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The place of interests, agency and imagination in funds of identity theory

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ABSTRACT

Funds of identity is a recent entrant to the field of identity theories. Located within sociocultural theory, the concept developed from the notion of funds of knowledge to consider all life experiences that collectively shape identity development. It draws attention to the relationships, settings, experiences, and cultural tools and symbols that are personally meaningful to people, and ways these mediate engagement with identity development. I make two contributions to advancing funds of identity theory. First, I provide empirical evidence with respect to a very young child's engagement with funds of identity. I report findings related to Zoe, a child who participated with her family in a qualitative project on the interests of children aged from birth-to-five years old in Auckland, New Zealand. Second, I extend funds of identity theory through arguing that agency and imagination ought to be explicit concepts in this theory given that it foregrounds the capacity for humans to act on and imagine their worlds. Interest, agency, imagination and identity are concepts that can promote the dynamic view of development Vygotsky championed, and help to explain the way ongoing sociocultural mediation determines developmental possibilities and learning trajectories.

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Introduction

Sociocultural theory “integrates topics traditionally treated as distinct phenomena – such as cognitive, social, emotional, motivational, and personal identity processes” (Rogoff, 1998, p. 680). Funds of identity (Esteban-Guitart, 2016; Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014) is a concept that argues identity is a social phenomenon that is culturally mediated. It highlights the life experiences that are significant to people, and explains how these help individuals to define themselves, thereby developing identities. As a concept, funds of identity derives from Vygotskian sociocultural perspectives of human development, where intellect and affect combine holistically to explain what motivates and sustains development. In Vygotskian terms, identity is a higher-order psychological function (Holland & Lachicotte, 2007; Kozulin, 1990) that integrates understandings and emotions “relevant to a culturally imagined, personally valued social position” (Holland, & Lachicotte, 2007, p. 102).

This paper makes two contributions to advancing funds of identity theory. First, I offer empirical evidence of funds of identity being employed by a child younger than participants in previous studies. I focus on 4-year-old Zoe, a child who participated in a project on children's interests in Auckland, New Zealand. Experiences of personal meaning for Zoe emanated from, and were expressed in, her participation in cultural activities. I describe these interests, and ways these were mediated in interactions with her parents, teachers, and peers. Zoe manifested agency and imagination while engaging with these funds of identity. Hence, the second contribution is to argue that agency and imagination are fundamental to identity development and ought to be explicit concepts in funds of identity theory. Before defining the concepts central to this paper, I describe the educational significance and context of the study.

Study context

Early childhood education centers worldwide partner with families in educating and socializing young children. The contexts of family homes and community settings such as early childhood centers are therefore vital with regard to stimulating, recognizing, and mediating young children's early life experiences, interests, and identity development. Early childhood education in New Zealand, the context of the present study, is available for children aged from birth to 6 years old. The name of the curriculum document, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017), translates from Māori (the indigenous language of New Zealand) as a mat that creates a strong foundation for children to stand on. Children are viewed as capable and confident learners, and play-based learning is prioritized in pedagogy.

Te Whāriki, like many international early childhood curricular documents, specifies children's interests as a primary source of curricular decision making. The document states that families will "contribute knowledge of their children's capabilities at home and in other settings and will be seen as 'experts' on their children's interests" (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 64). Young children's growing interests and capabilities in *Te Whāriki* include them using "their imaginations to explore their own and others' cultures and identities" (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 15). Children are empowered to direct their own learning: "[to] have agency to create and act on their own ideas, develop knowledge and skills in areas that interest them and, increasingly, to make decisions and judgments on matters that relate to them" (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 18).

Identity formation from a sociocultural perspective

Culture is the mediator for the social phenomena that humans participate in and contribute actively to (Vågan, 2011). Culture provides the resources for developing and defining each human's individual identity (Esteban-Guitart, 2016). There is a growing body of significant work into the relationships between experience, learning and identity that follows Vygotsky's (e.g., 1978, 1986) legacy about the importance of history, culture and society in mediating human lives. In short, identity is about the past, present and future, and argued as a vital link between learning and sociocultural context (Vågan, 2011). A simple working definition of identity from a sociocultural perspective is "who we are for ourselves and who we are in relation to others" (Roth, 2006, p. 3). Identity is also about imagined and positively anticipated futures (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014; Penuel & Wertsch, 1995). Multiple identities across time and context are therefore possible, with identity being a work in progress subject to ongoing cultural experience.

