

BUSCANDO LA LUZ: CHILDREN'S EXPRESSIONS OF DIGNITY  
IN A CO-DESIGNED WORKSHOP

by

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation was designed to understand learning experiences that affirm and recognize the fundamental human right to learn. Human dignity is the mother value of the human person from which all rights flow (Barak, 2015). Therefore, to design for the fundamental right to learn is to design in accordance with human dignity. Educational dignity is defined as the cultivation of our mind, humanity, and potential (Espinoza et al., 2020). As part of this project, I wanted to understand how children experience education dignity. I worked with six of my former kindergarten students, who were then in fourth grade, and four of their siblings to create a social design-based experiment (SDBE)—an envisioned learning ecology of their desire. SDBEs seek to re-mediate unjust structures in pursuit of equitable and just outcomes (Gutiérrez, Jurow & Vakil, 2020). My SDBE re-mediated the ecology of learning by consulting with child partners to collectively plan and design the goals and participation structures of our summer workshop. The analysis for this dissertation was guided by three questions: 1) How did the child partners articulate learning and their desires for learning in the interviews and throughout the co-designed workshop? 2) Was there empirical evidence of the children experiencing educational dignity in the co-designed workshop? If so, how was it empirically observable? 3) Did my role as their former teacher transform through the co-design, and if so, how? Through a storytelling approach to presenting the findings, this study identifies children's expressions of dignity articulated throughout the workshop as well as my pedagogical innovations (Alvarez, 2023) in pursuit of respecting the dignity of my child partners. Consequently, the child partners exhibited the development of a new consciousness in the ways they participated in our newly co-created interdependent learning ecology. Finally, this study underscores the role of critical reflexivity on my part as the researcher, participant, and former teacher for the actualization of the experience of educational dignity.

## DEDICATION

To Joseph, José and Vicente for your patience, love, and encouragement to fulfill this dream and for always believing in me.

To my child partners who patiently taught me the value of collectivity and joy through their brilliance and ingenuity.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Since entering graduate school, one truth has remained consistent as I stumbled through each semester—this journey is not an individual endeavor. I could not have survived the plague of self-doubt and feelings of inferiority without the love that surrounded me and helped pull me closer to the light of believing in my own capabilities. It has been within community and the love within my home that gave me the courage to confront self-doubt in order to recognize my capabilities as a scholar.

The week after I told my husband, Joe, that I desired to get a PhD and study the phenomenon of learning outside of public schools, he gifted me a plaque that said, “Make it Happen” and a journal with gold letters etched onto the leather cover that said, “Keep your eyes on the stars and your feet on the ground.” Joe has given me more than support; he has always expressed an unwavering belief in me especially in times when I outwardly express self-doubt. He was the reason why I was able to take the first step in applying to graduate school, because I knew no matter what happened he had my back. Thank you, my love, for seeing me, for encouraging me and for listening so patiently while I read draft after draft to you. We share the same heart for children, and for this, I know I am never alone.

The preface and dedication are both dedicated to the two precious humans that have taught me most in life, my sons. I would like to take this opportunity to recognize them individually.

My José, your strength, perseverance, and determination leaves me breathless in admiration. Your courage to speak the truth has given me courage to do the same. Your certainty in knowing who you are gives you certainty in the decisions you make in life. You inspire me and teach me by your example. Thank you for your patience with me. I love you immensely.

My Cente, this world received a love like no other when you entered it. Your innate intuition and emotional intelligence are a gift. You feel deeply and you see everything that most overlook in life. Your wisdom and compassion are a source of comfort for so many including your mama. Your heart gives me courage. I love you so much.

My thirst for learning began in my home. My parents' desire to learn was modeled in the way they consistently seek information about the world—the past and present. They have taught me that to learn is to experience life and to listen to people's stories. Mom and dad, thank you for giving me a home filled with books and stories, and a passion for history and learning. You have taught me that learning is a journey of transformation, and as human beings we are always learning and growing.

In the introduction of this dissertation, my brother Jojo's role in my life and learning is captured in stories and memories from our childhood. He was my first teacher in life and has continued to play that role. I am here because of him. I met my mentor, Dr. Manuel Espinoza, through Jojo, I learned what it means to be Chicana because of him, I learned what it means to be a human being and the role of healing ourselves so that we may serve humanity. I am because he is. Jojo, you are the greatest teacher I have ever known.

Our younger brother, Stephen, was born when Jojo and I were 7 and 11. We have marveled at him ever since. The intellectual and spiritual force that you are, Steve, has always had great purpose. Your wise soul has taught Jojo and I to observe, to listen and to know there is always more than what we are able to see. You are magic.

In June of 2019, I told Jojo I was thinking about applying to graduate school for a PhD. He reminded me that our dear brother, Dr. Manuel Espinoza, was at CU Denver and encouraged me to reach out to him, which I did, and my life has never been the same. I have never been the

same. To know Manuel Espinoza is to be changed forever as a human being. Hermano, in your presence I have learned how the enactment of peace and love are expressed in every action and interaction. I have learned to be a humanist by watching and observing how you regard every human being including myself. You invited me into an intellectual world I did not know I was capable of understanding or participating in, and that invitation has transformed me in ways I didn't know were possible. *Gracias por darme amor, respeto por mi mente y la experiencia de mi dignidad.*

Shortly after reconnecting with Manuel, he invited me to join the Right2Learn Dignity Lab. Once again, my life changed. To be part of Right2Learn is to be part of the most tender of hearts with brilliant minds and humble souls. To be part of Right2Learn is to participate in an ecology composed of dreams for human rights. To be part of Right2Learn is an honor of a lifetime. I humbly offer this dissertation study to our vision and goal of amending the education clause of Colorado's state constitution declaring education as a fundamental right. My hopes are to provide an understanding of how to design learning environments where the experience of one's right to learn is recognized and affirmed—this is our mission.

We began graduate school in the Fall of 2020, on screens that first year, and yet we almost immediately knew this was destiny. My sister scholars, Ashieda, Trang, Marlene, and Brenda, I was meant to meet you on this journey as sources of comfort and solidarity. The intuitive understanding we share in spaces that otherwise I would have felt alone enabled me to continue to place one foot in front of the other. When the light dimmed from overwhelming feelings of insecurity, you pulled me to the surface. You saw me, you held me, and you gave me sisterhood. We did this, my sisters, together.

*Mis hermanas del alma*, Bea, and Liz, I search for the words to express what our journey together has meant to me, but more than words, my heart expands in my chest with love and gratitude. The alchemy of our love and friendship has produced a beauty far beyond what I have ever known. The arrival of your powerful spirits into my life has helped me recognize the power of my own. The *poder* you both have given me has enabled me to love myself through your eyes. *Querida* Liz, you have brought so much love, learning and healing to our lives.

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the synergy we created collectively and my yearning to return to that space. Thank you for listening so closely, caring so deeply and for recognizing, before I did, where I needed to go with my research. Dr. Ricarose Roque, your gentle guidance lit a path to help me understand how to tell our story and the emergence of our co-designed ecology.

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## PREFACE

This study began years before I entered graduate school. It began my fourth year of teaching in 2005, the year I became a mother, and it expanded in 2008 when my second child was born. There are no words profound enough to describe the transformation when one becomes a mother. With each of their births, I was overcome with an overwhelming compassion for all the mothers, fathers, grandparents, and families that send their precious young ones to school. I became overwhelmed by the honorable role and responsibility I had to guide, to teach and to love someone else's child. I realized I have a part in fulfilling their hopes and dreams for their children, because I too had hopes and dreams for my own children—that they may live their purpose whatever that might be.

Watching my own children grow has been my greatest life lesson in human development, humanity, human learning, and education. When my boys were little, they were delicate and yet fierce, vulnerable, and yet wise beyond their years. Every time I thought I had mothering figured out; they once again had a humbling lesson for me. What they have taught me is that learning is a lifelong continual journey beyond the brick and mortar of a school. Because of this lesson, and because I am a public-school teacher, I agonized over sending them to school. In a standards-based institution, I knew a standard could not represent their brilliance or their potential. I began to see standards as constraints to how we evaluate and judge children. Now as a mother, I see them all as miraculous.

In 2008, I began researching early childhood theories of human development and stumbled across the Reggio Emilia Approach to early childhood. The philosophy, the language and how the child is regarded, as brilliant and capable, felt consistent with how I saw my own children, and what I had hoped for their education. So, in 2009, I opened my own preschool in

our home, *Nuestro Hogar Preescolar*. For the first time in my career, I had the autonomy to create something that felt consistent with what children deserved to grow and flourish—to follow their curiosities. During this time, I immersed myself in books about the Reggio Emilia approach to understand how to foster what they call an emergent curriculum—a curriculum that emerges from the play, imagination, and curiosities of children. I had to learn to watch and listen to children at play. Consequently, I began to see their play and imaginations as intellectual brilliance deserving of the right nutrients to enable the flourishing of their potential.

As it does in life, time passed quickly and before I knew it, it was time to send my boys to school outside of our home. I searched feverishly for somewhere that might offer an environment that was consistent with the Reggio Emilia philosophy. A place that also sees children with inherent potential contingent upon how we regard the child, and how we design and guide learning experiences. Unable to find such a place, we returned to public schools. I sent my boys along with the hope and dream that we might do better for our children.

My precious sons, José and Vicente, now young men, are the brilliant minds that inspired this project. The dream for a cultural shift in public schools where children experience the sense of their worth, and the actualization of their potential began with the birth of each of my boys, and so it will continue.



## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

*¿Por qué te fuiste maestra?*

Why did you go, teacher?

*Me fui, mi amor*, I left, my love, because you have the right to play and be joyful.

You have the right to be seen, valued, and nurtured as though your life, your mind, and  
your ideas are miraculous and sacred

because

they

are

*Me fui* because some days I did not know if I was nurturing you or harming you

at times my vision was so blurry

I did not know if my decisions were guided by my human instinct

or

by the socio-cultural construct of schooling that was not designed

to nurture you

*Me fui* because you deserve better

a sanctuary where you can explore, move, create, blossom, and thrive

*Me fui* so that I can understand what you need and deserve to sing your song and be free.

On a cool and cloudy day in May of 2020, I had just finished packing up my kindergarten classroom after nineteen years of teaching. I stood with my hand on the doorknob prepared to close the door for the last time, and I stared at the now empty room. Memories flashed through my mind like an 8 mm film, movements flashing without sound. I looked at the

carpet and saw children gathered in a circle processing their day, their experiences, their pain, and their joy. The scene then changed. I saw children moving freely and joyfully throughout the classroom as they stepped into their being, purposefully becoming part of a trusted community we had cultivated. The scene changed again, and I saw children moving in melodic movement as they ran up to show me their painting, creation, or invention glowing with pride and excitement. My heart ached to relive those moments again, witnessing children’s joy and the miracle of them *becoming*.<sup>1</sup>

The child who poignantly asked me “¿Por qué te fuiste maestra?” “Why did you go, teacher?” is one of the child partners in this study. He asked me this question when I went to visit him in first grade after leaving my kindergarten classroom to pursue graduate school. The children from that last class are now, in 2025, fifth graders. I have been visiting them as often as I can for the last five years. On one of those visits in spring of 2023, Axel, another former student, caught sight of me and ran back into his classroom as I visited with children in the hallway. He quickly returned and gave me a note on a scrap piece of green construction paper where he had quickly jotted, “Dear Ms. Chávez, I miss kindergarten. I miss free time.” These words written with swift and deliberate intention by an insightful child communicated why I chose to leave the classroom to study the phenomena of human learning. I have sought to understand more clearly what my students needed and deserved as human beings in order to thrive and flourish. This tiny little note was instructive to that inquiry and representative of what children communicated to me every day—their insatiable desire for “free time” or “playtime.” I began to wonder if this human desire to be free and play that the children expressed was an expression of their dignity and their fundamental right to learn (Espinoza & Vossoughi, 2014).

