CRITICAL VISUAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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Introduction

To situate the studies in this chapter, we recognize image as a communicative event, one that elicits and invites viewers to participate (or not) vicariously in the lived worlds of those represented or objects featured. Informed by Gee’s (2005) discourse analysis, critical visual discourse analysis (CVDA) is grounded in several semiotic and critical principles (Albers, Vasquez, & Harste, 2011). First, visual language is reflexive in that it has the capacity both to create and to reflect the context and reality in which it was created. The viewer is implicated to the degree of her or his familiarity with the context, as well as visual messages sent and interpreted by the viewer. Second, visual language creates opportunities for situated meanings. That is, interpretations and productions of visual data are produced in a given context and based upon previous experiences. Third, language is composed of many different social languages (Bakhtin, 1981), and visual designers and artists use different tools or media through which to communicate or carry out their intended message. Fourth, there are units of analysis within visual texts, including graphic, structural, semantic, pragmatic, and tactile (Albers, 2007), that focus attention on how art elements and principles of design operate in visual images, and which make visible discourses that become evident in the artwork.

Why CVDA

As critical literacy educators, we are very interested in how arts-based pedagogy intersects with critical literacy practices, and understand how images come to mean in print-based (e.g., magazines, billboards, posters, etc.) and digital spaces (e.g., pop-ups, forced viewings of ads, YouTube videos, etc.) (Albers, Vasquez, & Harste, 2017). Our work has increasingly argued for the systematic study of images as integral to critical knowing, and encourage participants to use art as a way to interrogate the everyday images and language we encounter, to understand the relationship between image and language, offer a lens through which to analyze images – both published and student-generated – and consider how art can be used to speak to and against social injustices. Theoretically, we have argued that images, like written texts, are embedded in an ideology of visibility (Albers et al., 2017; Johnson-Roullier, 2009–2010). Across our work, we have argued that visual language is marked with ideologies, beliefs, and practices (both producer and viewer).
around which it is used, read, and applied. We position CVDA as both a theory and a method that drives analysis of visual data.

The phrase “What we see is what we get” implies nothing is hidden in what is seen. Yet, in an ideology of visibility, argues Johnson-Roullier (2009–2010), the self and other necessarily are in a “tangled maze of representations” (p. 28) in which what is “‘real’ becomes only that which can be seen, whether or not what is seen is the same as what actually is” (p. 28). Van Winkel (2005) argued that regimes of visibility seep through all aspects of culture, and the most “diverse forms of cultural production have reduced themselves (or allowed themselves to be reduced) to a number of visually mediatable aspects” (p. 1). For example, in digital spaces, we have discussed how pop-up advertisements work both as ideology and regime. In a simple search on The New York Times site for information, a viewer’s interest in the top stories is interrupted by banners, not of headlines, but of advertisements for products and/or services. Further, before viewers can access a complete article, often they must view an ad or a sequence of ads — not by choice — but determined through a search engine’s complex algorithms targeted personally to a viewer. There is little choice for a viewer in digital spaces to simply access information (e.g., news story) as they can in print-based texts. Readers are forced into viewing information they may not wish to read. Thus, viewers’ desire to read the news online is entangled in a web of visual representations, both still and moving, which, as Fuchs (2016) argued, engenders a “colonization of societies and human spaces to open up new spaces of commodification and capital accumulation” (p. 62). Further, an unrelenting barrage of these visual ads becomes a regime of visibility, a systematic imposition of ads — mediatable aspects — targeted to a viewer's searches by search engines like Google, Yahoo, Bing, etc. We argue that attention to the visual mode is significant and critical, especially with young children who also are barraged with similar visual information. We suggest that CVDA provides analysts with a way to work through mazes of representations and regimes of visibility to understand ideologies and how they act on viewers to engage in particular practices, develop particular beliefs, and act in particular ways (Shannon, 2011).

