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ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

Reimagining the “Well” (Digitally) Literate Body: Lessons From Children’s Diverse (Digital)-Literacies-in-the-Body With Videogames at Home

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ABSTRACT

This article draws on the notion of literacies-in-the-body to reexamine findings from a study on children’s (7–12) digital play and well-being, reimagining what is meant by a “well” (digitally) literate body in childhood. Recent literacy scholarship highlights that children feel, perform, and produce literate knowledge across settings—yet in formal education, their bodies are often monitored and corrected according to narrow cultural norms of the (il)literate and (un)well child. Drawing on a recent ecoculturally-informed, home-based study with 20 UK children and their families, we consider children’s bodies at (digital) play as a way of thinking otherwise about both (digital) literacy and well-being. A multimodal analytical approach is used, drawing attention to the embodied and contextually situated interactions between children, digital devices and videogame texts. Our analyses illustrate diverse embodied operational, cultural, and critical (digital) literacy practices within family ecologies that support dimensions of well-being, which are both eudaimonic and hedonic in nature. Implications for (digital) literacy education and research methodology are discussed.

1 | Introduction

Education is often positioned as a panacea for social inequalities, not least through a passionate, but sometimes narrow, focus on (il)literacy as (non-)mastery of a set of discrete skills (e.g., Lee and Burkam 2002; Uddin 2024). Literacy education in particular is routinely framed as vital to children’s well-being (e.g., Hunn et al. 2023). The ability to read and write—typically understood as “literacy”—does indeed offer many children important opportunities to relax, feel confident and understand the views of others (Clark et al. 2024). However, dominant discourses tend to privilege fixed, de-contextualized conceptions of literacy (Clark 2018; Flewitt and Roberts-Holmes 2015), while foregrounding a narrow range of predominantly eudaimonic well-being *outcomes*, including academic success, social belonging, and *future* economic security (e.g., Derby et al. 2022; Hunn et al. 2023).

Such frameworks often overlook the complexity of causality, including the influence of socio-economic and cultural capital, and the difficulty of determining directional relationships between literacy and well-being. They also serve to position the child as “becoming” rather than “being” (James et al. 1998), locating the importance of (literacy) education within neoliberal, future-oriented logics: children and young people are seen as human capital being prepared for future roles in the economy (Biesta 2006). Within such logics, the relation between literacy development and children’s well-being is perhaps often taken for granted: in the future, it is imagined, children will enjoy the benefits of their intellectual labour in the now, rather than acknowledging that well-being can be, and is, experienced through literacy in moments in the here and now. As Ahmed (2010) articulates compellingly in the chapter “Happy Futures,” emotions need not serve a particular object in order to have value; “pointless emotions are not

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meaningless or futile” (p. 198). Much literacy research has neglected the ways in which learners experience literacies as immanence, although affect-oriented literacy scholars have conversely centered immanence as a vital component of literacy experience (e.g., Boldt 2021; Ehret 2018).

In contrast with more autonomous framings (B. V. Street 1984), research within the New Literacy Studies tradition has long reconfigured literacy as literacies: dynamic, socially situated practices that children engage in well beyond the static set of skills emphasized in school. This body of work has long established that children’s literacies fulfill multiple social and emotional purposes, often unrelated to conventional educational attainment (e.g., Barton and Hamilton 2012). Barton’s seminal text, *Local Literacies* (1998), showed how small, everyday acts of reading and writing in the lives of adults (e.g., letter-writing or curating a personal recipe book) generate local forms of pleasure, connection and calm—momentary experiences of well-being that may indeed cumulatively support well-being in the longer term. However, the role of children’s *bodies* in literacy and well-being remains underexplored. Recent scholarship has begun to illuminate how embodied literacy practices (e.g., Hackett and Somerville 2017; Johnson 2017) and digital literacy practices (e.g., Cárdenas Curiel et al. 2025; Ehret and Hollett 2014) are central to how children feel, perform, and produce literate knowledge across settings. However, recent work also demonstrates how schools discipline children’s movements in line with normative ideals of the (il)literate body (Dixon 2010). Policing of children’s “well” literate bodies is executed in both specific policy and curriculum guidance and less tangible, cultural expectations. In England, for instance, the current Key Stage 1 and 2 curriculum descriptions for handwriting emphasize a *statutory* requirement for children to “sit correctly at a table, holding a pencil comfortably and correctly” (Department for Education (DFE) 2013, 24). Dixon’s work (Dixon 2010) shows how such practices serve to limit the ways in which children’s bodies can *move with* literacies, whereas Dernikos (2020) demonstrates how sensory cues such as sound affectively orient bodies and contribute to producing students as “successful” or “unsuccessful” readers.

Although this work offers valuable insights, explicit engagement with the notion of *well-being* remains rare, and theories of embodied literacy are less commonly extended to conceptualize children’s digital practices. Conversely, the “wellness” of children’s bodies at digital play has frequently been viewed through the lens of physical health, with research attending to concerns such as sedentary behavior or obesity (e.g., Goodman et al. 2020). Recently, some public discourse has taken a more optimistic turn, supported by scholarly work highlighting digital play’s potential to foster intelligence (Sauce et al. 2022), digital competence (Marsh et al. 2021) and curriculum knowledge (Ellison and Evans 2016). Nonetheless, such claims are often tethered to instrumental educational outcomes, diverging from the historically recognized intrinsic value of play. At the same time, interest in critical digital literacy (Pangrazio and Selwyn 2023) continues to grow, often framed as essential for protecting children from harm (e.g., Ey 2024; Kargin and Demir 2023). Despite a growing recognition of the importance of critical digital literacy, little research has explored how a diverse range of embodied digital literacy practices in

everyday life might themselves be generative of well-being beyond *protection*. The interplay between children’s bodies, digital literacies, and well-being remains under-researched and under-theorized.

Addressing these absences, this article draws on a New Literacies framing to examine how children’s embodied (digital) literacy practices at home intersect with well-being. Our work builds on scholarship that conceptualizes literacy as the everyday, multimodal and embodied experiences children have within and beyond reading, writing, listening, and speaking (Johnston et al. 2022; Mackey 2002, 2011). We consider children’s bodies at digital play not as incidental, but as sites through which literacies and well-being are produced. By understanding these practices as situated and diverse, we aim to resist deficit framings and generalizations and unsettle autonomous understandings of children’s digital and media play. Instead, we adopt an intersectional, strengths-based lens (Alper et al. 2016) to invite more contextual and ideological framings of children’s digital engagements. Our ethnographically-informed approach situates children’s digital play within the specificities of their lifeworlds, drawing on Prinsloo’s (2005) notion of digital tools as “placed resources” and Ang’s (1996) reminder that individuals are always embedded in social, cultural and material relationships and structures that mediate their digital choices, actions and experiences. We do not assume children’s experiences reflect static social or cultural categories; however, we explore how digital play is produced through the entanglement of personal and contextual forces (Scott et al. 2023). In doing so, we interrogate the idea that literacy education—conceived narrowly as skill acquisition—is a/the “solution” to well-being and social inequities. Instead, we consider how attention to children’s *existing* and in-the-moment embodied (digital) literacy practices at home might offer a more expansive view of the well-being benefits of digital play. We also consider how this attention might contribute to reshaping ideas about what the inequality “problem” in literacy education is as well as how it might be addressed. The study thus examines how children’s video and digital game play within family contexts creates spaces for embodied and affective meaning-making that may exceed schooled expectations of literacy and how such practices relate to children’s experiences of well-being.

The research informing this article draws on a broader international project on children’s digital play and well-being (2022–2023) conducted in the UK, South Africa, Australia and Cyprus. Although findings from the full dataset are reported elsewhere (Scott et al. 2024), this article focuses on a UK-based subset: 20 children aged 7–12. The richness and scale of the wider qualitative dataset necessitated a narrower analytic focus; accordingly, this article primarily presents some overall findings associated with the UK data, before attending more closely to the digital literacy practices of three children—Malik (12), Dylan (7) and Penny (9). Within the broader spectrum of children’s digital play—which extends beyond activity *directly with* a digital technology’s affordances to encompass a wide array of playful practices (Parry and Scott 2019)—this study placed particular emphasis on video and digital games, including commercial, educational and casual games across platforms. Although the wider project examined several themes (Scott et al. 2024), this article is written with the following questions in mind:

1. What are children's diverse, situated play and embodied (digital) literacy practices with videogames?
2. How do these situated practices relate, in different ways, to children's well-being?
3. How might a focus on well-being shift understandings of the purpose of (digital) literacy and what it means to be (digitally) literate?

The study aligns with an ethnographic logic of inquiry (Green and Nixon 2005), in which theoretical commitments, methodological design and analytic processes are treated as mutually constitutive. Conceptualizing literacy as embodied and ecoculturally situated requires attention to children's everyday practices within home contexts; consequently, the study adopted a home-based and ethnographically-informed approach. The multimodal analytic framework was designed to trace literacies-in-the-body as they emerge through the interplay of children, digital technologies and family environments.

2 | Grounding Literature: Theorizing the “Well” (Digitally) Literate Body in Childhood

What does it mean for a child's literate—or digitally literate—body to be “well”? The answer is contingent on how well-being is conceptualized and on how literacy and digital literacy are defined and valued. Understandings of what it means to “be literate”—and of how literacy might contribute to well-being—are shaped by the purposes we ascribe to literacy, the bodies we center and the contexts in which these practices unfold. This review brings together scholarship on literacy, embodiment, digital play and children's well-being to situate the study's investigation of (digital)-literacies-in-the-body within a range of relevant, intersecting scholarship. We begin by examining how relationships between literacy and well-being have typically been conceptualized within educational policy and research. We then turn to work in New Literacy Studies and related scholarship that offers alternative ways of understanding how meaning-making is experienced through bodies. Building on this perspective, the review considers research on children's digital play within (post)-digital childhoods, foregrounding the hybrid material-digital environments in which literacy practices unfold. Finally, we foreground an underexplored site for further inquiry across these bodies of work: despite growing recognition of embodied literacy practices and complex relationships between digital play and well-being, relatively little research has examined how children's embodied digital literacy practices and well-being are co-constituted in their everyday play at home. Highlighting this as an important site for further inquiry establishes the conceptual foundation for the present study and informs its ethnographically-informed analytic approach.

2.1 | Literacy, Well-Being and the “Well” Literate Child in Research and Policy

Research linking literacy and children's well-being has often been shaped by developmental and skills-based paradigms that position literacy as an individual competence, associated with cognitive, instrumentally educational and future economic

outcomes. However, children's subjective well-being is multifaceted, relational, and deeply shaped by context. In conceptualizing well-being for our own study, we drew on a framework developed in collaboration with UNICEF (2021), which considers three interrelated domains: how children feel about themselves (e.g., autonomy, purpose, competence), their relationships (with caregivers, educators, and peers), and their environments (e.g., home, school, online spaces). Traditionally, subjective well-being has been theorized through two primary lenses: hedonic and eudaimonic (Ryan and Deci 2000; Huta and Waterman 2014). The eudaimonic perspective frames well-being in terms of flourishing and self-actualization, encompassing six key dimensions: autonomy, personal growth, self-acceptance, purpose, mastery and positive relationships (Ryan and Deci 2000). In contrast, hedonic accounts foreground embodied experience, emphasizing subjective happiness, positive affect and life satisfaction (Ryan and Deci 2000). Traditional theorizations of eudaimonic and hedonic well-being have informed distinct research trajectories, with eudaimonia commonly being positioned outside of subjective well-being. By many accounts, eudaimonic well-being is strongly associated with the future, in terms of long-term flourishing, whereas hedonic well-being is generally considered as primarily associated with short-term pleasure and gratification. However, recent scholarship suggests that such divisions are more theoretical than empirical (Huta 2022, 512), advocating instead for an integrated, holistic approach (Disabato et al. 2016).

Educational and policy discourses surrounding children's well-being sometimes implicitly align with such distinct temporal logics. Hedonic well-being tends to be associated with children as beings in the present, whereas eudaimonic well-being is often aligned with a positioning of children as *becomings*—future adults in the making (Ryan and Deci 2000; James et al. 1998). Such an implicit alignment can be observed in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (2019) concept note, which asks: “what kinds of competencies (knowledge, skills, attitudes and values) [will] today's students need to thrive in and shape the future for better lives and for individual and societal well-being” (p. 8). Similarly, the UK's Character Education Framework (Department for Education 2019), aimed at primary and secondary age children (ages 5–16), presents a focus on developing character traits (e.g., grit, perseverance, self-regulation) that prepare children to become successful, well-rounded adults, foregrounding: “the ability to remain motivated by long-term goals, to see a link between effort in the present and pay-off in the longer-term” (p. 7). Though the UK's EYFS also sits within a wider future-focused policy landscape, early years pedagogy and well-being practice have traditionally placed greater emphasis on children's needs and rights *in the now*. Ofsted's (2024) early years inspection handbook, for example, emphasizes the need for children to “feel safe” and to be “secure and happy.”

Within much literacy scholarship, children's vocabulary and phonological awareness are taken as indicators of “proper development” and communicative competence (e.g., Hart and Risley 2003). Literacy, framed as mastery of discrete skills, is often positioned as essential to children's well-being. For instance, Hunn et al.'s (2023) international systematic review of 17 studies found a significant association between lower literacy and increased mental health difficulties, albeit mediated by structural factors such as poverty. Their analysis privileges largely eudaimonic

indicators of well-being, suggesting that limited literacy restricts opportunities for civic engagement (Cree et al. 2012) and access to well-paid employment (Dugdale and Clark 2008). The UK's National Literacy Trust (Clark et al. 2024) reports that children who are highly engaged in reading and writing demonstrate significantly better mental well-being than their less engaged peers, citing both “immediate and longer-term benefits” (p. 25). Such approaches largely neglect how well-being is lived and experienced relationally in children's bodies within everyday literacy practice.

Such implicit alignments also have critical implications. As Wyn and White (1997) have argued, youth policy frequently positions older children and young people chiefly as future workers and citizens in the making, placing greater emphasis on their anticipated economic and social roles than their present rights, needs and well-being. Scholars in the “new” sociology of childhood have long resisted these future-oriented framings, calling instead for recognition of children's lived experiences, perspectives, and agency in the now—not just as preparation for adult life, but as lives that matter in and of themselves (James et al. 1998). In this light, the dominant privileging of eudaimonic, future-facing well-being can be seen as complicit in the marginalization of children's present realities and rights within education systems. Recent work in education research has described such challenges to universal models of development and flourishing through the concept of pluriversality, which recognizes the coexistence of multiple, locally grounded ways of knowing and being well, rather than a single, normative trajectory (Perry 2021). From this perspective, children's well-being cannot be understood as a universal developmental endpoint, but rather as emerging through diverse relational and cultural practices. This orientation resonates with our focus on literacies-in-the-body as situated, embodied enactments of well-being within specific family ecologies. Moreover, such framings of well-being risk universalizing a narrow, middle-class conception of what it means to “flourish” and to support the flourishing of one's children. As Gillies (2006) observes, notions of well-being and good parenting are deeply classed and culturally situated. Families from different social and cultural backgrounds may emphasize investment in a child's feelings of safety, self worth and justice over the individualized, future-oriented ideals privileged in policy discourse.

