

An Exploration of an Immigrant Child's Agency and Social Interactions in Her Preschool

Jahee Kwon¹⁾

State University of New York at Fredonia

Sung On Hwang

Incheon National University

Abstract

This study aims to explore the agency and social interactions of an immigrant child, identified as a shy girl with a school adjustment difficulty. Data were collected through class observations and interviews with the child's teachers and mother. The findings highlight how this immigrant child showed her active agency in building relationships with others and adapting to and negotiating with class rules. The material settings, class rules, physical space, classmates, and/or teachers' presence restrained or promoted her interactions with her peers. Thus, this study offers important insights into how immigrant children may be better understood and supported by rethinking educational practices that can limit their agency and peer relationships.

Keywords : immigrant child, agency, relationships, preschool adjustment

Corresponding author, ¹⁾ Kwon@fredonia.edu

Introduction

In the past decade, the number of children who are immigrants (including children who may have been born in the U.S. but whose parents were not) in the U.S. has notably increased. According to the Migration Policy Institute (2019), 24.3% of children under age five in the U.S. are immigrants or come from immigrant families. For immigrant children, preschool is the most important context in which they first face differences between their home culture and that of their new country (Tobin et al., 2013). Although immigrant children's access to early childhood education in the U.S. has increased over time, administrators and professionals in early childhood education have remained relatively unprepared for working with children of immigrants in their schools (Colegrove & Adair, 2014). The majority of early childhood teachers are White, middle-class, and monolingual (de Brey et al., 2019), and may have limited experiences with children from different cultural-linguistic backgrounds (Souto-Manning, 2013). Such limited experience can negatively influence the ways in which they perceive differences among their students. For example, because of their limited English skills and distinct cultural backgrounds, immigrant children are easily viewed as socially and even cognitively incompetent in school (Oh, 2016; Valdés, 1996; Yamamoto & Li, 2012). Moreover, their distinctive actions and initiating activities are oftentimes misunderstood and controlled by teachers who have adopted a deficit view of such differences (Adair et al., 2018).

Prior studies (e.g., Colegrove & Adair, 2014; Guo & Dalli, 2016; Oh, 2016; Yamamoto & Li, 2012) have challenged this deficit view of immigrant children. Immigrant children initiate their own learning and actively seek out opportunities to learn a new language (See Colegrove & Adair, 2014; Guo & Dalli, 2016). They can especially expand their range of capabilities when teachers provide spaces and times in which they can decide what and how they learn (Colegrove & Adair, 2014). Additionally, although they possess cultural differences and limited mainstream language skills, immigrant children can actively build a sense of belonging in unfamiliar preschool settings and have been shown to employ different types of strategies when playing with their peers. For instance, children who are immigrants use non-verbal communication (e.g., eye-gaze, gestures, silence, imitations) and adjust their interest levels as they play with others (See Guo & Dalli, 2016; Oh, 2016; Oh & Lee, 2019;

Yamamoto & Li, 2012). By using strength-based, rather than deficit-focused, approaches, we can recognize what immigrant children can bring to their schools and better support them as they adjust to new educational settings (Duocet & Adair, 2018; Tobin et al., 2013).

Although researchers have tried to highlight the strengths of immigrant children, currently there is a paucity of studies examining immigrant children in preschool. To date, studies of immigrant children have examined their cognitive, linguistic, and literacy development while devoting little attention to their social development in early education settings (Castro, 2014; Neitzel et al., 2019). In addition, 'agency' is a commonly used term in early childhood conversations, but questions still persist about how immigrant children exercise such agency in their schools and how different factors influence it (Guo & Dalli, 2016). To address this gap, this study focuses on a Latino immigrant child's preschool life in the U.S. and addresses the following research questions:

- 1) What strategies does the immigrant child use when she adjusts to a preschool and interacts with teachers and peers who mainly use English?
- 2) What are the social experiences of the immigrant child in school, and what are the factors affect these experiences?