All social activity is culturally mediated. In this paper, mediation is understood to function as any cultural mediation of activity that generates ongoing intellectual and affective development (Kozulin, 1990, 2003). It comprises the interactions, processes and tools used to make meaning (Kozulin, 2003; Wertsch, 2007). Mediation is therefore viewed as three-fold in context, it is: human (in interactions with self and others), institutional (in the organization, composition, and priorities of settings of human participation), and symbolic (in the cultural tools such as language, and, pertinent in the case of this paper, the resources used in play interactions).

Next, I define concepts central to my argument about Zoe's engagement with funds of identity: interests, funds of knowledge, funds of identity itself, agency, and imagination.

Interests

Dewey (1913) first drew attention to the concept of 'interest', defining it as an object, activity, action, or event that inspired and motivated learning through encouraging engagement and effort. Interest aligns with the "personally meaningful" element of funds of identity theory. Young children's early learning occurs through active, purposeful observation, participation, and contribution to experiences in their families, communities, and cultures (Rogoff, 1998, 2003). In the process, children's interests are stimulated by the many and diverse peoples, places, things, experiences, and cultural activities that they engage with. This

kind of learning is significant and dynamic, and is mediated by meaningful activities. It is also commonly taken-for-granted as it is embedded in everyday cultural practices (Rogoff et al., 2016).

Children have many interests in their everyday lives. Some are momentary and fleeting; others are significant and long-lasting. The foci of interest are often represented in, and mediated through, their choices of play activities in early childhood settings, and their personally meaningful lines of inquiry into various topics. Institutional aspects of early childhood centers' organization and running also mediate children's capacity to act on their interests, for example, there may be particular expectations about routines, interactions, behaviors and use of play resources and equipment. Teacher-mediated interactions and priorities may reflect these expectations.

A conceptual and analytical framing for interests, that takes account of the tacit nature of much human experience and children's own representations of what they regard as important in their lives, is needed to ensure that researchers and teachers recognize children's significant interests. The concept of funds of knowledge, explicated shortly, provides one conceptual framing. In prior work I have extended this concept to early childhood education (Hedges et al., 2011) through aligning it with interests. In doing so I argued that children's interests are stimulated by family, teacher, peer and community funds of knowledge, and that they select funds of knowledge-based interests to share, explore and build on during play and interactions. Furthermore, these funds of knowledge-based interests contribute to children's identity development (Hedges & Cooper, 2016).

Funds of knowledge

Funds of knowledge is a theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical concept that originated in work reported in González et al. (2005). In its initial formulation, it described the nature, type, and content of learning in families. The premise behind funds of knowledge is that all families, whatever their social and material circumstances, have historical and sociocultural knowledge, skills, resources, and ways of learning specific to their particular experience in their communities and cultures. Moreover, funds of knowledge recognizes that alongside knowledge and experience families strive to find ways to enhance their household functioning and wellbeing.

For example, types of family experiences that children can participate in and learn from include gardening, caring for younger siblings, working in a family-owned small business, hobbies, music events, sports, and shopping. Children become interested in, and reenact, selected experiences in their play in early childhood settings in ways specific to their families and cultures (Chesworth, 2016; Hedges et al., 2011). Such examples exemplify Vygotsky (1978) view that play is a vital way that children learn, imagine, represent, and re-imagine their experiences, and practice the roles that they see adults fulfil.

More recent research has highlighted that relevant funds of knowledge are not confined to families but also arise from socioculturally-mediated interactions with teachers (Charteris et al., 2018; Hedges et al., 2011), peers (Andrews & Yee, 2006; Hedges et al., 2011; Moje et al., 2004), and community sources such as popular culture (Hedges, 2011; Poole, 2017). Hence, these authors suggest that children are exposed to multiple sources of learning and funds of knowledge, and select those of interest and meaning to engage with further in personal knowledge and identity development, a hypothesis explored in this paper. It is this shift in understanding of the broad settings and sources of participation that inspired Esteban-Guitart and Moll (2014) to posit the concept of funds of identity. Research centered on funds of knowledge and funds of identity have the same goal: to develop responsive and authentic curriculum and pedagogy.

Funds of identity

Contributions of Erikson and Mead to understandings of the "self" in identity development (see Penuel & Wertsch, 1995; Holland, & Lachicotte, 2007 respectively) point out that individuals are actively engaged in

identity formation. The concept of funds of identity (Esteban-Guitart, 2016; Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014) recognizes that people belong to a broad range of communities of participation, and develop extensive interests, knowledge, and skills learned in multiple contexts through socioculturally-mediated interactions. Individuals then draw on life experiences that have particular interest and meaning for them to create their identities. Funds of identity are therefore social, historical and cultural resources used by people to define and understand themselves.