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<sup>1</sup> *Becoming* in this instance, as theorized by Quennerstedt and Quennerstedt (2013), regards the child as a holder of human rights, full status humans in a socio-political contextual present, continually growing and changing.

Yet, the context of our school was in a constant state of scrutiny for underperforming on state standardized tests, resulting in strictly structured days without time for what the children desired most—to play, to move, and to be free.

The contradiction between state mandates and what I felt children needed to thrive and grow has been an internal conflict for two decades. Unable to articulate these tensions, I found the language I needed in the summer of 2019 when I was given an article titled, *Perceiving Learning Anew: Social Interaction, Dignity, and Educational Rights* (Espinoza & Vossoughi, 2014). Over the course of the summer, I read the article several times, closely annotating the language of educational rights that “have discernible social interactional and dignitarian origins” (p. 286). As I yearned to make sense of this language and my role as a pedagogue, I also began to construct a new vision of learning.

The following school year, the internal conflicts intensified as I began to navigate district initiatives while reflecting on my role as a teacher, or rather, the teacher I desired to be—one that recognizes a child's fundamental right to learn. For example, I found that when I was not trying to control my students so that they would listen to “my teaching,” but rather organized in a way that enabled collaboration and choice, they participated and interacted with a kind of synergy that electrified the room. Witnessing this synergy was like observing co-created worlds emerging through imagination. This magic manifested during “free time” and “play time”. This new vision of seeing children after closely reading about *social interaction, dignity, and educational rights* enabled me to start “*perceiving learning anew.*”

The phenomenon of human learning is widely studied, and yet the possibilities unknown as each wave of educational reform sustains the cultural-historical construct of control and dominance in the classroom (Cuban, 1993). The potential for human learning and its possibilities

have been evidenced throughout our human existence on earth; consider the fact that humans created an object that launches into the universe. Despite this, the everyday organization of learning for children in the contemporary US feels galaxies away from the cultivation of curiosity and ingenuity that sent us into outer space. As a public-school teacher for twenty years and a mother watching her young children grow and develop, the pernicious reality of our rote, controlled, and punitive schooling practices has felt like an insult to human potential. We are curious, innovative, intellectual beings and our learning environments should be designed to cultivate and nourish these inherently human qualities (Scheffler, 1985). On the contrary, schooling practices too often suppress curiosity and creativity, denying the possibility of the actualization of potential. It's as though we close the shades and block sunlight from nascent sprouts unaware of the possibility of a newly discovered flower or fruit.

The organization and design of pedagogy in public schools too often revolve around reductive quantifiable numbers that supposedly measure what children know (Rose, 1989; 2022). Human learning is far too complex to be represented by a number or even a standard (Scheffler, 1985). Children are far too miraculous to be categorized into hierarchical grouping based on a score. I have often wondered, why do we choose for young people what they are to learn and evaluate them on predetermined outcomes? If we are inherently curious, imaginative, and innovative beings, why do we not start and end with the human being in the design for learning? Instead, we position smaller and younger people, especially historically racialized children, as inferior thus sustaining the banking model practices of an oppressive education (Freire, 1970). Consequently, after just a few years in our schooling system, children quickly conceptualize learning and their identity as learners via their everyday experiences in school (Dewey, 1938; Scheffler, 1985; Nasir, 2012). Most often those experiences are prescribed by a system of

standardization of human beings resulting in a sorting mechanism of who fits the so-called standard (Flores & Rosa, 2015). Learning and identity are then conceptualized by the rating of said performance on a standardized continuum (McDermott & O'Dell, 2001). This begins as early as kindergarten.

By listening to and observing children, I have found that the belief in their capability and the recognition of their free will to explore their curiosities, creativity, and imagination cultivates a different kind of learning environment; one where children come alive (Edwards, 1993). Paying attention to what captures their minds and hearts, listening to their thoughts and the way they process, collectively and individually enables the cultivation of such environments (Schultz, 2003). This is why my last kindergarten class was a pivotal moment in my learning as an educator. The tensions of prescribed curriculum, the expectation of a rote model of teaching, my students' resistance to both, and their innate desire to play and move led me to graduate school. I wanted to explore the phenomena of human learning and the kind of learning that my students deserve as capable human beings. I wanted to understand how to revive the light that once radiated from them when they played in the warm sun that beamed through the windows of our kindergarten classroom. I wanted to understand how to design in ways that enabled the igniting of their human potential.

To study the design of learning that affirms human dignity, I knew I had to understand my role as a designer, facilitator, and as their *maestra*. Vivian Gussin Paley (1989) emphasizes that our behavior in the classroom as educators is an important part of the “hidden curriculum.” Through this study, I hoped to reflect on my role, what informed my pedagogical improvisations (Erickson, 1982), and how those actions contributed to the formation of the co-created worlds

with children. Therefore, a brief journey into my own cultural-historical past is an important part of this story.

### **The Making of a Scholar and *una Maestra***

“Wake up” my older brother, Jojo, said while poking my arm. Our parents worked opposite schedules. Mom worked nights and slept during the day while dad was at work. Jojo was my mentor, my guide, and my earliest teacher during those critical and formative years. Still half asleep, I followed him into the kitchen on a Saturday morning where he had chocolate milk made for us, and the small TV on the kitchen table with Sesame Street just starting its most recent episode. This is how my weekly literacy lessons began. By the time the program was over, so was our chocolate milk, and there we sat on the carpeted kitchen floor as he continued the lessons from Sesame Street, skillfully teaching me letters and sounds. I was four and he was eight. And I emerged as a blossoming reader.

Upon entering school, I was filled with a tenacious sense of capability as Jojo had prepared me to not only be a strong reader but also with a sense of mental grit. Watching films all day in our basement like *Breakin’* (1984), a film about break dancers, who fought both economic and social injustices, and danced their way through the struggles—so did me and Jojo. This tenacity that I possessed was often seen as a threat by my teachers and to the cultural context of control and obedience. In the first grade, my teacher had had enough of me and sent me to read by myself in the library. I suppose it was a sort of punishment for being a “troublemaker,” however, it was in the library where I immersed myself in books. Reading was the superpower that my brother had gifted me. I can still see myself sitting on the library floor, isolated, and reading biographies of varying historical people, most specifically on Harriet Tubman, which I read repeatedly. Her perilous efforts to guide enslaved people to freedom

contributed to my early learning of fighting for justice, freedom, and human rights at just seven years old. This solitary time in the library was the only time I ever remember learning in school about Harriet Tubman and the struggle for freedom and justice; albeit I was all by myself.

My promising beginning as a strong reader in school cannot explain how I ended up in remedial classes by seventh grade with my fellow Chicano peers who had attended school with me since the first grade. There we sat in a basement room without windows or sunlight, bored, unchallenged, and consequently with wilted identities as learners. This feeling of being segregated, because I was not smart enough, enraged me while also resulting in layers of insecurities and an internalization that something was wrong with me. I felt deficient. This feeling spiraled into a tumultuous middle and high school academic performance.

Although my merit did not prove worthy, an unexpected opportunity disrupted my path of academic demise. It was 1997, my senior year in high school, my GPA a 2.5, and my ACT scores a 16—twice. One unexpected spring day, I was called to the counselor's office, a place I rarely visited. I was introduced to a kind man named Dr. Ernie Andrade who was recruiting Chicana/ Latina students to the University of Northern Colorado's education program. I knew immediately that this was my one chance to go to college. Dr. Andrade not only helped with my admittance to UNC, but he also awarded me a scholarship to the *Cumbres* program, a fully paid tuition for Chicana/ Latina students who planned to major in Bilingual Education.

The first semester, I was fortunate to be placed in two classes with Dr. Matthew Jockers, a professor of English and technology. It was in his courses that the trajectory of my life changed. I felt as though for the first time in my life I was intellectually capable. Dr. Jockers was a young, energetic man heralding on the first day the brilliant works of James Joyce. We listened captively as he paced with an infectious energy around the classroom. Then, bringing us into

conversation with who he considered one of the most influential writers of the 20th century, Dr. Jockers called on us for our thoughts and perspectives. While he waited for our response, he expressed the most genuine regard for us by looking straight into our eyes with a joyous and encouraging smile. Once we muttered a thought or response, he would explode with exuberance, imparting in us a feeling that he thought we were just as brilliant as James Joyce and worthy of being in conversation with him.

Early in the semester, Dr. Jockers yelled out at me as I was gathering my things after class, “Adria, come see me at my office hours today. Bring your paper.” It was a solitary walk to his office from my dorm room on that brisk autumn day. This new identity as a college student and budding scholar felt strange, foreign, and yet exciting. I held my paper in both hands and walked past the library up to the education building not knowing what to expect. Entering Dr. Jockers’ office on the ground floor, I found him at his desk engrossed in his writing. He looked up at me and gave his signature joyous smile. And there we sat, each week, me on the other side of his desk, both pulled in closely around my paper, reconstructing each sentence for clarity and precision. He taught me words like conjunctions, gerunds, subordinate clauses, etc. He taught me grammar in the context of my own language and writing so that I could understand how to make it more clear to my reader without suppressing my voice or ideas. After two semesters of one-on-one tutoring with Dr. Jockers, I felt myself growing in ways I did not know possible. I developed an identity as a scholar, eventually finding solace in writing and to my surprise reading again. He awakened a capability I did not know I possessed or one that was lost in that dark basement classroom in middle school. It was as if oxygen gently reached the embers of my potential, and the spark grew. Every child deserves these opportunities and experiences to realize

their potential, to find that light within that I felt with Dr. Jockers' dedicated assistance to my growth enabling me to participate in the world in new ways—as a writer writing this story.

### **My Story: the Chicana Experience**

It rained furiously that August night in 1995. The kind of rainstorm where the gutters turn into small raging rivers and the windshield wipers on the highest setting are still unable to keep up with the downpour on the windshield. My aunt went out into the storm that night looking for my great uncle at the High-Rise bar, his local favorite on West Colfax in Denver. He had always been my Great Grandma Pita's baby even at fifty years old. Now, he could not be found, and Pita had been in a coma for nearly two days. We all sat up in her ground level apartment like a pilgrimage, sitting by her bedside as the matriarch that raised her children, grandchildren, and her nephew, my great uncle, began to breathe more shallowly. But she was waiting for him.