2.2 | Literacies-in-the-Body: An Embodied Alternative

In contrast, New Literacy Studies perspectives and related sociocultural scholarship reconceptualize literacies not as a set of decontextualized skills, but as embodied social practices, emerging through relationships, environments, and cultural participation. To conceptualize what children's literacy and digital literacy are—and what they are for—we drew on Green's 3D model of literacy (Green 1988; see also Green and Beavis 2012) in dialogue with New Literacy Studies perspectives that situate literacies as always entangled within social, cultural, and material relations (B. V. Street 1984; Pahl and Rowsell 2012). Consistent with Street's ideological model, literacy is understood in our own study as a socially situated practice; however, our study extends such perspectives by examining how literacies are

also enacted through embodied, affective, and material relations within everyday family ecologies. Building on affect-oriented reworkings of foundational literacy theories, literacy events can be understood not (primarily) as encounters between human subjects and textual artifacts, but as sites of circulating *vitality* (Boldt 2021). Drawing on Snaza's (2021) discussion of Boldt's concept of *vitality affect*, agency is located in the literacy event itself—an emergent movement of energy, relation, and feeling that exceeds any individual element. From this perspective, literacy does not simply occur within events; rather, literacies are animated by the vitality that moves through them.

Green's model, meanwhile, articulates literacy through three interwoven dimensions: the operational, cultural, and critical. The operational encompasses the technical skills required to read, write, and make meaning across modes and contexts. The cultural refers to the social and semiotic systems in which language and meaning are embedded, recognizing that to become literate is to participate in culture. The critical dimension foregrounds the non-neutrality of texts and practices, emphasizing both critical analysis of power and the potential for personal and collective meaning-making. Green (1988) defines this stance as entailing both “the means to reflect critically on what is being learned and taught” and “to take an active role in the production of knowledge and meaning” (p. 163).

Although the link between literacy and well-being is often framed in normative developmental and economic terms, relatively little research has examined the forms of well-being implicit in diverse literacy practices at home—particularly hedonic and affective forms of well-being as lived and felt within children's bodies as they move with literacies. However, emergent work informed by posthumanism (e.g., Hackett and Somerville 2017) and the affective turn (e.g., Sherbine 2019) has highlighted the ways in which children feel, perform, and produce literate knowledge across settings. This scholarship has shifted focus from literacy as internal cognitive mastery to a view of meaning-making that arises through dynamic, situated, and sensory engagements with the world. It has challenged Cartesian dualisms, reconfiguring children's bodies not as passive vessels but as vital participants in literate practice (Johnson 2017). Jones (2013) conceptualized embodied literacies as those “embedded in, performed through, and experienced as bodies” (p. 525), a definition that underscores the affective, sensory, and performative dimensions of children's meaning-making. Building on this, studies have explored children's embodied responses to literacy in formal education (Leander and Rowe 2006; Dernikos 2020), as well as the performative enactment of literate knowledge through movement and gesture (Taylor 2014; Sherbine 2019; Mackey 2002). This research has repositioned the body as central to literacy—not as peripheral or supplementary, but as constitutive of meaning-making itself. Meanwhile, affect theory (Sherbine 2019), pays attention to the unconscious forces or intensities that “work to support, motivate and inspire literate engagements” (Lenters 2016, 286). Affect and emotion are understood as relational forces, distributed across bodies, materials, and texts (Truman et al. 2021; Ehret and Rowsell 2021). Passions and desires, in this framing, become vital drivers of children's literacy practices at home (Leander and Boldt 2012; Lenters 2016). In this context, Flewitt et al. (2015) have shown how children's communicative

repertoires emerge through gaze, movement, and touch, whereas Kuby and Rowsell (2017) offered the concept of “transduction” to describe shifts across bodily, material, and linguistic forms in literacy events. K. E. Wohlwend (2011) similarly documented how children enact literacy through multimodal play, using gesture, spatial positioning, and voice. Hackett (2014) extended this work by foregrounding kinesthetic and spatial literacy practices, particularly those unfolding in informal and intergenerational settings. Crucially, embodiment here is not an afterthought, but a generative site of meaning-making. Mackey’s (2002) notion of “playing the text” is particularly helpful in its insistence that textual consumption and production are always interconnected: even the still child is playing the text through pretending or imagining, performing, engaging with the rules of the game, strategizing, orchestrating, interpreting, fooling around, and “not working.” As Mackey (2002) insists, embodied literacies are not “other than” traditional literacies; the body—hands, eyes, balance, and breath—routinely directs attention through habitual, often imperceptible, actions.

Although links between embodied literacies and well-being are rarely made explicit in such literature, they are nonetheless implicit. Even in the absence of direct attention to well-being, embodied literacies scholarship has nonetheless foregrounded how dominant ideas of the “well” literate body circulate within schools and policies. Scholars have shown how children’s bodies are monitored and regulated in ways that align with normative scripts of the (il)literate child (Dixon 2010). English statutory curriculum guidance for handwriting, for example, encodes both bodily discipline and a particular vision of well-being. Literacy curricula often demand a narrowly defined bodily comportment—stillness, upright posture, controlled motor movement—as implicit evidence of literacy readiness (Hackett and Somerville 2017). Regulation also functions through diffuse cultural expectations (e.g., Dixon 2010; Dernikos 2020). In this way, the expected “schooled body” is a docile one, with literacy success measured not only by cognitive performance but by behavioral compliance. Johnston et al. (2022) have argued that bodies enacting the “right” kind of literacies are more likely to be deemed successful and well-adjusted, aligning with institutional ideals of well-being tied to academic achievement, social belonging, and future economic potential.

Although connections to well-being remain largely implicit, these shifts offer new possibilities for examining how literacy is experienced through the body. Scholars have highlighted how diverse literacy practices—especially those grounded in children’s everyday and cultural contexts—foster confidence, self-expression, and meaning-making (Hull and Schultz 2002; Pahl and Rowsell 2012; Hackett and Somerville 2017). Even if these benefits are not framed in terms of “well-being” per se, the emphasis on identity, agency, and belonging implies a strong connection between literacies and children’s social and emotional well-being.

2.3 | Digital Play and (Post-)Digital Childhoods

Within contemporary childhoods, digital play provides a particularly generative site for examining embodied literacy practices, as children’s meaning-making increasingly unfolds across

hybrid material–digital environments. Both “play” and “digital play” are complex phenomena, and definitions are much debated (Marsh et al. 2016). Many studies focus narrowly on “core gamers” (Scharkow et al. 2015); often competitive male players pursuing action or shooter genres. Both beyond and within this group, players pursue a wide range of games and modes of play that meet varied interests and needs, including both “traditional” videogames and a range of so-called “casual” apps and games. Indeed, children’s digital play varies beyond this: children sometimes play directly with a device’s affordances (e.g., a game app), pretend to play a digital game, or use a tablet to represent another object (such as a smartphone or non-digital book) or draw on the digital in imaginative play (Scott 2018). The present study was designed primarily to attend to children’s uses of video and digital games across various platforms. This included commercial videogames, educational apps, creative platforms, and casual mobile games. For that reason, we retain the term “videogames” to signify the primacy of children’s play directly with a device’s affordances in the study’s framing, while noting that the study employed an expansive definition of videogames, attending to any digital game played by children in the study. We also retain the term to bring our article into conversation with studies on videogames and well-being that employ a much narrower definition. However, we acknowledge that the term “videogames” is therefore something of a metonym in its use in the present paper. Acknowledging that children’s playful practices with digital technologies span far beyond digital and videogames, however, we also paid attention to broader forms of play and digital play, knowledge which served to *contextualize* our understandings of children’s more specific, video (or “digital”) game play in each case study. Videogame play has been studied extensively in relation to children’s cognitive, social, and affective development (e.g., Griffiths 2002; Gee 2003; Johannes et al. 2021), offering rich opportunities to examine embodied engagement, problem-solving, and collaborative play.

Digital devices and texts have long featured in children’s communicative practices both in and beyond school, yet debates persist over how digital literacies should be conceptualized. Addressing this complexity, Marsh (2005) defined children’s digital literacy as encompassing both the literacy practices linked to digital devices and a broader range of communicative acts mediated by new technologies, recognizing the multimodal nature of young children’s meaning-making. Drawing on Kress’s (2003) conception of literacy as “lettered representation” (p. 140), one instance of an embodied digital literacy might involve a child texting friends via in-game chat, navigating the screen through tapping and swiping. Alternatively, informed by B. Street’s (2004) emphasis on “communicative practices” (p. 326), another form might involve a child responding to the auditory cues of an enemy’s “attack” in a combat game by using embodied knowledge to maneuver a controller and deploy their troops in defense.

Such practices are not static, but continually shifting, with children increasingly participating in digital cultures that blur producer-consumer boundaries. In the UK, nearly 4 in 10 (39%) children aged 8–17 in 2024 reported uploading their own videos to online platforms, with TikTok remaining the most popular for this purpose; additionally, one-third (33%) of 8–11-year-olds reported using artificial intelligence tools for a range of purposes (Ofcom 2024). Research on children’s play increasingly

highlights the deep entanglement of digital and non-digital practices—a phenomenon often framed through the lens of postdigitality. Pettersen et al. (2025), for example, describe children moving fluidly between Minecraft and physical block-building, whereas Potter et al. (2024) document how digital storytelling became enmeshed with physical den-making during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Although initially developed for school contexts, Green and Beavis' (2012) tripartite model has since informed understandings of children's digital literacy across home and formal learning spaces (e.g., Colvert 2015). For example, Sefton-Green et al. (2016) extend the 3D model to digital environments, framing operational digital literacy as the skills and competencies needed to read, write, and make meaning across media and modes (e.g., decoding print, using images and movement effectively, operating digital technologies for communication, and navigating information sources). The authors define cultural digital literacy as the understandings and practices shaped by engaging in digital literacy within specific social and cultural contexts and critical digital literacy as the ability to critically engage with digital texts and artifacts, examining issues like power, representation, agency, and authenticity. To ground these dimensions within lived contexts, we also draw on Prinsloo's (2005) concept of digital technologies as "placed resources": digital practices, although often framed as global, are shaped by—and co-constitutive of—local ecologies. However, research on digital play has often separated questions of literacy from those of well-being, limiting understanding of how they are experienced together.

2.4 | Digital Play, Embodiment, and Well-Being: The Present Study

Bringing these strands together, the concept of (digital)-literacies-in-the-body offers a framework for examining how literacy practices and well-being are co-constituted through embodied engagement with digital texts, spaces, and relationships. Despite growing interest in children's digital engagements, we still lack a clear understanding of how children's well-being is produced in relation to these complex and hybrid (post-)digital environments. Even as operational forms of digital literacy (e.g., technical skills acquisition) have received increasing attention in education and policy (Marsh et al. 2021), and critical digital literacy has been promoted as a protective tool against bodily harms (e.g., Ey 2024; Kargin and Demir 2023), relatively little attention has been paid to how embodied digital literacy practices intersect with children's well-being. Much existing research focuses on the potential risks of digital game play, particularly its associations with mental health concerns and family conflict (e.g., Alrahili et al. 2023; Li et al. 2022; Vázquez-Cano et al. 2024). Conceptualizing the potential value of digital play narrowly, such work ignores the broader affective, experiential, and well-being-related dimensions of digital play, standing in stark contrast with wider research on play, which has long acknowledged its intrinsic value and contribution to children's holistic well-being (e.g., Winther-Lindqvist 2009; Rao and Gibson 2019). When it comes to physicality more specifically, children's bodies at digital play have often been scrutinized in relation to physical health, with early studies linking gaming to sedentary behavior

and obesity (e.g., Goodman et al. 2020), although more recent reviews (e.g., Kracht et al. 2020) have challenged these associations, and other studies show how some forms of digital play—such as exergames—can actively promote physical activity (e.g., Staiano et al. 2013). However, studies on digital play and well-being have rarely situated children's digital play in the context of family understandings of well-being and the diverse ways in which factors *beyond* digital play may intersect with well-being. At the intersection of digital practice, embodiment, and well-being, some media scholars have also fundamentally critiqued the dominance of eudaimonic frameworks such as Deci and Ryan's (1985) Self-Determination Theory, which center autonomy, competence, and relatedness, as appropriate models for conceptualizing children's engagements with the digital. These models, critics argue, often neglect children's hedonic, affective, and bodily motivations for engaging with digital media, as well as the forms of well-being such experiences may afford (Scott et al. 2023; Tamborini et al. 2011). Such motivations include the pursuit of arousal, sensory pleasure, and affective intensity.

Despite an abundance of historic research framing the relation between children's digital play and well-being in largely negative terms, ambitious recent work, especially Vié et al.'s (2024) large-scale synthesis, demonstrates more complex well-being trajectories for digital play. Vié et al.'s (2024) synthesis countered a pervasive past narrative, pointing instead to the potential of digital games to *support* aspects of children's well-being. Such work foregrounds a need for situated, bodily-oriented analyses capable of explaining how such dimensions of well-being emerge in concert with children's digital literacies.

Meanwhile, though theorizations of embodied literacies have developed significantly (e.g., Jones 2013; Sherbine 2019), their application to *digital* literacies remains relatively underexplored. Exceptions include work by Cárdenas Curiel et al. (2025) and Ehret and Hollett (2014), who demonstrate how children's engagements with digital texts are always situated in, and through, the body. Mackey (2002), for instance, insists that children are never merely consuming texts—whether reading a book or playing a game—but “performing” them bodily: “sprawled on the sofa with a paperback thriller in hand, or hunched over a joystick,” children enact texts through “some kind of bodily immersion” (p. 183). Literacy, in this framing, is an inherently embodied and affective practice. K. Wohlwend (2008); K. E. Wohlwend (2011) similarly positions children's play not as a prelude to literacy but as a multimodal literacy in its own right—an emergent, performative, and affectively charged form of meaning-making. Her work, along with that of Thiel (2015), traces how children rework and replay media texts through embodied and affective acts. K. E. Wohlwend (2020) also critiques how dominant classroom norms—rooted in developmentalism and standardization—can constrain or enable children's media play, thus shaping what kinds of literacies and bodies are legitimized in educational spaces.