Esteban-Guitart (2016) identified five categories of funds of identity. Social funds of identity are the significant relationships that influence behavior, emotions and self-concept. Institutional funds of identity are social structures, methods and processes that influence ways of being and behaving in communities. Geographical funds of identity refer to specific environmental features that shape life experience. Cultural funds of identity are the particular symbols and tools that influence and mediate experience. Finally, practical funds of identity include specific interests that motivate individuals. In this way, identity development derives from interest and personally meaningful engagement across a range of socioculturally-mediated experiences.

Whether or not children's interests and learning are recognized and responded to as funds of identity in education settings depends largely on teachers' efforts to become familiar with children and their families (Subero et al., 2016). Approaches to research grounded in funds of knowledge draw on ethnographic methods. Teachers visit families to learn about and gain an appreciation of family experiences and funds of knowledge. Research approaches centered on funds of identity also sometimes use methods from arts-based approaches and visual ethnography (Pink, 2013), so include artifacts such as objects, drawings, maps, videos, and photos. People also construct identity through narratives (Bruner, 1996; Chase, 2018). As I will demonstrate in the case of Zoe below, a home visit, visual and literacy artifacts, and a young child's narratives about her interests were a powerful combination of methods to ascertain and understand what was most meaningful to her.

Prior research on funds of identity

Funds of identity research has thus far occurred in school settings with primary school-aged students in Spain (e.g., Esteban-Guitart, 2016; Jovés et al., 2015; Subero et al., 2016), secondary students in China (Poole, 2017), and in tertiary settings with student teachers in Australia (Charteris et al., 2018). The studies in Spain in particular also sought to differentiate the concepts of funds of knowledge and funds of identity and illustrate their methodological differences. These studies, located in Catalonia, used methods such as "identity drawing" to enable children to represent personally meaningful experiences within and beyond the family home. The instructions related to this drawing task asked children to draw people, places and activities that were of interest and had meaning for them. Here, both agency and imagination were clearly employed in student choices of data generated. This point was not explicit in the study, however, it could have been critical to understanding students' interests, and analyzing the drawings and related narratives in relation to authentic interpretations of identity.

In China, Poole's (2017) study was built around teenagers' choices and engagements with digital devices. One method involved students creating avatars "to reveal something personal about themselves" (p. 57). In doing so, the students' agency was mediated by imagination, but again this was not acknowledged explicitly in the analysis. In Australia, Charteris et al. (2018) explored the funds of identity resources student teachers brought to their studies by asking them to relate course content to their prior experiences of education. In turn, these were used to project identities of the teachers they wished to become. Again, these methods involved agency and imagination as central personal decision making forces that remained implicit, and unacknowledged for their significance in influencing the participants' data.

In short, prior studies on funds of identity have described choices, actions, decisions, and future projections made by individuals selecting and making meaning from their cultural experiences. However, in the pursuit of analyzing funds of identity, the critical role of self-motivation and active intentionality – key elements of agency – were not made explicit. Additionally, I argue that imagination also needs to be recognized as central to explaining individual identity choices and desired trajectories in these studies' findings. Neither were explicitly considered in these prior studies and appear critical to the validity of the analysis and the authenticity of the pedagogy that follows. The concepts of agency and imagination are now explained further to argue for their explicit inclusion in the theory of funds of identity in order to offer a more complete and valid interpretation of identity development.

Agency

Vygotsky (1978) argued that without a capacity to organize, relate to and distinguish between experiences, humans would be powerless to act on what was important to them and their lives. This capacity was described as agency by Holland, & Lachicotte, (2007) and deemed critical by them to understanding the actions and behaviors involved in internalization, a process by which humans create their own thinking and identities from their exposure to cultural experience. Agency is observable in the capacity to act with initiative, commitment, and effort within the socioculturally-mediated contexts of human interactions (van Lier, 2008). Agency – and its role in identity engagement – can be observed in research through empirical data of human interactions in a range of cultural settings (Holland, & Lachicotte, 2007; Penuel & Wertsch, 1995). Moreover, within educational settings van Lier (2008) has suggested that agency may be both individual and collaborative where it draws across the “creative energies and symbolic capacities of ... learners” (p. 165).

Agency manifests in purposeful actions that are mediated by “social, interactional, cultural, institutional, and other contextual factors” (van Lier, 2008, p. 171). For example, attaching purpose and significance to the choices of activities that children select in early childhood settings assumes that the institutionally-mediated provisions of resources and equipment allows children to represent their everyday cultural experiences in their choices.