Theoretical Frameworks

For this study, we draw upon sociocultural approaches to children's development. James and Prout (2015) argue, "children must be seen as active in the construction and determination of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live" (p. 7). Preschools are social settings based on cultural assumptions regarding children's education and learning (Huf, 2013). As children participate in the practices and routines of their class, they engage with these cultural assumptions. However, children do not simply adapt to the rules and routines of their class; they are intelligent and sophisticated human beings who act in and sometimes resist the adult-controlled world (Corsaro, 2003; Markström & Halldén, 2009). Through their participation, children contribute to the production and creation of school practices (Corsaro, 2018; Rogoff, 2003). Based on this approach, children's agency refers to their capacity and power to act and construct their own

preschool lives (Guo & Dalli, 2016; Huf, 2013; Markström & Halldén, 2009). Children's agentive actions, including acting purposefully, negotiating roles, resisting social expectations, and constructing relationships with others, are based on situations in which their desires and needs are affected by resources, including spaces and people (Guo & Dalli, 2016). Through a sociocultural lens, we can view an immigrant child as an active agent who shapes her preschool life and interacts with others through her everyday participation in preschool practices.

Prout (2005) argues that society can be seen as “produced in and through patterned networks of heterogeneous materials” (p. 70). In this sense, education can be depicted as a set of diverse material things that are displayed, managed, and used (Lawn & Grosvenor, 2005). In (pre-) school settings that incorporate such materials, children's agency is a relational concept in that relational configurations enable particular actions or disable others (Kontopodis, 2012). Guided by this perspective, we selected Actor-Network Theory (ANT) to guide our research. ANT is grounded in the field of science and technology studies, but it has been used by many other researchers in different disciplines over the last 30 years. ANT examines interactions among actors, both human and non-human. From ANT's perspective, non-human and human actors are equally important. Networks of human and non-human actors are ever-present and interact with and influence meaning-making (Latour, 2005; Law, 2008). In particular, in ANT theory, things matter. Law and Hetherington (2000) argued that objects should be evaluated according to three categories: 1) objects themselves; 2) display and organization; 3) embedded information. Using ANT theory, scholars (e.g., Fenwick & Edwards, 2011; Kontopodis, 2012; Waltz, 2006) have revealed the particular ways in which actors (e.g., children, teachers, equipment displays and installments, physical spaces, policies, rules, labels) translate or resist the set actions in which they are involved. Fenwick and Edwards (2011) argued that when we apply ANT theory, the way in which the human and non-human actors' connections produce forces and effects (e.g., knowledge, routines, behaviors, policies, innovations) in school should be the focus. ANT theory provides an analytical tool with which we can trace which actors are involved in preschool practices and how these particular assemblages of actors have come about; the theory can also challenge such assemblages. A network of actors is not static and durable, as actors can be moved from the context wherein they are assembled or used to instigate transformations within a new context (Danish & Enyedy, 2015). In this sense, ANT can point to “a way of intervening in

educational issues to reframe how we might enact and engage with them” (Fenwick & Edwards, 2011, p. 11). Hence, this study looks closely at the networks of actors in an immigrant child's preschool life so as to provide some insights and possible implications for reconsidering our taken-for-granted early childhood education practices.

Methods

Setting and Participants

The focal child of this study was Julia², one of the participating children in a case study of immigrant children's preschool adjustment. The study was conducted in a childcare center for three- and four-year-old children in a rural area of western New York in the U.S. For the study, the first author contacted the center director and explained the purpose of this research and its procedures. After discussions with teachers, the director suggested three potential participating children who had enrolled in the center as their first school and whose parents were immigrants. To recruit participants, consent forms were sent to the parents of the possible participating children. After Julia and her parents agreed to participate in the study, consensus and permission were obtained from the teachers and the parents of the other children in the class.

Julia was a four-year-old child. Her family had immigrated from Puerto Rico three years prior due to her father's job. At home, the family mainly spoke Spanish. Julia's older sister and brother (fourteen and ten years old, respectively) sometimes spoke to each other in English, and the older sister assisted in Julia's English speech therapy assignments. Julia's mother described Julia as very shy and quiet, but well-behaved. Because of her limited English skills, Julia had received speech services in the center. Her mother believed that if Julia improved her English skills, she would make more friends and socialize more.

