

Cultural Identity Agency: An Allyship for Recentering Culture & Identity with Children

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Abstract

This article argues for a renewed educational commitment to allyship with children by centering culture, identity, and agency as fundamental rights. Drawing on theoretical, empirical, and autoethnographic evidence brings into conversation a critical examination of how contemporary schooling shaped by the Global Education Reform Movement (GERM) and neoliberal ideology, diminishes children's cultural identities, agency, and full personhood. To counter these reductive structures, the article introduces *cultural identity agency*, defined as the ability to maintain and sustain one's cultural identity by resisting assimilation and colonizing practices. Rooted in the preservation of cultural identity, home language, and community knowledge, cultural identity agency extends beyond skill-based or meritocratic notions of agency by centering culture, identity, and justice-oriented learning design as essential components for children's participation and empowerment. The article concludes by calling on educators to reimagine the image of the child as capable sense makers and to enact an allyship that sustains children's cultural identities to rehumanize early learning environments.

Keywords

culture, identity, agency, allyship, personhood

Introduction

Schools should be places where children have allies. Allies who recognize children enter school with many gifts including traditional cultural knowledge (Johnsson & Tualima, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Moll, et al., 2006), linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005), interests, hobbies, experiences, natural curiosity and inquiry about their world (Cochran-Smith, 1999; Dewey, 1938; Rogoff, 2014). Educators, learning design, and classroom spaces all contribute to an allyship force that solidifies, validates, and sustains students' cultures, heritage, identities, languages, abilities, and holistic ways of being so students feel valued, a sense of belonging, cared for, and loved (hooks, 2014; Souto-Manning et al., 2026).

Embracing the values of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) when working with children should also be at the core of our work as educators. However, when these values are challenged and compromised through an ever-changing geo-political global landscape, a revisiting and repurposing of our work as educators is necessary. We must remain grounded in leading in how equitable educational experiences are offered to children, especially while navigating uncertain futures.

To support the goal of allyship with children, an understanding of the current educational environments being imposed on young learners and their effects must be addressed to situate the importance of our work. By recognizing the harmful impacts from school policies, specifically from the heightened (GERM) Global Education Reform Movement,

(Sahlberg, 2016) and neoliberal ideologies of schooling, (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Sonu et al., 2016) educators can start to reshape their roles and perceptions of the image of children as capable and knowledgeable beings centering asset-based framing. This article will start with a discussion of agency and allyship which includes my definition of agency I call '*Cultural Identity Agency*,' where I offer a holistic and humanized way to conceptualize the agentic and innate capabilities of the child. A discourse using theoretical, empirical, and autoethnographic evidence will then be presented to further my rationale of the need of cultural identity agency for children who are subjected to an over emphasis on standardization, measurement, and carceral curriculum (Carlone, 2021). Finally, after exposing the cataclysmic effects that erase cultural identity agency in children, a call for action will be envisioned using a conceptual model to initiate reflection for reinvigorating our roles and efforts for cultivating and sustaining children's culture and identity in their school spaces.

1. Allyship and Agency in Education

1.1 Allyship in education

Genuine and authentic allyships for and with children in schools are not only needed, it is their right. According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, (1989) children shall have support and advocacy of their identity to exist in a world free from harmful and discriminatory practices. Similarly, in the United States, the Codes of Ethical Conduct from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (2011) designed principles preserving childhood which position educators to work positively with children, families, and the community using culturally responsive practices.

I offer two more reasons why allyship is essential, while naming the educational practices that are currently undermining children's rights. First, allyship means preserving cultural identity by resisting hegemonic paradigms of readiness and preparedness. These ideas subtract the learner from the educational experience (Valenzuela, 2010) through dehumanized transactions of control and discipline (hooks, 2014). Secondly, an allyship for children challenges the repressive nature of educational processes of society's norms on children that Foucault (1977) calls exertion and restrictive. Using Blackburn's (2011) definition of allies as "people who advocate for marginalized populations" (p. 83), and Patel's (2011) conception of allyship as a model where people in power work to end systems that maintain that power, can help elevate children past oppressive systems and into horizontal communities of learning. Allyship, then, becomes a transformative stance—challenging these norms by affirming children's cultural identity within their learning communities with educators relinquishing and sharing power with their students.