Agency is recognized in any positive form of action. James (2009) suggested agency is present when children act creatively and with influence and effect during interactions with peers and adults. In relation to human mediation and agency there are ongoing debates in the sociocultural and childhood studies literature about the role and power of adults to restrict or reduce children's choices. In this vein, Esser (2016) and Corsaro (2018) noted that agency can be observed when children show resistance to adult structures, norms and instructions, and/or when children ascribe new or innovative meanings to adult expectations and engage with each other accordingly. Both points are salient in the illustrative case that follows.

Imagination

Agentic actions occur in everyday life and represent “novel variations” (Holland, & Lachicotte, 2007, p. 105) of what has been observed or participated in. This point suggests that some capacity to transform and be creative with experiences is involved in meaning making. In his comprehensive lecture on imagination and its development in childhood, Vygotsky (1987, see also, 2003) defined imagination as using experience to create ideas rather than repeat or imitate an experience. He distinguished between “reproductive imagination” as a function of memory and “creative imagination” as the production of new ideas and images that have not occurred previously in a person's consciousness or experience. Imagination draws on life experience but creates new combinations of ideas, emotions, thoughts and meanings.

Vygotsky believed that conscious efforts began in childhood to recombine and reimagine personal and collective experiences. He noted his agreement with Piaget's belief that consciousness, through imagination,

occurs in matters of interest to children. Vygotsky (1978) observed that imagination was visible in children's sociodramatic play, the leading activity of children aged from 3-to-6 years. Furthermore, children's development of speech and increasing understanding of concepts promotes their capacity to imagine as it enables representation beyond what is known (Vygotsky, 1932, 1987). Thinking and imagination therefore have a close and complex relationship. One purpose of human imagination is to create new forms of activity and behavior that align with personal interests and intentions.

Bringing significant concepts together

Interest, agency, imagination and identity are concepts that promote the dynamic view of development and learning that Vygotsky (1978, 1986) championed. They are also cognizant of, and responsive to, ongoing personal and sociocultural factors (van Lier, 2008). In short, as a theory for researching and interpreting identity development, funds of identity focus on participants' interests, experiences and choices during socioculturally-mediated engagements. These are made explicit in data as participants consider their past and present experiences, and project their desired selves, both in the present and the future. The few prior studies grounded in funds of identity thus far led me to consider that these activities explicitly involve both agency and imagination. The assumptions underpinning the exploration presented here were that funds of knowledge-based interests (Hedges & Cooper, 2016; Hedges et al., 2011) become funds of identity in young children if:

- these interests are prominent in children's self-initiated engagement in play-based learning experiences;
- the interests are mediated in ways that connect with identity development;
- children manifest agency in mediated engagement in play; and,
- imagination is involved with actions and narratives associated with this play.

The central questions I set out to investigate in this paper were therefore: 1. How can funds of identity be viewed as developing in very young children (i.e., younger than those previously researched and who are not yet attending school)? 2. In what ways are the concepts of agency and imagination of explicit value to funds of identity theory?

Research design

To examine these questions, I re-analyzed selected data from a project that explored young children's interests in relation to their everyday lives in their families, communities, and cultures (see Hedges & Cooper, 2016). The project drawn on was naturalistic and utilized interpretivist methodology and qualitative methods in its design and implementation. These approaches align with sociocultural theory to generate rich data and respect the involvement of researchers, teachers, families, and children. Its central focus was on play-based activities and socioculturally-mediated dialogue and interactions between teachers and children, teachers and families, children and families, and child peers. The project was an instrumental case study: one that refines theory or provides insight (Stake, 1994). The venture was a partnership between university-based researchers and center-based teacher-researchers who through co-researching and utilizing each other's strengths and knowledge enabled deeper insights into children's interests than either group might establish alone.

The focus child of this paper, Zoe, attended Small Kauri Early Childhood Education Center, a full-day service for children aged 6 months to 5 years old. The center was licensed for 37 children. The center owner employed qualified teachers, many of whom had been teaching at the center for more than five years. The teachers valued a well-resourced play-based and culturally-responsive environment that enabled all children

to engage with activities of their choice and interest; an example of institutional mediation critical in determining children's opportunities to engage with personally meaningful activities.

A number of data generation methods were employed including video and audio recordings of children and teachers in everyday interactions, accessing children's assessment portfolios that contained drawings and artifacts of children's learning, teachers' reflective and analytic memos, and home visits of selected focus children – Zoe was one of these focus children. These methods were followed later by short child-friendly interviews in order to add rigor and veracity to the interpretations of children's interests that had been building during the timeframe of the project.