In Julia's pre-K class, there were two European American teachers, with the lead teacher (Ms. Smith) and the assistant teacher (Ms. Marshall) speaking only English. The class had

² All names are pseudonyms.

thirteen children, including seven European Americans, three African Americans, and three Latinos, and the students used English in the class. Ms. Smith described that Julia was extremely quiet and did not engage in play at all at the beginning of the school year. Even though a native Spanish-speaking assistant teacher was present in the class for the first three months, Julia rarely talked. According to Ms. Smith, Julia made some progress in that she participated in the class routines. The teacher also said that Julia's communication had improved after receiving speech therapy because she started to mimic her teachers and began to communicate with them by using non-verbal language (e.g., pointing to an object, using eye-gaze). However, Ms. Smith described Julia in infantilizing terms and explained she was below average in terms of English skills and academic abilities. She worried that Julia remained shy and spent most of her play time by herself. For these reasons, she suggested Julia for our study.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected through observations, field notes, and interviews with the teachers and Julia's mother. We used participant observations (Preissle & Grant, 2004) to take a close look at her preschool life. The first author observed Julia once a week for six weeks from January 2020 to March 2020. Because of COVID-19, the study was forced to conclude in the middle of March. For each visit, Julia was observed for approximately three hours during indoor and outdoor play, snack, and lunch time. When observing her, two video cameras were used: one to capture the entire class situation and the other to focus on Julia's activities and interactions with others. By adopting a "slow reactive approach" (Oh & Lee, 2019, p. 5), the first author responded to the child only when requested, and placed herself in a spot where she could see Julia as well as keep a certain distance from her. During observation, field notes were taken describing the school context (e.g., play centers, materials, routine, rules, events, and interactions between children and teachers). After observation, the field notes were expanded, with detailed situation descriptions, comments, and questions.

Julia's mother and teachers were interviewed to acquire background information about Julia's family and preschool. Before observations, informal interviews were conducted for approximately 30 minutes. With a translator's help, Julia's mother was interviewed in

Spanish at her home. She was asked about her family, immigration story, and view on her daughter's preschool adjustment. The teachers were interviewed in the classroom in English. They were asked about their teaching experiences, the demographic information of the children, and their perspectives on Julia's academic abilities and peer relationships. All interviews were transcribed into English. After observations, to clarify our understanding of Julia's body language and the class context (e.g., classroom rules, Julia's lunch seat), Ms. Smith was contacted via email and she replied to our questions.

For data analysis, we conducted microanalysis (Graue & Walsh, 1998) by paying attention to Julia's minute-by-minute actions and words in the video recordings. We also read and reread the field notes and transcripts, and coded them line-by-line to identify patterns. In addition, by using ANT as an analytical tool, we traced the actors (e.g., the class routines, rules, places, objects, children, teachers) and relations involving a given activity. At lunchtime for example, we analyzed Julia's responses while identifying the lunch table setting, the rules, the other children, and the presence of Ms. Marshall. In the next step, we repeatedly reviewed the initial codes, the video recordings, and our field notes to identify common themes across the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). We searched for the common themes that demonstrated Julia's agency-related actions and words as she participated in an activity and the factors affecting her relationships with her teachers and peers. For data triangulation, we also paid attention to the responses of Julia's teachers to her body language, the classroom rules, and the setting, which influenced her activity participation and peer interactions. Lastly, after checking the themes in the codes and the entire data set, we generated a thematic map of the analysis and refined the names of the themes. Through this process, we identified three themes that presented Julia's adjustment strategies and some factors promoting or hindering her social relationships.

Findings

Quiet and Careful Non-verbal Strategies for Social interactions

Ms. Smith described Julia as very shy with her teachers and peers. Because the teacher

thought that Julia's language barrier played a huge factor in her social interactions, she worked closely with a speech therapist to teach Julia the appropriate ways to talk to her peers in English. Per her teacher's descriptions, Julia tended to be quiet during observations and spent her time by herself. She occasionally spoke some words and sentences to express her wishes or feelings, answered her teachers' questions, and talked with her peers. However, this did not mean that she was only shy and passive in her interactions with others. Instead, she more often used her non-verbal strategies to interact with her teachers and her peers. According to Oh (2016), when immigrant children are not fluent in the dominant language, they use their own unique methods of interacting with others. Non-verbal strategies (e.g., eye-gaze, gestures, silence, imitations) are one way immigrant children to socialize with adults and peers (Oh, 2016; Oh & Lee, 2019). In Ms. Marshall's interview, she stated that, "Julia does a lot of pointing. When she didn't know how to peel an orange, she handed it to me." In our observation, to participate in art activities or dramatic play, she often brought a smock or a cloth and handed it to teachers when seeking their assistance. She also used other non-verbal strategies to play with her peers, as these field notes reflect:

