

Can making art lead to making change in the world? "I don't know how to do what I drew."

(Bad teacher-researcher! No 🍪🍪! 😊)



## Ludic Language Pedagogy Playground

<https://www.llpjournal.org/>

# Can making art lead to making change in the world? "I don't know how to do what I drew." (Bad teacher-researcher! No 🍪🍪! 😊)

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Social impact games  
So what?

#### Peer reviewers:

D.M. Jones  
Paul T Johnson  
James York  
Peter Hourdequin

### Key points

- **What is this?** A weird collection of thoughts, ideas, questions, and art related to confusion about whether language or art or anything can lead to real world action.
- **Why did you make it?** I'm interested in ideas and media and creativity and participation in society. How are those linked? In a lot of ways, I think.
- **Who is it for?** It's for anyone who has ever sketched an idea on a piece of paper and then done nothing with it. It's for anyone who struggles thinking about social issues. It's for anyone who hopes, somehow, to empower students and help transform them and society. Somehow.

### Tweet synopsis

"Play → Make → Share" works in Little Big Planet.  
#so\_what?  
But does making and sharing have any impact on Our Big Planet?  
#transformation  
#nodice in LLP MMM, please!

View at the LLP Playground: <https://www.llpjournal.org/2021/09/15/dehaan-can-making-art.html>

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## 1. Play → Create → Share

[Little Big Planet](#) is a game series in which players can play platforming (running and jumping and collecting items on the way to a goal, like classic Mario games) levels, create their own platforming levels, and share their creations with all the other players online. I've always loved the simplicity and thoroughness of their message: **Play, Create, Share**. Ideas move around in the ecosystem of the game and community.



[https://littlebigplanet.fandom.com/wiki/PLAY.\\_CREATE.\\_SHARE.\\_Demo](https://littlebigplanet.fandom.com/wiki/PLAY._CREATE._SHARE._Demo)

The game helped me understand and practice media literacy education. I played this game a lot and loved the ease with which I could play new levels, change them for myself, and the ability to upload them to the game server.

About a year after playing this game, I stumbled across David Buckingham's amazing [book](#): "Media Education: Literacy, Learning and Contemporary Culture" which discusses "critical consumption and reflective creation." I saw connections between Little Big Planet and Media Literacy Education:

Play	→	Critical Consumption
Create	→	Reflective Creation
Share	→	<a href="#">(in a class, or in a community)</a>

And I thought that the "discussion and analysis" work of Media Literacy Education takes place in the forums and community interactions.

Little Big Planet and David Buckingham's book inspired [our Game Camp project](#) (playing, analyzing, making and sharing games).



Rad logo by Yuka Yoshimura deHaan

## Game Camp



Play

Create



Share

## 2. Random readings

I heard that one power of art is that it helps the artist (child/student) **imagine** a possible reality or future. [Related related](#).

I read in Cook (2000) that language (jokes, riddles, puns, poetry, free speech, protest songs) **creates** an alternative reality that people can then engage with or around.

I now think about art and language as being “in the same boat” -- of someone using tools to express an idea and to communicate something to themselves or to others.

Related TED talk: Robinson uses language to imagine how we **solved** the climate crisis. To inspire action.

[https://www.ted.com/talks/kim\\_stanley\\_robinson\\_remembering\\_climate\\_change\\_a\\_message\\_from\\_the\\_year\\_2071](https://www.ted.com/talks/kim_stanley_robinson_remembering_climate_change_a_message_from_the_year_2071)<sup>1</sup>

The World's Largest Lesson (activities related to the SDGs) encourages “[ARTIVISM FOR NATURE ... show you care for nature](#).”

## 3. Art, language, multimedia

There are so many ways to communicate and to create some reality (for yourself, for others):

- Manga
- Pictures
- Movie
- Poem
- Story
- Dance
- Games
- Songs

People use media and language to create meaning.



[Image source \(creative commons license\)](#)

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<sup>1</sup> Comment from Peter Hourdequin: “This seems to relate to the field of ecolinguistics, which is essentially discourse analysis from an environmental perspective. <http://ecolinguistics-association.org/>” (August 25, 2021, 16:16)



So I did a little "experiment."

#### 4. What kind of future world do people want?<sup>2</sup> Can we use media and language to change the world?

I talked to my family.