Together, this scholarship underscores that both the consumption and production of digital texts are situated within the moving, feeling body. Although few of these studies frame their findings explicitly in terms of well-being, they consistently highlight the relational, affective, and collaborative benefits of embodied digital literacy practices. Notably, Cárdenas Curiel

et al. (2025) draw on Guzmán's (2012) notions of *cuentos* and *pláticas* ("stories" and "conversations") to explore how two girls (aged 7 and 14) playing *Animal Crossing* use digital literacies to (re)write intersectional embodied identities rooted in joy and pleasure. Their work offers a compelling example of how digital play may function not only as a site of textual production, but as a generative space for well-being and identity work—particularly among children navigating multiple cultural and embodied positions.

The present study builds on these perspectives to consider how children's embodied digital play at home may reconfigure understanding of the "well" (digitally) literate body in childhood. We paid attention to children's bodies at digital play—as well as their utterances—as a way of thinking otherwise about the operational, cultural, and critical dimensions of (digital) literacy practices and how they intersect with well-being across both eudaimonic and hedonic domains. In doing so, we retained an understanding of these practices and their intersection with well-being as always constituted by the dynamic interplay of social, cultural, material, and temporal dimensions, with attention to Ang's (1996) critique of media research as often inattentive to the "web of relationships and structures which constitute them" (p. 41).

3 | Methods

The broader study we draw on in this paper investigated how digital play relates to well-being within the everyday lives of diverse children (aged 7–12) and their families in the UK. Understanding literacy as enacted through bodies, materials, and social relations necessitates methods capable of capturing interactional and embodied meaning-making in a way that is attentive to action in context. For this reason, data were generated using a multi-method family case study design, informed by ecocultural theory (Weisner 2002) and grounded in ethnographic and longitudinal traditions. The study was informed by an ecocultural approach (Weisner 2002), meaning that children's digital play was studied in relation to the environments and cultural contexts children live within. Children's digital play and well-being were understood as ideas connected with complex, interrelated environments and cultural contexts. Although the study is not positioned as a full ethnography, it aligns with an ethnographic logic of inquiry (Green and Nixon 2005) in that the study attended to situated practice, relational context, and participants' everyday experiences in naturalistic settings. This approach reflects conventions in literacy research, where ethnographic and longitudinal observation are often adapted to study situated practice (B. V. Street 1984; Heath 1983). Because of the scale of the project, though, detailed research tools were designed and shared with the research team. However, researchers were encouraged to draw first and foremost on ethnographic principles, and the research tools were sensitively and collaboratively revised for local use. Researchers were encouraged to deviate from particular research activities to better reflect what was appropriate in each family context. Children and their families themselves always played a role in shaping how research visits were carried out. Researchers were never detached observers during the data collection, but rather were implicated in the practices they were studying and made detailed field notes

following visits, which were included in the analyses. They were also encouraged to pay serious attention to ordinary and everyday things and to how everyday social actions might connect with broader social, historical, and cultural contexts (Baszanger and Dodier 2004).

In line with this orientation, analysis was approached with attentiveness to how meaning emerged through unfolding literacy events, rather than residing solely within discrete participants or artifacts. In this sense, our analytic practice was informed by affect-oriented discussions in literacy studies, including Snaza's (2021) account of Boldt's (2021) concept of *vitality affect*, which foregrounds the relational energies through which literacy events take shape. These perspectives offered a sensitizing orientation toward what Manning (2016) has described as "care for the event" (p. 192). Snaza articulates this orientation as an ethical commitment to letting go of knowing in the sense of imposition of predefined concepts, in favor of an openness to noticing how we can best *care for this* event, with full acknowledgement of one's own inseparability from it. Accordingly, the analysis sought to remain responsive to the movement, ambiguity, and affective intensities through which children's digital literacies and well-being were enacted in everyday family contexts.

The study was also semi-longitudinal. Researchers made consecutive visits to families over a period of time, attempting to notice both sustained actions and practices within families and shifts in practices over a modest period (e.g., Ruspini 2010; Neale 2020).

The study's design (Figure 1) was thus shaped by its central aims and theoretical commitments, integrating a range of methods to enable a rich, cross-case exploration of the topic outlined above. Situated within a broadly interpretivist paradigm, the research approached meaning-making as contextually embedded and co-constructed. To this end, we designed the approach to generate data not just about each child's digital play and digital literacy practices, but also about each child and family more broadly, including a holistic view of their understandings of well-being *in general* and any current issues intersecting with family well-being (both good and bad), as well as the child and family's broader hobbies and passions.

Data collection focused on both children's self-directed digital play practices and their responses to one of two puzzle-based "focus games" introduced during "Visit 2." Families participating in Stage A were introduced to *World of Goo*, a physics-oriented puzzle game, whereas those in Stage B were offered *LEGO Builder's Journey*, a narrative-driven journey puzzle game. Each stage included 10 UK-based families. Over a 14-month period, researchers conducted 120 visits in the UK in total, with approximately six visits per household. The majority of the fieldwork emphasized children's everyday, volitional digital play in naturalistic settings. Children were encouraged, though not required, to engage with their assigned "focus game," and their experiences were revisited in later sessions. A number of methodological features were included to facilitate close attention to embodied literacy practices. Though some interviews were audio recorded only, much of the data collection was audiovisual. Children and families were introduced to the

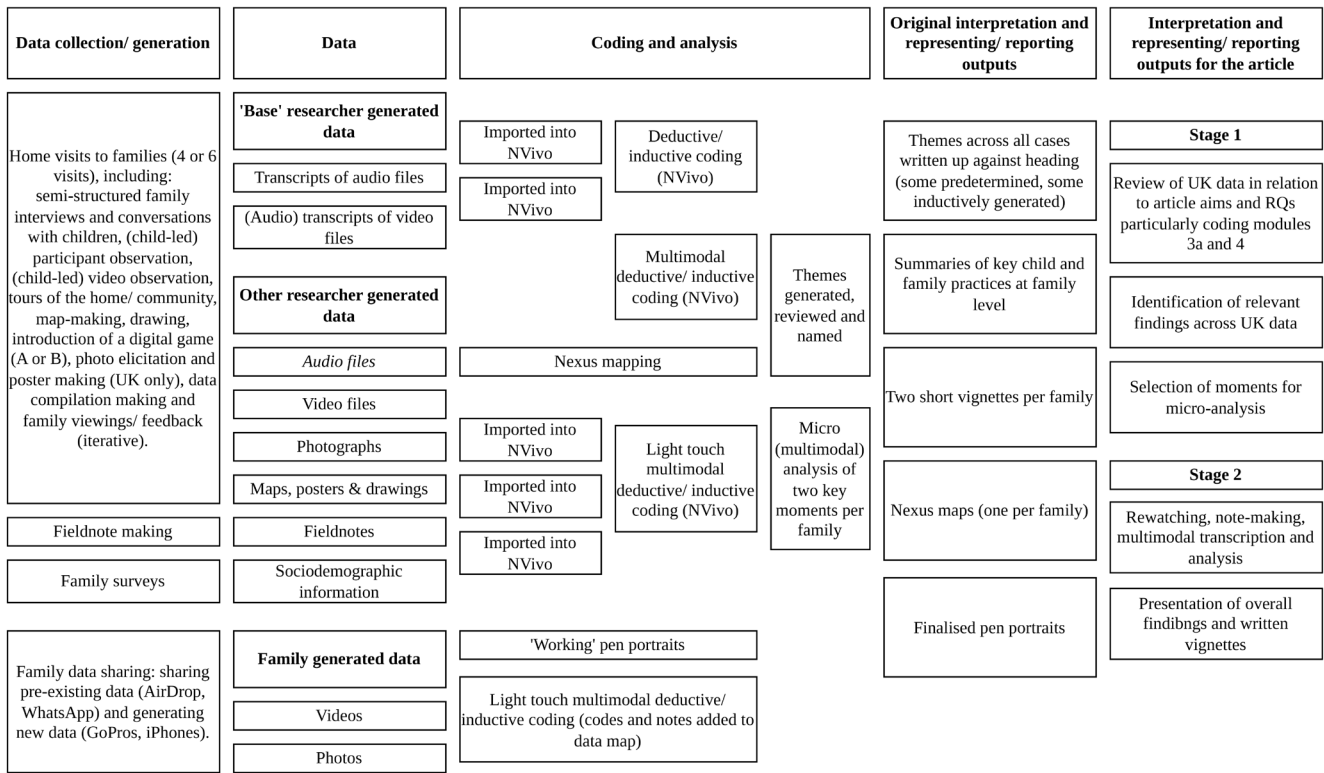


FIGURE 1 | Overview of study design, data, and analytic approach.

researchers' camcorders early in the fieldwork and encouraged to "show" as well as "tell," for example, children were invited to lead a physical tour of things and places I like to play, partially inspired by Plowman & Stevenson's "toy tours" (Plowman and Stevenson 2013). During field visits, researchers adopted a balanced approach when it came to the "gaze" of filming—sometimes directing camcorders at children's bodies and sometimes at screens-at-play. Children were provided with *GoPros* to record their own play, and parents were encouraged to share with researchers "naturally occurring" data in the form of pre-existing videos, text, and images.

Although the methodological framework was broadly standardized, researchers were invited to adapt tools and approaches in response to the specific needs and preferences of participants. A recommended set of activities and resources served as a starting point, but researchers were encouraged to make changes as appropriate as part of an iterative, reflexive research process. As a result, there was a range of variations in methods, tools, and the use of technologies in the UK. For instance, in F3, the final visit activity was replaced with a gamified PowerPoint "quiz," developed in response to earlier observational and interview insights about 11-year-old Luke. This alternative approach offered greater autonomy and reduced direct focus on the child, aligning with his apparent preference for task-based interactions.

Participants were recruited through a combination of school newsletter outreach, community-based engagement, and snowball sampling. The purposive sample was deliberately constructed to reflect intersectional diversity—across dimensions such as race, ethnicity, language background, socioeconomic status, and family structure.

The UK cohort included children aged 7–12 (mean age: 9.8 years), with a balanced gender distribution (10 identifying as "girls," 10 as "boys"). In total, 68 individuals formally participated in the UK, though children's narratives also incorporated references to family members, peers, and pets who were not directly involved in the study. A participant overview is provided (Table 1). The descriptors presented in Table 1 are included as a form of methodological transparency, rather than as fixed characterizations of families. Research on children's digital lives has frequently drawn on intersectionally narrow samples (Alper et al. 2016), sometimes presenting as universal claims about children's digital literacy practices that are, in fact, routinely derived from samples consisting entirely of white, middle-class children living in highly educated and affluent households. In contrast, Table 1 makes visible the diversity of families involved in this study. The categories derive from recruitment procedures rather than ethnographic interpretation and are therefore treated as provisional reference points, rather than stable identities. Although recruitment drew on the NS-SEC classification as a proxy measure to support the socioeconomic diversity of the sample, subsequent analyses attended to families' practices, relationships, and everyday ecologies, rather than treating socioeconomic classification as explanatory in itself. Similarly, the broad ethnicity categories in the short form were adapted from those in the UK Census, but families were invited to self-describe their racial and ethnic identities beyond these standard categories. Descriptors in the text are used only where families self-identified in these terms. The study followed ethical guidelines from BERA (2018) and AoIR (2020), with a commitment to ongoing, informed consent. For children, assent was dynamically assessed, including through body language (Dockett and Perry 2011). As a gesture of appreciation, families were invited to keep the digital device used during fieldwork—an iPad in the UK.

TABLE 1 | Summary of participants.

#	Pseudonym (a)	Age	Gender identity	Child's racial or ethnic identity, as identified by a parent or carer responding to the UK Census and open-ended options offered in the recruitment process	Family NS-SEC socioeconomic status, derived from self-described occupations disclosed in the recruitment process, where possible	Household structure (b)
F1	Penny	9	F	White—Eng/Wel/Scot/NI/British	Intermediate	Mum (P) Dad (P) Younger Sister (P) Older Brother (P) Pets: 1 dog, 1 cat
F2	Adaobi	11	F	Black or Black British—African	Managerial, administrative, and professional	Mum (P) Dad (P) Younger Sister (P) Younger Brother (P)
F3	Luke	11	M	Black or Black British—African	Managerial, administrative, and professional	Mum (P) Dad (P) Younger Sibling (P) Youngest Sibling (P)
F4	Romeo	7	M	Asian or Asian British—Any other Asian background	Intermediate	Mum (P) Dad(P)
F5	Dylan	7	M	Asian or Asian British—Indian	Managerial, administrative, and professional	Mum (P) Dad (P)
F6	Pinar	9	F	Prefer to self-describe—Half British, Half Turkish	Routine and manual	Mum (P) Younger Sibling (P) Mum's boyfriend (NP)
F7	Jemima	10	F	White—Eng/Wel/Scot/NI/British	Routine and manual	Mum (P) Older Brother (NP) Pets: 2 cats
F8	Logan	12	M	White—Eng/Wel/Scot/NI/British	Intermediate	Mum (P) Older Sister (NP) Pets: 2 dogs
F9	Henry	10	M	White—Eng/Wel/Scot/NI/British	Routine and manual	Mum (P) Mum's boyfriend (NP) Pets: 1 dog
F10	Willow	11	F	White—Any other White background (please describe)—White Polish	Managerial, administrative, and professional	Mum (P) Dad (step) (P) Pet: 1 dog, 1 cat
F11	Thomas	12	M	White—Eng/Wel/Scot/NI/British	Managerial, administrative, and professional	Mum (P) Dad (NP) Older Sister (NP)
F12	Zain	7	M	Chilean/Swiss/Pakistani	Managerial, administrative, and professional/Intermediate	Mum (P) Pets: 2 guinea pigs
F13	Hailey	10	F	White—Eng/Wel/Scot/NI/British	Managerial, administrative, and professional	Mum (P) Younger Brother (P)
F14	Lewis	8	M	White—Eng/Wel/Scot/NI/British	Managerial, administrative, and professional	Mum (P) Dad (P) Younger Brother (NP)
F15	Aaliyah	11	F	Mixed—Black Caribbean and White	Managerial, administrative, and professional/intermediate	Mum (P) Older Half-Sister (P) Older Half-Brother (NP) Pets: 2 dogs

(Continues)

TABLE 1 | (Continued)

#	Pseudonym (a)	Age	Gender identity	Child's racial or ethnic identity, as identified by a parent or carer responding to the UK Census and open-ended options offered in the recruitment process	Family NS-SEC socioeconomic status, derived from self-described occupations disclosed in the recruitment process, where possible	Household structure (b)
F16	Maik	12	M	Arab	Unknown	Mum (P) Older Brother (P) Younger Brother (P) Older Brother (NP)
F17	Annie	10	F	White—Eng/Wel/Scot/NI/British	Intermediate	Mum (P) Older Brother (P) Younger Sister (NP)
F18	Ollie	8	M	Mixed—Black African and White	Full-time parent	Mum (P) Pets: 2 cats
F19	Harriet	9	F	White—Eng/Wel/Scot/NI/British	Managerial, administrative, and professional	Mum (P) Dad (P) Older Brother (P) Older Sister (P) Pets: 1 dog
F20	Fisayo	11	F	Black or Black British—African	Routine and manual	Mum (P) Older Brother (P) Older Sister (P)

^aThe bolded names represent the three children whose cases are explored in greater detail in this article.