In the dramatic play area, Alyssa, Maya, and Denzel started to choose their clothing. Julia brought a scarf to Ms. Marshall in the block area and she tied it around Julia's neck. After wearing it, Julia wandered near the dramatic play area and watched the children wearing their dress-up clothes. She picked up a baby doll and pretended to be a mother. While she played by herself, she kept an elbow distance from the other children and watched them for approximately five minutes. Alyssa, Maya, and Denzel had not decided on a theme for their play. Alyssa pretended to be a zombie and slowly walked to Maya and Denzel. Maya and Denzel opened a refrigerator and searched for some food. Julia gave a small button to Denzel. At that time, Denzel used the button to prevent zombie-Alyssa and suggested Julia push it together. They started to chase Alyssa.

(Observation, 5 February 2020)

In the above vignette, Julia used her non-verbal strategies to join the other children's play. She wore a scarf as the children chose their costumes, observed their play, and wandered with a baby doll near her classmates while keeping a certain distance. When appropriate, she offered Denzel a button as a "tool" to enter the play to chase and to repel Alyssa in their avoidance play, which changed the flow of the play. Her strategy involved "nonverbal entry" and "encirclement" (Corsaro, 2003, p. 42), means by which she skillfully entered her

classmates' play without resistance. Corsaro (2003) argued that when a preschool child uses direct strategies (e.g., "Can I play?", "What are you doing?") to join other children's play, they often receive negative responses from their peers. They fear that their play might be disrupted by the new child. From this perspective, Julia's non-verbal, indirect strategies successfully allowed her to enter in play. Alongside these strategies, she also often used her facial expressions (e.g., making a surprised face, smiling) in order to show her interest and to join in the other children's play.

In addition, she skillfully suggested other children join her play. For example, she handed over the manipulatives that she was using to a girl when she approached the math table and made space for a boy when he came to the water table. She shared her play materials and space to welcome other children. In another situation, she pretended her book was alive and moved it toward her peers when they came to her reading area. She exhibited welcoming gestures by using the book without directly invading her peers' space. Even if her peers refused her invitation of play by ignoring it, through rejecting the book rather than Julia directly, it was a safe way of protecting her from rejection. By using different strategies, she initiated play with others. When we consider that children are active agents who construct their everyday lives as social beings, Julia emerges as an individual capable and active in building relationships with her peers through her non-verbal strategies.

Different Social Interactions in Different Situations

Throughout this study, Julia's interactions with her classmates varied depending on the situation. We found that she interacted little with her peers during snack or lunch time, when children naturally gather at a table. When having snacks or lunch, children were supposed to sit and to eat at their table, upon which Ms. Smith attached their names and photos. Ms. Smith used assigned seating to mix children with different eating speeds and personalities. Each child's snack or lunch was served on an individual plastic plate on each table by Ms. Marshall. Ms. Marshall distributed food for the children while they engaged in an activity led by Ms. Smith. Right after the activity, children went back to their seats and had lunch without any confusion. The following vignette showed Julia's interactions with her peers during a typical lunch period:

Julia's table was close to the main door of the class. Four children [Julia, Andrea, Alyssa, and Tom] were assigned to the rectangle table. Julia's seat was near the right corner [longer side] of the table. On her right side, which is the closest to Julia, there was Ms. Marshall. On her left side, Andrea sat about 20 inches away from Julia. On the opposite side, Alyssa and Tom were seated. At lunchtime, Julia kept eating except for when she asked Ms. Marshall's help to peel her banana and answered Tom's question about her salad. After finishing her lunch, she played with her water bottle by putting her fork into its top handle and waited until other children finished their lunch. As they finished, Tom and Alyssa lay down on the table and Andrea rested her hand on her chin and waited for Ms. Smith's call for lunch dismissal.