I asked them

**"What future do you want?"**  
**"What world do you want?"**

I asked them to:



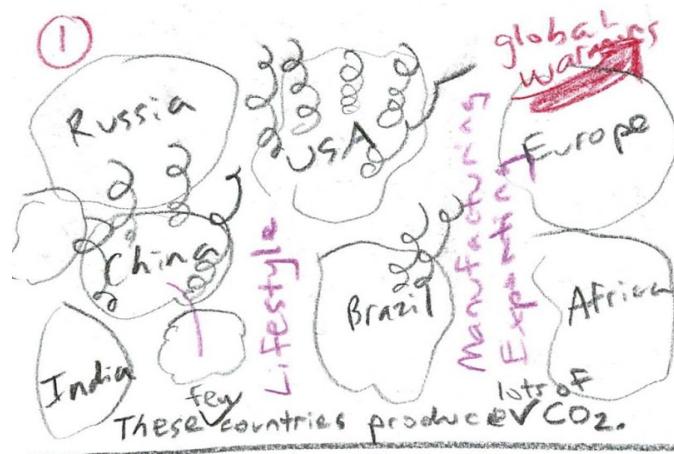
use some media (drawing, words, whatever they wanted) to create something (**to explore, answer and explore their answer**) for themselves.

#### 5. This is what they (we) made

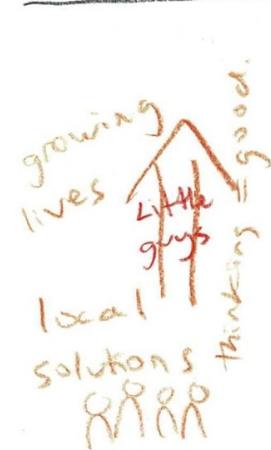


<sup>2</sup> Comment from Peter Hourdequin: "what present do we want is an important question too, no?" (August 25, 2021, 16:17). I agree. [Humans are bad at thinking about the future](#). I perhaps should have asked my family about the near future, or the present, to make things practical. Teachers might want to ask about the present rather than the future.





What if the other countries BOYCOTTED them?