It must have been one or two in the morning after the bars had closed. I was asleep on the sofa when my uncle came in soaking wet and ran to her bedside. It was within minutes that I heard him and my grandmother wailing, and I knew she was gone. I walked slowly into her room, sat on the floor next to her bed, and held her soft eighty-six-year-old hand that was still warm but breathless. At that moment I realized we were losing our ancestral knowledge. Pita spoke primarily only Spanish and my dad, his siblings, my brothers, and myself did not. The realization of not knowing the language well enough to know Pita and her story was tragic and devastating. What *consejos* or advice would she have told me if only I could have understood her? What *cuentos* or stories would she want me to carry on? And why did the rest of us not speak Spanish or understand it enough to know what she would have told us?

This is my Chicana story.

Our family is part of the socio-political history of forced assimilation, tracking, and subtractive schooling in the US of Mexican and Mexican American children (Valenzuela, 1999; Yosso, 2006). Forced assimilation constituted experiences of humiliation and degradation resulting in fractured identities of not knowing where we belong as the language and cultural practices of our ancestors became plagued by survivalist amnesia. I was unaware of this history until my older brother, Jojo, still teaching and guiding me, handed me a book, *Youth, Identity, Power: The Chicano Movement* by Carlos Muñoz, Jr (1989). Through this text, I found *el espíritu* of generations of Chicanos who have felt the same pain I felt when Pita died—the loss of language and culture, and the desire to hold on to the sacred teachings of our ancestors. I learned how Chicanos have struggled for decades for our history to be recognized and taught in public schools. I then had an insatiable desire to understand more of our history and to reclaim my identity as a Chicana. And like the little girl who sat on the floor of the library reading by herself, I began a solitary journey searching for and reading texts, poetry, *teatro*, whatever Chicano literature I could get my hands on. Ironically, all that material I found was outside the confines of my Denver public high school—the very city where Chicanos walked out demanding our history be taught thirty years prior.

Since losing Pita, I began to understand the role of language in human connection and relationships. As bell hooks (1994) explains, language enables joyous and intimate bonds between human beings. The desire for such intimate connections with Spanish speakers like my *abuelita* incited a journey of teaching myself Spanish through a tedious process of translating my favorite song lyrics from the late singer Selena. I also intentionally placed myself in Spanish speaking communities to practice this new and yet lost language. The desire to learn Spanish for

relational purposes was unfulfilled in my high school Spanish classes. Completing workbook exercises was not helping me, so I had to take it upon myself to understand how I could learn and acquire the language. It was within music and community where my fluency in Spanish flourished.

This process of reclaiming identity by reclaiming language enabled a cultural intuition—that is, “the unique viewpoints Chicana scholars bring to the research process” (Delgado Bernal, 1998, p. 555). Cultural intuition as an educator brought a consciousness to my pedagogy. It enabled a realization how English is privileged within public school institutions, where immigrant children attend, and how that has a consequential influence on their identities and their learning (Valenzuela, 1999; Mendoza-Denton, 2008). I knew and understood the feelings of grief, loss, shame, and guilt as one begins to recognize the generational wounds of assimilation. As my students’ teacher, I often felt tormented by my role, because I was participating in the same context that enforced assimilation upon my family.

Cultural intuition has guided me in my careful attempts to co-create worlds with children, places where they feel a sense of belonging. However, for nearly twenty years, I became entangled in the world that often took me from the co-created world with my students. Each day was an exhausting effort to find a balance between delivering the scripted curriculum while also trying to maintain our co-created world. This constant and conscious effort often felt like I was trying to look out the windshield during the torrential storm just like my aunt, searching for clarity. I just wanted to protect my students’ light, so the storm of assimilation did not extinguish it.

## The Historical and Legal Quest for Light

*Silas Hardick Fleming, a father of two, testified in Brown v. Board of Education (1951) stating that of course it would be more convenient for his children to attend the school just two blocks rather than a dozen blocks away from their home, but that there was more cause for his involvement in the lawsuit. He became involved “whole soul and body” because he and his children were “craving light” (Kluger, 1976, p. 412).*

The thirst and desire for learning have been expressed in courageous efforts throughout human history (Foner, 1970; Douglas, 2013; Walker, 2000; Walker, 2018). Legal testimony, like in the above epigraph, is a verse in the song that has been sung by many in human history. It is also the inspiration for the title of this dissertation, *Buscando la Luz*, looking for light. Light, in this context, is the kind of learning experiences that both satisfy and stimulate the human desire for learning—our fundamental right to learn. The light, as defined by the philosopher Simone Weil, is the “faculty of attention” that brings us closer to a “mysterious dimension” that brings “light into the soul” (p. 58). This faculty of attention is different than will power which she describes as “the kind that, if need be, makes us sink our teeth and endure suffering” like when small children try to stay within the confines of a square on the carpet to avoid the humiliation of their clip being moved down on a clip chart or their card flipped from green to red indicating their behavior “unacceptable” for all to see. Simone Weil describes this not as attention, but rather as a muscular effort of obedience. Faculty of attention or learning, on the contrary, is the development of intelligence and capability that “can only be led by desire” and “for there to be desire there must be pleasure and joy” because “intelligence only grows and bears fruit from joy” (p. 61). The desire for joy in teaching and learning has long been documented dating back to the 17th century when John Amos Comenius, who is considered the father of pedagogy and a humanist, described this effort as “forging places for humanity” (p. 211) where teachers teach

less, learners learn more, and schools become scenes “less of aversion and useless labor” and more of “leisure and enjoyment”—places he describes where there is less darkness and more light.

In the nineteenth century, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi vivified humanistic ideas towards teaching and learning by placing the child at the heart of teaching and positing that every child is capable. As a pedagogue, he illuminated the relationship at the center of pedagogy and emphasized that to participate in learning processes with a child he had to win a child’s trust (Leclercq, 2011, p.61). Pestalozzi discussed the importance of freedom and independence for a child’s development. This humanistic approach and vision of the child allowed him to discover that children inherently want what will help them flourish, and by flourishing, they discover satisfaction—joy. These ideas influenced Friedrich Fröbel, who opened the first kindergarten in Germany in 1837. In a time when children were perceived as untamed creatures in need of taming, Fröbel saw the child as part of nature in need of the same space, rest, and patient care that plants in a garden are given. And as part of nature, he described the “inner connection” between the child’s mind and soul as the “law of development”, and as educators, we must “obey and follow, guard and protect” this divine law of development as our educational work (Fröbel, 1886).

In the twentieth century, ideas and philosophies of human learning followed in pursuit of what the child needs and deserves to flourish particularly when society emerges from dark times. An example that has influenced my own teaching is the Reggio Emilia approach. I found an affinity for Loris Malaguzzi, the founder of the Reggio Emilia approach. Like myself and so many educators who grapple with the contradictions of state-run schools with what children actually need and deserve to flourish, Loris Malaguzzi described why he left his job after seven

years of teaching middle school, “the state-run school continued to pursue its own course, sticking to its stupid and intolerable indifference towards children, its opportunistic and obsequious attention towards authority, and its self-serving cleverness, pushing prepackaged knowledge” (Edwards, 1993, p.29). After leaving his position as a teacher, he and several parents opened a school literally from the rubble that children played in after the destruction from World War II. As a collaborative effort in the design of the philosophy of Reggio Emilia, he described an embodiment of the practice through reflection and dialogue that centered relationships amongst all community members including teachers, children and parents. They upheld the belief that human learning is and should be a satisfying experience—enjoyment as described by Comenius two centuries prior. This satisfaction and enjoyment are made possible when the child is regarded as an intellectual being in interaction and therefore, sees themselves as inventors and authors from which interests and motivation explode (Comenius, 1920, p. 44).

Through my graduate studies, I began to connect my affinity for the Reggio Emilia approach with Barbara Rogoff’s community-of-learners (1994). The community-of-learners challenges the dichotomy of teacher-run vs child-run learning theories. This emphasis, I found to be consistent with both Pestalozzi’s and Fröbel’s philosophies. The theory behind the Council of Europe Pestalozzi Programme discusses the education process as an “intersubjective communicative act based upon interpersonal relationships” (Huber, 2011, p. 51), and Rogoff describes how children and adults are active together in shared endeavors with flexible roles for the cultivation of collaboration. Rogoff also challenges the dichotomy of freedom v. control, and Fröbel explained that recognizing a child as free does not mean that the adult leaves them alone to “drift into vicious lawlessness”, but that the adult protects them by making “judicious

adjustments to their surroundings” to give them “ample opportunity to unfold” (Fröbel, 1886, p. 7).

### **Guaranteeing Education as a Fundamental Right**

This connection of humanist views across centuries that regard children as capable, intellectual, and deserving of freedom, protection, and nourishment is a human right evidenced in the patterns charted across centuries. How, then, do we ensure that this right is recognized for every child? In the United States, Education as a fundamental right is not proclaimed in the U.S. Constitution. The federal government has reserved the right to each state for the establishment of a public school system, and the inclusion of individual state education clauses in their state constitution (Right2Learn Select Committee, 2022). With that said, not one state declares education as a fundamental right in its educational clause. There are hints of promise in many state constitutions, to the extent that judicial rulings have interpreted the language of an education clause as an indication of constitutional value. Examples of cases have been in Virginia (*Pauley v. Kelly*, 1979) and Kentucky (*Rose v. Council for Better Education*, 1989). In both cases, the judicial interpretations of the education clause declared education as a fundamental right serving as a catalyst for modern day education reform.

In *Rose*, judicial interpretation served as the impetus for the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA). The language of KERA emphasized the vitality of an “adequate education.” In the *Rose* case, the majority held that, “A child’s right to an adequate education is a fundamental one under our Constitution” (*Rose*, 1989, p. 20). The lower court in the *Rose* case requested recommendations from a Select Committee<sup>2</sup> on how to achieve an adequate and efficient system

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<sup>2</sup> A quartet of “distinguished Kentuckians” including Kern Alexander, Chairman; John Brock, Superintendent of Public Instruction; Larry Forgy, attorney-at-law; and Sylvia Watson, Director of Development at Georgetown College and former City Commissioner of Louisville and State Budget Director.

of schools. Their response to adequacy is as follows: “Ultimately the test of adequacy must be whether through the vast complexity of the educational arrangements needs of individuals and society are being met” (The Select Committee Report, 1988, p.29). To expand on what those individual needs are for the exercise of education as a fundamental right, the Select Committee introduced promising language which resulted in the development of the *Rose capacities* found on the first page of the KERA reform (Appendix 1).

Returning to The US Constitution, although education is not mentioned, the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, ratified in 1868 during Reconstruction, has been instrumental in victories of landmark cases; *Mendez v. Westminster* (1947) and *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). In both cases, racial segregation was ruled unconstitutional based on equal protection of the law. However, in cases in Texas (*San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez*, 1973) and Colorado (*Lobato v. State of Colorado*, 2013), the Supreme Court ruled that disparities in funding across rich and poor districts were not unconstitutional because they were rationally related to the educational clause of their state’s constitution. Therefore, the tests of strict scrutiny were not applicable because it is reserved for fundamental rights. Education, in both Colorado and Texas, is considered a governmental service along with transportation and waste removal. Thus, inequalities in educational opportunity persist. This is the current state of education where I have been teaching for two decades and where the children from my last kindergarten class attend school.