(Observation, 26 February 2020)

During lunchtime, we found that Julia interacted with Ms. Marshall and her classmate only twice and that she was quieter than usual. Her limited interactions might be affected by her relations with the other children. During our observation, we did not see Julia playing with Andrea, Alyssa, or Tom. The interview with Ms. Smith confirmed that they were not Julia's close friends. Moreover, Ms. Marshall's presence at the table may have caused Julia and the other children to remain quiet. More importantly, non-human actors were involved in the lunch setting (e.g., a certain portion of food per plate at the assigned chair per child at the table, keeping a certain distance from each other, "lunch rules"—sitting and no talking while eating). Set portions of food per child based on his or her age and the learning of table manners are emphasized in the New York state childcare regulations manners in compliance with USDA Child and Adult Food Programs (CACFP). Although there are no specific table settings or manners mentioned in the regulations, to run the lunch period effectively and educationally, Ms. Smith created her own class lunch setting and rules in accordance with them. In her email response (August 25, 2020), Ms. Smith emphasized that "the children were asked to remain seated and use their manners . . . Table manners are important as these skills children need when they move on to kindergarten. Also those who had different social skills to encourage conversations with one another." In the lunch space, the network formed among the individual portion of food, the assigned chairs and tables and the distance between them, lunch rules, the children, and Ms. Marshall's supervision. This ironically led to Julia eating without talking, which restrained her interactions with others.

In contrast, we observed that Julia showed more interactions with her classmates during

pretend play about lunch in the dramatic play area. In the play area, Julia and her classmates pretended to eat by using plastic food and dishes:

Julia took out all kinds of plastic food and dishes from a cabinet and set them up on the table. She said to no one in particular, "lunch, lunch." Jonathan came to her with a smile on his face while waving his hand to her. Julia asked, "Taco or Hamburger?" As Jonathan pointed out the plastic hamburger, Julia handed it to him. He pretended to eat it while standing. Michael watched their play and came to the table, "Can I have one?" Julia handed a plastic taco to him. Jonathan said to Julia, "I am thirsty. Can I have a drink?" Julia pushed her cup toward him and he pretended to drink. After that, he handed his apple to her to have a bite. Tom, Denzel, and Destiney came to the table and asked for food. Tom pretended to make a spicy hamburger and asked "Have a bite." Julia pretended to eat it.

(Observation, 4 March 2020)

During the play, Julia initiated speaking with her peers, interacted with them, and shared plastic food. The other children asked her for food, made new dishes by adding different plastic food to the toy hamburgers that Julia shared, and asked her to try a bite. When focusing on the materials involved and the lunch play space, there were different types of plastic food that could be easily taken apart and combined, self-selected plates and/or seats, and no lunch rules while 'eating.' The network of things (e.g., plastic food, no preselected individual plates and seats, the lack of rules set by adults), children, and teachers' absence shaped a new arrangement during lunch play. This arrangement enabled Julia to engage in play for approximately 32 minutes and to interact with her classmates, in particular with Michael and Tom, whom she had rarely been observed to play with. In all these ways, lunch play differed from the actual lunch scene presented above.

Adherence and Resistance to Classroom Rules

Markström and Halldén (2009) argued that as they exert their agency, children accept the school rules while pursuing their interests and creating time and space for themselves. Ms. Smith viewed that Julia often did not understand her class rules and participated in only her preferred activities. Although Julia had a hard time understanding the class rules at first, over time she became familiar with them and incorporated them into her play. In her class, Ms.

Smith had concerns about the problems that may arise when too many children are gathered in one place. In her attempt to respect children's free choices while preventing crowding in an area at any one time, she introduced laminated nametags for the children to use during play. After the children chose their play area, they were supposed to put their nametags on an area board on the wall. As Ms. Smith intended, Julia moved her name tag whenever she changed her play area. One day, as a girl entered into the dramatic play area, Julia pointed out the area board on the wall. Julia wanted the girl to follow the class rule, which stipulated attaching a name tag to the board when playing. This means that she understood and internalized the classroom rule regarding the limited number of children in one area.