^b(P) indicates this individual is a formal participant in the study. (NP) indicates this individual is not a participant in the study.

Figure 1 summarizes study data and the analytical approach. Data were coded through a combined deductive–inductive process. Full text transcripts of researcher-generated audio files and the audio aspects of video files, plus fieldnotes, were imported into NVivo for coding. Other forms of data (original video files, photos, maps, and drawings) were coded and analyzed in a model of ongoing cross-comparison. Deductive codes drew on a project-specific framework (partially presented in Table 2). Inductive codes were generated through close reading. Team-based interpretive discussion was central, with the UK team (six researchers) collaboratively contributing to coding and thematic analysis, often working in pairs and including sharing and cross-comparison within the team. This drew on the inductive and deductive codes, nexus maps¹ (Scott 2018), pen portraits, and analysis summaries. Although the analysis is not generalizable, it is offered as transferable (Lincoln and Guba 1985), supported by rich description and open-access materials, including full research tools (Scott et al. 2025), to enable replication or adaptation.

For this article, we reviewed our analyses and coding across all UK data to identify insights relevant to the above research questions. The analyses presented below draw both on the initial (in-depth) work undertaken in generating our study's initial findings and further work undertaken for the purpose of the article, thus combining analysis of each child's digital literacy practices at a broad level, with a more detailed, multimodal analysis to examine what was happening “in the moment.” In the first stage of analysis, our deductive coding framework was important for identifying the embodied literacy practices discussed in this article. Children's digital play practices, including enacting operational, cultural, and critical digital literacy, were part of coding module 3a. Similarly, the deductive framework was important for noticing aspects of children's subjective well-being, which were coded according to UNICEF's (2021) framework, which informed coding module 4. This process supported the identification of some overall findings in response to the RQs above, including the identification of a range of relevant examples. To choose vignettes for inclusion in the present article, we reviewed our analyses and coding across all of the UK data, particularly returning to analysis summaries and the coded NVivo files to identify “moments” in which the relation between children's diverse embodied (digital) literacy practices with videogames and their subjective well-being connected with a “universe of existing histories” (Wohlwend 2009, 130) of “valued and expected practices” (Wohlwend 2009, 231) that were very ordinary and everyday in the lives of the children and families included.

Though many examples were identified through the coding, this article focuses in depth on three “information-rich” (Patton 2002, 230) cases. In line with Patton's (2002) theorization, these can be considered “critical cases” (p. 236). Patton described critical cases as information rich cases “that can make a point quite dramatically or are, for some reason, particularly important in the scheme of things” (p. 236). We consider those chosen for the purposes of the present article to be critical cases in the sense that they offer particularly deep insights into the intersection of children's digital-literacies-in-the-body and well-being. However, the notion of information-rich, critical cases should not be misinterpreted to suggest

TABLE 2 | Excerpt from the deductive coding framework (modules 1a, 1b, 1c, 3a, and 4).

1a. Things—general	PZ Puzzle	PCRP Playing: creative play	ASD Affective state: disengaged
B Bodies (e.g., human, animal)	RAC Racing	PCOP Playing: communication play	ASC Affective state: confused
BP Body parts (e.g., toes, fingers, legs, hands)	RP Role-playing	PDP Playing: dramatic play	ASO Affective state: other
NDS Non-digital spaces (e.g., a room, garden, school, land, sea, mountain)	SALP Saloon and party	PLP Playing: locomotor play	4b. Well-being: relationships
DS Digital spaces (e.g., a YouTube comment board)	SB Sandbox	PDEEP Playing: deep play	(UNICEF 2021)
NDMT Non-digital material things (e.g., objects that are important, chairs, carpets where play occurs)	SM Simulation	PEP Playing: exploratory play	<i>(rfc)</i> (reported by the focus child)
SND Sounds and silence	SPR Sports	PFP Playing: fantasy play	<i>(rcg)</i> (reported by the caregiver)
SML Smells	STR Strategy	PIP Playing: imaginative play	PPCA Perceived positive with caregiving adults
1b. Things—technologies (Marsh et al. 2020)	SRV Survival	PMASP Playing: mastery play	PNCA Perceived negative with caregiving adults
ST Standard television	DGPEO Digital game or play experience—other	POP Playing: object play	PPNCA Perceived positive with non-caregiving adults
SMT Smart television	3a. Child digital and play practices (original coding frame, drawing on Scott (2018) and Marsh et al. (2020))	PROP Playing: role play	PNNCA Perceived negative with non-caregiving adults
T Tablet	<i>(rfc)</i> (reported by the focus child)	PREP Playing: recapitulative play	PPP Perceived positive with peers
S Smartphone	<i>(rcg)</i> (reported by the caregiver)	PTP Playing: transgressive play	PNP Perceived negative with peers
MP Mobile phone	<i>(o)</i> (observed)	4. Children's well-being and digital play	PPMTH Perceived positive with more-than-humans (e.g., animals)
GC Games console	DPINT Digital practice: initiating	4a. Children's well-being: self (UNICEF 2021)	PNMTH Perceived negative with more-than-humans (e.g., animals)
HH Handheld	DPCWG Digital practice: copying, watching, glancing	<i>(rfc)</i> (reported by the focus child)	PPANC Perceived positive with ancestors
D Desktop computer	DPEE Digital practice: exploring, enquiring	<i>(rcg)</i> (reported by the caregiver)	PNANC Perceived negative with ancestors
L Laptop computer	DPPK Digital practice: performing knowledge	<i>(o)</i> (observed)	4c. Well-being: digital and non-digital environments, including the in games and online communities, in homes, communities, suburbs, architecture, human and material elements (UNICEF 2021)
PMP Portable media player	DPOPDL Digital practice: enacting operational digital literacy	POA Perceptions of autonomy	<i>(rfc)</i> (reported by the focus child)
SP Speaker (e.g., Bluetooth)	DPCUDL Digital practice: enacting cultural digital literacy	POR Perceptions of relationality	<i>(rcg)</i> (reported by the caregiver)
SS Smart speaker/voice assistant	DPCRDL Digital practice: enacting critical digital literacy	POD Perceptions of dependence	PES Perceived emotional safety
SMTY Smart toy	DPC Digital practice: connecting	POC Perceptions of competence	PED Perceived emotional danger
ET Electronic toy	DPD Digital practice: disconnecting	SOP Sense of purpose	PPS Perceived physical safety
VAR Virtual/augmented reality device	DPER Digital practice: emoting, relating	SIM Self-image	PPD Perceived physical danger
WT Wearable technology	DPAFF Digital practice: affecting	SEA Self and emotional awareness	SOB Sense of belonging
R Radio	DPCSE Digital practice: creating, synthesizing, extending	AOO Awareness of others (e.g., humans, more-than-humans)	SSD Sense of social disconnection
TO Technologies—other	DPMT Digital practice: multi-tasking	HAO Hope and optimism	
1c. Things—digital games or specific digital play experiences (Adapted from Teixeira et al. 2020)	DPQUES Digital practice: questioning	ASH Affective state: happy	
AC Action	PSYP Playing: symbolic play	ASS Affective state: sad	
AD Adventure	PRTTP Playing: rough and tumble play	ASF Affective state: fearful	
ARC Arcade	PSDP Playing: socio-dramatic play	ASA Affective state: anxious	
BTCD Board, table, cards and dice	PSOP Playing: social play	ASFR Affective state: frustrated	
E Exercise	PRELP Playing: relational play (caring of/for others central)	ASAR Affective state: angry	
EE Explicitly educational		ASR Affective state: relaxed	
FS Fighting and shooter		ASE Affective state: excited	
MM Multimodal text engagement/creation (music, rhythm, drawing, written text)		ASB Affective state: bored	
PL Platform		ASENG Affective state: engaged	

that the moments selected for analysis were *extraordinary*, but rather that the vignettes presented below represent discrete instances of “quotidian” (Plowman and Stevenson 2013) home digital literacy practices that were observed more generally in each case. Having identified moments for micro-analysis, the second stage involved applying a more detailed multimodal analytic lens to the three selected cases, paying particular attention to bodies, sounds, movements and gestures in addition to language. Supplementary to the study’s full text transcripts of the audio aspects of all audio and video files, partial multimodal transcripts of identified micro-moments (lasting between 47 and 83s) were generated. This approach was chosen to capture the interplay of language, movement, gesture, and embodied engagement in digital play, focusing on those elements most relevant to understanding children’s digital-literacies-in-the-body and well-being. Although loosely following Flewitt (2011) and Scott (2018), our transcription style was specifically adapted to balance detail with analytic tractability: we selectively documented actions, gestures, and sounds that contributed to meaning-making. This allowed us to foreground embodied and affective dimensions of practice, which were central to our research questions. In each of the three vignettes presented below, we begin by drawing from data *across* each family’s case to situate the moments within broader understandings of: (a) each child and family; (b) their narrative accounts of well-being, including any specific issues they had discussed in relation to each child’s well-being; (c) the child and family’s hobbies and passions; and (d) the child’s broader digital play and literacy practices. We combined analyses across the dataset with close analyses of three vignettes. In doing so, we enacted an analytic process of *zooming out* and *zooming in*. This enabled us to combine a more holistic picture of practices noticed across the dataset with a deeper understanding of how these practices intersected with a range of individual and contextual factors and well-being in three brief “moments.”

4 | Results

Analysis proceeded iteratively, guided by the study’s conceptualization of literacies-in-the-body and informed by Green’s three-dimensional model of literacy. The analytic process combined deductive attention to operational, cultural, and critical dimensions with inductive analysis of how these practices emerged through embodied interactions among children, digital technologies, and home contexts. Rather than treating literacy as the mastery of discrete skills, analysis focused on how literacy practices became visible as situated, relational, and embodied meaning-making. Findings are first mapped broadly across examples from 20 UK families, before attention shifts to three in-depth “moments” that make visible the situated intersections of children’s embodied digital literacy practices and well-being.

4.1 | Children’s Digital-Literacies-in-the-Body With Videogames at Home

Across our research encounters, we noticed digital-literacies-in-the-body as operational, cultural, and critical practices unfolding within children’s engagements with videogames. These

literacies became perceptible not only in verbal reflections but in the rhythmic co-performance of gesture, interface, sound, and attention. Meaning-making traveled through fingers, screens, and sensorimotor responses as children and families oriented to gameworlds. These data draw attention to literacies-in-motion: enacted, performed, and materialized. *Operational-digital-literacies-in-the-body* surfaced in children’s fluid navigation across media environments—locating information, communicating through multiple modes, interpreting spatial cues—as *knowings* emerged through action. In F2, 11-year-old Adaobi’s movements interacted with her younger brother Gabriel’s (7) attempts to build in *World of Goo*, co-constituting a moment of shared learning. Lying close together on the sofa, Adaobi’s pointing gesture redirects Gabriel’s attention, initiating a new level. Long stretches of silence are animated by the barely perceptible movements of Adaobi’s arms: hesitations, pauses, and withdrawals, granting space instead for Gabriel’s fingers to drag across the screen, attuning to the tactile rhythms of the fiddly Goo Balls. At other moments, her own fingers are centered, modeling the rapid stretching movements before the tablet is passed back to Gabriel to try again. Literacy is not only scaffolded, but redistributed across bodies, surfaces, and screens. Meanwhile, in F10, 10-year-old Willow manipulated the Xbox controller while narrating her approach to playing *The Sims*. Her embodied expertise coalesces in gesture, interface interaction, and reflection:

So you’ll just build these and find a floor in here. More patterns. And you can see how much Simoleons, which is the kind of money [...] and you can like press this one to make it fully. Press X to make like one of these kind of things.

When asked by researcher, Shabana, how she “*learned*,” Willow describes a tactile logic of trial and error: “sometimes I just fiddle around with it [...] press X on floor and you can like... great! so if we go into build mode you can like customise everything.” Here, operational-digital-literacies-in-the-body coalesce across repetition, haptic feedback, and improvisational attunement. A further example, focused on Malik’s digital practices, is described in more depth below.

Children’s *cultural-digital-literacies-in-the-body* unfolded through game practices steeped in familial and social meaning-making. In F15, 11-year-old Aaliyah and her mother Ruth participated in a shared cultural practice centered on digital mystery games, their mutual favorite genre. Ruth articulated this shared mode of attending to hints within the gamespace during a conversation with researcher Liz: “they have hints don’t they? So the mystery games we play, if you are stuck you can like, if you play it a bit more you can get hints so it then helps you, helps to complete that.” During Visit 3, as Aaliyah engages with the focus game, *LEGO Builder’s Journey*, her fingers rotate the screen, bricks sliding and pausing under her gaze. Her body rests, attends, and probes the gamespace’s spatial puzzle. As she explains: “I just try and, like, look around and see if I can find anything that will help it.” Though Aaliyah enacts this familiar cultural-digital-literacies-in-the-body within *LEGO Builder’s Journey*, the pair later reflected on the game’s minimal provision of hints and

clues as a factor shaping their overall negative assessment. As Ruth shared: “we’ve discovered there’s nothing in that that we can get any hints or anything just to try and guide us to figure out that level.” In other cases, embodied understandings of media meanings and modes *within the contexts of the games children played* became visible. In F11, 12-year-old Thomas plays the fighting game *Brawlhalla*, his gestures synchronizing with the movements of his chosen character, Thea. Describing her abilities, he simultaneously performs them:

Because she has really good... she’s good at speed [...] she’s got her own set of skills that come with this sword, here [...] this one’s a lance and then it has her own special abilities, so you can do that (points the lance upwards), you can do that (moves with the lance) and then I get my own shoes.

