: perceptual, structural, and ideological (see Table 1), and like Serafini (2014), we employed these three dimensions as interrelated, nested analytic perspectives for articulating

Table 1. Critical Multimodal Literacy Analysis.

Steps in Visual Analysis	Concepts/Definition	Examples From Research
Perceptual	– Literal/denotative contents of images and elements of design. Create an inventory of the elements – Start with the picture and then move to the text on each page – Synergy between text and picture	– The drawing includes members of the classroom community including student artist and researcher. Speech bubbles and labels are used to indicate classroom dialogue.
Structural	– focus on visual design – functions of the contents of images and text – reanalyze visual components with attention to content – writing analytic notes on the visual details that we subsequently noticed	– Calm is visually suggested by the strong horizontal lines, open use of space, and use of round shapes in the drawing.
Ideological	– communicating and learning with multimodal tools – acknowledging and shifting power relationships – restorying, re/presenting, redesigning – leveraging multimodal resources to critique and transform sociopolitical realities	Marcela positions herself as the main subject in her composition drawing the viewer in with her confident gaze.

visual meaning potentials rather than hierarchical, linear processes. The *perceptual dimension* is the literal/denotative content of images and elements of design, and the *structural dimension* as the focus on visual design and functions of the contents of images and text.

For the *ideological dimension*, we developed a critical multimodal literacy framework that builds on theories of critical literacy and multimodality and is informed by an equity pedagogy lens. Our process of ideological understanding was recursive in that we moved from the data to theory development, creating the framework to fit research we had read and the data generated from this study. We were influenced by theory and research on critical multimodal literacy (e.g., Ajayi, 2015), critical literacies (e.g., Lewison et al., 2002), and equity (e.g., McGee Banks & Banks, 1995). As we analyzed the data and considered our other research studies, we engaged in the process of theory production. We were particularly interested in how Marcela employed multimodal tools to represent her understanding, deepen her science learning, acknowledge power relationships, and critique and transform her classroom learning experiences. As we considered her work, alongside our experiences with other students in elementary classrooms, we developed the four components of our critical multimodal literacy framework.

Using the three dimensions of visual interpretation (Serafini, 2014) enabled us to critically analyze and interpret Marcela's image by (a) identifying characters, action, objects, and relationships and (b) describing how visual elements and multiple modes work together to convey messages about Marcela's meaning-making. See Table 1 for definitions of the steps of visual analysis with examples from our artifact.

Co-constructed, multilayered analytic methods are particularly fruitful for multimodal texts and allow for the understanding of expansive notions of literacy. Our iterative readings represented critical interpretive processes by which "messages within visual texts . . . can be analyzed . . . both in how something is said (grammar of visual texts; media; object placement, space, color, etc.), and . . . what is said (composition: messages conveyed and discourses)" (Albers, Vasquez, & Harste, 2011, p. 195). In the next section, we present our findings, which provide insight regarding how a critical multimodal literacy approach can provide equitable learning spaces in the classroom.

Findings

In this section, we present data from Marva's research and demonstrate how critical multimodal literacy supports understanding the complexities of children's literacy practices and offers new possibilities for equitable classroom instruction. Our iterative conversations about the framework helped us explicate how Marcela's artifact illustrates the four components of a critical multimodal literacy framework. We found that she communicated and learned with multimodal tools and restoried the curriculum to include her perspectives. The artifact reflected power relationships and demonstrated how she leveraged multimodal resources to represent her experiences as a learner.

Communicating and Learning With Multimodal Tools

Despite her articulated uncertainty about using illustrations as a way to demonstrate understanding in the classroom, Marcela exhibits sophisticated skills for communicating using visual language. She engaged enthusiastically, meticulously illustrating her learning. Her image depicted a classroom instance where she realized what and how she understood disciplinary science information.

Marcela uses several illustrative techniques resourced from her "repertoires of literacies" (Callow, 2006, p. 9) in her multimodal responses, reflecting her learning. First, she captures the visual elements within the classroom environment including the image of a penguin projected on the screen at the top of the page. Then, Marcela uses thought and speech bubbles to access language and complement the visuals in this multimodal ensemble. In addition, she uses arrows to draw the viewer's attention to her place in the center of the page (in the center of the classroom) as well as the important work she created. Finally, she uses a callout to zoom in on her work, providing the viewer detailed access to her classroom achievement. The callout Marcela chooses, a magnifying glass, is reminiscent of science textbooks and becomes a

clever tool to get a close up view of a previous visual response. We noted that some aspects of her artifact were not taught as part of the visual-based curriculum (i.e., speech bubbles, callouts), which means she had the opportunity to capitalize on her own visual knowledge.