Expert testimony from two historical cases, *Brown v. Board of Education* (1951) and *Lau v. Nichols* (1974),<sup>3</sup> provided continual evidence for the desire for light and the right to the

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<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that there are several education cases that could be included here including *Plyler v. Doe*, 457 U.S. 202 (1982), where it was ruled in favor of undocumented children who were, under the 14th amendment equal protection clause, at risk of being denied an education due to their immigration status when the district attempted to charge undocumented families.

satisfaction of learning. In both *Brown* and *Lau* feelings of inferiority were expressed due to exclusionary practices based on race and language enacted by school policies thus extinguishing the possibility of enjoyment and satisfaction from participating in learning experiences. *Brown* brought the “separate but equal” doctrine under constitutional scrutiny, ruling segregation based on race unconstitutional and declaring “separate inherently unequal”. The remedy, as explained by Bell (2004), simply focused on the “separate.” The Warren court’s remedy, decided in *Brown* II (1955), declared the desegregation of public schools “at all deliberate speed” while equal treatment of Black children and the protection of their hearts and minds remained unmentioned. The aftermath of this remedy, as documented by Bettina Love (2023), set into motion what she refers to as “Educational White Rage,” the erasure of Black teachers and Black culture in schools, and the formal beginning of an anti-Black educational agenda. Today, we are in an era of “re-segregation” where *de facto* segregation caused by housing patterns and societal discrimination is stubbornly complex nationwide (Breyer, 2022).

Twenty years after *Brown*, plaintiffs in the *Lau* case testified that eighteen hundred Chinese American children were being denied educational opportunities because they did not speak English. They asserted that the San Francisco school system violated their constitutional right to a meaningful education. The plaintiffs represented a large community of Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans in San Francisco who had been historically denied equal opportunity to education for decades (Sugarman, 1974). In the *Lau* case, the plaintiffs petitioned for their equal opportunity to a meaningful education including the use of their home language alongside learning English. Like *Brown*, the ruling sided with the plaintiffs finding violations of the plaintiff’s Fourteenth Amendment and their right to equal protection under the law. However, the remedy also did not respond to their desires; access to their home language while learning

English. *Lau* did set into motion guidelines for identifying children learning English as a second language and “instructional treatments” for the development of English (Crawford, 1999), consequently, the continuance of assimilation models persisted as movements opposing bilingual education raged the nation threatening the promise and possibility of a pluralistic and multilingual education.

Both *Brown* and *Lau* discussed the psychological harm to children when schools deny equal opportunity (Sugarman & Widess, 1974; Kluger, 1976). The historical voices and expert testimony of parents and social scientists called for an education that fulfills the desire to learn in a way that enables a person to feel their worth as an intellectual being as opposed to experiences of subordination and inferiority. These desires to learn are expressions of human dignity and our fundamental right to learn and grow in ways that are humanizing. My students’ desires to play and have “free time” were also expressions of dignity.

With the help and assistance of my child-partners, whom I continually visited from my last kindergarten class, I set out to understand the possibilities of a co-designed workshop in search of *light*—the enjoyment and satisfaction that humanists have illuminated across centuries. Like Pestalozzi, I wanted to take on an external observer’s perspective so that I could begin to understand my role from a distance as a participant/ observer in the co-creation of a community with children. The significance of this study and the perspectives of child partners is also instructive to my participation with the Right2Learn Dignity Lab, a group of friends who have committed our scholarship to amending the educational clause of Colorado’s constitution and to declare education as a fundamental right. Our scholarly commitments to human dignity, which will be discussed more fully in the Conceptual Framework, has given me an understanding and vision of how children and youth must be regarded in our classrooms—as equals and as capable

and free human beings (Scheffler, 1985). Designing learning experiences that respect human dignity, the minds, and potential of children requires a kind of listening to their desires for learning. It was my hope that in this study, the children would provide Right2Learn with empirical evidence of how educational dignity is experienced, and indicia on how to design education that fulfills the human right to learn.

## CHAPTER II

### DIGNITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS AS A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Human dignity is the “mother value” of the human person conferring all human rights (Barak, 2015). Our fundamental rights, including our right to learn, flow from this mother value. Therefore, dignity is instructive and provides a vision of a new standard of education—one that enables individuals to find their song in life and to sing it as part of the human chorus (Dr. Manuel Espinoza, personal communication, Sept. 30th, 2023). To recognize and respect human dignity is to see the human person as sacred and fully human. Furthermore, respect for human dignity is grounded in social and educational justice theories because the human person is seen as the end and not a means to an end (Barak, 2015; Nussbaum, 2011; Rawls, 1971).

The language of human dignity entered global dialogue during the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948 post World War II. The drafting was a global response to protect human rights after heinous acts of cruelty. The first lines of the UDHR Preamble read, “Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.” Article 1 of UDHR reads, “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.” Thereafter, the language of human dignity has been codified in constitutions throughout Europe and in South Africa propelling dignity into the discourse of human rights adjudication.

However, dignity and human rights regarding education are far less discussed especially in the judicial realm in the United States. The application of this language into the design of public education and its social and cultural norms has yet to be realized. Jeremy Waldron (2012),

a professor of law and philosophy at New York University School of Law, explains that it must become part of the daily life of the community to become law and for a declaration to shape social and cultural norms. Cultivating educational spaces where dignity is inviolate, begins with the cultivation of norms based on principles of respect for human dignity.

The language of “respect for human dignity” was discussed at the European Commission for Democracy through Law in 1999 where legal representatives from European nations gathered to discuss the constitutional value of human dignity in their respective countries. Henri Pajol, Rector of the Pôle Universitaire Européen de Montpellier, suggested replacing the language of “protection of human dignity” with “respect for human dignity” because, although it can be useful, protection is a defensive act. On the other hand, respect means “opening up to others, being receptive to them and listening to them” (July 2, 1998, opening speech). The precedence of the language of respect for human dignity initiates a dialogue to develop a shared understanding of how we enact respect for human dignity in social life. In correlation with the language of the Preamble of the UDHR, “recognition” of human dignity is foundational to freedom, justice and peace.

In accordance with defining dignity and its role in our daily life, fundamental freedoms have been discussed in literature on dignity as a constitutional right and value, as well as in human rights provisions. In Waldron’s (2012) definition of dignity he brings to light the capability of human beings to choose and to have agency, which constitutes our right to freedom. Waldron’s definition of dignity as a normative idea is as follows:

Dignity is the status of a person indicated on the fact that she is recognised as having the ability to control and regulate her actions in accordance with her own apprehension of norms and reasons that apply to her; it assumes she is capable of giving and entitled to give an account of herself (and of the way in which she is regulating her actions and organizing her life), an account that others are to pay attention to; and it means finally that she has the wherewithal to demand that her agency and her presence among us as a

human being be taken seriously and accommodated in the lives of others, in others' attitudes and actions towards her, and in social life generally (2012, p.202)

Waldron explains that the action of recognizing one's inherent dignity is treating and acting towards themselves and others as though they too are "one of the ultimate ends" capable of making decisions for oneself. Recognizing the dignity in another, is recognizing them as free and capable human beings.

In his book, *Human Dignity: The Constitutional Value and the Constitutional Right*, Aharon Barak (2015) explains that dignity as a constitutional right is the freedom of the human person to write her life story (p. xix). Dignity, as the mother value from which all fundamental rights are born, confers our right to freedom which in its effect is the development of capabilities to participate in social life, choosing our path and writing our story (Nussbaum, 2011; Espinoza et al, 2020). Therefore, an education in concert with human dignity is one that provides all possible opportunities to develop capabilities to enact one's free will in life.

### **Dignity and Education**

As noted earlier from landmark educational court cases, the absence of respect for human dignity in the design of learning in public schools has been felt for decades. Although its enactment is certain to have a presence in social interaction in classrooms, the right to experience the recognition of one's dignity is not declared as a fundamental right for all. To manifest this dream, the Right2Learn Dignity Lab (R2L), a collective of scholars and friends, has committed to securing education as a fundamental right by writing an amendment to the education clause of Colorado's state constitution centralizing the language of human dignity. Inspired by W.E.B. Dubois' speech *The Freedom to Learn* (1949), the Right2Learn Dignity Lab found both their name and direction:

*Of all the civil rights for which the world has struggled and fought*

*for five thousand years, the right to learn is undoubtedly the most fundamental. If a people have preserved this right, no matter how far it goes astray, no matter how many mistakes it makes, in the long run, in the unfolding of generations, it is going to come back to this right.*

Our scholarship, guided by Dr. Manuel Espinoza, has included developing criteria and content for human dignity through a collaborative consolidation process of reading testimony from court cases where dignity has been injured.

Inclusive of our scholarship, R2L has studied human rights instruments such as Article 26 of the UDHR which states, “Everyone has the right to education,” followed by in Sec 2, “Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.” Guided by this language, R2L has written in their amendment to the educational clause of Colorado state’s constitution, “Education is a fundamental right held by all persons; it is a means for achieving social equality and necessary for the fulfillment of freedom, justice, and peace” (R2L, candidate amendment, 2023). The amendment declares public schools as “sanctuaries, spaces where the inherent and inalienable dignity of the human person is inviolate.” The human right to learn, as defined by R2L, is the recognition of one’s inherent dignity and their right to actualize their human potential.

Educational dignity is defined as “the multifaceted sense of a person’s value generated via substantive intra- and inter-personal learning experiences that cultivate one’s mind, humanity and potential” and meaningful participation as “substantive involvement in socially vital activities” (Espinoza et al, 2020, p.325). Their social interactional methodological approach provides evidence of how the experience of one’s dignity relies on social action and interaction. Their examination found that the manifestation of dignity occurred when learners’ minds were taken seriously by efforts to understand participants’ perspectives, taking participants’ concerns

seriously by archiving and returning to them, treating disagreements as an opportunity for collective growth, and how “poetic talk” generated a “sense of communion and solidarity” (p.343).

The cultivation of one’s mind, humanity and potential are a person’s right to the full development of their “human personality” as stated in Article 26, Sec. 2. The human personality, as R2L has come to understand it, is all the human has been, is and will become (Espinoza & Childress, 2022). Like all living organisms, human beings require conditions and factors that enable us to grow, thrive and flourish physically, intellectually, and spiritually. These conditions and factors are contingent upon human effort (Scheffler, 1985). Recognition of these fundamental rights are interdependent upon duties and obligations (Barak, 2015). This is what binds us in our humanity. The recognition of our rights manifest through human interaction rooted in the equality of our inherent and inalienable human dignity.

Rarely do we read about dignity, potential and fundamental freedoms in state constitution education clauses or in the context of U.S. public schools, and yet public schools are compulsory for children. As documented in the book, *Troublemakers: Lessons in Freedom from Young Children at School* by Carla Shalaby (2017), children are often not regarded or treated as full human beings with the unalienable right to be free in public schools. Through her research, Shalaby illustrates how school policies and practices of control, management and prescribed outcomes are harmful to the dignity and freedom of children. Most often, these practices of control assault the dignity of the child and their freedom to sing their song. The intention of this dissertation study is to help us understand how we can design for freedom and respect for human dignity to guarantee the actualization of human potential—enabling children to find their light and sing their song in life.