Although researcher Fiona’s camera remains fixed on the screen, a rhythmic coordination unfolded between the sounds of Thomas’s taps and Thea’s movements—swipes, aerial ascents, and forward thrusts materializing through the interplay of fingers, *XBox* controller, and gameworld. Another example, foregrounding Dylan’s play with *Fortnite*, is discussed in more depth below.

Finally, *critical-digital-literacies-in-the-body* came into view when play became a site of reflection on representation, identity, and power. In F2, Adaobi questions the gendered limitations of *Subway Surfer*:

The only thing I don’t like about it is how you change the characters, because I used to be able to have a female character—I’m not trying to be sexist, but—I just wanna know how to change the characters and all that.

In another moment, wherein she is winning in *World of Goo*, her narration gives voice to an imagined internal monologue of her non-playable character (NPC) opponents as she succeeds in the game, whereas her smile amplifies a sense of pride: “they’re all leaving, like, how could she beat us? At the end of the day, they probably don’t even know I’m a girl.” When researcher Shabana invited Adaobi to expand on various comments about the visual representation of girls in games, Adaobi explained:

Some people, like, think—I know this happened like years ago and obviously it doesn’t usually happen any more—like obviously girls can do stuff boys can do, I’m just like [...] it’s that kind of thing where like ha ha, I’m winning sort of thing like that [...] I mean I don’t know where I’ve heard this, but I know I’ve heard it somewhere, like people, like, think that girls can’t actually play games.

Here, *critical-digital-literacies-in-the-body* begin to take shape—emerging not only in Adaobi’s spoken reflections, but also in her affective and performative engagements with

gameworlds and characters. Her observations and playful gestures bring into view how limited opportunities for female representation within gaming environments may participate in reproducing dominant assumptions about who is (and isn’t) likely to succeed. Attention to bodies was even more vital to noticing children’s critical-digital-literacy-in-the-body as personal meaning making and cultural transformation. In F18, 8-year-old Ollie’s *Minecraft* gameplay materializes a care ethic at odds with game mechanics. Ollie was immersed in *Minecraft* play, but the game’s survival mechanics at times positioned him in tension with his own affective attachments to animals, particularly when actions such as farming and eating animals became necessary for progression: “I’m trying to not do that, but I kind of need that to survive [...] if you lose even a slight bit of health, your hearts don’t respawn, you don’t heal.” We watch Ollie building a “Mansion Dog House” for his many dogs (tamed from wolves): “I’m just going to build myself a mansion dog house. This is going to be hard because literally I’ve got so many dogs that I need to make a mansion.” As the structure grows, dogs are seen wandering across half-built walls and roofs, often obstructing the construction efforts. Despite Ollie’s endeavors to avoid hurting them, the building process sometimes leads to dogs falling from the higher stories of the Mansion Dog House. We notice Ollie’s hands pause on the controls, then navigate left and right to determine the dogs’ positions. His voice emerges: “come on. I need you to move” as his fingers hold back until the dogs shift to safer ground. An ethic of care materializes in his play as he consistently apologizes—“sorry dog!”—and plans his next strategies for minimizing harm: “I was thinking, if I outline it with slime blocks, they can bounce instead of hurting themselves.” Ollie’s protective gestures toward the dogs carry no strategic value within the game’s survival logic, and the affordances of slime blocks are reimagined for purposes beyond their original design. Through these embodied and affective engagements, personal, affective attachments reconfigure the terms of play. Rather than merely following mechanics built into the game, Ollie becomes differently attuned to its narrative and material possibilities, renegotiating how his version of the text is played. Another example, highlighting Penny’s transgressive text production with *Bloxburg*, is discussed more expansively below.

4.2 | Children’s Digital-Literacies-in-the-Body, Well-Being, and Family Ecologies

Children’s digital-literacies-in-the-body with videogames intersected with well-being in ways that were affectively and contextually diverse. Across the dataset, links surfaced with perceptions of autonomy, perceptions of competence, feelings about identities, emotional experience, awareness and regulation, relationships with others, creativity, a sense of safety, and a sense of equity and feeling represented. However, these connections were shaped by the relational ecologies of each household. The games that children chose, and their digital-literacies-in-the-body with these games, connected with diverse and often intersecting contextual and individual factors. These included specific family dynamics, practices and cultures, neurodiversity, physical differences or disabilities, a range of emotional and learning needs and dynamics between

different environments, such as those between home and school. Children's digital play choices and digital-literacies-in-the-body were also associated with very different deep interests, desires, and needs.

In Willow's case (F10), operational literacies supported feelings of competence, identities, creativity, autonomy, and emotions. Willow had a lot of creative hobbies, including knitting, and invested time in watching *YouTube* tutorials to attune her body to the physical movements needed for both knitting and building in *Minecraft*. Feelings of competence surfaced in her verbal reflection on her own abilities; "It's really hard. Because like when you like... it's hard to get with the controls, but also like you have to know your way around. You can't learn this game easily [...] you have to know where the buildings are, you have to like, I don't know, write everything off by heart." These operational-digital-literacies-in-the-body offered imaginings of future identities, through creating and role-playing a future wherein she was a vet: "*You can make your ideal career and how you want to look when you're older, so you can pretend to live that life.*" Creativity and autonomy held particular resonance in Willow's life. Following a recent house move, Willow had recently started attending a new school, which she had somewhat mixed feelings about. When asked by researcher Shabana how she was feeling about the move, Willow replied: "*I don't feel I can think about it yet.*" Willow explained that she felt "*left out*" of conversations between her friends from her previous school and, when meeting new people, "I don't like it, I like just sticking with the same people." Willow's body was particularly attuned to bad weather—thunderstorms, lightning, and heavy rain were all upsetting, particularly when they happened while she was at school and unable to seek the comfort of her mum. She often looked up the weather forecast to see what the day would be like: "there was one a couple of weeks ago [...] I heard a thunderstorm so I just started crying [...] Depending on if I'm at school [...] if I'm at the shops and it thunderstorms then I always call her." In contrast with the school move, and the weather, over which she had little control, Willow derived great pleasure from making creative choices across a range of activities in her leisure time, including choosing how to decorate her bedroom, saving up money to buy wool for her crochet projects and spending time making her *Sims* avatars and houses just how she wanted them: "*I like my bedroom because it's got all the things that I love. And I really like playing games. And the creative thing is very right because I do like creating things, like I don't like specific rules [...] I guess I do forget about reality because I'm just in The Sims and I focus on their lives.*"

For Aaliyah and her mum, Ruth (F15), cultural-digital-literacies-in-the-body, such as those foregrounded in relation to *Adventure Escape Mysteries*, became a shared resource for closeness. Ruth noted how the embodied practice of finding out and clue-seeking had emerged and evolved as a shared practice: "That's one thing we do together, yeah we love a good mystery, play like a mystery game don't we, like finding out who the murderer is." Ruth was a teacher with a leadership role at a local college, resulting in a very busy schedule and frequent need to work at home on evenings and weekends. During such times, Aaliyah and her mum often engaged in a practice of *being with* Ruth, remaining physically close, offering physical and emotional closeness, while she and Aaliyah attended to different pursuits,

such as Ruth working on her laptop while Aaliyah played on her smartphone next to her on the sofa. In this context, Ruth explained how playing mystery games had served as an important space reserved for togetherness in moments shared between just the two: "It used to be mine and Aaliyah's 'thing'. Because her sister goes to band, so whenever she went [...] we used to play it, probably two, maybe three times a week, where we just sit and have half an hour, just us."

For Ollie (F18), meanwhile, critical-digital-literacies-in-the-body appeared to support emotional well-being, identities, and relationships, particularly his awareness of others. Ollie and his mum, Amanda, shared a deep affection for animals and for being outside in nature, often speaking with some sadness about their mutual desire to have a pet—especially a dog—a wish constrained by Ollie's severe allergies. Ollie had to be extremely careful about his allergies and asthma, having spent time in hospital on several occasions as a result. In contrast, Ollie's *Minecraft* play offered a safe space to explore nurturing interactions with animals, which supported positive affective experiences. *Minecraft's* material-semiotic resources became tools for care and imagination. Offline, similar attachments shaped family rituals—bird-feeding and bat-detecting—further entangling digital literacies with relational ethics.

The situated nature of children's digital-literacies-in-the-body with videogames and their relation with well-being within complex family ecologies are discussed more expansively in the three "moments" below, beginning with Malik.

4.2.1 | Vignette 1: Malik's Operational-Digital-Literacies-in-the-Body With Clash of Clans

Twelve-year-old Malik (F16) lived in a quiet Sheffield neighborhood with his mum, Jameela, and three brothers. His dad worked abroad, and the family visited him in Kuwait during school holidays. At home, they spoke both English and Arabic. Jameela taught Arabic at a private language school, where Malik also studied—though not in her class. When asked about well-being, Malik's mum focused on achieving a balance across physical, relational, emotional, and spiritual aspects: "well-being is the right food and the right nutrition, the sleeping [...] maintaining a good balance in all those aspects. So like mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually are all encompassing and all provide a good status and well-being." Recently, Malik had taken up a new workout routine inspired by fitness influencers on TikTok. Insecurities around appearance and peer approval materialize through Malik's entanglements with algorithmically surfaced influencer content, bodily disciplines, and schoolyard socialities. Explaining why he had recently become interested in workout routines associated with fitness influencers, he explained: "now I workout, so I'm not fat, like I don't want to be fat like, it's not a good feeling because you'll probably get bullied and stuff." This aspect of Malik's case foregrounds a compelling tension associated with children's entanglements with digital cultures. Although Malik's digital play supported aspects of his well-being, his engagement with fitness influencers on TikTok raises questions about their potential impact, particularly given the body anxieties and fears of bullying entangled with Malik's engagement. Recent work has explored some of the many issues

associated with fitness influencers on TikTok, particularly foregrounding the troubling misogynistic discourses circulating in content ostensibly focused on men's health and well-being (e.g., Wescott et al. 2024; Haslop et al. 2024).

Malik's hobbies emphasized competitive physical play, including playing football and basketball. His interest in football extended to digital play with games like *FIFA*, although he said the latter were not quite as good as the former, because with non-digital football: "you're actually playing." After school, he enjoyed eating out and going to the cinema with his cousin and friends. Beyond digital game play and emphasizing (post)digital continuities, Malik's digital literacy practices traversed digital and material. Interests in personal fitness are entangling with algorithmically surfaced influencer content, shaping emerging bodily orientations and self-perceptions. These entanglements emphasize the importance of methods that attend to both talk and bodies in digital play.

When it came to digital play, Malik's everyday practices included frequent collaborative play, both supporting his younger brother's competence and competing with his friends, although he said he preferred the latter so he could become more skilled; "because I want people to teach me." Malik's digital play practices

take shape within relational fields where skill, expertise, and recognition circulate as valued currencies among friends. As Jameela explained about Malik's enjoyment of games like *FIFA* and *Fortnite*, which choreograph competition and status performances; "because [...] there are levels, there are points, there is status where you can fulfill. And then the centre of the talk with your friends is... I've done this, I've done that." In line with our study's conceptualization of subjective well-being, many digital literacy practices in Malik's case, including the one featured in the vignette below, appeared to support his well-being. This was observed across multiple dimensions of subjective well-being, including autonomy, competence, identities, and relationships.

The partial multimodal transcript in Figure 2 corresponds with an 83-s excerpt from a longer, 38-min video, generated during Shabana's first visit to Malik's home. It illustrates Malik's operational-digital-literacies-in-the-body with the online, real-time multiplayer strategy game, *Clash of Clans*. Visit 1 was intended to generate data about each family's existing digital play experiences and family perspectives on children's subjective well-being. In the moment selected for microanalysis, researcher Shabana had invited Malik to show her some of the things he liked playing. Shabana asked Malik what was "good" about playing the game. As he continued to play, Malik explained:

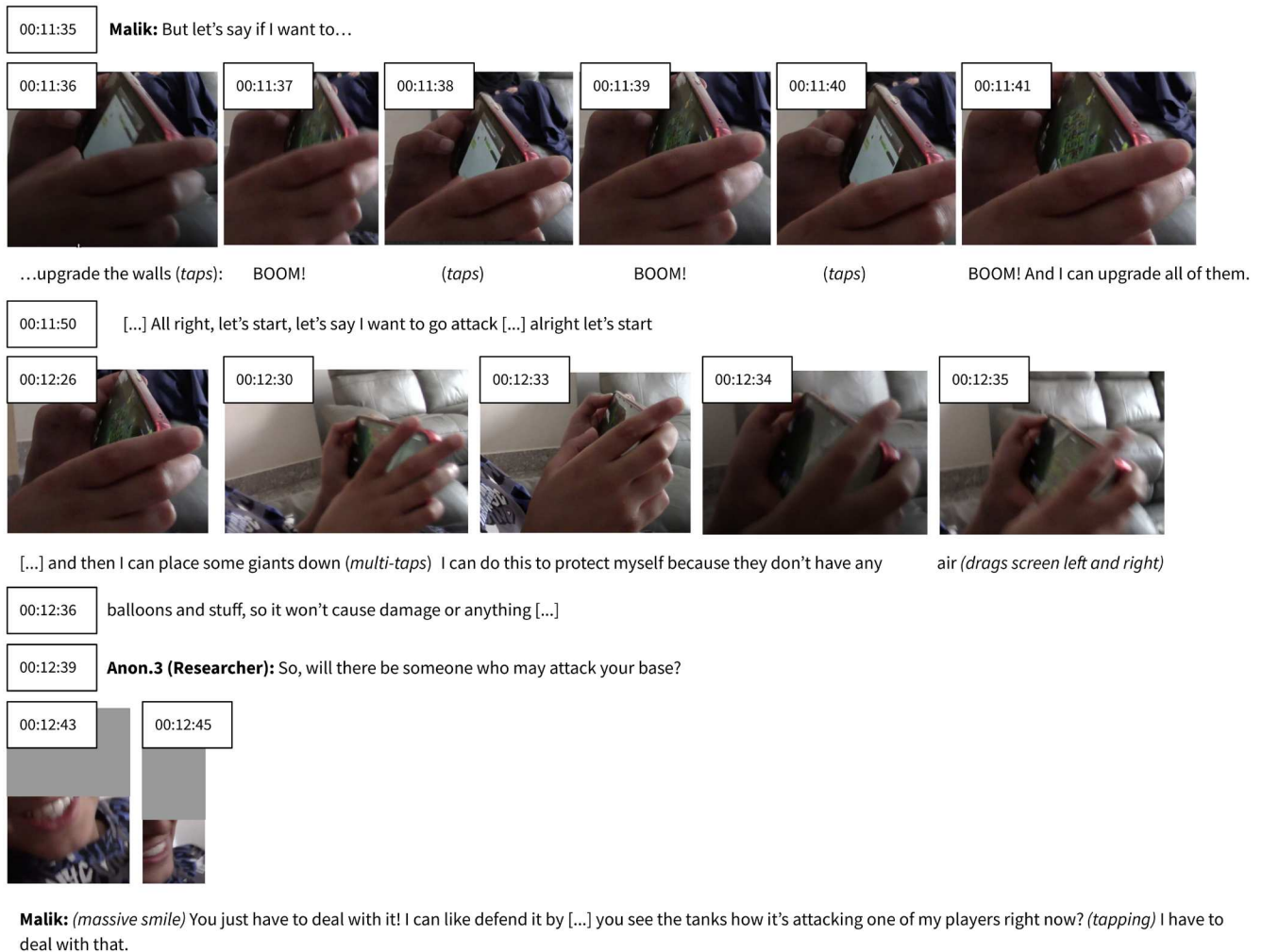


FIGURE 2 | Malik shows Shabana what is good about *Clash of Clans*.