The drawing in the callout within the larger drawing represents Marcela's work shared in a prior classroom activity (see Figure 2) and demonstrates her content knowledge and learning outcomes of the Talking Drawing strategy. More specifically, Marcela uses multimodal resources to label important elements in her drawing (e.g., snow, water), recall important facts (e.g., the height of Emperor penguins), and build knowledge during the lesson. Having "multiple ways in which to express and demonstrate meaning" (Albers, 2006, p. 75) became a powerful opportunity for Marcela to build perspectives of what it means to be literate. Marcela capitalized on the potential of multimodal tools in ways that may not have been possible with language-based resources typically privileged in school. Multimodal resources allowed her to demonstrate her understanding. Indeed, this student, who often struggled with expressing her knowledge in traditional writing approaches, blossomed in the context of expansive multimodal literacy practices.

Restorying, Representing, and Redesigning

Like Thomas and Storniaulou (2016), we are interested in the ways "young people transform the mean-making process through . . . creative restorying practices" (p. 314). Although restorying is often used to explore the ways students respond to readings and "counteract incomplete textural renderings that dehumanize and divide" (Thomas & Stornaiuolo, 2016, p. 314), we found restorying to be a helpful heuristic for exploring the ways Marcela used multimodal tools to assert her identity and "pushback against the dominant narrative" (Thomas & Stornaiuolo, 2016, p. 314) assigned to her at school. In the classroom, Marcela seemed to be positioned as an English learner who sometimes struggled with literacy lessons; Marcela's reflective writing about the *Tuesday* book demonstrated her desire to write in English, but because print-only responses "may become hurdles for children and beginning [language] users" (Mora, 2017, n.p.), these types of writing activities might have reinforced negative narratives about Marcela.

Framed by restorying perspectives, Marcela's exit ticket reflects her identity as a successful meaning maker and represents her knowledge as a literacy and language user. By relying on her semiotic resources to convey her understanding of the lesson, Marcela "disrupt[ed] traditional assumptions of what young and novice [language] learners can do with language, transcending simplistic and reductionist views of language use" (Mora, 2017, n.p.). Notably, although not directed to do so, Marcela's design intentionally uses English language in speech and thought bubbles to mark her classroom achievement. Not only does Marcela reflect on her work and acknowledge that she completed it, she takes pride in her work and highlights it through the details revealed in her magnified callout.

Like the third graders in Wiseman's (2015) study, Marcela overcame the reality of her classroom status through multimodality. In contrast to the disorganized and confused writing that Marcela produced when she was only using English to communicate her understanding of the *Tuesday* book, Marcela is confident about her multimodal composition as well as her new disciplinary knowledge. Through her exit ticket, Marcela restories herself as a successful language learner who skillfully utilizes multiple communicative resources (e.g., English language, semiotic tools) to make meanings of texts, reflect upon her own learning, and demonstrate accomplishment in the classroom.

Acknowledging and Shifting Power Relationships

Marcela's multimodal artifact reflects the power relationships in the classroom and, in particular, during this visual-based literacy lesson. Research has demonstrated how dynamics can shift between students and teachers when students have opportunities to expand their modes of communication (Kuby, 2013; Zapata & Van Horn, 2017). We observed two main ways that Marcela shifted her relationships in the classroom. First, her visual representation reflected her empowered and successful academic self. Second, her choice to refer to her previous visual productions situates her as an expert in the classroom.

Analyzing visual cues in children's images provides a window to their academic, social, and cultural understanding (Zapata & Van Horn, 2017). Marcela's depiction of herself as a learner provides insight to her relationship to teachers and curriculum in the classroom. When we examined her drawing, we see how she depicts Marva in a prevalent role. Marva is the largest person or object in the image and is placed higher on the frame; certainly, Marcela sees her as important. However, Marcela uses visual grammar to align herself with the adult and affirm her own importance. The characters' illustrated relationship, although not balanced, is paralleled in the ways that Marcela drew them both so similarly with nearly identical dress and hair. Visually, Marcela situates her images in a strong diagonal vector, which creates a reading path (Callow, 2013). The reading path, which denotes the way your eye moves when it processes an image for understanding, shifts from Marcela to Marva in one direction and to her academic accomplishment in the other. The three most salient elements in her image are connected and reflect Marcela's social world—her positive engagement with Marva. Notably, Marcela positions herself, and not the adult, as the main subject in her composition. She holds the salient center of her multimodal text attracting the viewer. Her positioning and smile do invite the spectator. However, her confident gaze does more and demands the viewer's attention; the viewer sees her in a position of power and success in the classroom.