As CVDA analysts, we acknowledge that all written texts reside in other texts, just as all readings of images reside in past readings. Thus, our aim in CVDA is to understand which art elements, structures, and discourses in commercially designed images inform teacher- and student-generated visual representations and their interpretations, and to what extent they are redesigned and/or reproduced in these texts. Said another way, we attempt to understand the mazes of representation that emerge in participants’ visual productions. Questions that drive CVDA include the following (Vasquez, 2004):

- How do texts work?
- How do texts do what they do in constructing readers and viewers?
- How do we understand what texts attempt to do in the world and to people?
- Whose story is this? Who benefits from this story? Whose voices are heard and whose are not?
- Whose story is missing from this text? Whose story dominates this text?
- What modal and design choices do textmakers produce, and what ideologies/discourses underpin these choices?
- How do these modal and design choices position the viewer to read and respond to the image in particular ways?
- What alternative perspectives might be offered in reading/viewing between the lines/elements?
- How do we move students to take active stances with texts as a means to de-construct and re-construct the social spaces in which they live?
Critical visual discourse analysis

- How can students and teachers together see how texts work to construct their world, their cultures, and their identities in ideological ways?
- How can students and teachers come to know how they use texts and images in particular ways to put on offer particular ways of thinking, doing, or being?
- How can texts be used as social tools for re-constructing identities, cultures, and worldviews?

Using CVDA

We offer an example of CVDA from a study that we conducted in 2012 regarding teachers’ critical work with advertisements. The purpose of this study was to understand how ads worked on participants as viewers and consumers, and the extent to which teachers, engaged in a critical literacy curriculum, learned the visual language with which to talk back to discourses of consumerism, especially through their construction of counter ads. In particular, we studied: (1) What messages do teachers speak to when they read and analyze advertisements? (2) How do teachers critically redesign a common advertisement through their production of counter ads? and (3) What can be learned from these counter ads for creating curriculum for young children?

To situate their reading within a CVDA perspective, teachers learned and applied the grammar of visual design (orientation, vectors, colors, size, weight of object, etc.) to study the modal and design choices in advertisements, and critically studied the discourses that underpinned visual elements and messages conveyed (Harste & Albers, 2013). We then invited teachers to study commercially generated advertisements found in magazines, home improvement stores, and the internet, and to interpret and discuss discourses and messages they saw operating in these ads. Specifically, they responded to the following questions: What do you think the designer of this advertisement is selling? How are they selling this product/concept/idea? After these experiences, teachers in small groups chose one ad and redesigned it from a critical perspective (Harste & Albers, 2013).

Participants created a range of different counter ads, one of which was Figure 27.1. We present how we analyzed this image using CVDA. One group of participants chose the popular McDonald’s Big Mac ad with the tag line, “the only cure for a Big Mac Attack, Attack, Attack, Attack” (each of the Attacks increases in size and shifts color, with a large photo of a Big Mac superimposed over the bottom two Attacks) (www.pinterest.com/redbeard1983/mcds/?lp=true). In the original ad, the viewer is compelled to engage in the visual appeal of the Big Mac, initiating a relationship between the viewer and the product in which the product is needed and used by the consumer. In the ad, the consumer’s hunger attack becomes greater as it nears the Big Mac, symbolized by the increasing font size of the word “Attack.” Stavrakakis (2006) argued that there is a challenge to “lessen the ideological grip of advertising fantasies” (p. 87); viewers are constructed as consumers who engage in the visual elements mediated as fantasy. While consumers of this product may think this product is good, because the Big Mac is an ATTACK on hunger, McDonald’s is the clear financial beneficiary of engaging viewers in the fantasy of consuming, knowing that their product may result in health issues.