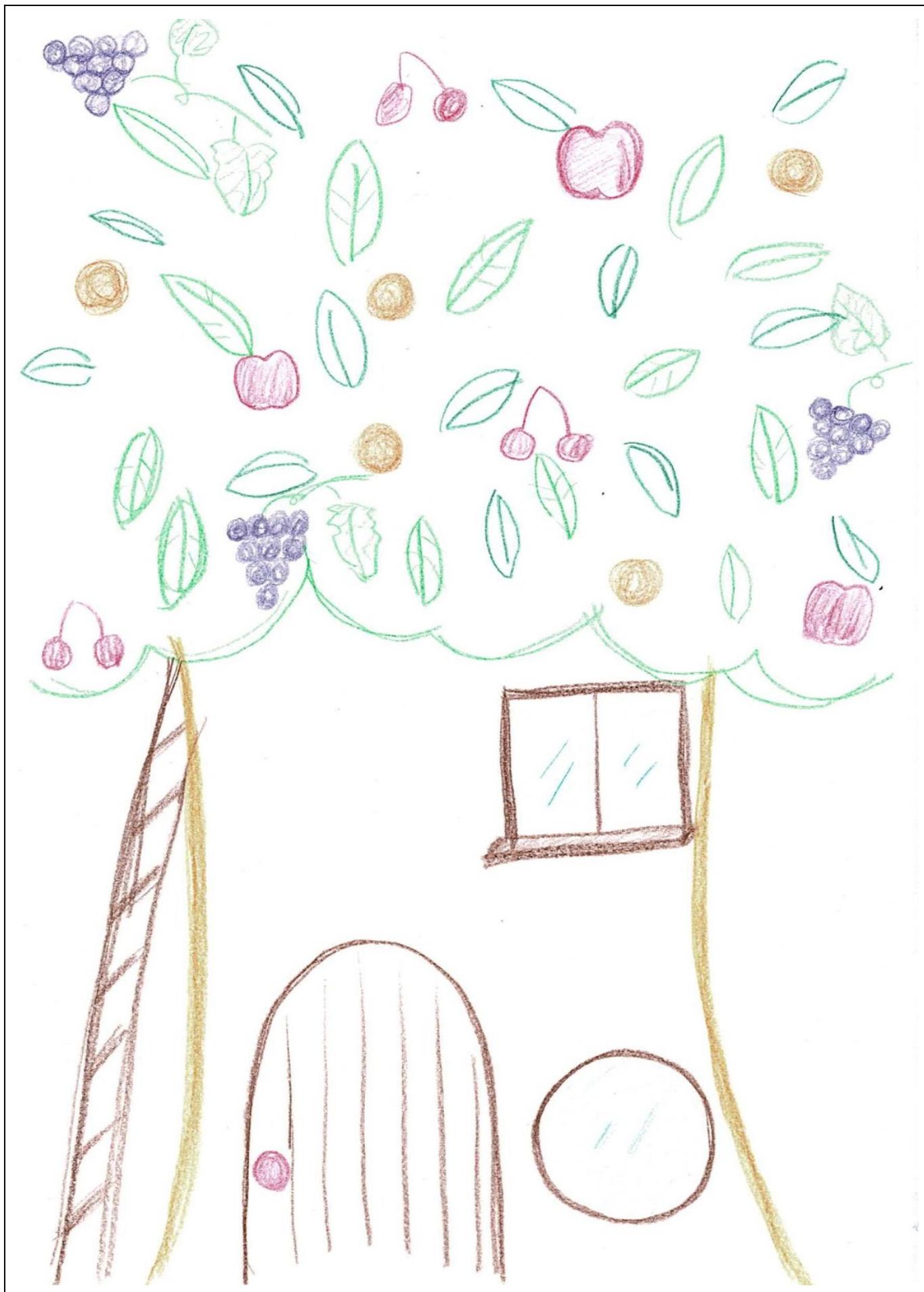


COOLER GREENER

④

BALANCED WORLD





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And, then, after they drew their pictures, I asked them about their impact on the world.

## 6. I asked them if they/we had changed the world or created anything. They/we said:

"I think I thought a little more about the economy."

"I didn't change."

"Before - nothing. I can't compare."

"The world didn't change. I didn't do anything."

"White paper turned colored."

"I am thinking about what I can do for the environment."

"Is change closer because you made this?"

"No no no. I haven't done anything."

"But you made that thing."

"It's a waste of paper."

"I haven't done anything."  
"But you made that thing."  
"It's a waste of paper."

"I don't know how to do what I drew."

"Does making things change the world?"

"By showing it to other people."

"Think about it more. Revise it. It may become real."

"I wish I could make something like this."

"If people have a really strong motivation, that person will create it."

"But if the idea is somewhat realistic or fantasy, it's totally different."

"Should I have said "take 15 minutes and do one thing to change the world?"

"People plant trees, to change the world, and then they stop."

"They lack money."

"They stop."

"I don't know how to do what I drew."



And then I thought about what they did and said.

## 7. Did their art change them? Did their art change the world?

Did my family change? Did the world change?

Absolutely. Everyone in my family's brains changed in some small way. They had to think about drawing. My family has the memory of creating their pictures. The pictures are still physically in my apartment. The world has those objects. We have the memory of creating and discussing those pictures together around our little table.

But, did the world really "change?"

Well, the world was not instantly transformed into what my family drew in their pictures. Their art did not lead them to creating in the real world what they thought about on paper. At least not yet.



And then I thought some more. My rambling thoughts are in the Appendix, along with comments and questions from reviewers that made me come to this realization:

## 8. Bad teacher-researcher. No 🍪🍪🍪 😊

Does making art: "draw the world you want" create that world?

No.

But that makes sense.

They drew a picture of the world they wanted.

They did what I asked them to do.

Maybe that experience will have some effect on them. It might be one tiny factor that changes them and connects to future experiences. But that's a die roll.

Die rolls, and random inputs and outputs, are not really something I want to think about as a teacher.

If I really had wanted them to create something that would change the world to what they want the world to be, I could have / should have asked them:

"Draw something that will make others change their behavior in line with the world you want to live in."  
(And then we could have studied provocative art examples, or effective poster advertisements.)

Or

"Draw something that will help you remember to act differently in line with the world you want to live in."

(And then we could have studied habits of mind and self-reflection and goal setting perhaps).

Die rolls, and random inputs and outputs, are not really something I want to think about as a teacher.