The two teacher-researchers at the center informed children and families about the project and generated the data of authentic everyday teaching and learning, along with undertaking the home visits and child-friendly interviews. Negotiated permission based on respectful relationships, voluntary participation, informed consent, and children's ongoing assent were enacted throughout the study. In addition, the ethical principle of credit – naming the centers, teachers, and children – was offered to recognize the generosity of participation in research (Cullen et al., 2011).

The overarching intention of the research design of the project was to get as close as possible to children's experiences in order for the research team to collectively interpret their interests. Qualitative data analysis requires multiple ongoing processes of categorizing, exploring, explaining, and theorizing data (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Miles et al., 2014). Given that young children are developing their abilities to articulate and express their intentions, decisions, actions, and interests, many collaborative, recursive, and iterative analytical discussions occurred amongst the research team about children's expressions of their interests and the deeper meanings these might represent within the conceptual framings of the project.

However, the research team missed a vital final step in not returning to the children's families to verify in-depth interpretations of the focus children in the study – I recommend this in future studies. Fortuitously, when Zoe's mother and I came into contact again a few years later, conversations about Zoe added further clarifications to the research team's original interpretations and provoked further insights. These prompted my re-analysis of data about Zoe in light of my reading about funds of identity theory. Secondary analysis of data is well-accepted in qualitative work, although accompanied by legitimate epistemological, methodological, and ethical debates (e.g., Hammersley, 2010; Heaton, 2010). In this case, I re-used data generated in a project that I had led to investigate additional questions (itemized earlier) that arose from the main finding of the wider study. This finding was that identity development was a fundamental interest of children's (Hedges & Cooper, 2016). I undertook a supplementary analysis to develop more in-depth understandings of this finding (Heaton, 2010). As I was fully involved in the original project, and used a systematic, reflexive, interpretive process that included conversations with Zoe's mother, this paper does not suffer from the typical issues secondary analysis is criticized for: the problems of fit, context and verification (see Hammersley, 2010; Heaton, 2010).

Zoe's funds of identity

As noted, children's interests in, inquiries about, understandings and negotiating of multiple identities was a notable outcome of the project (Hedges & Cooper, 2016). The following presents in-depth analyses of Zoe's funds of identity engagement, highlighting the sociocultural mediation that occurred and the agency and imagination in her actions, language and behaviors.

Zoe's learner identity

Zoe was read to frequently at home from an early age and developed an interest in language and literacy. At her early childhood center, Zoe acted on this interest through regularly choosing to participate in reading, drawing, and writing activities. She also involved teachers in her interest. Language and literacy, as

symbolic tools used to mediate and extend learning across other subject domains, are common foci of teachers in educational settings. Zoe's teachers mediated her learning by helping her spell and write words that were meaningful to her, such as 'Mum', 'Dad', 'Tamar', 'Paul', and 'cat'. Zoe also acted playfully and imaginatively with words and sounds. One entry in her assessment portfolio recorded her writing in a mix of upper and lower case letters the rhyming words 'cat', 'pat', 'sat', 'that', 'fat', 'mat', and 'bat', alongside invented words 'lat', 'nat', and 'tat'.

Zoe's playfulness with language, and understanding of the purposes and structures of language, was a shared interest with her friend, Isabella. In their play together, Zoe and Isabella showed that funds of knowledge-based interests related to language and literacy were important as social, geographical and cultural funds of identity: Zoe's grandfather was Hungarian, Isabella's mother was Cambodian and her father Samoan. Zoe and Isabella each brought their home and heritage languages into the center setting. Together, Zoe and Isabella demonstrated collaborative agency (van Lier, 2008). They acted on their shared interest and respective languages to create an imaginative, secret, shared language they called "Campy".

The following is an excerpt from a transcript in which Daniel (one of the teacher-researchers) attempted to make sense of and engage with Zoe and Isabella's languages. The girls' Samoan and Hungarian words were mixed with English and their invented Campy words; the Campy words are written as they sounded and are italicized.

Isabella: *Shushianako*

Daniel: What did that mean?

Isabella: That means talk ... Or hello ... *Nunga* means goodbye. *Shushiana* means talk. ...

Zoe: *Congcong*. It means lie down ... And *tankyo* means sit down

Isabella: And *nofo i lalo* means sit down

Daniel: I know that's Samoan

Daniel: Zoe, do you know any words from Hungary? Because your [grandfather]'s Hungarian eh?

Zoe: Yeah. *Csókolom*. That's how we speak hello in Hungarian.