1.2 Agency in education

The term *agency* in education is often broadly defined, leading to superficial interpretations and limited understandings. Agency terminology such as voice, choice, and ownership are generalizations scholars name as surface level and tokenistic (Bragg, 2021; Baroutsis et al., 2016). Traditional conceptions of agency are usually framed through Eurocentric lenses granted to children based on merit and skill metrics which frequently exclude students of color (Adair & Sachdeva, 2021). Children are often associated in nostalgic imagery in need of protecting and continued to be portrayed as future becomings, not as contemporary beings (Lynch, 2017). Forms of

adultism attempt to preserve pureness by determining who and what belong in the domain of childhood (Bloch et al., 2003) limiting agency to romanticized narratives as too young to make decisions to think critically (Vitek, 2025; Yoon & Templeton, 2019).

Contemporary literature of authentic student voice and agency emphasizes more is involved than just simply listening, initiating free choice, or gathering student input. For example, Adair & Colegrove (2021) define agency as expanding student capabilities to influence or make decisions about how and what they learn. Carlone (2021) introduces epistemic agency—taking responsibility for one’s learning and contributing to knowledge-building practices, while Kuby & Vaughn (2015) describe agency as situated and relational, shaped by historical and social contexts. Agency formation is also relational based on many factors (Gallagher, 2019) and can be exercised as a form of a resistant agency where students refuse deficit-orientated characteristics of themselves to exert their own creative methods not always recognized by schools, teachers, and institutions (Yosso, 2005; Garlen et al., 2022).

1.3 Agency vs. Cultural Identity Agency

Building from these conceptions, I contemplate if definitions and understandings of agency can evolve even further to reflect its complexity? How do students develop agency and what precedes the act of agency itself? These questions become important to guide a deeper inquiry into how agency is cultivated and recognized within educational spaces. I contend many definitions omit the processes of agency formation in relation to identity and culture of the learner. Often, agency is framed as skill-based or as a discrete action, ignoring the deeper processes of development. My contribution to the scholarship of the phenomena on student

agency centers on the process behind agency formation and how culture, identity, learning theory, and being in communities of support can sustain agentic development especially across diverse cultural contexts.

I introduce a new definition: *Cultural Identity Agency*, which emphasizes being a full person of agency through reciprocal engagement within the community. I would define *cultural identity agency* as the ability to maintain and sustain one’s cultural identity by resisting assimilation and colonizing practices. This includes home language, cultural knowledge, and ways of being. Agency from this standpoint is inherent from birth—not earned or acquired from meritocratic systems. Cultural identity agency can be cultivated in schools through multiple ways including commitments to culture and identity, communities of practice, and learning design to promote justice oriented and culturally sustaining educational opportunities. These critical components are not a guarantee for agentic development nor the answer to a binary conception of whether agency is created or not, rather these pathways can become avenues in exploring children’s development while maintaining true identity of who they are. Recognizing the moral obligations to children as having cultural identity agency is of the utmost importance, as the following section will demonstrate.

2. GERM and Neoliberalism-Socialization and Subtractive Schooling for Children

2.1 GERM & Neoliberalism

The term Global Education Reform Movement (GERM) conceptualized by Sahlberg (2012) as a movement that prioritizes principles of increased standardization, a narrowing of the curriculum to core subjects and knowledge, the

growth of high stakes accountability, and the use of corporate management practices (Fuller & Stevenson, 2019). Policy influences date back decades to geo-political ideologies fearing the crisis of capital which included reports and legislation from the United States, such as *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 and the *No Child Left Behind Act* in 2001.

Globally, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), a conglomerate of thirty-eight countries from around the globe implements the Programme for International Assessment (PISA), which compares nations' student performance often seen as an evaluation of education systems. Results continually create a 'PISA' shock resulting in nations emphasizing reform efforts emphasizing narrower curricular scopes, standardization, high stakes testing, and accountability measures (Wu, 2026). As a consequence, reform efforts have reached the youngest of learners with the "mini PISA" being implemented on 5 year olds (Bradbury, 2020), where developmental data on children is available to countries to now compare and reform their early childhood programs.

The naming of this schooling system has also evolved and is referred to as neoliberal schooling (Dahlberg & Moss 2005; Harvey, 2007). Neoliberal schooling is a system based on economic perspectives of how schools should be organized and operationalized through policies preferencing marketization, privatization, and efficiency. Neoliberalism as a mindset believes free markets and competition are positioned to best serve the needs of the population including public education for children (Harvey, 2007).