## The Capabilities Approach

Two themes related to dignity--capability and free will--are instructive for the design of education that affirms and recognizes these inherently human qualities. Influenced by Amartya Sen's Capability Approach (1999), Martha Nussbaum presents a philosophical and economic framework designed to develop the capabilities that enable free will and well-being. Nussbaum explains that the Capabilities Approach was developed to answer the question: "What is a person able to do and be?" Emblematic of the human personality, who a person is and who they are able to become is contingent upon opportunities to develop capabilities. Within this framework, Nussbaum presents ten central capabilities<sup>4</sup>, which Sen described as "substantial freedoms," that enable a life in harmony with human dignity, because their development enables a person to choose how they will participate in society. Participation is expressed by the choice to act on fundamental freedoms—i.e., social, political, economic and environmental (Nussbaum, 2010). In this proposal, my intention is to understand how the design of learning can grow from this framework. To begin, take the fourth capability:

*Senses, imagination and thought:* Be able to use the senses, to imagine, think and reason—and to do things in a truly human way, a way informed and cultivated by an adequate education, including, but by no means limited to, literacy and basic mathematical and scientific training. Being able to use imagination and thought in connection with experiencing and producing one's works and events of one's choice. (p.33)

An adequate education, as described by Nussbaum, develops our inherent capacity to imagine and think through experience and production of one's choice. She emphasizes that the approach "espouses a principle of each person as an end" (p.35). A constitution, she explains, ought to protect these central capabilities, recognizing them as essential rights of the human person.

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<sup>4</sup> Life, Bodily Health, Bodily Integrity, Senses, Imagination and Thought, Emotion, Practical Reason, Affiliation, Other Species, Play, Control Over One's Environment (Nussbaum, 2011)

In her discussion on education, Nussbaum addresses the fact that the United States has not elevated education as a fundamental right in constitutional law. She also explains that there are states that have declared education as a fundamental right. Kentucky defined an “adequate education” as a fundamental right conferring an adequate education as the development of seven capacities known as the “Rose Capacities” from the 1989 case *Rose v. Council for Better Education*.<sup>5</sup>

From Nussbaum’s Capabilities approach and the Rose Capacities, education is regarded as the guaranteed pathway to ensure the development of human capability. The capabilities that Nussbaum names draw from are inherently human qualities but also require an education for their full development. Take for example, *emotions*, enabling the cultivation of relationships, *affiliation*, enabling us to live and learn together, *other species*, enabling concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the natural world, and finally, *play*. It is through participation in socially organized activity where the development of capabilities are made possible.

Although Nussbaum does not reference Lev Vygotsky’s (1978) seminal contributions to developmental psychology, they both consider *play* as critical to the intellectual development of a child. Vygotsky elaborates that a child’s desire to play expresses a developmental need and is “the first manifestation of the child’s emancipation from situational constraints” (p.99). Through

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<sup>5</sup> “A child's right to an adequate education is a fundamental one under our Constitution. The General Assembly must protect and advance that right. We concur with the trial court that an efficient system of education must have as its goal to provide each and every child with at least the seven following capacities.i) sufficient oral and written communication skills to enable students to function in a complex and rapidly changing civilization; (ii) sufficient knowledge of economic, social, and political systems to enable the student to make informed choices; (iii) sufficient understanding of governmental processes to enable the student to understand the issues that affect his or her community, state, and nation; (iv) sufficient self-knowledge and knowledge of his or her mental and physical wellness; (v) sufficient grounding in the arts to enable each student to appreciate his or her cultural and historical heritage; (vi) sufficient training or preparation for advanced training in either academic or vocational fields so as to enable each child to choose and pursue life work intelligently; and (vii) sufficient levels of academic or vocational skills to enable public school students to compete favorably with their counterparts in surrounding states, in academics or in the job market” (*Rose* 790 S.W.2d 186, p. 59)

play children take on roles in imaginary situations where rules are operationalized, and children act in ways that are beyond their average age. Thus, play serves as a zone of proximal development where potential is realized. The activity of play is a process of sensemaking of one's reality through the imaginary. In this vein, Vygotsky provides us with the theory that play is not just pleasure, but a necessary part of human development.

Nussbaum's *Creating Capabilities Approach* elaborates that capabilities are inherent, but their development is contingent upon opportunity and social application. This idea demystifies the notion of fixed abilities or fixed potentials (Nussbaum, 2012; Scheffler, 1985). Instead, it assesses the opportunities available for the development of capabilities and addresses the inequalities that are evidenced in capability failures resulting from discrimination and human deprivation. Nussbaum's approach shifts the deficit gaze from human beings and towards the kinds of opportunities provided for the development of human capabilities. Furthermore, it is a social justice structure based on equitable principles of, "those who need more help to get over the threshold, get more help" (p.24). Help, in this sense, is not a fateful categorization of one's ability, but what a human being needs for the fulfillment of their fundamental right to learn. The organization of help or assistance (Vygotsky, 1978) and play are indicia for the design of learning that sees the human person as the end of all effort in education.

### **Principles of Respect for Human Dignity**

The significance of upholding Article 26 of the UDHR and its guarantee of its promise is crucial in the struggle for educational justice. Two salient historical examples are *Brown v. Board of Education* (1951) and *Lau v. Nichols* (1974). In both cases, the psychological harm on children was discussed in testimony due to exclusionary practices and the denial of equal opportunity to education—a violation of human dignity. These historical voices and expert

testimony called for an education that fulfills the desire to learn in a way that enables a person to feel their worth as a human being (Kluger, 1976; Sugarman & Widess, 1974). This study is in response to those calls, so that we may understand how to fulfill this desire and right to learn. In this vein, the principles of respect for human dignity in this study regards children as:

1. Equal participants with valuable and consequential epistemologies to the co-construction of design and meaning making (Edwards, 1993; Rogoff et al, 2001; Rosado-May et al, 2020; Petrone, 2020).
2. Free human beings in the development of capabilities that are consequential to their participation in social life (Nussbaum, 2011).
3. Capable human beings with potential that is contingent upon opportunities and the design of learning environments that prioritize human flourishing (Scheffler, 1985; Nussbaum, 2011).

Educators have few examples of how to design according to the above principles.

Therefore, I carried out this study to learn alongside my child partners in an effort to understand 1). how to design guided by the principles of respect for human dignity, and 2). how to empirically observe children's experience of educational dignity. These principles served as both material and ideological resources to reflect on throughout the co-designed workshop, and throughout the data analysis phase to understand how the children experienced the workshop and my role as both facilitator and collaborator.

## CHAPTER III

### A SOCIO-HISTORICAL LINEAGE OF RE-MEDIATING THE RELATIONSHIP OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

Learning, as theorized by sociocultural theorists, is mediated by relationships, ideologies, and material artifacts within an ecology (Cole & Griffin, 1986; Packer & Goioechea, 2000; Phillip, 2011; Jurow, Horn, & Philip, 2019; Nasir, 2012; Jurow & Freeman, 2020). Therefore, a sociocultural perspective would suggest that children's conceptions of learning are mediated by their experiences within schooling, most specifically the continuum of experiences (Dewey, 1938). Salient components that mediate learning within US schools include tools that are often products of the culturally constructed ideologies such as language usage (Cazden, 2001). The organization of language usage and interaction in classrooms have been found to be a factor in determining who gets to participate and is given access to learning opportunities (Cole & Griffin, 1986; Erickson, 1996; Sawyer, 2004; Hand & Gresalfi, 2015). For this study, these theories were imperative in understanding the schooling experiences of the child partners to collectively re-mediate towards equitable and dignity affirming learning experiences.

Public schools are often sites where macro cultural, historical, and political ideologies disregard and undervalue children's identities, epistemologies, and their linguistic and cultural practices (Valenzuela, 1999; Valencia, 2004; Yosso, 2013; Alvarez, 2021, 2023). These unexamined ideologies can be found in micro-interactions within classrooms (McDermott & Raley, 1999; Erickson, 2004). However, culture is not static, and the analysis of these infrastructures, their social and material dimensions, provide the opportunity to be re-mediated for equitable and dignity affirming cultural practices (Jurow, Horn & Philip, 2019). This was our intention for the co-designed workshop.

## **The Role of Participation**

Drawing on sociocultural theories of learning, the attention to the cultural and social organization of human beings in relation to one another inevitably unveils the dynamics of how a context and norms are constructed. Participation structures within a context, therefore, are vital in understanding how educational dignity is made manifest in a learning environment. Espinoza et al. explain, “Both meaningful participation and educational dignity are generated by linguistic and interactional moves that can be charted and analyzed” (p. 2). Educational dignity is made manifest via meaningful participation in “socially vital activities” (p.1). Therefore, participation frameworks enable an analysis of not only participation but the exercise and recognition of one’s right to participate in educational activity. In a learning environment, participant structures refer to the way of analyzing how people take on participant roles and stances (i.e., group work, lecture, class discussion, etc.)—which are revealed in how they use language to position themselves and others in interaction (Philips, 1983; Polman, 2004; Cornelius, 2008). Learning and identity are, therefore, trajectories, or learning pathways that are facilitated or constrained by one’s participation in socially constructed systems (Nasir et al, 2020). Learning pathways are a culmination of experiences and interactions consequential to a child’s identity as a learner and how they participate in learning activity. The socially constructed culture, therefore, plays a significant role in the learning trajectory of a child.

### **Re-constructing Culture**

Schooling practices that construct discriminatory norms are what McDermott and Varenne (1995) refer to as a “cultural problem,” because they create a collective illusion of what constitutes “normal.” This collective illusion has fateful consequences for those who do not fit

into the culturally constructed “norm.” Take for example their case study on a child named “Adam.” Adam was a child who struggled with learning to read and write, not abnormal and yet his struggles were made to appear abnormal within the schooling context. Difficulty to read and write was not a reflection of Adam’s intellectual and social capabilities when observing him outside the schooling context. He easily was part of the social scene participating as a happy child in out-of-school activity. However, in the classroom and testing scenarios it was disastrous for him. Not only were all school activities designed around reading and writing, but they were also designed to make Adam’s reading challenges visible, constructing a deficit image of Adam to all other social actors including his peers. McDermott and Varenne documented the interactional organization of Adam’s learning disability (LD) within the school context and illustrated the LD as an institutionalized ideological property with capitalistic and industrialized roots. Since the industrial era, the sorting and categorizing of children by so-called deficits has invalidated and dehumanized children’s inherent potentials and capabilities. Such unjust and dehumanizing practices deny children the opportunity to develop capabilities and actualize their potential. Many of the students in this dissertation project have had experiences like Adam, and one aim is to understand how to design in a way that enables the actualization of potential and the sense of their dignity as free and capable human beings.

### **Children’s Resistance, a Sentinel Warning**

The U.S. has an invidious history of racist ideologies that have plagued public schools and have funneled down to micro-interactions in the classroom (Esmonde & Booker, 2016; Nasir, 2012; Vossoughi & Gutierrez, 2016). Examples of institutionalized harm impacting the flourishing of children and youth are ubiquitous. Love (2019) refers to the institutionalized harm

as “spirit murdering” of Brown and Black children due to carceral practices of punishment and consequences inclusive of “no tolerance” policies and “classroom management” practices of control and obedience. These practices perpetuate the sorting of children based on behaviors that either succumb to the control or those that resist.