In an effort to mediate their learning further, Daniel suggested that the children could write a dictionary of their Campy words, but the girls declined. Daniel was initially surprised then reflected that perhaps they were motivated by having a common language that only they understood; that symbolized their shared connections and special relationship. He also realized that their shared language provided a way to exclude others – both teachers and peers – when they wanted to play together privately. Illustrating awareness of the bonds of their friendship, Zoe and Isabella demonstrated agency as a form of resistance to the common social expectation that all children be friends and play with each other. Teachers recognized and respected the children's wishes, and were thereby fostering their capacity to resist as they make decisions and act on these.

Zoe's potential adult identities

Zoe was keenly interested in the world of adults. Zoe's parents married when she was aged 4, an event that enabled her to observe and participate in specific cultural practices and activities. The wedding piqued Zoe's interest, which she enacted in multiple ways in the center. Her teachers mediated this interest by providing

her with resources, time and support to create artifacts that held meaning for Zoe. For example, Zoe narrated the wedding events in detail to teachers while looking at photos after the event. Sue (a teacher) documented Zoe's description of the wedding.

I wore a cream headband. I went to the hairdressers and got curly hair. Only me, mummy, and nanny went to the hairdressers, not daddy, I think he was at work or something or at home. Mummy got curly hair but not nanny ... I didn't say special words at the wedding only mummy and daddy ... We had a flower cake, it had flowers all around it. I think it was a lemon cake maybe. A circle cake.

Zoe's narration expressed what was meaningful for her. Later, she began to imagine whom she might marry in the future. On one occasion, teachers provided materials for Zoe to draw a life-sized future husband. The drawing was taken home and pinned to Zoe's bedroom wall for several months. In this instance, Zoe was drawing on social and cultural funds of identity to explore and act on new ideas and learning, and to imagine a future adult self. This act of imagining was mediated in all three ways: institutional (the cultural activity and practices of a wedding ceremony and the expectations of marriage), human (teacher-mediated dialogue), and symbolic (photos depicting clothing worn to the wedding, vows made, and having a celebratory cake).

Personal narratives are a form of self-mediated dialogue through which we reveal ourselves to others. Trish (a teacher-researcher) captured Zoe talking about her interests on video in a short child-friendly interview toward the end of the data generation period. The topics that Zoe selected to talk about demonstrated that she had multiple further funds of identity from which to explore adult roles. Selected excerpts of the transcript of the interview follow.

I like playing Mum and Dads ... Cos what I like about that is I really want to be a Mum when I grow up! And a police officer ... Cos I've been playing with my doll babies a lot and I've got good things to look after babies: bottle, foods, and cream and some water and a high chair and a push chair ... Did you know when I went to the swimming pool on Friday I saw two cars parked on the yellow lines and you're not allowed and I told them off! ... They parked the car there and you're only allowed to park where you can. So I told the people off ... And ... on Friday ... we went to fix the windows cos they were breaking windows and burglars usually break windows instead of knocking on doors and that's stealing.

There are two connected parts to this narrative. Firstly, Zoe expresses her interest in adult roles and future possible identities. Next she refers to the responsibilities and institutionally mediated roles of these adults. In doing so she reports and explains her understanding of specific incidents of rule-breaking. In an effort both to understand the background to, and veracity of, Zoe's expressed ideas and to mediate Zoe's thinking further, Trish shared the video with Zoe's mother. Zoe's mother recalled Zoe asking questions about burglars after their house was broken into. She then said that this narrative contained a mix of truth and imagination in relation to both the burglary and overhearing her mother's complaints about cars parking illegally outside the swimming pool where Zoe went for swimming lessons.

Zoe demonstrated agency and imagination in expressing her understanding of adult roles and responsibilities that she might take up in the future. This included consideration of what to say to those who break societal expectations and contravene norms. In her narrative, Zoe clearly showed that she was drawing on social funds of identity in terms of what responsible adults do, and institutional funds of identity in relation to ways these roles and responsibilities represent larger social expectations, problems, and structures. She drew on these resources in socioculturally-mediated interactions with teachers who used photos from home and drawings created in the center as visual artifacts to stimulate and extend conversations, and self-mediation through her sociodramatic play. The latter further exemplifies Vygotsky (1978) view of play as a leading activity in children's learning and development. When children engage in

socio-dramatic play, they demonstrate agency and imagination in representing the actions, language, thinking, and emotions of the human roles they are exploring and enacting.