The group of teachers who created this counter ad deconstructed the original ad by first reading with the text to understand the relationship between one’s health and food being constructed in order to read/speak against the discourses in place regarding this relationship. To do this, they use a similar design as the original ad. Structurally, the Big Mac remains at the lower center of the ad except that, in the new ad, ingredients symbolic of death have been added: five sets of skull and crossbones, electrocardiogram readouts, and RIP (rest in peace) repeated eight times. Written in bold black and red permanent markers, the text “Have YOU had a Mac Attack LATELY?” is an ironic response to the “only cure,” the sandwich itself. The words “Mac
“Mac Attack” are written as an electrocardiogram tape reading that represents heartbeats with the letter “k” in “attack” being drawn out into a flat line. The “attack” is not “a cure,” but the cause of a lethal heart attack.

As a viewer, there is an immediate attraction to the image of the sandwich itself, which reveals a deeper message: discourses around eating fast food and health. Symbolized by repeated RIPs and skull and crossbones, these mediatable aspects of the counter ad are emphasized through repetition, and make visible possible lethal results of repeated consumption. Like the original ad, this group of teachers drew upon desire to engage the viewer in the fantasy of consuming this product. The product carries the weight of the ad, surrounded by large blocked fonts and use of vibrant colors of yellow, black, red, sky blue, and lavender colors, with words written in heavy black marker demanding viewers’ attention (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). The word “DIE,” written as a subscript in red and outlined in black, rests visibly at the bottom of the text, symbolic of – figuratively and literally – “six feet under,” the final resting place for those who overly consume this product. While not visible, this group of teachers invited viewers into inquiry: What about this product may cause eventual death with overconsumption?
Metaphorically and literally, the teachers repackaged the ad to send a message that is critically clear: The Big Mac, “It’s to DIE for.”

The desire that advertisements creates, argued Stavrakakis (2006), is a nexus of consumer desire, lure of advertising fantasies, and identification with the product. Viewers are positioned in a consumer culture, one in which practices of desire and consumption are ideologically, physically, and emotionally embodied. Desire as a discourse has an authoritative hold on consumers. According to Jhally (1990), there must be a material-symbolic relationship between consumer and object. People’s use of the object is the minimal starting point for the discourse concerning products/objects. In this counter ad, teachers have created this relationship. Like the original ad, they have repackaged the product in similar ways. Using the layered beauty of the sandwich itself, from the sesame seed bun to the tomato (skull and crossbones) and lettuce (RIPs), teachers produced a visual material-symbolic relationship with viewers, with the message of danger clearly evident in the product’s use. At once, while teachers repackaged and questioned the original ad, they also organized their counter ad drawing upon those same aspects of desire (color, message, organization of objects, etc.). The advertising industry – and the companies who employ them – enjoy a “passive legitimization that adds to its hegemonic hold” (Stavrakakis, 2006, p. 87). By studying counter ads through CVDA, we identified which aspects of the original ad teachers chose to repackage, how they repackaged them, in terms of which modes and how they represented through these modes, and the extent to which they were able to offer alternative perspectives on a popular product. Studies that we have undertaken that involve CVDA, we suggest, provide researchers, teachers, and teachers of young children with an analytical tool to study the discourses that underpin the attractive designs in texts, like advertisements, that seduce consumers – including young children – with slick taglines and deliberate placement of objects. Awareness of messages, both those we see and those we and others create, we argue, is what makes democracy possible.

**Rationale for using CVDA**

Critical methods of reading and analyzing images and discourses that underpin them within and across different types of texts, for example, picturebooks, advertisements, public service announcements (PSAs), and video, have become more visible in literacy research (Albers et al., 2013). Scholars have outlined a range of analyses that have illuminated pathways into understanding how discourses emerge in image-based work and in different contexts. We articulate two reasons why studying image and how they act on young and older viewers are important. First, using CVDA demonstrates the importance that educators and researchers become consciously aware of how arts-based images, media, and digital texts work. Awareness of material-symbolic relationships between viewer and object positions viewers to read images more critically. In that way, CVDA allows for the development of a set of new media skills that enable researchers, teachers, and their students alike to interrogate and critically analyze media texts such as advertisements, YouTube videos, website images, and so on, and participate more fully and democratically in a media-rich world. Second, of critical importance is knowing, studying, and understanding the role of structures, elements, and discourses that play out in all types of visual texts. Visual language, like written language, can become a language of critique. Viewers learn this language that allows them to understand and question how images mean and how they encourage particular beliefs and social practices, especially as they encounter messages that financially benefit large corporations and their own interests (Albers et al., 2008).