Unfortunately, the ideals of neoliberalism have now re-engineered the primary classroom for children to narratives of productivity, performance, and value-for-money

accountability systems (Hall & Pulsford, 2019). Concepts of readiness have trickled into the earliest of learning environments from Head Start to preschool (Wesley & Buysse, 2003; Ricciardi et al., 2021) amplified by a panic in learning loss due to school closures during the Covid-19 pandemic (Betebenner & Wenning, 2021; Zhao, 2021). What counts as learning is now associated with prepackaged curriculum, assessments, universal screening, and interventions all imposed on the youngest of students.

Schooling for children in the midst of GERM and neoliberal political and economic priorities has profoundly shaped and converted educational outcomes in favor of readiness and performance-based metrics (Garlen et al., 2022). As a consequence, children's voices and agency are silenced through the coercion of scripted curriculum and assessment mandates, while also sequestering their culture, language, curiosities, and the right to participate in their education. Children of color are often perceived through an image of deficit framing and subjected to school systems as training sites where agency and participation rights are earned based on merit and achievement in academic and behavior progressions (Adair & Colgrove 2021).

2.2 Images of the child through GERM and Neoliberal lenses

The hidden social and racial contracts of schooling

In Neoliberal schools, a child's right to exist becomes nonexistent through deculturalization processes (Spring, 2016) and subtractive schooling experiences (Valenzuela, 2010; Salazar, 2013). Love (2014) calls this approach to schooling as "spirit murdering," a slow death of the spirit, particularly in students of color where they are denied full inclusion,

protection, nurturance, and acceptance in their school space. Boutte & Bryan (2021) elaborate how violence in schools comes in many forms, not just physical, but also symbolic, linguistic, curricular and pedagogical, where souls and spirits are humiliated, invisibilized, and dehumanized. These are the detrimental consequences of agency deduction for young children as they go through the social and racial contracts of schooling.

Social contract of schooling

The irony of school life is that the students at the center of the school enterprise are the least empowered members of the community (DiMartino & Midwood, 2017). Two primary notions continuing to undergird conceptions of the modern child according to Gittins (2009) include the romantic-morally innocent child, and the *tabula rasa*- the cognitively empty child, both with roots tracing back to the Enlightenment era of the sixteenth century. Due to this paradigm, the image of the child (Malaguzzi, 1993; Veerman, 2021) in schools is often framed through deficit lenses of not being knowledgeable or with nothing to contribute. Manifested through systems of rigid learning designs and an obsession with measurement and accountability, children are reduced to metrics and labels. Rogoff (2014) refers to this as assembly line schooling where children (the products) are shaped to conform, think, and act in ways that reflect dominant societal norms.

This in essence, is the social contract of schooling. Children are not seen as full persons or participants co-existing with adults until they can be formally socialized and assembled in the proper knowledge based economy (Ball, 2012). Adair (2021) builds off Mills' (2014) personhood notion within the social contract of schooling, mentioning the lines of personhood and

subpersonhood which consistently offers rights to full persons. Sonu & Benson (2016) use the term quasi-human where children are seen as not yet human or yet to be, until they reach certain intellectual, cognitive, and social levels proving they can be obedient, compliant, and sit still to take in the approved knowledge (Jenkins, 2021). These are all reductionalist approaches for a child's development and passage into full personhood under the social contract.

The racial contract of schooling

The social contract of schooling within personhood and subpersonhood lines often becomes racialized (Mills, 2014; Adair, 2021). If children are students of color, their experience is twofold. Along with the social contract, they face additional elements of subtractive schooling (Valenzuela, 2010), erasing cultural identity while also having their bodies, actions, language, and thoughts surveillanced in their school spaces (Love, 2014; Jenkins, 2021)

Critical Race theory (Ladson-Billings, 2021) and Latin critical theory (Yosso, 2005) lenses examine research disclosing the devastating implications of how policies, practices, and perceptions impact populations of Brown and Black children disproportionately. The U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (OCR, 2021) unveils disparities of suspension rates affecting Black children at the rate of three and a half times more likely than their White counterparts. When looking at the Chicana/o educational pipeline, out of 100 students, 44 graduate from High School with 7 going on to graduate with a Bachelor's degree (Yosso, 2005).

Furthermore, frames of deficit lenses tend to view children of color as behind, at risk, and in need of catching up. Stratified pathways for students are then predetermined and

codified through interventionist curriculum or language-based programs (Anyon, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2021). Jenkins (2021) posits schools are vehicles through which enduring ideas about belonging are communicated and enacted through policies, practices, instructional images, curricular materials and discourses in daily social interactions. Students quickly understand who is represented in school spaces and which bodies are valued. Black, Indigenous, Latinx students and other people of color (BIPOC) must choose a conformist pathway to schooling where the idea of “twoness,” (Du Bois, 1903) being of two cultures, becomes nonexistent in the racial contract in schooling.