Foregrounding agency and imagination in funds of identity

Learning is not only a cognitive and social experience, but also an identity experience. Who we are, what we are able to do, and what we will be, based on what we learn, are constantly challenged when we attend learning situations. (Ligorio, 2010, p. 97)

Children are curious about human lives and naturally motivated to be keen observers, participants, and learners in cultural activities and practices (Rogoff, 2003). The relationship between memory, thought, concept development, emotions and imagination is complex (Vygotsky, 1987). Vygotsky suggested that thinking and imagination together support children in meaning making, and that the development of imagination was assisted by the development of speech and verbal expression.

I have offered examples of socioculturally-mediated learning in an early childhood setting that illustrate funds of identity drawn on by a young child in her learning and identity projection. Institutional mediation occurred through the structure, organization, and expectations of the center and family settings. In particular, an emphasis on play-based learning – and associated language, resources and equipment as symbolic mediational tools – enabled Zoe to demonstrate her funds of knowledge-based interests. In turn, human mediation occurred as Zoe engaged with teachers, peers (Isabella in this paper), her mother, and her own narratives to foster further learning. Language and literacy were amongst important cultural tools that mediated Zoe's learning as adults gained insights in her interests, that is, personally meaningful experiences, and her acts of imagination.

Zoe's funds of identity were central in her selection of activities to pursue with others in her early childhood setting. Children's socioculturally-mediated play, learning, dialogue, and questions about their experiences and interests, provide great insight into their attempts at meaning making and identity construction in the multiple contexts of their lives. As Bruner (1996) noted, education and psychology are both concerned with:

[Q]uestions about the making and negotiating of meanings, about the construction of self and a sense of agency ... and especially about the cultural 'situatedness' of all mental activity. ... Learning, remembering, talking, imagining: all of them are made possible by participating in a culture (pp. X-XI).

Play, learning, remembering, talking, and imagining are all key ways that children participate manifesting agency and imagination in early childhood education settings that enable them to act and reflect on their understandings of their lives in their families and communities.

Agency therefore appears well-aligned with the theory of funds of identity in relation to the active, intentional, and purposeful selection, uptake, and transformation of knowledge, interests, and experiences from within a culture. When learners engage in sharing understandings and building knowledge "they take responsibility and show initiative; they are required to self-direct and self-assess their own processes" (Ligorio, 2010, p. 94).

Zoe manifested agency to select and act on her interests as she developed her language, literacy, and meaning making capacities, both as an individual and collaboratively with her friend Isabella. Zoe acted on her interest in what adults do, also drawing on her imagination as she expressed ideas about who and what she wanted to be as an adult: a wife, mother and police officer. Zoe imagined and explored funds of identity about adult roles, relationships, rights, and responsibilities across both home and early childhood education settings, and in other community settings (e.g., the local swimming pool).

Agency and imagination were also both evident when Zoe and Isabella drew on their individual languages and created their invented language, Campy. Zoe's imagination enabled her to think about and act

to circumvent institutional norms through devising Campy language with Isabella. Agency here also manifested as resistance when Zoe and Isabella avoided writing up their invented language, possibly because that could have provided access for others to use it and engage with them.

Using her imagination also enabled Zoe to go beyond her own experience and participation in her parents' wedding to imagine herself with a future husband. Identity explorations in progress that are supported by others can be made visible to others through "identity artifacts" (Subero et al., 2018). This concept aligns with the methods proposed in funds of identity research whereby objects learners create, such as Zoe's "future husband", might reveal the people, places and things that have meaning to them.

Advancing funds of identity theory

The empirical evidence and argument presented in this paper first demonstrate that funds of identity can be drawn on by very young children in prior-to-school settings, adding to the breadth of contexts of research utilizing the concept. Zoe exemplified that humans of a younger age than previously researched can extrapolate existing knowledge into the future to imagine "a 'possible self' that regulates aspiration, confidence, optimism ..." (Bruner, 1996, p. 36).

The powerful combination of methods used in the project, particularly home visits, visual and literacy artifacts, and short personal narratives, enabled insights into Zoe's funds of identity. These methods are of value across the life span. While these methods align with those advocated by Esteban-Guitart (2016), and other prior research has attempted to identify innovative ways to gain insights, these studies have not always used home visits nor shared data to gain the contributions of people who know the participants well to add veracity to interpretations. Zoe's mother and her teachers, as significant adults in Zoe's life, were able to contribute to understandings of her interests and identity development "oriented [through agency and imagination] towards a self-chosen and positively anticipated future" (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995, p. 83). Later, further clarification and validity occurred through conversations between Zoe's mother and me, prompting the re-analysis related to funds of identity in this paper.