We have studied the visual, media, and digital texts of hundreds of participants, from young children to pre- and in-service educators and administrators. We have used children’s literature,
advertisements, digital devices, and electronics (among others) in our studies to understand and adopt critical stances towards research and education. Our work with young children and teachers of young children has led us to understand that images shape the mindsets, identities, and practices of young children both at home and at school. Our studies have produced significant insights into why CVDA is an important tool in the classroom and in research. First, children have the capacity to engage in deep thinking and analytical understandings of a range of texts, and ask sophisticated questions about everyday texts, like cereal boxes, candy wrappers, and school/class posters. Second, young children who grapple with social issues (e.g., gender, poverty, religion, translanguaging) can learn how to speak against the inequalities that exist in their lives. Third, children speak visibly through their images. Teachers who read images with intentionality and systematically can address issues that children present in their drawings. Fourth, teachers who are knowledgeable about image analysis can create curriculum for young children that opens up what literacy looks like, and the many ways in which communication can be expressed.

**Examples of studies analyzing data through CVDA**

Across our professional lives, we have conducted a number of studies with young children and teachers of young children that involved the use of CVDA. We suggest that researchers can work with a range of data when using CVDA. For example, in one study (Fisher et al., 2014), we examined the images of a six-year-old boy, John, who drew how he misbehaved and how he would “make a better choice” on school behavioral forms. As his primary mode of written communication and over time, John’s images evolved from active participation in class to images of anger, violence, and power, to images of isolation and hopelessness (Figure 27.2).

CVDA forced us to problematize the use of visual imagery as a punitive endeavor in literacy, and to interrogate how art was used to reify concepts of “good children” versus “bad children.” We argued educators must study all communicative forms of children, including those on behavior forms that may seem benign, to understand how children’s images communicate their social practices, motivations, origins, and destinations. In another study with grade three children (Albers et al., 2009), we investigated how children visually interpreted and represented gender. After studying and discussing gender stereotypes in fairy tales in a six-week unit on gender and how women and men can take on alternative roles, we asked girls to represent the activities they thought boys liked, and asked boys to represent the activities they thought girls liked. Despite discussions of stereotypes, all but several children represented women/girls and men/boys in traditional gender roles.

In the next section, we present a more in-depth discussion of other studies in which we have used advertisements, picturebooks, word clouds, and technology devices as data.

**Using CVDA to analyze illustrations in children’s literature**

In our article (Albers et al., 2011) “Interrupting Certainty and Making Trouble: Teachers’ Written and Visual Responses to Picturebooks,” we studied both the visual and written responses of two groups of teachers, one from the US and one from Canada (N=41), to three picturebooks we saw as conveying social issues, *Willy & Hugh* (Browne, 2000), *Sister Anne’s Hands* (Loribecki, 2000), and *Into the Forest* (Browne, 2005). Teachers in the US primarily conveyed their understanding of these picturebooks through image while the Canadian teachers responded through written and voiced reflections. We wanted to know to what extent two different groups of participants were growing in their ability to identify explicit (easily seen images/words) and implicit (hidden/subtext) visual and/or written messages in these books.
Figure 27.2  Series of three drawings by John
Figure 27.2 (Continued)
We used critical discourse analysis (Rogers, 2013) to study written responses and CVDA to study visual responses (Albers, 2007). We looked at both groups and how they represented their understanding of these picturebooks, and developed a table to analyze how image and word across groups expressed discourses that emerged. Canadian teachers as a group were much better
at identifying explicit messages in text (those signed by either words or pictures) than they were at identifying implicit messages.