3. Empirical Evidence & Autoethnographic Accounts of GERM and Neoliberal Schooling

3.1 Empirical Evidence of the implications of GERM and Neoliberalism schooling

Research studies investigating schooling processes of young children continue to show how teachers shed their students’ home and family knowledge to reaggregate into the school system as students, not as children. Teachers of young children often hold beliefs that students need to be trained on how to behave, read, and use materials before agency can be granted.

“The first six weeks are pure training,” one teacher explained, “because they’re kinder,” and after they are trained, they can have more but limited choices, I still don’t give them a lot of free choice because there’s a lot of training and they still won’t do what they’re supposed to, I’ll give them more freedom as long as they’re getting everything done. (Adair et al., 2018, p.14).

Adair (2021) contends this as “racist justifications for the denial of agency that eventually become the racist foundations for SEL, behavior modification systems, discipline programs, and rote task-oriented pedagogies” (p. 140).

Bradbury (2020) extends insights of the datafication process in early childhood education revealing how educators report planning formal lessons not necessarily following the children’s interests. Datafication has led educators to shift mindsets of teaching and learning with an emphasis on collecting evidence in quantifiable ways while also increasing focus on literacy, numeracy, and ability grouping. Accountability measures now hold teachers captive to systems where data has dire disciplinary implications for program and school evaluation now tied to performance pay.

3.2. The Deduction of agency and culture- Autoethnographic accounts

Personal accounts from scholars of color in the education field, including myself, share similar and common autobiographical experiences and accounts relating to the social and racial contracts of schooling. Ladson-Billings (2021) describes that when growing up, she had a home language (a primary discourse) and a school language (a secondary discourse) soon learning schools value the secondary discourse, which is the culture of power (Delpit, 2006). Similarly, latin crit scholar Maria Salazar (2013) shares her experience as she entered school:

“I went to school with all of my treasures, including my Spanish language, Mexican culture, familia (family), and ways of knowing.” “I abandoned my treasures at the classroom door in exchange for English

and the U.S. culture; consequently, my assimilation into U.S. society was agonizing. One of my earliest memories is of wishing away my dark skin; I wanted desperately to be White, and I abhorred being *la morena*, the dark-skinned girl. I came to associate whiteness with success and brownness with failure. I was overwhelmed with feelings of shame over the most essential elements of my humanness. As a result, my experience in the U.S. educational system was marked by endless struggles to preserve my humanity” (p.121).

I mention these scholars' experience as their story is my story and is all too familiar for many students in school systems. During my schooling experience, I changed my appearance and rebranded myself away from my Mexican heritage. I did not know at the time, but my cultural spirit was also dying a slow death. As a Mexican American Chicano (born in the United States as a 3rd generation of my family) I, too, noticed that light skin and certain ways of being was equated with success. My identity in school was similar to that of a tennis match, a back and forth of decision-making processes of who I was or should be. I often changed my behavior, clothes, and appearance to align with how I thought I should exist in society, as the idea of “twoness” (Du Bois, 1903) could not co-exist. I had to pick. I remember changing my slick back hairstyle in 3rd grade in favor of a parted to the side style that matched my White peers in the classroom. In middle school and high school, I went from Cholo to ‘Preppy’, from Homies t-shirts and Ben Davis to Ralph Lauren, Gap and Guess, from Chuck Taylors and Nike Cortez, to slip on brown penny loafers, and from Dickies to straight legged jeans so that I could tuck in my shirts to be “presentable.” This is what seemed like success and expanded into my social

constructs of society with my preferences for white doctors, teachers, mechanics, pilots and politicians.

As I entered the teaching profession, I found myself continuing to mask my true identity and emulating values and beliefs of individualism, competition, and meritocracy. I was a reproducer of a dominant society educated in systems of assimilation and conformity. This drives the point that schooling processes continue to be subtractive experiences reproduced for children of color and why educators need to empower their students. Being denied full participation due to perceptions of cognitive inferiority, developmental limitations, as well as social and racial status reinforces deficit views as educators retain control over resources and instructional decisions often alienating learners from full participation and meaningful learning.