Marcela references her own visual text from another lesson in this main image, which reflects how she is building on her own prior multimodal compositions to understand and reflect her knowledge. Rather than referring to a traditional information source, such as a textbook, a website, or a book, she references her own work. In essence, she is the producer of knowledge in the classroom. This is another way that

Marcela shifts relationships in the classroom. Her decision to incorporate her prior work situates her as a curricular resource. As Zapata and Van Horn (2017) found that materials can facilitate processes and products in the classroom, our analysis revealed that Marcela's designs become acts of knowledge creation.

Leveraging Multimodal Resources to Critique and Transform Sociopolitical Realities

In response to the prompt "draw something you learned," Marcela illustrated a classroom scene. At first glance, this drawing appears to be a familiar depiction of classroom learning comprised of a student (Marcela) and a teacher. Yet Marcela chose to depict Marva, not her classroom teacher, in her scene. Marcela's multimodal representation could be interpreted as both a critique of traditional literacy instruction and an envisionment of the type of classroom environment she hopes to learn and participate in (Mora, 2017). By placing herself, and not a teacher, at the center of scene, Marcela advocates for a learning space that privileges the multiple subjectivities and interests that students bring into the classroom. Through a depiction of the rich multimodal resources that Marva mobilized within the classroom (e.g., the Talking Drawings visual strategy, the penguin video, written language, spoken language) to build her science knowledge and support her literacy learning, Marcela's drawing reflects a hopeful vision of student-centered literacy learning that a multimodal curriculum promotes—one where Marcela doesn't have to "feel nervous" about the grades on her report card because she is free to learn science in visually rich and agentive ways.

Extending these themes of critique and transformation, Marcela's multimodal representation provides insights into the ways that she perceived herself as a learner of complex literacy practices. Marcela's drawing depicted multimodal resources as powerful tools for expression and demonstrated disciplinary learning that was not limited by the deficit-oriented narratives often used regarding English learners in the classroom. In her multimodal production, Marcela challenged and disrupted these dominant narratives by specifying her learning processes and outcomes from prior lessons, modeling ownership of literate practices, and displaying disciplinary knowledge. Although she created a representation of her science learning within an education context, her work is very personal. Drawing provided a context for Marcela to create her own narrative and affirm her social identity in the classroom. Marcela was able to demonstrate her potential; therefore, the multimodal experience became an equitable classroom practice that supported successful learning.

Conclusion

Marcela's responses illustrate how a multimodal literacy curriculum provides opportunities for children to engage and learn in the classroom. Analyzing her multimodal responses with a critical perspective enabled us to "understand the available positions that children . . . take up in their multimodal work; particularly, how they appropriate

and transform various discursive modes and resources to (re)position their own subjectivities" (Kendrick et al., 2010, p. 396). Specifically, critical multimodal literacy provided a framework to understand how Marcela "talked back" to normative discourses through visual representations of multiple social identities (e.g., science learner, redesigner, successful student) within her multimodal production. Overall, our close analysis of Marcela's work allowed us to better understand her interpretations and perceptions of learning, herself as a learner, and the social dynamics within the classroom.

We found that Marcela created possibilities and extended meanings through her own drawing, text, and images using her response to reconsider and reflect on her own identities. Likewise, Marcela's multimodal production allowed her to center her own experiences in the disciplines, develop her own complex understandings, and situate herself as a knowledge producer in the classroom. Moreover, Marcela's drawing may suggest that she is reimagining herself in ways that reflect greater school success than apparent in the observation field notes and through an analysis of her schoolwork. This connects with other research that demonstrates how using critical and multimodal approaches provide opportunities for children to critique texts and resist and reconstruct unequal social structures (Ajayi, 2015; Thomas & Stornaiuolo, 2016). The critical multimodal literacy framework illuminates reading and writing practices of marginalized or struggling readers, taking into account how children reflect their identities and use multimodal products to reflect content area learning for second language acquisition (Martinez-Roldán & Newcomer, 2011; Zapata & Van Horn, 2017).

Our four dimensions of critical multimodal literacy—which include communicating and learning with multimodal tools; restorying, representing, and redesigning; acknowledging and shifting power relationships; and leveraging multimodal resources to critique and transform sociopolitical realities—demonstrate how critical multimodal literacy has the potential to promote equitable classroom practices. Our work resonates with other studies that demonstrate how the integration of multimodal communication provides children, regardless of age, background, and literacy level, with powerful opportunities to build their understanding and reflect their strengths through various perspectives (Albro & Turner, 2019; Cappello & Lafferty, 2015; Ghiso & Low, 2013; Kuby, 2013; Wiseman, Kupianinen, & Makinen, 2016). Collectively, research demonstrates how children use multimodal tools in unexpected and imaginative ways with limitless potential. While we cannot predict how children will mobilize literacy resources, we can use the equitable framing of critical multimodal literacy theories and research methods to understand the complexities of their multimodal composing, identity-making, and knowledge production.

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