## 9. Actions connect in systems

If a player makes a level and shares it with other Little Big Planet players, they have changed that world. Game level designers are explicit about their goals. They want to make something to show other players. Maybe to spark excitement or revulsion or amazement. But there is a direct connection between creator and audience through art and action in a specific system.

If I had wanted my family to create change in the world, then we should have defined the system and what scale (in our home, in our neighborhood, online?) and to think about what tools we have at our disposal and what people we hope to influence, and how. We might do something on our own, or make something that provokes others to also think about what we might care about sharing with them.

## 10. I conflated the systems. Bad teacher-researcher. No 🍪🍪🍪 !!! 😅

Sure, that quick little art project might not lead to the global change shown in those pictures. Or it might, with some lucky rolls of the die and some good people and opportunities around us. Maybe nothing will happen. Most likely the latter.

I screwed up and combined and connected and mixed up the systems of:

- a closed game playing and game creation ecosystem (sharing = purpose and impact)
- and** a closed art make-show-tell-discuss community (making = purpose)
- and** a massive planet inhabited by so many factors and people and ideas.  
(making and sharing can have impact, if either designed carefully or luckily stumbled into).

As a teacher and a researcher and a father, I need to think about the scale I am trying to do things on, what is possible, what other people want to do, and take the time to think carefully, play carefully, learn carefully and act carefully.

For me, it's about thinking about what the goal of the learning (on a family level, or class level, or student level, or personal level) might be, and then figuring out what to do and how to do it to reach that goal. It's possible that the goal might be very clear:

→ Make a game that helps players to practice some vocabulary.

(And in that case, I would have my kids or students play and think about other games that do that goal well or poorly.)

But it's also possible that the goal might be more open-ended and explorative, to give students more agency.

→ Are you interested in games? Let's play a bunch of games.

(And in that case, I would make sure we talk after each one, and whatever sparks our curiosity we are going to follow whatever information gathering or creative or social participatory goals we might start pursuing.)

I did actually [make a worksheet](#) to help me and my students “work backwards” from a goal or “explore forwards” from an experience. (Not sure why I didn’t think of this earlier. The OPR LLPeers helped me remember this.)

**Example (starting with 5 and working backwards):**

1. What games do you need to play and understand?	→	2. What activities will help you gain a deep and broad understanding of the game in #1 and its connections to society?	→	3. What (else) do you need to do to prepare for your participatory project?	→	4. What participatory project do you want to do in the Game Terakoya seminar?	→	5. What is your long term goal?
<p>Maybe - a popular game - a game that is unknown in Japan - a game that has interesting historical information.</p> <p>- Maybe: “Railways of the World” or “Tales of the Arabian Nights”</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- play the game several times</li> <li>- discuss it with the teacher and classmates</li> <li>- read some information about games (e.g., why people like games)</li> <li>- find out information about the background of the game (e.g., the real history of railroads, the real culture of Arabia)</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I need to read reviews (boardgamegeek.com, amazon.com) of the game I choose to:</li> <li>-- understand how to write an attractive and effective review in English</li> <li>-- know what other gamers think of the game (so I can write something different / interesting)</li> <li>- I should write drafts</li> </ul>		<p>I want to write a game review that native English speakers will think is interesting.</p>		<p>I want to use English to communicate effectively online (in comments and forums)</p>

I need to start with:

- The right mindset and the right scale
- A clear understanding of methods, materials and mediation
- A clear understanding of who, what, where and why we are doing what we want to do
- And not expect half an hour with a piece of paper and some colored pencils to reshape the planet

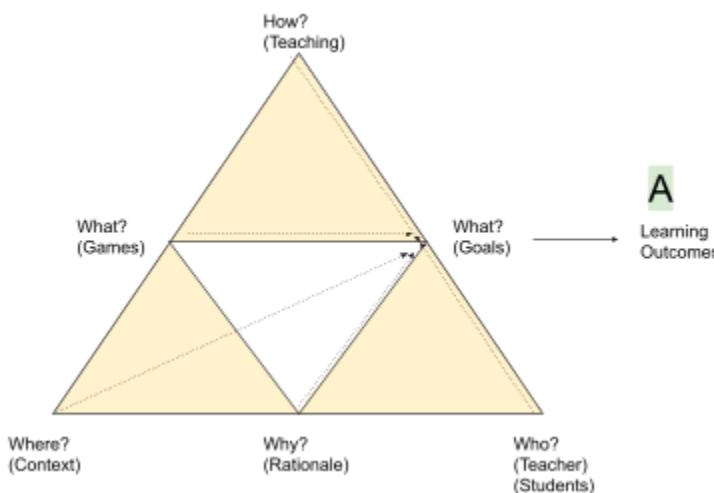
Maybe then art or language, or whatever we decide to make or do, for whatever purpose, can change the world.