They seemed better able to articulate verbally their critiques of books than write about them. In the US group, teachers drew upon their knowledge of the grammar of visual design (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) and visual discourse analysis (Albers, 2007, 2013) to represent the complexity of discourses they saw operating in these picturebooks. They often saw only a single discourse emerge to visually render a solution to the issue, like bullying (*Willy & Hugh*). Significant to this study, CVDA enabled us to see how easily common assumptions about issues (bullying, racism, traditional family units) are visually (and easily) reproduced as dominant discourses. After reading *Sister Anne’s Hands*, participants visually represented racism, for example, through iconic symbols and multi-colored objects (hands, squares), with race visually and metaphorically separated by line. Race was treated as an issue of equality rather than an issue of dominance, access, diversity, or desire (Janks, 2010) (Figure 27.3). By opening up spaces to understand regimes of visibility (van Winkel, 2005) and engaging participants in discussions of how discourses become internalized and reproduced in their own images, they became more critically aware of how and which images acted on them, and the cultural – and hegemonic – hold that these symbols had on how they represent dominant discourses.

**Using CVDA to study word clouds**

In their book, *Technology and Critical Literacy in Early Childhood* (Vasquez & Felderman, 2012), Vivian writes about an inquiry that she and her son TJ led with a group of young children (aged five to six years) in a co-op class and their parents just outside Washington, DC., in which they planted tomatoes, a study that Vivian called the “Tomato Trials” (p. 65–75). Vivian used Wordle, a word cloud software program, to study an inquiry project on planting, specifically tomatoes, which was part of the early childhood curriculum. This group of young children and adults used the tools of technology not just to seek information, but as a tool for critically analyzing the information they would gather on planting. The group analyzed a TV commercial, the Topsy Turvey Tomato Planter, which was available on YouTube. Children studied the commercial designer’s use of black and white and color video. The children noticed that black/white video was used to convey “back-breaking work” of planting tomatoes and featured a man. When the Topsy Turvey Tomato Planter was introduced, the commercial turned to color featuring a woman effortlessly planting tomatoes. Children discussed the overt message that only men can do back-breaking work, with the implicit message suggesting that women cannot. Children also compared two websites, Topsy Turvey and a Vegetable Garden site, using Wordle. Wordle gave prominence to the frequency in which particular words appeared in the online article. In the Vegetable Garden site, children identified which words in the word cloud were the largest, like
“tomatoes,” “grow,” “plant,” and “garden,” important words about planting tomatoes. They then analyzed the Topsy Turvey site, and noticed that the most frequent words used were “Topsy Turvy,” “order,” and “step,” important words about ordering this product. Children generated multiple uses and functions for Wordle: (1) analysis: to compare/contrast website articles to see which words are more frequently used and how readers/viewers are positioned, for example, gardeners or consumers; (2) editing: studying which words are used too frequently in a written text; (3) promoting and advertising: generating words to promote what a text might be about; and (4) art: to see Wordles as shapes, colors, metaphors, and symbols that can be overlaid onto photographs and other artworks.