It's a bit of a hard game [...] If you constantly play it, probably a month. But if you don't sweat on it, like go on it a lot, it will probably take you like... my best took a couple of years [...] I'm really good at the game [...] You can interact with your friends. You can attack other people's villages, as you can see, look I'm doing it right now [...] It makes me feel good, because you've done so much hard work, you see? Everything's basically... because you see how good? You see how it takes time? And it tried to say oh, you can just buy, get 197 gems to do it like for apps earning money by doing that. It gives you a bit of gems at the start so you can like "ah this is way quicker this is better." Let's say if I go here, my base isn't that good and it isn't that bad. Actually, I think it's a bit trash.

In the excerpt that follows, gameplay continues through a choreography of talk, sound, gesture, and movement, with preferences and pleasures emerging through Malik's entangled interactions with the interface.

In this micro-vignette, Malik's digital literacy practices align in multiple ways with Sefton-Green et al.'s (2016) application of Green's (1988) 3D model to digital literacy. In line with our study's conceptualization, Malik's operational-digital-literacies-in-the-body in this excerpt can be seen as supportive of multiple dimensions of subjective well-being. Attending to the embodied and language-based aspects of the vignette, a more traditional reading through the lens of digital literacy as *skills and knowledge* might acknowledge the clear operational digital literacy *skills* displayed in Malik's play. Malik is demonstrating the skills and competencies required to read, write, and make meaning using a range of modes. Of course, this includes decoding alphabetic print, but also an understanding of the affordances of a range of modes, including visual elements in the game and how his own touch and movement will influence play. With a fluent series of taps and multi-taps, he builds upgraded walls and places giants, bolstering his encampment's defenses against attack. His agile operation of the mobile phone and the game supports Malik's engagement in meaning-making practices. Swiping across the screen to double-check an initial assumption, he establishes that his online opponent doesn't have any air-based means of attack (such as balloons). He reasons that his land-based defenses will be adequate, showing in-depth understanding of diegetic in-game elements. In line with Mackey's notion of "playing the text," he is *engaging with the rules of the game* and *strategizing*. Moving out of the diegetic world of the text to *orchestrate*, he plans his next acts and then back in to carry them out. At the same time, he works seamlessly across digital and physical planes.

A more expansive interpretation might foreground the in-the-moment, hedonic, and affective pleasures emerging through Malik's operational-digital-literacies-in-the-body. We are struck by the central role of the phone and Malik's fingers, casually holding the device as he enacts "valued and expected practices" (Wohlwend 2009, 231) that produce naturalized ways of doing and being in the everyday. In the moment, Malik's

fluent, habitual taps, accompanied by his repeated utterances of the word "BOOM!" as he positions the castle walls into strategic digital space, suggest a synergy between sound and bodily movement coming together to create a strong affective response. Equally noticeable is the confluence of the (playful? triumphant?) smile on Malik's face as his words communicate the seemingly burdensome task ahead: "I have to deal with that." In combination with his earlier attempt to explain what was "good" about playing the game—"It makes me feel good, because you've done so much hard work, you see?"—these moments draw attention to Malik's feelings of competence and autonomy in the face of strategic challenges. In the moment we have selected, playing unfolds against the backdrop of an open online field, with unknown opponents and emergent strategies coalescing in real time. However, we are drawn to the ways in which competence and autonomy are entangled with Malik's anxieties about how he is perceived by his friends and Jameela's emphasis on the relational salience of levels, points, and status in Malik's gaming life: "*the centre of the talk with your friends is... I've done this, I've done that*" and her articulations of well-being as "a good status and well-being." In this moment, such "*good status*" appears co-constituted through the entangled vitality of playful "*BOOMS!*," fluent gestures, and affective intensities that reverberate across bodies, devices, sounds, and peer discourses.

4.2.2 | Vignette 2: Dylan's Cultural-Digital-Literacies-in-the-Body With Fortnite

Seven-year-old Dylan (F5) lived in a Sheffield apartment with his mum, Shifrah, a radiographer, and dad, Jeevan, who worked part-time in IT security. The family had moved to the apartment just 7 months before fieldwork began. Although English was spoken at home, Malayalam was also used occasionally. His parents supported both academic learning and fun, balancing study, swimming, cinema trips, and takeaway nights as a family. When asked about well-being, Dylan's mum, Shifrah, emphasized diverse aspects: "physical, mental, social, yeah everything—a balance." The recent house move away from an established friendship group had been very upsetting for Dylan, as Shifrah explained: "we moved house, so it was very hard for Dylan because he was leaving his friends behind. He was like—I'm going to be alone again, I'll have nobody to play with—and it was very, very hard." Dylan's mum shared that he would get "really upset" when he felt he wasn't "doing his best" or was making mistakes, whether in digital games or at school. These feelings appeared closely tied to his self-image and a growing concern with physical appearance. Aware that he was smaller than many peers, Dylan worried this made him a target for bullying, explaining: "I'm tiny and I don't want to have any bullies." His concerns about body image seemed linked to a desire for control over how he presented himself, with his mum, Shifrah, noting his perfectionism in his physical appearance: "He's right now very conscious about how he looks, his appearance, and he does not like it... like he wants his hair in a certain way and he wants his dress to be in a certain way [...] if he doesn't get it that way he gets very, very upset."

Energetic and full of humor, Dylan enjoyed a mix of activities after school, including digital play. He played *LEGO Batman*, *Subway Surfer*, and *Fortnite*—using voice chat and *WhatsApp*

to stay connected with friends, demonstrating mobility across platforms during play. He called himself “a YouTuber,” creating singing and dancing videos on a private YouTube channel shared only with family. Dylan also made music on his tablet with apps like *Beat Maker Go*. Dylan’s digital literacy practices drew on shared cultural resources to reinforce affinity within his friendships in ways that crossed seamlessly between digital and non-digital spaces. Dylan and his dad, Jeevan, emphasized that playing *Fortnite* could be about the gameplay itself, but also about sustaining shared passions within friendships, as Jeevan noted: “it’s mostly like a more of communication for them.” Dylan explained how shared plans to perform dances at school were sustained through chat in *Fortnite*:

So basically if me and my friend have a plan we need to do, like me being Michael Jackson at school, you go to Fortnite, we play one round and while you're playing the round we will chat about our plan.

Similarly, Dylan invested serious time and effort into attuning his body to cultural resources in ways that appeared to support his well-being in relationships, as well as self-identity. Jeevan explained that Dylan: “watches the videos and learns the dance steps by himself.” Dylan’s knowledge of both dances and platforms for showcasing them played a role in cementing his social status within friendships:

This is my favourite one. It’s me and my friend [...] my neighbour, Yusuf [...] he also do a YouTube channel. [...] I told him how to make a YouTube channel. I knew how to make a YouTube channel and then I told my friends, they’re like—nah, you don’t make it. I took my Mum’s phone down, we recorded videos, and then he said—can you show me how to make a YouTube channel? I did it and then boom, now we both have YouTube channels.

In line with our study’s conceptualization of subjective well-being, many digital literacy practices in Dylan’s case, including the one featured in the vignette below, appeared to support his well-being. This was observed across multiple dimensions of subjective well-being, including relationships, identities, and competence.

The partial multimodal transcript in Figure 3 corresponds with a 47-s excerpt from a longer, 9-min video, filmed during Shabana’s fifth (and penultimate) visit to Dylan’s home. It illustrates Dylan’s cultural-digital-literacies-in-the-body with the online videogame and game platform, *Fortnite*. Visit 3B included a range of activities to generate insight into the child and their family’s continued use (or lack thereof) of a “focus game.” The moment unfolded during a poster-making

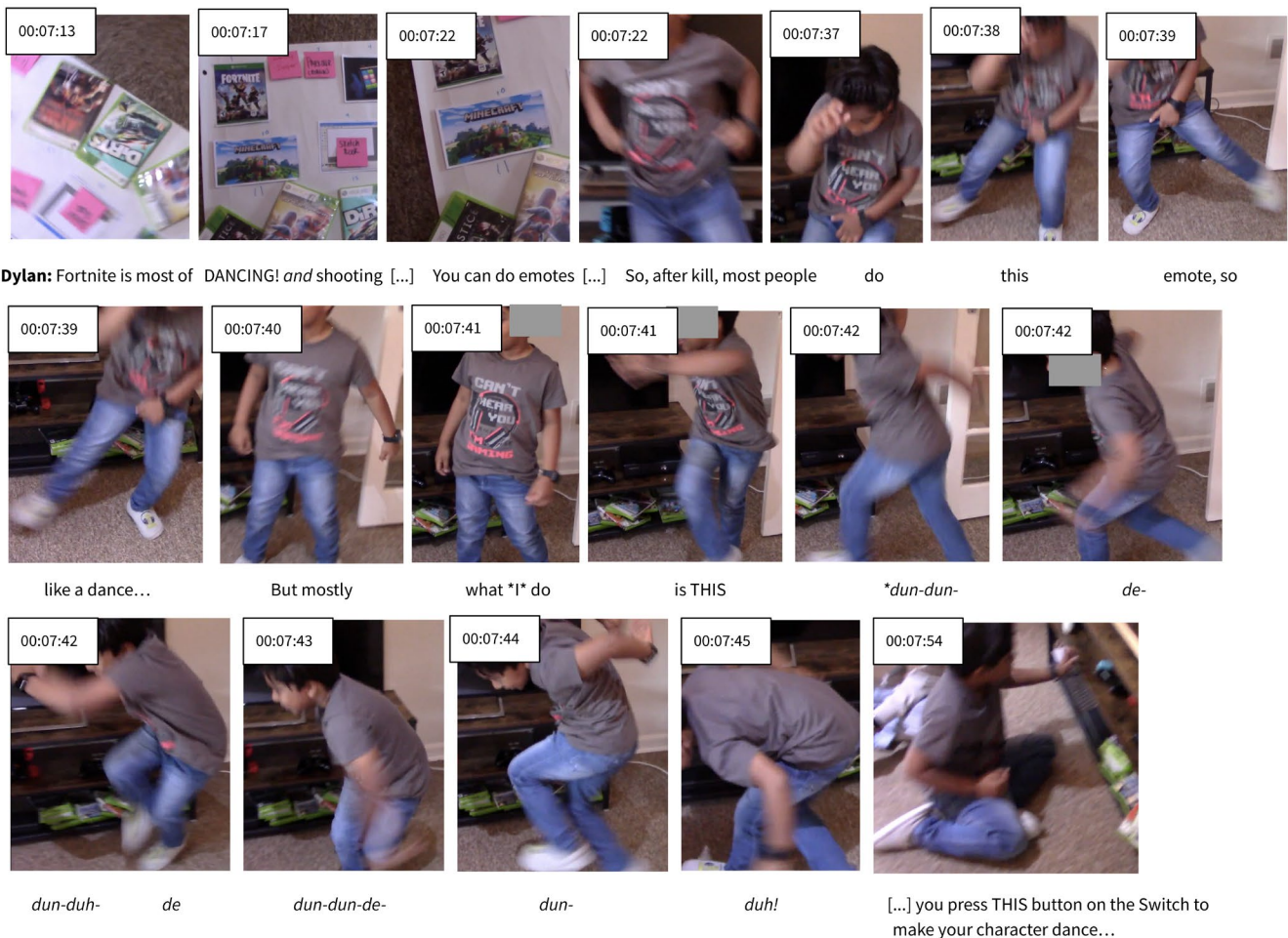


FIGURE 3 | Dylan shows Shabana the *Fortnite* dances.

activity, which was designed to generate data focused on the child's perceptions of the "focus game" in relation to their other digital passions and broader interests. In the moment selected for microanalysis, Shabana had been undertaking the poster-making activity with Dylan, asking him to rank games according to his preferences and explain why they were positioned in the way he had chosen. Dylan had selected 14 games to include on his poster, choosing to position *Fortnite* at number "1" as his "first favourite game" and *World of Goo* at "7." After discussing the relative merits of several of the 14 games, Shabana asked Dylan whether any of the games he had chosen were "like" *Fortnite*, to which Dylan responded that *LEGO Batman* (number "5") was "kind of" the same. Dylan began to explain that both featured fighting people and shooting. Seemingly trying to bring Dylan back to Shabana's question, Dylan's dad, Jeevan, asked: "But they're also the same things, right?" In response, Dylan began to explain:

(Pointing to LEGO Batman) But this is most of fighting. For that (pointing to Fortnite) Fortnite is most of. Fortnite is most of (standing up) Fortnite is most of DANCING! And of shooting.

In the excerpt that follows, Dylan tells—but also shows with his body—what is different about *Fortnite*, as he physically demonstrates the game's iconic dances.

This micro-vignette demonstrates the ways in which Dylan's digital literacy practices align with Sefton-Green et al.'s (2016) adaptation of Green's (1988) 3D model of literacy. Consistent with our study's framing, Dylan's cultural-digital-literacies-in-the-body in this moment can be read as supportive of multiple facets of subjective well-being. Like Malik, Dylan enacted operational-digital-literacies-in-the-body, his actions fluently decoding and responding to affordances of a range of modes. For example, he draws attention to the button on the physical Switch device to demonstrate how this translation between physical and digital space is made possible. A lens of digital literacy as *skills and knowledge* also draws attention to the cultural understandings and practices derived from engaging in digital literacy practices in specific social and cultural contexts. Dylan's performance demonstrates his awareness of cultural norms and practices within the *Fortnite* gameworld, where avatar dances represent shared cultural meaning.