As I gained a critical consciousness of understanding the world around me, I changed my practices and pedagogy as a teacher, which was met with resistance in the school. I advocated for my students to not be part of stratified systems and refused to implement curricular materials that were culturally exclusive and developmental demeaning to children. I instilled in my students and families to have pride in retaining and sustaining their cultures and languages so that the same pattern does not continue for them as it did for me. One year, in a parent-teacher-student conference, one of my second-grade students told their family that they do not want to speak Spanish anymore. Right there and then, I saw myself in this young student and knew what I had to do. I had to be an ally for them to promote their cultural identity agency in who they were. I just wish I had a teacher when I was younger to give me the affirmation of cultural identity agency. I needed an ally during my schooling.

4. Cultural Identity Agency

Drawing from two decades of teaching experience, my inspiration is guided by Deleuze & Guattari's (1987) theoretical construct of assemblage theory for exploring and explaining phenomena translated from particular sets of interrelated elements to analyze social complexities. The ideas through this particular assemblage are components I found to be most humanizing for children during my practice as an educator. A specific model of this sort is not so apparent in the field, especially involving culture and identity in an assemblage of teaching and learning, power dynamics, and communities of practice, as it relates to early childhood education.

4.1 A Model of Cultural Identity Agency

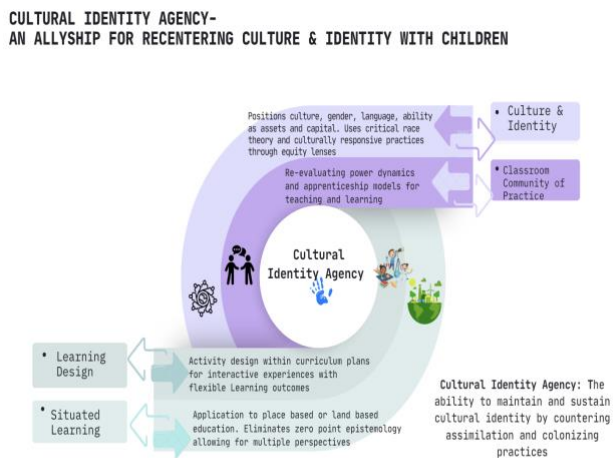


Figure 1. Cultural Identity Agency- A theoretical Framework of pathways promoting, preserving, and sustaining cultural and intellectual identities

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I have selected Cultural Identity Agency and allyship in an assemblage of culture and identity, communities of practice, and learning design to investigate how allyships with children can form and or maintain student identity. The bidirectional arrows in each element symbolize either additive and liberating agency experiences

or reducing and deducting agency experiences. The arrows inward are bold, denoting full potential for self-identity and ability. The arrows outward are empty silhouettes representing a deflated and eradication of the individual identity and ability.

This theoretical model is twofold. First, it explores the process of being an individual with cultural identity agency through four lenses within an assemblage of learning theory. Simultaneously, it offers counterpoints to readiness and standardized learning challenging social theory reproduction and Zero Point Epistemology (Bang, 2014). This model is not linear, nor does it require all elements to be present for cultural identity agency or allyship to occur. Rather, assemblage theory allows for the immediate micro-level analysis of interpretation, so translation becomes concrete with transformational actions and reflexivity in the present. A practitioner or scholar can enter from any entry point allowing for reflection and the solidification of practice or for refinement and adjustment in practice within that element.

4.2 Cultural Identity Agency- Elements in practice

Culture and identity

Scholars use critical race theory to examine school inequality, emphasizing culture and race alongside gender and social class as key factors in educational outcomes. When children receive messages that their knowledge, culture, language, and experiences count within the learning environment, this becomes an additive schooling experience. Students who feel a sense of belonging and connection with school are less likely to fail, be suspended, or be expelled” (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018, p. 137). Through critical race theory, ‘cultural identity agency’ is either

maintained, sustained, and additive or deculturalized, subtracted and eliminated (Spring, 2016). Teaching and learning considers the learner's standpoint (Lukacs, 1971) using culturally sustaining pedagogy (Pairs, 2012) to incorporate a learner's culture, language, identity, intersectionality, and interests.

Reflections for cultivating and sustaining culture and identity in your classroom can include: How do you honor and recognize your students' culture and identities in your classroom? How do you situate yourself with knowing the histories of your students' cultural backgrounds and become an ally countering assimilation and deculturalization processes. In what ways do you provide and encourage multiple perspectives, languages, and knowledge construction in your classroom to center and validate knowledge?

Classroom Community of Practice

Lave and Wenger (1991) introduced Legitimate Peripheral Participation (LPP), where learners gradually move toward the center of full participation within communities of practice. However, learning in schools often associate apprentice models that routinely sequesters newcomers from full participation. Schoolchildren are legitimately peripheral, but kept from participation in the social world more generally" (1991, p. 104).