Using CVDA to analyze teacher-generated paintings

Jerry conducted a series of workshops with teachers working with the paintings of artist Jacob Lawrence, an African American Harlem Renaissance painter (Harste et al., 2007). Teachers identified a critical issue they felt strongly about, and used any element of Jacob Lawrence’s artwork that they wanted to produce a painting that addressed this issue. Jerry introduced teachers to Jacob Lawrence by showing them some of his artwork, and talked about how Jacob Lawrence, single-handedly almost, alerted the world to what the black experience meant to African Americans growing up in the United States. He also showed the video Jacob Lawrence: The Glory of Expression (Freeman, 1999), after which he invited participants to try to take a critical stance for themselves on some aspect of literacy they felt strongly about. They wrote short reflections on what they were trying to say in their artwork and distilled their reflections into four-line poems that captured their intent and accompanied their paintings. In these studies, Jerry had done all this work analyzing these texts using ongoing critical literacy methods of analysis (Harste et al., 2007). However, when we reanalyzed these texts together and applied CVDA, we were surprised at what we found. Using CVDA allowed us to consider how teachers as artists positioned the people, objects, and their understanding of literacy in their paintings. The significance of this analysis was a breakthrough for us in terms of what it meant to be critical. How teachers viewed literacy, who gets to participate in literacy, and how they participate became much clearer in their paintings and four-line poems. We saw, for example, in Figure 27.4, how teachers understood and valued literacy in the traditional sense of reading (the book) and writing (book’s content), visually representing literacy as knowing how to read and write. The poem also clearly represented this understanding, “Open wide this book/and enter in.” This research allowed us to understand that despite all of what researchers at the time were doing to analyze data, they were not necessarily taking a pragmatic approach. Rather, they attended more closely to the semantic and syntactic systems of meaning operating in texts (Vasquez et al., 2017).

Using CVDA to analyze critical redesigning with technology

In 2016, we taught a summer institute focused on critical redesign and making with teachers and administrators (Vasquez et al., 2017) working with wet media, clay, and technology. We studied how knowledge of these modes could support children’s reading and production of images. Questions we asked included the following: Is making different from inquiry? What is the relationship between making and critical literacy? What role does critical literacy play in making? We were interested in how teachers used modes (visual, spatial, digital, written, among others) to represent a social issue. In Vivian’s technology workshop, institute participants created satirical art, from a critical literacy perspective, using a discarded piece of technology. The redesigned objects and their titles were data, alongside the discussion that accompanied these
projects. We studied teachers’ processes of redesign, the critical response to their project, and the extent to which they conveyed a message that positioned viewers and makers to take social action and/or be aware of the social issues that underpinned this redesign.

Where CVDA gets us

Activist, author, and conservationist Terry Tempest Williams (Toms & Williams, 2006) argued for the importance of an ethical stance towards life. She stated, “I think that, as children, the art that we are raised with seeps into our bloodstream. It becomes part of our DNA.” We suggest that CVDA enables us to understand, to some extent, participants’ DNA – the origin(s) of their representations and the discourses that underpin these representations. Further, CVDA enables us to engage participants of all ages in critical discussions and reflections on how texts – theirs and others – work in terms of modes, art elements, structural organization of objects, etc. We pose that the significance of CVDA lies in the reading, production, and analysis of visual and digital texts, texts that continually shape our “DNA,” and help us understand how we, as researchers, can build a more critically aware citizenry.

First, critical literacy provides children with another set of media skills to understand how power and language operate within texts. Discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis are
Critical visual discourse analysis

often applied to print-based and/or written texts, while visual discourse analysis is applied to school-generated and commercially generated visual texts. In combinatorial relationship, CVDA enables us to more systematically apply structural and discursive analyses to a range of visual and digital texts. As texts become increasingly modally mixed and complex, we suggest that CVDA provides a tool of analysis that can be applied to these intricate texts.

Second, as teacher educators and researchers, we invite young children and teachers to engage in practices driven by visual and digital modes and represent across modes, such as Wordles, paintings, and podcasts (Vasquez & Felderman, 2012), among others. CVDA positions us well to study how modes operate, the relationship between and among material-symbol-textmaker, and discourses that are culturally and linguistically embedded in representations. While we are well versed in conventional methods of qualitative analysis and have together authored a number of research studies, we also turn to other disciplines to build upon our work with CVDA. For example, we draw specifically upon art as a discipline to help us as researchers to respond to the function and value of art, both as an aesthetic object and as an object created from social practices, and to understand the role of the arts in making life meaningful. When this happens, new understandings are made in experience, and new ways of working in the world are opened (Greene, 2001). For example, texts like word clouds are not mere linguistic arrangements of words, but highlight the discourses that underpin written text through visual means. In essence, then, visually representing as a social practice involves understanding how art is a way of doing things in the everyday. Critical visual discourse analysis enables us to understand the social practices around which visual texts are produced – the mazes of representation, how different texts operate on viewers, and how participants represent others and objects in their own texts – and interpret the “DNA” or origins of these representations through discursive and structural approaches.