A more generative framing might center the spontaneous, hedonic intensities and affective charge of Dylan's digital-literacies-in-the-body. We pause to consider the complex assemblage of bodies, materials, and spaces, as well as the discursive shifts—from the messy poster-making materials (paper, post-notes, photos of games, handwriting) to Dylan's body, and then to the Nintendo Switch console itself. In the moment, it seems the poster-making materials are not enough to convey all that Dylan wants to show to Shabana. Instead, his body speaks through energetic movement. Dylan's body carries intricate cultural knowledge of the ways in which (post-)digital bodies move within the *Fortnite* gameworld to signify a win. Announcing: "most people do this," Dylan's hands make an "L" shape, which he holds to his forehead, whereas his body bounces from one foot to another, swinging from side to side. In the *Fortnite* universe, these movements, which

can be produced using the "Take the L" (take the loss) emote, are one of several movements commonly deployed to signify victory after killing an opponent in the game. The dance, which is colloquially believed to be based on a move by Pennywise, the clown character in "It," is frequently used beyond *Fortnite*, for example, in the case of France's Antoine Griezmann celebrating a successful penalty kick in the 2018 Football World Cup final (Thier 2018). Though versed in this movement and its shared cultural resonance, Dylan's own (post-)digital body asserts individuality in its divergent victory-signaling practice. Asserting: "what I do is this," Dylan's arms instead swing ahead of, and behind, his body as his legs skip energetically, accompanied by a jaunty song: "dun-dun-de-dun-duh-de, dun-dun-de-dun-duh!" In the *Fortnite* universe, these movements, which can be enacted using the "Tra la la" emote, hold a less explicitly victorious cultural resonance. The emote carries an ID of "HappySkipping" and the description: "Sometimes you just need to skip the battle." "Tra la la" is a set of nonsensical syllables, often used in songs or as a refrain, to suggest gaiety, lightheartedness, or playful derision. We are struck by the playfulness of the accompanying song, through which Dylan has added sound to the dance, and the casually swinging arms. Dylan is demonstrating his characteristic humor in adopting this lighthearted and playful movement as his own personal expression of victory. Dylan's words—and body—are moving this cultural digital literacy practice into a more critical engagement with the text, subverting cultural expectations about how the post(digital) body moves in this community of practice, at the very same time that his body is demonstrating sophisticated participation within it.

Consistent with our study's framing, Dylan's cultural-digital-literacies-in-the-body in this moment can be read as supportive of multiple facets of subjective well-being, including relationships. Our awareness of Dylan's everyday digital literacy practices and their relation to well-being emphasizes the centrality of embodied cultural understanding in affirming his membership of communities of practice—both within and beyond gameworlds. In this sense, the moment chosen for analysis connects with the earlier example, wherein Dylan subverts his friend's expectations to make his own dance-based YouTube channel. At the same time, Dylan's body is showing how cultural-digital-literacies-in-the-body and critical-digital-literacies-in-the-body support his feelings of autonomy and identity—both individual and collective. Though it seems important to participate in these peer cultures, as we know from Shifrah's comments, asserting individual identity is also vital to Dylan's evolving sense of self.

4.2.3 | Vignette 3: Penny's Critical-Digital-Literacies-in-the-Body and Transgressive Text-Making With Brookhaven

Nine-year-old Penny (F1) lived in a three-bedroom home with a garden in southern Sheffield, with her parents Kristen and Gary, siblings James (11) and Poppy (7), and their puppy, Charlie. Kristen worked part-time as a SEND administrator, whereas Gary, an Automotive Paint Technician, was the main earner. All but Gary enjoyed swimming, often using a garden pool in summer where the children played together. They occasionally visited local parks and theme parks, especially in

warmer months. Penny, however, often lost interest in hobbies outside the home, having started and left several activities including dance, gymnastics, swimming, and trampolining. Most of Penny's digital interests were introduced by her older brother James, including the game *Bloxburg* on *Roblox* and the series *Stranger Things*. Though she often played alone, she also engaged in digital play with siblings, friends, and a cousin. The siblings frequently played together on their own devices, with *Bloxburg* a shared favorite. Penny preferred open-ended, customizable role-play games. Her favorite play space was her bedroom, where she used her laptop and smartphone while watching TV. Kristen saw digital play as a safe way for Penny to connect with friends and took measures to protect her emotional well-being, including using parental controls, monitoring her friend lists, and regularly checking in on her play. When asked about well-being, Penny's mum, Kristen, mentioned a range of dimensions, including safety and physical fitness. Overwhelmingly, however, she emphasized positive affect:

Just that she remains happy. Whatever Penny chooses to do I just want....she just needs to be happy, happy with her choices, happy with what she's doing. Yeah and just be happy.

One of the issues Penny and her family raised in terms of well-being was confidence and autonomy in relation to her friends. When, during an interview, Penny mentioned that she loved knocking down houses she had built in games like *Roblox*, Shabana asked Penny to tell her more. The discussion turned to ideas about being "in control," an idea Penny expanded on by explaining that she was: "terrified" of her "best friend": "I have such a lack of confidence." Seemingly trying to explain, Kristen elaborated:

Her friend is quite over-confident and likes to control things. And Penny is quite polite and doesn't say when she doesn't like something or... because she doesn't want to upset her. So I think in that, I think that's what she's saying is that she kind of does lack confidence almost in real life at the minute.

By contrast, Penny said that playing digital games made her feel "free, finally it makes me feel like I'm just... I'm like Charlie [family dog] that's just been let out of his cage after 6 hours. Freedom!!" One of the ways that Penny appeared to respond to a perceived lack of confidence and control in relation to peers was through acts of transgression. On one occasion, Penny told researcher, Shabana, that in the past she had sprayed on her best friend's front lawn in *Roblox*, although her friend didn't know it was her that had done it. When Shabana asked: "Do you want to say why you've done that?," Penny simply replied: "Because I wanted to."

We noticed evolving identity as a key theme in Penny's case, with tentative engagement in new, more "grown-up" activities marking this transition. Beyond digital play, Penny was beginning to experiment with self-presentation—choosing clothes, styling hair, applying make-up—and expressing new interests, such as cooking. These practices were shaped by uncertainty, self-doubt and family negotiation. For instance, Penny and her

Mum gently contested her abilities in hair and make-up, with Penny downplaying her efforts through humor and play. As Penny said of her efforts to style a friend's hair and make-up: "I make it look ridiculous... once I put a... remember, she put my hair in pigtails and then she made her hair look ridiculous and put a Jojo Siwa bow in it." In digital spaces, Penny's identity play unfolded through role-play and customization, especially in her favorite game, *Bloxburg*. Here, she designed a home, customized her avatar with care, and cooked virtual recipes—activities mirroring her evolving offline interests. *Bloxburg's* flexible design and permissions settings afforded both independence and privacy, enabling Penny to explore identities with lower social risk. When asked what she valued most, her emphasis was on autonomy and control:

It makes me feel, like, quite comfortable, because, like, obviously I can just do things on my own without anyone, like, having to bother me or something. I like to role-play on my own sometimes too, like, without anyone.

Penny's virtual role-play reflected and reinforced her tentative offline engagement in the kitchen. These interlinked practices supported her well-being by fostering agency, relational connection, and a sense of competence and safety. In line with our study's conceptualization of subjective well-being, many digital literacy practices in Penny's case, including the one featured in the vignette below, appeared to support her well-being. This was observed across multiple dimensions of subjective well-being, including identities, autonomy and emotions.

The partial multimodal transcript in Figure 4 corresponds with a 60-s excerpt from a longer, 9-min video, filmed by Penny on a *GoPro* and shared with researcher, Shabana. It illustrates Penny's critical-digital-literacies-in-the-body with the *Brookhaven* game on the *Roblox* platform. All families had been offered the option to share photos or video clips loosely relating children's play, broader interests and activities with the research team and a *GoPro* camera had been left with each family for the purpose of generating data. Penny and her family shared a range of photos and videos, depicting family trips, the sisters making pizzas together and playing with the family dog. The moment selected for microanalysis is from a longer video shared with the research team. Penny and her family had explained how they liked to engage in co-play in a number of *Roblox* games, often playing on individual devices in their own bedrooms. We were excited to hear that Penny had chosen to film and share some clips from a play session in *Brookhaven* with her sister, Poppy. In the moment below, Penny and Poppy had been playing for some time, each on their laptop in their own bedroom, when Penny proposed: "let's get some coffee" to her sister. In the excerpt that follows, Penny and Poppy discuss going to get some "lattes" in *Brookhaven*.

Like Malik and Dylan, Penny enacts operational-digital-literacies-in-the-body—for example, in manipulating the "Grill Master" barbecue. A lens of digital literacy as *skills and knowledge* also draws attention to the cultural understandings and practices derived from engaging in digital literacy practices in specific social and cultural contexts. Penny's embodied *Brookhaven* actions make explicit her awareness of cultural



FIGURE 4 | Penny and Poppy get lattes in *Brookhaven*.

norms and practices within the *Brookhaven* gameworld, where going for a coffee is a normalized social practice afforded by the game's design features. The "Starbucks" in *Brookhaven* is a popular spot for players to hang out, chat, and "get coffee" with others as a way of engaging in social activities within the game.

A more expansive framing might foreground the emergent, affective intensities and relational entanglements of Penny's digital-literacies-in-the-body. The research team came back often to the clips of Penny and her sister dissolving into shared laughter while playing *Brookhaven*. These moments made the team smile—and laugh—and seemingly channeled something of the transgressive

release that had surfaced several times before in descriptions shared by Penny and her family in interviews. We are struck by the dissonance between Penny's rational instructions ("Let's go get some coffee") and the sheer chaos her body is dispensing in relation to the "Grill Master" barbecue in the *Brookhaven* universe. Penny's body is writing a different story to the one she is creating with her words. As she calmly suggests popping out for coffee, her fingers are tap-tapping rapidly on the keyboard; turning the grill on, raising the temperature from 100 to 200, to 300 and so on until the maximum temperature of 1000 is reached. Pausing for a brief second, she taps again to place, first, some chicken, then some steaks and finally some burgers onto the hot grill. Flames are already erupting as she reaffirms—"um and we can go and get some um some lattes." Flinging herself on top of her car, she urges Poppy to join her on the planned trip to the cafe—"Poppy come on!" but Poppy is already collapsing in giggles at the unfolding mayhem—"it's on fire!" Penny maintains her calm tone—"I've locked my house, it'll be fine." Watching the clip, we see Poppy streak across the screen from left to right, her avatar engulfed in flames—"I'm on fire!" At this point, Penny launches into Alicia Keys' 2012 female empowerment anthem, "Girl on Fire." Penny's spontaneous semiotic relocation of the "girl-on-fire" motif from the unfolding on-screen drama to the performance of a popular song exemplifies a form of transmediation that is free from the practice constraints of school (e.g., Johnston et al. 2022).

Sefton-Green et al.'s (2016) adaptation of Green's (1988) 3D model of literacy describes critical digital literacy as the ability to engage critically with digital texts and artifacts, interrogating issues such as power and agency, representation and voice, authenticity and veracity. However, Green's original definition of critical literacy suggested that a critical stance involved both: "the means to reflect critically on what is being learned and taught" and "to take an active role in the production of knowledge and meaning" (Green 1988, 163). As in the case of Dylan, Penny is engaging critically with the digital text, subverting cultural expectations about embodied ways of doing and being in this shared space, at the same time that she demonstrates sophisticated participation within it. Reading Penny's play as a form of literacy in action, we notice how she is both consuming and producing text. The text she produces is cognisant of expected ways of doing and being in the digital space, but produces transgression through confident authorship of both text and subtext. Consistent with our study's framing, Penny's critical-digital-literacies-in-the-body in this moment can be read as supportive of multiple facets of subjective well-being, in particular autonomy, creativity and identity. Our awareness of Penny's everyday digital literacy practices and their relation to well-being emphasizes the centrality of critical-digital-literacies-in-the-body in asserting her individualism within communities of practice—particularly within virtual spaces. Penny's transgression in *Brookhaven* connects with the earlier example, wherein Penny subverted cultural expectations in the *Bloxberg* space to anonymously vandalize her friend's garden.

Taken together, these analyses demonstrate that well-being emerges not as an individual psychological outcome, but as an embodied and relational phenomenon within complex family digital ecologies.

5 | Discussion and Conclusions

Research across literacy studies has continued to draw attention to how children's language and meaning-making practices are shaped—and often constrained—by schooling logics and middle-class expectations about what counts as legitimate. Literacy education frequently privileges recognizable linguistic productivity, future-oriented academic outcomes and normatively valued communicative forms, thereby narrowing the range of practices through which children may meaningfully participate in literacy worlds. Work by Boldt (2021), alongside others (e.g., Badwan et al. 2025; Snaza 2021) reorients literacy theory toward forms of participation grounded in affect, embodiment and care, arguing for spaces in which children may set the terms of engagement with language—including through movement, material interaction or forms of expression that resist immediate interpretation.

Across this emerging body of work, literacy is understood less as the production of stable meanings and more as participation in events animated by relational vitality. Such perspectives invite researchers and educators to attend to how literacy encounters might be cared for rather than evaluated according to predefined standards. However, among these theoretical developments, comparatively little attention has been paid to digital play as a site where such affective orientations might unfold. Our own study contributes by examining children's digital play—specifically practices entangled with video and digital games within family contexts—as a space in which embodied, affective, and ludic forms of meaning-making become possible beyond schooled expectations of literacy. We argue that digital play environments can function as sites in which children engage in forms of narrative experimentation, embodied participation, and playful "opacity" (Shannon and Hackett 2024) that unsettle dominant assumptions about literacy as discrete skill acquisition. In doing so, the study extends emerging affect-oriented discussions within literacy studies into the domain of children's digital literacies, where the prevailing tendency remains to conceptualize literacy primarily in terms of competencies and measurable outcomes. It is well established that children's home digital literacy practices support the development of digital skills (Marsh et al. 2021) and that attention to these practices is important in support of coherent and productive approaches at the intersection between home and school (e.g., Kumpulainen and Gillen 2017). However, our study draws attention to how children's home digital literacy practices matter in ways that are deeply situated and other than the ways in which they are often valued in contexts beyond the home—including in school.

In particular, informed by the new literacies scholars, we look beyond digital literacies as skills and knowledge to consider how digital literacy practices at home matter for children's well-being. We do so with reference to the 3D model of literacy. Though well-known and frequently applied to children's digital literacy practices, there is surprisingly little work to date which applies the 3D model expansively to illustrate what children's operational, cultural, and critical digital literacy practices at home "look like" and why they matter, particularly beyond narrow conceptualizations of digital literacy and in the lives of mid-age range children (7–12). Our findings offer a nuanced exemplification of children's operational, cultural, and critical digital literacy practices at home, whereas

our analyses trace the myriad and everyday ways they connect with well-being. In this sense, we extend the work of the new literacies scholars to consider a much broader range of functions that digital literacy practices fulfill in the everyday lives of children and their families. By tracing literacies-in-the-body through an ethnographic logic of inquiry, this study repositions the “well” digitally literate child as an embodied, relational, and contextually situated meaning-maker whose literacy practices and well-being emerge through participation in everyday practices, including digital play, within family ecologies.