## 10. Concluding by Connecting: “Ludic Language Pedagogy” - my journey

I teach language and literacy with and around games and other forms of play. Art and language are play.

In my deep dive into how to teach language and literacy with games (deHaan, 2019), I discussed, based on a year of working with a student in a very intensive fashion, the importance of goals, pedagogy, materials, teachers and games.

That project, and subsequent projects, helped me connect my realizations to activity theory and how I think about designing effective Ludic Language Pedagogy (deHaan, 2020). This is how I visualize how I plan, teach and research my LLP:



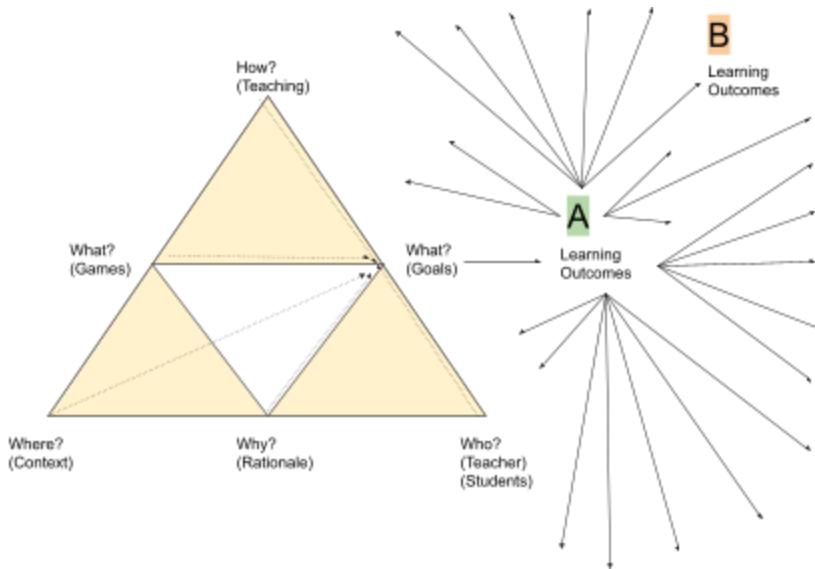
But that is not what I did in this Little Big Planet-inspired art experiment. What I did was something like this.

"Hey family, do A (make some art)."

"Cool. You accomplished A."

"Now, does your A suddenly also accomplish B (change the world)?"

"No? Huh. They don't / could / might never / absolutely / randomly connect? 😞 Weird."



Why did I expect B when I asked for A?      Bad teacher-researcher. No 🍪🍪 (😅)

If I want to be a good Ludic Language Pedagogy teacher and researcher, I need to think about clearer connections before, during and after I work with students or my family.

Why did I expect B when I asked for A?  
Bad teacher-researcher. No 🍪🍪 (😅)

## 11. Concluding by Connecting: "Ludic Language Pedagogy" - community work

For an even more grounded connection to what you can do in your classroom, take a look at Spano, York, deHaan and Bard's (2021) playground "One game, many approaches: How teachers can use a single game with any teaching methodology." We explored how different teaching approaches:

- Just play
- Present, practice, produce
- Task Based Language Teaching
- Pedagogy of Multiliteracies
- Connected Learning
- Game Design / Game Remixing

can use the same game (Monopoly) in different ways for different purposes.

"Just play" is just that: playing a game. Which might not be "bad." It might be a lovely afternoon, or bring a shy student out of their shell, or bring up an interesting cultural difference. But it's not going to directly, clearly or efficiently accomplish "bigger" goals like getting a high test score, landing a student their dream job, or making them or society "better" (however you define that).

To accomplish other goals (from more effectively learning grammar and vocabulary to transforming students, school or society), a teacher needs to look to those other methods. Playing is good, but “just playing” isn’t enough for some goals.<sup>3</sup>

And that’s what I conflated in my little art experiment and think piece here. I conflated “just make art” with “change the world.” Those might be connected, somehow, but if I really want to “change the world” I need to carefully plan, with my family or students or colleagues, how to do that and work carefully towards that.