Children are intelligent players in that they use their agency to act and to resist adult control (Corsaro, 2003; Markström & Halldén, 2009). Likewise, Julia showed her resistance (e.g., silence in response to teachers' questions, not moving to the area that teachers suggested) to the class rules set by teachers when pursuing her own interests in doing certain activities or playing in certain areas. The following vignette presents Julia's reaction to the limited number of students allowed to play in the block area:

After playing in the math area, she took her name tag from the area and watched Ms. Smith and Ms. Marshall. She wandered around her class for a minute and bumped into Ms. Marshall. Ms. Marshall said, "Where do you want to play, Julia?" Julia pointed out the block area. Ms. Marshall told her, "[The] block area is full." At that time, two girls came and talked to Ms. Marshall. While Ms. Marshall talked to the girls, Julia put her name tag on the math area close to the block area, and moved quickly and knelt on the edge of the carpet in the block area. As soon as she sat on the carpet, she touched the block box. Ms. Marshall found Julia in the block area and told her to go to another area. After Ms. Marshall left to help other children, she knelt down near the block area and watched the children playing in the area.

(Observation, 19 February 2020)

The above vignette shows that when her interest conflicted with class rules, Julia at first used a tactic, "weapons of the weak" (de Certeau, 1984, p. 23): she put her name tag in the math area to pursue her interest in playing in the block area, while observing at the same time the class rule requiring children to use their name tags during play. After this tactic failed, Julia's next choice initially seemed to show her resistance to the idea established by teachers

that only a limited number of children could play in the block area, but she ultimately chose to wait while other children finished their play. This shows that Julia did not simply resist the class rule. She found a compromise between accepting the restriction and pursuing her interest in playing in the block area while taking ownership of her own time and space, similar to the children in Markström and Halldén's study (2009).

She also tried to find a way to initiate play and to interact with her peers while adhering to the class play rules:

Julia was playing alone in the dramatic play area. She put a plastic taco on the self for the science area which was next to the dramatic play area. She called loudly, "Cafe! Cafe!" to the other area where three children played. Denzel came to the shelf, looked at her, and said "I am gonna have a coffee," touching some shells in a small basket on the shelf. He quickly put his name tag on the dramatic play area board and spoke loudly, "Who wants some coffee?" Julia repeated. "Coffee, coffee." Denzel replied to her, "My coffee is better." They competed with each other to sell their coffee and touched the shells in the baskets to pretend that they were coins. Ms. Smith saw them and told [them], "Julia and Denzel, those shells belong to the science area. If you want to play with those shells, you need to go to a table." When they heard Ms. Smith's play rule reminder, Julia and Denzel ended their play.

(Observation, 5 February 2020)

In the above vignette, Julia was the only child in the dramatic play area, and she called out to the other area to get attention from her peers. After Denzel joined her in the dramatic play area, they did not move the shells on the science shelf for their cafe play. This showed the children were aware of the class rules stipulating that a certain play activity (selling beverages) should be restrained a certain area (the dramatic play area) and certain materials (shells) were to be used only in the science area where they were located. The scene also reveals how actors (both human and non-human) participated in the children's play. The rules, shells, and science shelf made the children limit their play to the small area near the science shelf. At the same time, the network of the shells and the children turned the science shelf into their coffee shop counter. In doing so, the children continued to their play. However, the teacher's strict application of the rules ended the play between Julia and Denzel, who rarely interacted with each other. Julia's opportunity to develop a relationship with another potential friend was impeded.

Discussion

This study helped us understand when and how an immigrant child, described as shy and experiencing difficulties adjusting to her preschool, exercised her agency to interact with her teachers and peers and to participate in different activities by looking for different strategies. These findings challenge the image of Julia held by her teachers and highlight her strategies when pursuing her interests and her unique ways of interacting with others. On the other hand, the class material settings and rules restrained her interactions with others. Drawing on these findings, we will now discuss how to support immigrant children's agency and peer interactions in class.