As mentioned earlier, in Shalaby’s book *Troublemakers: Lessons in Freedom from Young Children at School*, she tells the story of four children in public schools, all of whom are categorized as “troublemakers.” Their behaviors in the context of the classroom are viewed as disruptive, exhausting, and resistant by their teachers. Most strikingly, the social and cultural construct of schooling illuminated in the book involves a punitive system of sorting children as “good” students who are quiet and obedient and “troublemakers” who resist control. Shalaby metaphorically illustrates how these precious and sensitive children known as “troublemakers” are like animal sentinels who detect risks to humans by providing advance warning of toxic dangers. The example she uses are the domestic canaries that were used in the early twentieth century to alert miners of odorless toxic carbon monoxide. The sensitive small birds were carried into the mines in cages and their lives sacrificed as their death alerted miners of the toxins giving them enough time to escape the toxicity. The resistance and perceived “challenging behaviors” exhibited by the four children in her study were warning signs that the cultural and social construct of schooling practices of sorting and control are toxic to human dignity, human flourishing and our inalienable right to be free.

### **Re-mediating Towards Hybridity and Diversity**

The child partners participating in this study are multilingual and first-generation students born to Mexican immigrant parents. The schooling experiences of multilingual immigrant and first-generation children in the US details a pervasive history of assimilation, erasure, and

subtractive schooling (Valenzuela, 1999; Flores & Rosa, 2015; Alim et al, 2016; Flores, 2020). Moreover, raciolinguistics theorizes the co-naturalization of language and race, providing a framework to examine the relationship between race, language, capitalism, and colonialism (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Alim, 2016). Scholars have long criticized language policies that position languages other than English as inferior and as a “problem” (Ruiz, 1988; Escamilla, 2006).

Studies have found that even in schools with dual language and bilingual programs, English is positioned as the superior language (Escamilla, 2006; Flores & Rosa, 2019). Such ideologies of privileging English have been sustained through practices of labeling and hierarchical categorizing of children’s English language proficiency against standard English. The stigmatization of such categories is inevitably internalized by children at a very young age. Chaparro (2019) highlights this in a case study of children participating in a dual immersion. In her study, Santiago expressed disappointment in class when he was labeled *Latino*. His response, stinging the air, as he protested with an “Awww!!” This relationship to himself and the rejection of his “Spanish boy” identity, as he referred to it, was constructed within the context of the two-way immersion program where language assessments sorted and defined children by language “ability.” Like the children in *Troublemakers*, Santiago’s behaviors were also considered “challenging.” Chapparro explains that Santiago was caught in a double bind— where he did not feel a sense of belonging in the dichotomous grouping of English-speaking white children or Spanish speaking Latinx children and this unsettling feeling resulted in his resistance.

Unjust practices of dichotomizing and categorizing language usage in two-way immersion programs, like the one Santiago experienced, includes Spanish speaking children experiencing multiple assessments in English thrusting them into a sorting mechanism where they are given deficit labels such as “limited” English proficient or “non” English proficient

(Hernandez, 2017). This categorization inherently communicates inferiority and negates the fact that multilingual children have an expansive linguistic repertoire and a hybridity of language that refutes compartmentalization. Rather, language repertoires for multilingual children are like rivers feeding into an ocean where they merge into an abundant sea of meaning making.

### **Possibilities of Public School**

Evidence of educational dignity can be found in literature like golden flakes of hope and possibility. In hopes of finding examples of how to re-mediate learning experiences with my child-partners, I sifted for empirical evidence that has captured ecologies where educational dignity was made manifest. Examples illustrated social interactions that conveyed a devoted regard for minds, ideas, inquiries, and dissents put forth by all participants (Rose, 1995; Gutierrez et al, 1999; Rogoff, Tukanis & Bartlett, 2001; Duckwoth, 2006; Haas Dyson, 2016; Espinoza et al, 2020; Vossoughi et al, 2021; Alvarez, 2021, 2023). Respect was illustrated by the inclusiveness of children and youth, and moments of careful and attentive listening to children who were treated as capable with ideas that matter (Schultz, 2003; Duckworth, 2006). Moreover, values were conveyed as everyone was treated as a valuable member of the collective (Rogoff, 2001).

The organization of social participation structures alongside academic task structure (Erickson, 1982) can be sites of possibility for the experience of educational dignity. Scholars have captured golden flakes over decades reflecting the cultivation of children's curiosities and ideas in their pursuit of learning (Edwards, 1993; Rose, 1995; Rogoff et al, 2001; Fraser & Gestwicki, 2002). Rose (1995) captured a view into a third-grade classroom in Calexico, California where Elena Castro, along with her third-grade students, co-created an ecology where intellectual risks were taken by children and regarded with care by Elena. The environment, a

busy and living ecology where students move fluidly through learning “rotations” most of their day while Ms. Castro worked with small groups at her table. At these rotations, students work both collaboratively and independently. Children's thinking, curiosities, and learning, captured in both English and Spanish, from their student-chosen theme, sea life, are displayed on the walls. These artifacts are a critical reference for the children in the development of their writing.

The student-chosen theme evolved into children independently researching and sharing their findings with assistance from Ms. Castro in the small groups. In the ethnographic description of Elena Castro’s classroom, we see a micro-interactional moment where Ms. Castro publicly recognizes a child’s contributions to the collective learning which resulted in a smile and lighting of the child’s eyes (p.71). This example represents a moment where a child experiences both her potential and capability—the sense of her dignity.

Cultivating children’s curiosities and seeing the child as capable were guiding principles for the vision of Reggio Emilia schools that opened after World War II in Reggio Emilia, Italy. Like Ms. Castro, Reggio teachers facilitate learning based on student interest and curiosities that manifest into the emergent curriculum (Fraser & Gestwicki, 2002). The inception of a project begins with observing children play and listening to their talk. In small groups, their ideas and interests are guided into a collective project that the teachers call “*Io chi siamo*” (“I am who we are”). The “we” is established so that children recognize that they are all teachers and learners capable of fertilizing the learning. The role of the teacher, to “galvanize each child to participate and grow, as much as he or she can” (Edwards, 1993, p. 219). Reflections and discussions on the process of learning through documentation is what makes the Reggio approach distinguishable (Roque & Tamashiro, 2022). This provides children the opportunity to reflect on their learning

and identify meaningful steps enabling them to share their processes of learning with the larger group (Edwards, 1993).

### **Children and Teachers Co-Creating Shared Worlds**

In addition to the Reggio approach, scholars have found that the role of the educator is to choreograph a kind of coordination with children to establish the “we”— “a relation of mutual attunement” (Vossoughi et al, 2020; Espinoza, 2011). Intentional choreography with the consciousness that “dignity is always at stake in educational activity” (Vossoughi et al, 2020, p. 20; Espinoza & Vossoughi, 2014) seeks to create a shared world *with* children. In the work of Anne Haas Dyson (2016), she describes the co-creation of a shared space as “the worlds of teachers and children come together” because children are positioned as social negotiators. In supporting children as developing writers, she explains that their initial marks on a page are children’s way of “learning to participate in a larger social and cultural structure that gives meaning to the marks that they make” (p.5). These compositions enable them to write themselves into existence in the world which can only happen by the response of another. Therefore, responses to the child and interactions that transform two “I’s” into a “we” are moments of possibility for the experience of educational dignity where children are valued and positioned as social negotiators and collaborators (Vossoughi et al, 2020; Espinoza, 2011).

### **Multi-voiced Worlds**

Scholars have captured classrooms where the creation of a pluralistic and diverse community is not only prioritized but the norm of the culture of the classroom. In these classrooms, we witness the description of children creating imaginative worlds and the freedom to express themselves utilizing their full linguistic repertoire (Dyson & Genishi, 1994; Paley, 2000). In this literature, these co-created worlds emerge during intimate sharing during circle

time, in the micro-interactional moments where equality of voice and perspective are enacted and where children's stories and imaginations guide both discussion and inquiry. Learning environments intentionally designed to value the whole child and their full humanity encourage learners to draw on all dimensions of their identities and cultural backgrounds. Gutierrez, Baquedano, and Tejada (1999) theorized hybridity as the co-creation of a culture inclusive of children's linguistic repertoires, cultural practices, and meaning making. With this lens, they argue, a method for organizing learning with a diversity of mediational tools promotes the emergence of a *third space*. Within this space, expansive learning is made possible as children share their perspectives, languages and experiences that move sensemaking to new and unpredictable learning opportunities. Rather than dichotomizing language as academic and nonacademic, all language usage is embraced in a multi-voiced ecology.

In these classrooms, collective sense-making requires a mutuality of relations and a different organization of power than is typical in many U.S. classrooms. Multi-voiced ecologies have been documented in classrooms where teachers and children are positioned as equal participants and where heterogeneity of cultural practices and diversity are fundamental to learning (Rosebery, et al., 2010). This kind of cultivation of a learning environment is contrary to the traditional teacher-dominated discourse patterns known as Initiation/ Response/ Evaluation (IRE) where the teacher poses a question with an answer, one child responds, and the teacher evaluates the response (Mehan, 1979; Cazden, 2001). To illustrate an ecology where students are equal participants in discussion, Pamela Brashaw, a teacher from "the OC" school, describes examples from what the school community called "sharing circles," a regular practice throughout the school day at the OC (Rogoff, Turkonis, & Bartlett, 2001). Bradshaw explains, "This kind of listening and thinking required in circle goes hand in hand with a collaborative learning model

where students build on one another's ideas and a student may benefit from contributing" (p. 111). Examples of these circles illustrate the adults, parents and teachers, slowly stepping back as students grapple and deliberate in a circle where they hold control of the discussion while developing communication skills. A result of this daily practice, often several times a day, was a kind of learning where students learned to listen to another point of view extending their own learning. Connecting to Nussbaum's *Creating Capabilities Approach*, a fundamental right to learn means the development of the capabilities of *emotions* and *affiliation*. This example from the OC provides a glimmer of how the pedagogical design of circle time can provide the opportunity to develop these capabilities where children learn to communicate and co-exist with one another.

### **Trusting in Children's Capabilities**

Trust in children's capability, valuing their mind and contributions as they participate in socio-cultural activity has been theorized by Rogoff as learning by observing and pitching in (LOPI) (1994; 2009). She compares LOPI to the common organization of learning that we most often see in US schools which she calls an "Assembly-Line Instruction" which seeks to "control learners' attention, motivation, and behavior in settings isolated from productive contributions to the community" (<https://learningbyobservingandpitchingin.sites.ucsc.edu/assembly-line-instruction/>). In Assembly-Line Instructional classrooms, teachers control the conversations and the learning. However, in a classroom that seeks to re-organize the learning environment where children's capacities are trusted and leveraged, like the sharing circle described above, the adult facilitators with time and mentorship release the facilitation to children. This example of transformation of participation requires adults trusting in the children, slowly stepping back and allowing them to also guide their circle time as they learn to process, and problem solve together.

Rogoff explained in a recent interview that LOPI regards children as fully human from the start (Petrone, 2020), and that the multifaceted approach to learning involves practices that are panhuman or “a cultural tradition of humanity.” Seven facets of LOPI have been identified by Rogoff and colleagues that are inclusive to all persons in the community as a means of cultivating togetherness for community goals.<sup>6</sup> Every individual has a purpose and meaningful part of the whole enabling them to express their freedom as human beings by choosing how they participate. LOPI is emblematic of the development of capabilities from Nussbaum’s approach as it provides individuals the opportunity to develop capabilities that enable their participation as part of the collective whole. In essence they can participate in their process of becoming, in singing their song and living a life in harmony with their dignity.