Let’s not roll dice in our LLPs.<sup>4</sup> Let’s choose the goals we want for students and society, and then choose the best method and mediation to achieve them.

Let’s not roll dice in our LLPs.

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<sup>3</sup> This whole paper might connect to the idea of incidental/[tangential](#) learning with games?

<sup>4</sup> Unless a die roll could be a methodology? 🤔🤔🤔



## Appendix

### Or "initial ramblings of a crazy person with comments from very sane Open Peer Reviewers"

All of the following were initially submitted after

"I don't know how to do what I drew."

the comments in section 6.

The Open Peer Reviewers left comments, challenging various arguments I was trying to make. Then I went away and thought some more and re-wrote Sections 7-10.

I still think the ideas below are ... "useful." So I've kept them here.

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#### 💡 So what?

Did my family change? Did the world change?

They imagined something. They changed. The idea that they have is in their heads. The world now has those creations. Those ideas are a piece of media in my apartment. Perhaps they are one step closer to realizing that reality?

But, even though their art is now in the world, the world doesn't actually look like that now, just from them creating those multimodal realities.

Does making things change the world?

Does playing (with language, with media) change the world?

#### 💡 "No, playing with language and media doesn't change the world."

*Person A makes some art to raise awareness of global warming.*

*Person B records a song protesting endless war.*

They are not directly cooling the planet, or making war stop. It's possible that their actions (consuming certain products and natural resources) actually aggravate the situation.

And, if they don't share this art or language, they don't help the planet cool, or help the war stop, either.

If they do share this art or language, they still aren't cooling the planet or making war stop.

Perhaps Person C or Person D will do something to help the planet cool, or help the war stop.

Art and language can prompt action, but art and language don't actually create action.

#### People need to act

People create actions. Art or language might make them think to act in the world. But only a person's actions directly related to changing the world actually create change.

#### Systems

How would one person actually change the world?

A vote for a pro-environment, anti-war elected official might actually change the world?

A letter to a pro-environment, anti-war elected official might actually change the world?

(Those are both *communication and language* play ... hmmm).

Becoming a pro-environment, anti-war elected official might actually change the world?

Well, the official still needs to make laws (language) to make a company or organization change their actions. The official is not turning off a generator or flying troops out of a country.

### Proximity

Ok. Person A makes some art. Person B votes for Person C. Person C makes a law. Person D turns off the generator.

Maybe there's a chance that Person A's art creates some change in the world. But how would they ever know? How could I/you know that Art A turned off Generator D?

Change probably happens all the time from a million different factors that we can't see or imagine. Like throwing a million dice in a swimming pool and seeing how many of them balance on an edge or vertex?

### Direct action

Ok. So I think we shouldn't roll dice. We should take direct action.

Care about the environment? Go ahead: plant some succulents in your home. Feel better. Change the air quality around you a bit. Plant a tree if you can. Change your electricity provider. Vote for a pro-environment official. Do direct and indirect actions.

And if people (students, friends, children, colleagues) don't know what they want to do?

Do something. Talk to them. Learn more about the world. Then plan some action and be as thorough as you can with them.

I'm partial to how the Pedagogy of Multiliteracies transforms students and society, in direct ways.

<https://llpjournal.org/2020/08/26/the-who-and-transformative-actions-of-teaching-with-games.html>

## 💡 Related LLP/education ideas

The Pedagogy of Multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000) helps teachers and students move from:

Experience	→ Discussion/Analysis	→ Making
Available Designs	→ Redesigning	→ The redesigned

Zhou (2012) discusses entrepreneurship as being turning  
Ideas → Action

Jenkins et al. (2006) discuss the "participation gap" in youth. They do not know how to act in society.

## 💡 Cycles

Little Big Planet has a lovely loop of  
Play → Make → Share

## 💡 So what?

Players in Little Big Planet changed the ecosystem of the game because what they made directly connected to other players, and other players played their games. Players, by making, **could** change the "world" of Little Big Planet. Other players experienced and learned and appreciated what others made.

But did the art that my family made change the world?  
Does playful language and playful media change the world?