When children are reduced to labels based on their performance, formulaic curriculum is implemented and alternative methods and models of schooling are prescribed. These labels position children as passive apprentices, while educators retain control over resources and instruction, alienating learners from meaningful engagement. Educators can revisit the teacher/learner relationship and

embrace a co-creation of knowledge pedagogy within the community of learners.

Reflections for thinking about your classroom community can include: How do you invite all members of the learning community from the peripheral to the center? How does your classroom foster a learning environment honoring children's capabilities, voices, and knowledge? What spaces and or routines are in place that elevate the practice of democratic principles? In what ways do you relinquish power with students?

Learning design

As culture is inherent in the individual, so is natural wonder. "From the very first days of the child's development, activities acquire a meaning of their own in a system of social behavior directed towards a definite purpose (Vygotsky, 1978, p 30.). Children begin to master their surroundings with help from tools, people, symbols, language etc., seeking new organization and accommodations of learning in sociocultural interactions (Rogoff, 2014). Cultural Historical Activity Theory (Leontiev, 1978; Engeström, 2011) in learning design is an elevated interaction which considers engagement opportunities, tensions, and the division of labor rules and roles in collective and collaborative surroundings. Tensions are welcomed as learning opportunities to build new understandings.

The issue with schools is when explicit teaching and modeling for the majority of the learning experience takes place, or eliminating tensions for students to confront using their own agency, could be why transfer and deeper learning may not occur. Breaking away from established patterns of activity requires expansive agency from both teachers and students. As Dewey (1897) states the only

possible adjustment we can give to children under existing conditions arises through putting them in complete possession of all their powers.

Reflections to think about the teaching and learning experiences being offered to children in your classroom can include: How do you plan and teach lessons to maximize student interactions? In what ways can students expand the learning outcomes of the designed lessons? What opportunities throughout a lesson do students get to collaborate, coordinate, or co design lessons within the learning community?

Situated Learning

Situated learning engages learners in meaningful and authentic experiences, using local environments and contexts associated with cultural knowledge (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Place based and land-based education (Bang, 2014) along with a critical pedagogy of place (Gruenewald, 2003; McInerney et al., 2011) can connect learners to their community by further supporting meaningful learning experiences through cultural, social, and historic contexts. School environments often engage with concepts and constructs developed under Zero Point Epistemologies (ZPE) where teaching and knowledge continues to be reproduced through dominant views of official knowledge (Apple, 2014; Bang, 2014). (ZPE) omits other perspectives and knowledge from entering into the learning experience thus invalidating all other forms of knowledge and or bicultural pedagogy (Darder, 2015).

Through the lens of situated learning, teaching and learning considers activity design and pedagogical approaches that rethink experiences into cross disciplinary learning. A shift towards promoting community-based design research and action plans with students to explore the dimensions of the social, cultural,

political, environmental, and economic milieu as participants in their world is the focus.

Reflections to think about the application of learning experiences for children in your classroom can include: In what ways is colonial knowledge disrupted and decentered within the learning design? How are you positioning your students as sense makers to explore and seek answers to questions about their world? How are students' inquiries about their world supported in your classroom?

Conclusion and Vision Forward- A call to action

Placing children at the center of the learning experience with complete possession of all their intellectual powers and cultural identity affords the opportunity for participatory and embodied experiences for sense making and living in and naming their world (Freire, 1970). Achieving this vision requires allies—educators committed to embedding culture and identity through interconnected frameworks of learning theory and practice. Cultural identity agency offers a counter-narrative to hegemonic and neoliberal schooling ideologies that devalue children through narrow readiness initiatives and limited learning scopes.

Cultural identity agency argues for a global educational shift away from deculturalization and antichild practices, and instead towards frameworks that center culture, identity, knowledge systems, and agency. By integrating culture, identity, learning theory, and communities of practice as an assemblage, agency and allyship emerge as a vital pathway for children's development in educational settings. Educators are encouraged to use this model to self-examine their practice and approaches with students. In addition, the model serves as a framework for conceptualizing student agency as an in-depth holistic

understanding that recognizes culture and identity as inherent in children. This paper calls on allies to uphold children's full personhood (Mills, 1997) supporting them as they navigate their world in search for futures of positive change. For even amid educational uncertainty, there must always be a steadfast commitment to joyful and just learning experiences for children (Soutter, 2020).

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