The development of the theory of LOPI began when Rogoff (2003) observed how children in Mayan communities in Guatemala are integrated into communities by practices that are inclusive of children rather than separating them from adult activity and the community. This theory has also been defined as “cultural practices that support informal learning as children observe and pitch in with everyday activities that are integrated into family and community life” (Paradise and Rogoff, 2009, p. 102). She noted that from a young age, children learn to observe community activity and events intently with the knowledge that they would be expected to participate. Children are seen as capable and active participants in the community. Furthermore, they consistently receive thoughtful and judicious assistance from an adult or expert. A key facet of LOPI to highlight is the fluidity of roles in participation and the distribution of expertise in

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<sup>6</sup> The seven facets of LOPI: 1) learning is organized and situated in community endeavors, 2) participation is organized around togetherness and collective responsibility, 3) interaction is organized around flexibility and fluid coordination, 4) the theory of learning is dynamic and inherent to the process of transformation, 5) people learn by multiple opportunities to keenly observe and contribute to on-going events, 6) communication is coordinated with judicious use of spoken language, and 7) evaluation is feedback on improvement in the moment (<https://learningbyobservingandpitchingin.sites.ucsc.edu/>).

joint activity (Rogoff, 1994). The teacher, therefore, is not the keeper of the knowledge or the only expert in the learning environment like the organization of an assembly-line instructional classroom. Rather, guided by principles of mutuality and reciprocity, children and youth are encouraged to bring their full selves into the learning process, and their participation is valued as contribution.

### **Adding Thread to Tapestry**

In the next chapter, I will discuss the approach to the research design and the methods. The intention is to understand how to co-create a multi-voiced world with my child partners where they feel valuable, capable and free. This is of course contingent upon my own learning and transformation as I unlearn assembly-line instruction practices and learn new ways of being with children. The hope is to create an environment of mutuality and reciprocity, and where dignity is experienced.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESEARCH DESIGN & METHODS

#### **The Emergence of a Social Design-Based Experiment**

The impetus for the summer workshop and the development of its design will be told in a detailed recount in Chapter V, “*La Historia/ The Story.*” However, to explain the methodological approach, I will present here the emergence of the design, the participants, data sources, and approaches to analysis. The research design idea began in a hallway at Esperanza Elementary School (Esperanza, hereafter) when Bea, one of my child partners, and I sat disillusioned from her experiences in third grade, but hopeful for the possibilities of learning together again. Our hope was a shared dream of a place of possibility to recreate the joy of free time like we had experienced in kindergarten. To transform our dream into possibility, we devised a plan for a summer workshop. This quickly took the shape of a social design-based experiment (SDBE), because it involved Bea and I imagining together a workshop of our ideal learning environment—for Bea, it was to have fun again, and for me, it was to see her joyful again. Gutiérrez, Jurow, and Vakil (2020) discuss how SDBE “seek to co-design learning ecologies in which learning is made equitable and consequential for youth from nondominant communities” (p.330). Processes of co-design involve a utopian approach to methods with an ideal goal as an outcome, but not a fixed goal. As an educator in pursuit of affirming the child partners’ fundamental right to learn, my ideal outcome was for the child partners to experience educational dignity, to feel a sense of their worth as capable and intellectual beings.

The day Bea and I sat in the hallway disillusioned, she had just disclosed experiencing harm in school and feelings of incapability. I desired at this moment to create a *third space*, a place where “students can begin to reconceive who they are and what they might be able to

accomplish academically and beyond” (Gutiérrez, 2008, p. 148), as part of the design of our SDBE. I knew that in this third space, it was critical for Bea to re-mediate her relationship to learning and ultimately how she saw herself as a learner through a careful approach to co-design. This also meant that as a teacher for twenty years, now a participant/ researcher in an SDBE with children, I, too, had to reconceive my identity so that I could develop a *new* consciousness to not reproduce the same practices that resulted in Bea’s feelings of disillusionment and incapability.

### **Re-mediating through Co-design with Child Partners**

I consulted research on the re-mediation for the organization of teacher learning in pursuit of equitable and justice-oriented practices in after-school programs, specifically in communities where children have been racialized and marginalized (Gutierrez & Vossoughi, 2009; Jurow, Horn & Philip, 2019; Jurow & Freeman, 2020; Vossoughi et al, 2020). Re-mediation has been defined as re-structuring “the social and material dimensions infrastructure” of learning environments by foregrounding the leveraging of community assets (Jurow, Horn & Philip, 2019). However, it is not just about re-structuring, but the commitment to achieving political ends of social justice and equity (Gutiérrez, Morales, and Martínez, 2009). In our SBDE, the political end was the human person experiencing their worth—their human dignity, and thus actualizing their potential within the collective. Re-mediating in pursuit of the experience of educational dignity would also introduce a new way of being together. For instance, although the children desired free time in kindergarten, the reality was that most of our days were dictated by the explicit instruction and assessment of standards. It was a controlled environment in which I rarely sought advice from the children. Therefore, the intention to re-mediate was contingent upon the co-design process, involving the children and reconceiving my role.

By co-design processes, I hoped to not only include the child-partners' voices and perspectives but also to move in coordination with them as we co-constructed our ecology. The Family Leadership Design Collaborative (FLDC) defines the process of co-design as “stakeholders coming together in order to collectively identify issues or problems of practice and to design solutions” (<https://familydesigncollab.org/co-design/>). Our co-design process included collective reflection on learning in school, and what we learned from each other in the workshop. I hoped that the process of collective reflection and deliberation would create an egalitarian and collaborative environment.

My intention was to recognize their right to be free from harm and judgment, and to resist a reductionist view of human beings by designing in ways that enabled them to feel valued and capable as active protagonists in the design of learning (Fraser & Gestwicki, 2000). This design approach included leveraging their hybrid language practices, their lived experiences, and above all their desires for learning. My hope for co-designing was to foster “relations of mutuality and co-construction of new knowledge” (Rosado-May, Urrieta, Dayton & Rogoff, 2020, p.79), and principles of reciprocity guided by the image of the child as a capable and intellectual being (Edwards, 1993). I also knew that the embodiment and enactment of these ways of learning and being together had to begin with me, and a process of “unlearning” the schooling practices that are internalized within me. The possibility of re-mediation of learning activity and the co-creation of a learning ecology was contingent upon my own transformation for the enabling of a community where dignity is recognized and affirmed. To understand if and how this re-mediated third space was co-created, and if we had indeed accomplished the experience of educational dignity, I developed the following research questions:

**Research Questions:**

1. How did the children partners articulate learning and their desires for learning in the interviews and throughout the co-designed workshop?
  
2. Was there empirical evidence of the children experiencing educational dignity in the co-designed workshop? If so, how was it empirically observable?
  
3. Did my role as their former teacher transform through the co-design and if so, how?

**Table 1**

*Research Matrix showing links between the research question, data sources and units of observation*

<b>Research Question:</b>	<b>Data sources</b>	<b>Units of observation</b>
1. How do the child partners articulate learning and their desires for learning in the interviews and throughout the co-designed workshop?	6 individual interviews (20-30 minutes each)  Video and audio recordings of circle time discussions and activity time	<i>Testimonios</i> from interview (audio)  <i>Testimonios</i> from conversational discourse
2. Was there empirical evidence of the children experiencing educational dignity in the co-designed workshop? If so, how was it empirically observable?	9 workshops, 2 hours each, three cameras=54 hours of video data	Discourse, interaction, and participation as documented in the video data
3. Did my role as their former teacher transform through the co-design, and if so, how?	10 Written and 5 voice memos, and audio and video recordings of circle time and workshop	Personal reflections written and oral  My discourse practices, participation and interaction with the children as documented in the video data

In the remainder of this chapter, I will include a brief background on the socio-historical context of the child partners' school, Esperanza, their community and the district where they reside—the same community where I spent my summers and weekends with my grandparents as a child. Then, I will explain the data I collected and how, the units of observation and approaches to analysis in pursuit of answering the above research questions. Finally, I will describe how the findings from the analysis are represented in Chapters V-VII, and my decision in presenting the data through a narrative retelling of our time together in the summer workshop.

### ***Esperanza and the Child Partners***

I felt that the choice of pseudonyms was consequential to the illustration of the place where this story began, and the human beings involved in this study. For this reason, our school, where we began our journey in a kindergarten classroom in 2019, I have named *Esperanza*. The word *esperanza* in English means hope. I chose this word for all the hope and possibilities that exist within Esperanza including children's hybrid discourse and cultural practices, and in the daily presence of *las comadres*, the children's mothers, volunteering as a way of expressing their unwavering support for their children and the school community.

Esperanza is in the southern community of one of the largest school districts outside the Denver metro area in Colorado. The district has been and continues to be segregated economically, ethnically, and linguistically. Demographically, southern schools are predominantly Latinx and Spanish-speaking with the largest immigrant population in all the district. I have been part of the school community since 2013 and often felt uncomfortable and enraged by the socialized normative rhetoric of “northern” and “southern” schools. The southern part of the district has experienced iterations of “low-performance” and “turn-around” based on high stakes testing outcomes. These outcomes have resulted in constraining reform rather than

seeking to understand what children and communities need and desire from their schools for their collective wellbeing and flourishing. In fact, with each iteration of “turn-around,” the district and state have made reform decisions without consulting the community, the children, or families. However, this SDBE desired to understand the desires and needs of the children, their mothers, and the community as we co-created our third space together at the local library for our summer workshop.

Recruitment letters were sent out to all students from my last kindergarten class still in attendance at Esperanza, a total of twelve out of twenty. I received six permission forms in return and a request from four mothers for siblings to participate resulting in a total of ten child partners. Two of the child partners were born in Mexico and had been in the country for three years, the remaining eight children were all first-generation and children of Mexican immigrant parents. Five out of the six participants from my students preferred speaking Spanish in kindergarten. Today, they speak a hybrid of language repertoires fluidly using English and Spanish like an embodied choreography of languages dancing together. As part of the co-design, I asked the children if they would like to choose their pseudonyms. I explained that I could not use their real names in the story I am writing about us, but they could pick any name of their choice. They either picked the names of their siblings, cousins, or community members whom they admired. Their pseudonyms, ages, and grade level in 2023 are listed below.

**Table 2***The Child Partners, Their Age and Grade in 2023*

Child	Age	Grade
Dylan	6	1st
Gustavo	6	1st
Bea	9	4th
Mili	9	4th
Hector	9	4th
Miguel	9	4th
Angel	9	4th
Santiago	9	4th
Vicente	9	4t
Espe	14	9th

**Data Collection**

(IRB protocol # 23-0226)

**Interviews**

In this social design-based experiment in pursuit of re-organizing learning activity with children, I wanted to understand how they articulated learning and their learning experiences in and out of school. Most importantly, I wanted to understand and center their desires for learning as part of the co-design. For this reason, I conducted six semi-structured interviews the week before the workshop began. First, I drafted interview questions to elicit the child partners'

conceptualization of learning, their individual narratives of learning experience, and their hopes for learning in the co-designed workshop. The questions are as follows:

1. Tell me about a time recently when you learned something in school.
2. Tell me about a time recently when you learned something at home.
3. What do you like to learn? What do you like most about it?
4. How did you feel when you learned?
5. Let's think about this past school year. Can you tell me about a typical day?  
What did it feel like when you walked in the door? How did you feel when you were in the classroom?
6. What would you like to learn about this summer in our workshop?
7. Is there something you would like to share or teach others?
8. What are your dreams for the future?