## Researcher gap. So what?

Lots of people talk about playing games. There are social impact games, games for change, educational games, gamification schemes.

Does experiencing a game actually matter?

Especially if a student doesn't discuss or understand it?

Especially if a student doesn't use the game to create an alternate reality?

And especially if a student doesn't act in the world based on their understanding?

### Does experiencing a game actually matter?

Are there levels of benefit to media based realities?

Is it "better" for a student to draw a picture of a happy planet?

Or make a game about a happy planet?

Or does that stuff not matter at all?

Is sharing a game, or making a game, or playing a game, any different, at all? Are any of these games closer to reality? Or are none close to reality at all?

Is only real-world action actually close to reality? Is it the only thing that matters? Is game playing, making and sharing actually a waste of time, and harmful, since it takes students away from real world problems and actions?<sup>5</sup>

Should students be playing games, watching videos, or reading newspapers in class

When they could be outside doing something in their own neighborhood?

Maybe they should be doing both, at different times?

How do students get transformed?<sup>6</sup> Does the Pedagogy of Multiliteracies actually transform/redesign students and the world? Or are there more effective or radical transformative pedagogies or actions that teachers should be thinking about and researching?

What is better for transforming students?

Playing a game?

Making a game?

Sharing a game?

Or actually taking an action in the real world<sup>7</sup>, however small that action might be?

Should students play good games? Or make good games?

Should students watch art? Or make art?

Should students read ideas? Or write and make ideas?

All of these, of course.

Should students join events? Or participate in projects?

Or should they make events? And get others to help them participate in projects?

<sup>5</sup> Comment from Paul Johnson: "Making, sharing, and playing games is something we do in the real world. And different virtues can be developed and exercised in-game, for example, patience, charity, kindness, etc. If a player is charitable to another player in an mmorpg, that is an real instantiation of charity. And vices can also be developed and exercised in game as well, for example, greed, hatred, bigotry. Gamers who play online often experience bullying and racism. That it happens in-game makes it no less evil or harmful, especially if the person being bullied considers the game to be a safe zone." (August 30, 2021, 19:47)

<sup>6</sup> Comment from DM Jones: "...and be conscious and virtuous transformers? (more than meets the eye) [Eudaimonia](#)" (August 25, 2021, 01:45)

<sup>7</sup> Comment from Paul Johnson: "The idea that games are not a part of the real world seems incorrect. Both virtues and vices can be developed and exercised, and friendships can be made and lost, all in-game." (August 30, 19:51)

How do students get transformed?

Does the Pedagogy of Multiliteracies actually transform/redesign students and the world?

Or are there more effective or radical transformative pedagogies or actions that teachers should be thinking about?

### Maybe it's all about steps?

Maybe art is about playing, and safe spaces. It's (perhaps) less risky to scribble on a piece of paper for a few minutes than it is to step outside and similarly move pieces and people around in one's neighborhood?

And then after making art, then students take real world action.  
Real world action must be scary for students and kids.

Maybe it's like steps in making a house?

First I could sketch a house.  
Then draft blueprints for my house.  
Then order materials, find a lot, organize labor for my house.  
Then actually build my house?

Maybe there are steps to action, and each step along the way is a chance for students to get more confidence in their ideas and closer and closer to real world action?

What if they get lost along the way?

When should students take real world action?

### 👉 Little Big Planet → Actions on our real planet. A better cycle? A pivot point?

Maybe real world actions need a better cycle playing, making, sharing.  
Or from playing to making to real world action.

Where is the pivot point?

Maybe students could:

Play a game  
Then make a game  
OR act  
OR act in game  
Then share?

Students could

Watch some media.  
Then they could make the same media.  
Then try another loop.  
And then participate in society?

## Suggestions for teachers

Here are some lesson plans. If you try one, let me know. :)

Some art	Some action	Some steps	Some poking
1. What kind of world do you want? Make it in art. 2. Discuss whether students or the world changed.	1. What kind of world do you want? 2. Do something in the world to make that world a reality. 3. Discuss how the world changed, and students changed.	1. What kind of world do you want? 2. Make it in art. Depict your ideal goal. 3. Now what? What can you/we do to make that a reality? 4. Take a small step to make that world a reality.	1. Ask students to show examples of media of the world that they want to live in. 2. Ask them "so what?" Is the world any closer to becoming this?