The methods used and subsequent interpretation framed by funds of identity brought to the forefront the role of agency and imagination in Zoe's expression of her interests. I have suggested that discussion of identity development is strengthened when it specifically expresses the importance of human agency and imagination. I have therefore argued and exemplified a case for making the concepts of agency and imagination explicit in a comprehensive theory of funds of identity. Funds of identity is about selecting and acting on personally meaningful interests and experiences from amongst the myriad of socioculturally-mediated human encounters. The very nature of the theory aligns with Vygotsky (1978) argument about human capacity to organize, relate to, distinguish between, and re-imagine and act on experiences. As Holland and Lachicotte (2007) note Vygotsky's work provides a foundation for understanding both agency and imagination in relation to identity. These understandings might be teased out further in relation to young children in future scholarship that brings together sociocultural and childhood studies understandings of these concepts.

I acknowledge that Zoe was a particularly keen child research participant with highly-developed verbal capacities in an institutionally rich environment. Further studies in early childhood settings might investigate wider applications of funds of identity theory in very young children. Questions to address include: How might environments and interactions foster children's development of funds of identity? How might environments and interactions reflect children's families and cultures to enable exploration of identity development that is authentic and relevant to their lives? Following Subero et al. (2018), how might assessment practices change to accommodate identity artifacts, that is, documents or products created by the learners themselves, through which they may project funds of identity that in turn can be used by the teacher for educational purposes? Moreover, while many children of the present generation experience photography

and video recording in their lives, and these methods were easily accepted in the project, visual methods need problematizing in discussions of ethics and in future research. Future research can also include addressing ways negative experiences help humans to develop resilience and imagine a positive life trajectory (Esteban-Guitart, 2016), evident in Zoe's experience of her family home being burgled. These may be occasions when using a capacity to re-imagine the past and project into the future are critical.

As noted, the purpose of funds of identity research, like that of funds of knowledge, is to apply what is learned about students pedagogically to motivate their learning. Understanding agency and imagination is also important for educational practice (Ligorio, 2010). Gajdamaschko (2005) argued that engaging children's imagination and emotions is important in education, otherwise there is a risk children will lose interest in schooling by adolescence. Within schooling, she suggested that while socializing, personality, and interest command attention alongside academic and cognitive achievements, imagination is often neglected. Perhaps then school contexts could learn and adapt from the relative freedoms accorded to children in early childhood education that enable agency and imagination, and by connection identity, to develop. This leads to another topic ripe for future research: to clarify the value and application of funds of identity theory in schooling practices.

A longitudinal investigation of interests, agency, imagination, and identity formation, perhaps one that follows up children from earlier studies at specified intervals or significant junctures in their lives, would generate in-depth data over time. Such studies would provide further insight into ways interests and identities stay constant or change over time as participants broaden their life experiences, become older, and encounter new forms of socioculturally mediated-learning in educational settings. Revisiting narrative and literacy and visual artifacts data from earlier phases would enable participants to reflect back on earlier capabilities and younger selves, contributing a sense of history to the past-present-future considerations of identity development.

Conclusion

The theory of funds of identity argues that humans select personally-meaningful experiences as cultural resources to engage with in identity development. It highlights the people, places, experiences and cultural symbols and tools of interest, and ways these mediate engagement with identity development. "Identity involves conceiving the learner not only as a cognitive agent but also an experiential, emotional, intellectual agent; it is contingent on ... what ... is significant and worth pursuing" (Esteban-Guitart, 2016, p. 107).

Early experiences are fundamental to young children's opportunities to develop interests and capacities to learn, understand and act on their worlds, construct identities, and imagine themselves as eventual adults and members of their families and communities. Family homes and early childhood settings are rich sources for children to determine what "is significant and worth pursuing", and provide ample opportunities for young children to draw on funds of identity in socioculturally-mediated interactions. In advancing funds of identity research in relation to children aged less than five years, I have offered evidence of ways a young child actively sought to understand her life, and made meaning from experiences, activities and practices from her family and community settings.

A second contribution of the paper is that Zoe's funds of identity were most visible when she demonstrated agency and imagination in her play and learning interactions, both with and without peers and teachers. This included her exploration of potential future identities as an adult. I have therefore argued that if the goal of funds of identity theory is to gain authentic insights into personally-meaningful identity influences and formation, that agency and imagination need to be present as explicit concepts in the theory. Inclusion of these concepts makes the theory more comprehensive and valid. Future research may be able to tease out these arguments further using a rich combination of methods to ascertain and understand what is of most significance in human lives in the pursuit of identity formation at different life phases and over time.

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