Practical application and future of CVDA

Maxine Greene (1995) argued that the ethical, the political, and the social cannot be separated from the imagination. We concur and argue that CVDA provides both a theory and method through which imagination in research is inextricably connected to the ethical, the political, and the social, and positions us as researchers to understand new possibilities in data. In this section, we offer some practical applications and the future of CVDA.

1 When research involves visual representations (print-based and/or digital), remixed texts, children’s literature, graphic novels, etc., we argue that the researcher must have a mindset that art as a discipline is amenable to analysis, and does not always necessitate a textmaker’s interpretation of her/his text. The humanities are filled with scholarly interpretations of classic artworks, classic literature, sculptures, and so on, and have been read, studied, and analyzed through a range of different lenses (critical, political, artistic, religious, etc.) with conclusions drawn and supported by disciplinary principles that guide this analysis. Critical visual discourse analysis is an approach to reading visual representations that systemically draws upon a number of disciplines including literacy, art, sociology, semiotics, among others to understand phenomena. Our analysis of a counter ad presented earlier demonstrates the complexity of CVDA which necessitates structural, discursive, and disciplinary understandings.

2 Research that involves analysis of visual representations should start from an inquiry perspective. For example, Vivian’s work with the Tomato Trials shows that young children ask sophisticated questions when viewing infomercials to understand gendered roles and particular work, and techniques, like color, emphasize these roles. Peggy’s work with children’s
drawings signals the importance of looking at children’s images across time and discursively to better understand how to support them, and to understand how young children easily reproduce gender stereotypes despite sustained discussions on alternative roles. Jerry’s work with teachers’ representations of literacy and how people and objects are positioned in paintings encourages all of us to critically look at how we have had our hands in the cookie jar, despite our good intentions, and how we might reposition ourselves more ethically in the world. We suggest, then, that work with CVDA enables people to learn to read image and discern ideologies and regimes of visibility that underpin these images.

If researchers are interested in CVDA, studies can be designed around visual representations that participants read, interpret, and reproduce. Our study of children’s literature was designed with two clear representational modes in mind: written reflection/interpretation and visual representation. We wanted to understand how messages in children’s literature are communicated, how participants responded to the systems of meaning in these picturebooks, and to what extent critical literacy informed their representations. By designing studies in this way, teachers can use CVDA with young children to read, interpret, analyze, and engage in sophisticated discussion of critical issues in children’s literature.

**Conclusion**

Eisner (2003) argued that “not everything knowable can be articulated in propositional form” (p. 379). We suggest that CVDA is a move towards knowing across modes rather than within one mode – written language – which often prevails in literacy research. We also forward that CVDA involves risky readings of visual representations that address social issues (Harste et al., 2000). Said another way, we position our analyses to look intentionally and differently at visual elements that comprise participants’ representations to understand what, where, and how underpinning discourses emerge and the practices around which representations are produced. In so doing, we lift the “lid of education” and see “the stuff inside . . . as the stuff of revolt” (Britzman, 1994, p. 276). That is, we take on critical researcher roles that imagine literacy education as something different – as something that signifies the importance of visual modes to communicate freshly – and which surprises itself through study findings. In working with CVDA, we recognize that art gives rise to ideas in studies that other systems of meaning may not, and allows us to imagine something different in data than what is often normalized and repressive.

**Note**

1 Hereafter called viewers.

**References**