First, the non-verbal strategies of immigrant children should be observed and considered as useful capacities that allow them to interact with their teachers and peers. Although language proficiency does influence a child's school adjustment, prior studies (e.g., Guo & Dalli, 2016; Oh, 2016; Oh & Lee, 2019) have shown that immigrant children are capable of using diverse methods to develop relationships with their peers in a preschool that is linguistically, socially and culturally different than what they are used to. Likewise, Julia, though viewed as a quiet girl with limited English proficiency, often used her non-verbal strategies (e.g., pointing, offering necessary objects and spaces, smiling) to communicate and play with her teachers and peers. In particular, in her non-verbal strategies, she exhibited pro-social behavior (e.g., giving, sharing, creating a comfortable atmosphere). Considering that children's pro-social behavior can promote peer acceptance (Gifford-Smith & Brownell, 2003) and prevent peer rejection (Girard et al., 2011), Julia's non-verbal strategies served as her strengths when building positive relationships with others. Oh and Lee (2019) argued that non-verbal strategies are important for culturally and linguistically diverse children when building peer relationships and thus, educators must value and nurture these diverse modes of communication. In order to do so, we suggest educators systematically observe immigrant children and provide encouragement when they use non-verbal strategies.

Second, this study confirmed that it is important to view immigrant children as active agents and to understand the intentions behind their actions. Julia's teachers sometimes misinterpreted her actions as violations of the class rules because they perceived her as a child struggling to adjust to school due to her language abilities and social skills. Our

observations showed that she did not simply misunderstand or resist the rules set by her teachers. She was aware of the school rules and skillfully abided by them while pursuing her own interests and playing with others. Also, as a way of exercising her agency, she decided not to play in another area and waited for an opening in the block area, where she truly wanted to play. This finding is in line with Guo and Dalli's (2016) argument that if immigrant children's ways of doing things appear to be resistant or maladjusted to school, they should be seen as capable rather than in need of re-shaping. No single practice works for all children, who possess a wide range of divergent backgrounds, needs, capabilities, and interests (Guo & Dalli, 2016; Oh, 2016; Souto-Manning et al., 2014). Although teachers have to set certain class rules, and following them is important, overly rigid enforcement of the rules can infringe upon children's valuable moments when exercising their agency and impair their ability to build relationships with others. Based on children's unique needs and intentions, teachers need to be flexible in their rules so they can provide opportunities for children's learning and relationship development with others in the school.

Lastly, it is important to trace how human and non-human actors shape and translate their diverse and complicated networks, and how these networks affect an immigrant child's social interactions. We found that all present actors (e.g., children, a teacher, shells, a shelf, a dramatic play area, rules) shaped a network, which influenced Julia's play with others. The above lunchtime vignette in particular showed how the network of children, a teacher's presence, and the lunchtime settings and rules restrained Julia's interactions with her peers. In contrast, in the dramatic play area, the network among children, freely chosen lunch play materials, and seats in the dramatic area enabled her and her peers to interact with each other (e.g., talking, distributing, sharing food). Mealtime is one of the important social avenues in which children converse with each other, develop friendships, and co-create their own social rules (Fossgard et al., 2018; Mason, 2021). Children perceive that a good school meal is more related to social interaction than eating food (Bruselis-Jensen, 2014). However, these notions have been neglected by proper behavior codes in school (Pike, 2008). We suggest that teachers consider their school lunch space a social space. Teachers also need to carefully examine the human and non-human actors related to children's social interactions and allow them to choose their seats and the peers with whom they want to eat. Although exposure to diverse students with different social skills can promote children's social skills, Julia, as a

shy girl, felt more comfortable with close and familiar children, and this may promote more interaction opportunities for her (and other children like her). By reconsidering their taken-for-granted lunch practices, we believe that teachers can offer meaningful opportunities for children to develop their social relationships.

Our findings come mainly from observing an immigrant child's morning activities. We were unable to collect extensive data on the child's full-day preschool life. Our study was limited in how it could address the ways in which different human and non-human actors (including schedules, curricula, discourses about teaching practices) shape different networks and how these networks affect immigrant children's activities and social relationships at different times. In addition, because of Covid-19, we were not able to interview Julia and her mother about their views on her preschool adjustment after observations. The views of children and families are important when considering the effectiveness of current teaching practices and rules. Therefore, we call for more in-depth studies on the interaction patterns of immigrant children in various school contexts. These studies should include the perspectives of children, teachers, and families so that educators can gain a greater understanding of immigrant children and, in turn, find better ways to support them.

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