In doing so, our study foregrounds the need to attend to children's bodies to more fully understand the relationship between children's digital literacies and their well-being. As scholars (e.g., Mills et al. 2023) have previously argued, children's home digital literacy practices exist not in the mind *and* the body as discrete entities, but in the “mind–body” (p. 111): digital literacy is experienced through, performed through, and embedded *in* the body. By attending to bodies, objects, and spaces as well as language within our data, we attune to the in-the-moment, hedonic, and affective pleasures produced through children's entanglements with the digital. Meanwhile, by situating the relationship between children's digital literacy practices and their well-being within more expansive, holistic analyses of child and family practices and articulations about digital play, well-being, hobbies and passions, we notice how quotidian embodied performances of, and responses to, digital literacy practices in the everyday are connected with a universe of existing histories of valued and expected child and family digital literacy practices and their intersection with well-being. Following recent theoretical developments (e.g., Cárdenas Curiel et al. 2025; Ehret and Hollett 2014), we attend to digital-literacies-in-the-body to offer a fine-grained analysis of hedonic, affective, and embodied forms of well-being as they emerge through the mundane, relational texture of children's digital literacy practices at home. In doing so, we conceptually reimagine the relations between digital literacies, bodies, and well-being in childhood. Attending to *vitality* as an event-based energy moving through relations invites a complementary ethical sensitivity within digital literacy research. In this sense, our analyses resonate with affect-oriented accounts of *care for the event*. From this perspective, scholarship may be understood as a practice of *caring for* the conditions through which digital literacies and children's well-being co-emerge.

Although the link between literacy and well-being is often framed in normative developmental and economic terms, relatively little research has examined the forms of well-being implicit in diverse literacy practices at home—particularly hedonic and affective forms of well-being as lived and felt within children's bodies as they move with literacies. Literacy, as mastery of discrete skills, is often positioned as essential to children's well-being. In such conceptualizations, eudaimonic indicators of well-being are often privileged, and investment in literacy is understood as a long-term pursuit whose benefits (such as access to well-paid employment) are assumed, although other work, such as that from the National Literacy Trust (Clark et al. 2024) emphasizes mental well-being and both immediate and longer-term benefits. Although acknowledging the important and

inevitable functions that mastery of discrete skills plays in children's lives, our study invites a more holistic view of the ways in which children's home-based (digital) literacy practices contribute to well-being in ways that remain under-acknowledged in policy discourses and are often difficult to perceive or articulate without attunement to the body as a site of meaning-making. In response, we offer an alternative imagining of the “well” (digitally) literate body—not as a subject to be disciplined and shaped through literacy education toward possible, future-oriented outcomes, but as already entangled with forms of well-being emergent in children's everyday digital-literacies-in-the-body with videogames at home. This repositioning suggests a pluriversal (Perry 2021) understanding of digital well-being, in which multiple embodied ways of being literate and well coexist rather than conforming to a singular, developmental ideal.

In our introduction, we introduced the idea that dominant discourses about literacy and well-being in childhood tend to locate well-being in the imagined future benefits of intellectual labour. Eudaimonic well-being is often positioned in alignment with the future, in terms of long-term flourishing, whereas hedonic well-being is generally considered as primarily associated with short-term pleasure and gratification. Recent scholarship, however, suggests that conceptual divisions between eudaimonic and hedonic well-being are more theoretical than empirical (Huta 2022, 512), advocating instead for an integrated, holistic approach (Disabato et al. 2016). Our findings invite reflection on how children's embodied engagements with digital literacies may link momentary pleasure and longer-term flourishing. In analyzing our own data, we frequently reflected on the extent to which any of the types of well-being we were paying attention to in children's play, in line with our shared framework (UNICEF 2021), could be understood as being in-the-moment expressions of well-being *alone*, or whether we saw evidence that repeated experiences of practices associated with well-being in-the-moment appeared to connect with longer term experiences of well-being for children. One answer to the question is, of course, that well-being in-the-moment holds intrinsic value, regardless of whether or not it serves to sustain dimensions of well-being in the longer term. However, the idea that hedonic well-being is a transient phenomenon in contrast to eudaimonia's longer-term flourishing warrants further reflection. In our own study, our methodological approach allowed for the situation of micro-instances of well-being within more expansive, holistic analyses of child and family practices and articulations about digital play, well-being, hobbies, and passions. As a result, we noticed many instances of repeated practices that supported well-being in the moment and appeared to fulfill deeper (and longer-term) needs, passions, and desires that were meaningful to the children themselves. Penny's transgressive play supported pleasurable affective experiences in the moment described in Figure 4, but repeated instances of this sort of digital practice also served a deeper purpose in supporting her longer-term feelings of autonomy and positive relationality. Malik's momentary pride in conquering his opponents in Figure 2 is clear, but his case also offers an example of how frequent experiences of such mastery appear to have been supporting his longer-term experiences of competence. In this sense, it is hard to disentangle eudaimonic and hedonic experiences of well-being, and also clear that shorter and longer term experiences of well-being are complexly interconnected.

Disabato et al.'s (2016) team reviewed a large, international sample to determine whether hedonia and eudaimonia represent one overarching well-being construct or two related dimensions. They concluded that a single, overarching construct more accurately reflected hedonia and eudaimonia when measured as self-reported subjective and psychological well-being, but that measures of eudaimonia may contain aspects of meaningful goal-directedness unique from hedonia. By this measure, the principal difference between the two is not necessarily the longevity of the effect, but rather the extent to which it is understood (subjectively) as meaningfully goal-directed. Ahmed's (2010) comments in "Happy Futures" resonate here; "Pointless emotions are not meaningless or futile; they are just not directed toward the objects that are assumed to cause them. Perhaps a revolutionary happiness is possible if we allow our boats to flee" (p. 198). In understanding well-being in our own study, then, perhaps the question is not whether children's digital literacy practices support children's longer-term flourishing by supporting externally determined ("assumed") goals associated with academic success, social belonging, and *future* economic security, but whether they support longer-term experiences of well-being that are meaningful to individual participants?

Over a quarter of a decade has passed since foundational ethnographies such as those by Heath (1983) and Barton and Hamilton (2012) called for curriculum and teacher education reforms that would meaningfully recognize and build upon the diverse language and literacy practices children bring with them from home—especially those shaped in working-class or non-mainstream communities. Yet, as Shirley Brice Heath reflects in Avineri et al.'s (2015) *Invited Forum*, the substantial global variation in language input behaviors documented across decades of research has had little impact on teacher preparation or reading curriculum development, even as school populations have themselves become increasingly diverse. In this time, global financial crises, employment shifts, and economic changes have meant that children and adults globally have less joint recreational time, whereas advances in digital technologies have drawn increasing attention to digital play as a recreational pursuit. Yet, the practices children and families engage in with digital technologies are not *other than* local literacies; they are themselves part of diverse family ecologies and deeply entangled with a broad range of personal and contextual forces. Although the ability to read and write remains of vital importance to children's well-being, a continued privileging of narrowly defined, skills-based models of literacy—at the expense of engaging with the full range of children's (digital) literacy practices at home—therefore risks perpetuating the very inequalities that social justice oriented literacy education purports to address, not least by turning children off reading for pleasure (Clark et al. 2024; Clark et al. 2025). In this context, our study's findings suggest two ways families and educators might attend differently to children's (digital) literacy practices.

Following Snaza (2021), affect-oriented literacy scholarship cautions against translating research directly into pedagogical strategies or prescriptive teaching approaches. Rather than offering techniques to be implemented, our work invites educators to reconsider how they attend to, value, and care for the (digital) literacy practices already unfolding within children's lives. In this sense, the implications discussed below are not

intended as instructional prescriptions, but as orientations that may help educators remain responsive to the relational and affective conditions through which literacy and well-being come into being. Firstly, and in line with arguments made by others (Thiel 2015; Ehret and Hollett 2014; Wohlwend 2020), both educators and families might pay attention to, value and embrace a wider repertoire of (digital) literacy practices with an open mind, considering how movements and sounds sometimes considered disruptive or antithetical to literacy learning might in fact be evidence of both children's literate knowledge and their agentic knowledge production. Rather than thinking about mastery of a set of discrete skills as the solution to issues of children's well-being facing society, attention to digital-literacies-in-the-body might attune families and educators to the ways in which such practices are already supporting children's in-the-moment subjective well-being as well as their longer-term experiences of flourishing on their own terms.

Secondly, educators might consider how attention to the entanglement of well-being with children's digital-literacies-in-the-body might, in fact, offer opportunities for experiences in the literacy classroom (and beyond) that are congruent with, rather than antithetical to, existing curriculum aims. Arguably, education policy in many global contexts is, at present, poorly positioned to support educators in engaging children in meaning-making activities that attune to the digital literacy practices that support their well-being at home. Rather, policy and curriculum uphold the neoliberal, future-oriented *economic security* model, which runs counter to children's desires (and needs) for well-being, including through hedonic practices. However, returning to discussions on literacy and social justice, attention to children's digital-literacies-in-the-body offers opportunities to support literacy learning that inspires and animates diverse bodies in the literacy classroom. In conversation with broader and well-established questions about the purpose of literacy education, the study highlights numerous dimensions of well-being that could perhaps be supported in the literacy classroom when children's deep interests, desires, and needs are taken into account, including within and beyond the digital. Indeed, the study highlights the ways that digital play can support a range of skills and competencies *congruent with* existing curriculum aims, including multimodal text creation, possibility thinking, creating and making and the development of critical media and digital literacy skills. As advocated in Clark et al.'s (2025) report on UK children and young people's reading in 2025, opportunities for reading should center on children's diverse interests, allow autonomy in choice of material and make links between reading and other media that children and young people already recognize as part of their cultural repertoires, for example, by giving students the opportunity to retell, critique or reconstruct digital media texts through movement rather than verbal responses, foregrounding both personal resonances and the digital media discourses they would prefer to subvert. Education policy makers could also consider how their work could be extended by offering guidance on apps and games offering holistic benefits, such as those that support children's multimodal text creation and broader, embodied literacy practices.

In methodological terms, the study contributes to a growing body of literacy and digital play research that has foregrounded the value of attending to children's bodies alongside language.

Specifically, our study raises productive methodological questions about what constitutes embodiment in (post-)digital contexts. Increasing attention to children's bodies need not entail a devaluing of what children and adults say. In the present study, language was methodologically decentered but not disregarded. Instead, we adopted an expansive, holistic approach to making sense of children's digital-literacies-in-the-body and well-being, attending to what children said, what adults said about children, children's bodies at play, and a wide range of other details (including spaces, objects, and affect) over a semi-longitudinal period. This approach generated questions as well as supporting our noticing. His process raised questions as well as supporting our noticing. The use of video data was essential, but our analyses foregrounded the in-the-moment decisions our team made about what was in focus. We captured both moments of significant researcher-child language-based interaction and extended periods of video data in which it might seem that "nothing much was happening." Moments that were entirely excluded from initial transcription because no spoken language was present were often understood as vitally important when it came to the more detailed, multimodal analyses. Attending closely to embodiment through repeated viewing also prompted reflection on what might count as embodied literacy practice in (post-)digital play. In some cases, children performed embodied knowledge of digital texts, as in Dylan's *Fortnite* performances; in others, fingers on screens enacted valued and recognizable practices that would likely be overlooked in language-centered analyses. Building on work that has challenged human-digital separations in studies of children's play and literacy (e.g., Marsh 2010; Burnett and Merchant 2018), our analyses raised methodological questions about embodiment itself. At times, noticed how analyses of children's digital-literacies-in-the-body transcended human-digital binaries, as human and avatar bodies moved in synchrony to experience and achieve in (post)digital spaces, prompting us to ask whether, and in what ways, avatars might be understood as part of children's embodied participation in literacy practices. Through this methodological orientation, we were able to think differently about both the well-being affordances of children's everyday digital play at home and about what the inequality "problem" in literacy education really is, as well as how it might be addressed. Our study contributes not only empirical insights into children's digital literacy practices but also extends emerging affect-oriented discussions within literacy studies into the domain of children's digital literacies, where the prevailing tendency remains to understand digital literacy primarily in terms of discrete skills and competencies.

In conclusion, the study makes three contributions. First, it extends affect- and care-oriented literacy scholarship into the domain of children's digital literacies, demonstrating how videogame play can operate as a space in which children experiment with meaning-making beyond schooled linguistic expectations. Second, it offers an expansive application of the 3D model of literacy, illustrating what operational, cultural, and critical digital literacy practices with video and digital games *look like* within everyday family life for children aged 7–12. Third, by situating digital literacy practices within broader family ecologies of play, hobbies, and relationships, the study traces how embodied digital literacies connect with children's lived experiences of well-being—a relationship that has rarely been examined empirically in literacy research.

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Disclosure

Permission to reproduce material from other sources: We have no sources requiring permission to reproduce.

Ethics Statement

Ethical issues were addressed throughout the study, in line with the British Educational Research Association's Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (Fourth Edition, 2018) and the Association of Internet Researchers' Internet Research Ethical Guidelines (Version 3.0, 2020). The project was ethically approved in line with The University of Sheffield's ethics application system (reference number 044273).

Adults participating in the study read an information sheet and signed a consent form. Depending on their age, children participating in the study were provided with either a bespoke, combined information and consent Booklet (6–8-year-olds) or Zine (9–12-year-olds). Though children were invited to sign these, children's ongoing assent to participate in the research activities was judged through frequent invitations to engage (or not) and ongoing attention to bodily and facial expressions of (dis/)comfort (Dockett and Perry 2011). If children appeared to be tired, then the interviews/video recording schedules were adjusted accordingly. All of the participants in the study have been assigned pseudonyms for the purposes of reporting.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

We are in the process of making anonymized transcripts available via ORDA. The suggested set of research activities and tools is currently available on ORDA.

Endnotes

¹ A nexus map (Scott 2018) is a methodological tool used to progressively take note of, and visualize, connections across bodies, digital media texts, devices, objects, spaces, time and discourses, overlaying actions and perceived practices within these constellations. The approach is indebted to Scollon and Scollon's (2004) "nexus analysis" and to Wohlwend's (2020) account of 'mediated discourse analysis'.

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