The interviews were one of the initial steps towards SDBE as the children's ideas and expertise were being leveraged for the design of the workshop. My interview approach was not to simply collect answers to the drafted questions, but to gain an understanding of the child partners' lived experiences (Seidman, 2006). Qualitative approaches to interviewing that seek to understand lived experiences and to actively listen to the participant's narrative emphasize the importance of the relational component of research (Reyes, Haines & Clark, 2021). I interviewed the six children who were my former students, Bea, Angel, Hector, Mili, Santiago and Vicente, all of whom I had maintained relationships with over the years. This relational component and intentional listening with compassion set the context not only for the individual interviews but also for the workshop. I audio recorded and transcribed the interviews using a transcription program that was able to transcribe both English and Spanish. Each individual interview lasted

between twenty to thirty minutes and took place at the local library the week before the workshop.

### **Video and audio recordings**

I chose video and audio recording as a primary source for analyzing social interaction, participation and conversation throughout the workshop. To understand the development of our *third space*, I used video recording to closely examine how we organized, interacted, and participated (Derry et al, 2010; McDermott & Raley, 2011; Hall, 2012). We used three cameras including a Canon video camera that stood stationary on a tripod for most of the workshop. We moved the Canon camera, either me or the child partners, when our activity transitioned from circle time to workshop/ activity time so that it captured all of us in proximity. We also had two smaller handy video recorders that were placed on the tables by the children wherever they were working. From the first moment we set out the cameras, the children were encouraged to move the handy cameras to capture their learning processes. Although the child partners were not part of the analysis of this research project, the co-design and inclusion of the children in the documentation process was an attempt to disrupt the power dynamics, roles and relations between the “researcher” and “researched” (Bang & Vossoughi, 2016; Kirshner, 2010).

Each workshop lasted two hours with a total of nine workshops. Therefore, with three cameras, I had a total of fifty-four hours of video data to review. I reviewed the entire video corpus as a whole-to-part inductive procedure (Derry et al, 2010; Erickson, 2006). This involved viewing the data while documenting what I was seeing, also known as content logs or content listing. This was followed by an inductive approach of repeated viewings of the “corpus of interest” which included indexed patterns of participation, interaction, collaboration, and conversation (Jordan & Henderson, 1995; Erickson 2011).

## **Content logs**

Content logs were organized by workshop day including the objective or focus of the workshop, the participants present, location and logging from all three cameras if they were recording. Logging was organized by activity each day including circle time and the workshop/activity time. I first observed the entire corpus of video while documenting what I was seeing in two-minute increments. Although it was difficult to capture all that was happening while observing, Jordan and Henderson (1995) explain “Content listings are useful for providing a quick overview of the data corpus” (p. 43). I then reviewed the logs and began a second column of “noticing” or patterns in participation, action, and interaction. Finally, I reviewed the “noticing” column and added a column titled “patterns” that became codes of both adult and child practices.

## **Memos**

After each workshop, I immediately wrote a memo when I arrived at home. Memos served both as a practice of recalling and reflecting on what happened during the workshop, and how the child partners participated and responded to my pedagogical design (Lempert, 2007). There were nine written memos total with an average of five pages, as well as five voice memos averaging five minutes each, and one video reflection via zoom. Memo writing served as a crucial component to capturing my perspective and interpretation of what happened in workshop and was later interrogated after close review of video data.

## **Approach to Analysis**

To understand how educational dignity is experienced by children and my role in the possibility of its manifestation, iterations of reflection and analysis were imperative to my learning. The first iteration included listening to the children’s *testimonios* which were captured

in audio from the interviews, and from the video corpus from the workshops. My original intention was to hold interviews, collect the audio data, and to code and analyze the responses. The interviews were semi-structured to create space for the children to feel comfortable and safe sharing their experiences in and outside of school as well as their desires for learning in our workshop. However, the responses emerged as *testimonios*, because they became narratives of experienced injustices while also dreaming of more just futures (Reyes & Rodriguez, 2012). Testimonios as methodology is “a research paradigm that pushes back against majoritarian stories and brings together communities who have been racialized so that they can explore, critically reflect on, and examine their languaging practices and knowledge” (Mizell & Flores Carmona, 2024). I did not realize while drafting my questions that the children would feel compelled to share their *testimonio*—their political lived experiences.

The audio data from the interviews were transcribed using a Turboscribe transcription service. I then reviewed the transcriptions through an inductive process of identifying patterns in the children’s responses categorizing under the following themes: 1) how the child-partners defined learning, 2) what experiences have shaped those definitions, and 3) their desire for future learning. Questions were also scripted as the workshop unfolded to probe metacognitive reflection of what enabled the child partners’ learning (see Figure 5 in Chapter V). I returned to the video corpus to analyze these specific segments and to transcribe the children’s *testimonios*. For this part of the analysis, and to answer my first inquiry question “How did the children partners articulate learning and their desires for learning in the interviews and throughout the co-designed workshop?” I selected segments from the video corpus for transcription and analysis (Derry et al, 2010). These segments were selected from circle time conversations where the children expressed their desires for learning and provided *testimonio* of their experiences. I

transcribed these segments myself using a micro-ethnographic playscript approach (Erickson, 2004) to capture our conversation. The playscript includes movement, utterances, facial expressions and dialogue in a second-by-second analysis.

Although our relationship had been established at Esperanza three years prior, this new iteration of relationship development included intentions of re-mediating traditional power dynamics between the children and myself, and with the intention to co-design the workshop in collaboration with my child participants. In the second phase of analysis, social interaction that constitutes an environment was my focus (Erickson, 2011; McDermott & Raley, 2011). Researchers in this field have called this a “natural history” approach which focuses on the interaction of human relations (Erickson, 2004; McDermott & Raley, 2011; Leeds-Hurwitz & Kendon, 2021). After content logging, I then returned to the logs to identify patterns in participation, discourse, and interaction. My approach to analysis included looking for interactional evidence of a third space where “the object of activity is extended and the activity itself reorganized, resulting in new opportunities for learning” (Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez & Tejeda, 2009, p. 287). Through this lens, I identified patterns of participation and interaction that created new opportunities for learning. I employed an inductive process of documenting patterns in participation and interaction, I then coded ten child practices and eleven adult practices (See Appendix B for the code book). The ten child practices included play, contributing, expressions, persistence, observing, movement, translanguaging, conflict, explaining, and collaborating. The ten adult practices included questioning, encouraging, expression, translanguaging, offering, documenting, play, guidance, explaining, intervening, and making connections.

I also indexed moments or “hot spots” (Jordan & Henderson, 1995) of interaction that I wanted to return to for a closer analysis including how language was used, and how the children

participated (Phillips, 1983; Cazden, 2001). The “hot spots” included returning to the practices coded most frequently, or practices that illustrated a shift in participation and new learning opportunities. Analysis also included my role as their former teacher and the intentionality to re-mediate power structures. Therefore, conversations analyzed the transformation of participation of the students and me over time. My hope was to develop an empirical lens for recognizing how children experience educational dignity and identifying pedagogical improvisations that contributed to its manifestation. This also required a micro-examination of interaction in two second increments of documenting verbal expressions, movement, gestures, and facial expressions (Jordan & Henderson, 1995).

The reflection and analysis of my own role and my continual transformation had consequential and political implications for the re-mediation of learning experiences. To decenter my role, I analyzed how I engaged in social interaction. The analysis involved observing my actions and reactions to the children lending itself to an autoethnographic approach. To examine my interpretations and reflections, I triangulated the analysis of the memos with what was documented in the content logs and then later with a micro ethnographic analysis of video segments (Ellis et al, 2011; Chávez, 2012). The goal was to micro-examine the interactions by viewing and documenting the second-by-second unfolding of a segment to prove or disprove my interpretations that were documented in the memos and content logs. This micro-examination also provided the opportunity to analyze if I had in fact re-mediated our learning ecology and deconstructed my power by cultivating equal participation.

### **Presenting the Findings through Storytelling**

What follows in Chapter V is the story of our workshop, and the findings found from the analysis woven throughout. A storytelling presentation of our Social Design-Based Experiment

enabled me to remain committed to honoring my child partners, their mothers, their histories and our relationship while illuminating the outcomes that surfaced (Gutiérrez & Jurow, 2016). It is a process and practice of weaving together “the temporal, spatial, and affective”, because as researchers we are always in relation “to and with communities” (Tachine & Nicolazza, 2022, p.9). A storytelling approach called for careful attention to what the child partners expressed in the workshop, and the brilliance and ingenuity they demonstrated in our co-constructed ecology. For this reason, the natural history approach to video analysis played a critical role in crafting the story, and required careful attention to what happened via iterative processes of reviewing the videos. The videos allowed me to see first-hand the social interaction that constituted our workshop over the course of the month. They allowed me to tell our story, the children’s stories, their perspective and illuminate their brilliance. Moreover, they enabled me to document the transformation of consciousness as we collectively sought to ameliorate historical injustices, and collectively dream of a desired place to learn together—again.

In Chapter VI, through a close analysis of the interactions that constituted our ecology, I began to see the evidence, the light, I had hoped to see. The evidence of the experience of educational dignity. In Chapter VII, “A Teacher’s Reflection”, I capture the transformative process of understanding my own developing consciousness. This included contrasting findings through the process of triangulating the data, because to truly tell our story, I had to examine what was happening within me as well.

## CHAPTER V

### *LA HISTORIA / THE STORY*

#### **A Child's Courage: The Impetus for the Workshop**

In March of 2023, my teacher assistant who lovingly supported my last kindergarten class, sent me a text message. She is my *colega* and *comadre* who loves children dearly and humanizes them in every loving interaction. In the text message, she mentioned that Bea, now in third grade, was struggling and frequently asked when I was coming to visit. The following week I drove to Esperanza and parked in front of the kindergarten playground where the child partners once ran screaming and yelling joyfully. After checking in at the front office, I continued up the stairs to my *comadre's* classroom. Minutes later, Bea walked in timidly with a slight smile. I boisterously jumped up, ran to her, and hugged her. As I knelt, she wrapped her arms around my shoulders and held on tight crying. I tried to understand the tears and asked her "Are these happy tears or sad tears?" Looking down at the ground, she did not respond as she wiped them away. I could not help but wonder what happened to the child I once knew in kindergarten. Bea was an energetic and vivacious child in kindergarten. She radiated confidence, unrestrained as she danced throughout the classroom daily humming the tunes of Fortnite. Her solemn demeanor on that day crushed my heart, and I yearned to understand what had caused this change in her.

I continued to visit weekly thereafter until the end of the school year. As I entered her silent classroom each week, children worked independently at their desks. I was not sure if this was the norm of the entire day or if I was just entering during writing time where the expectation was for children to write independently and in silence. When I entered, the children quietly alerted Bea who stood up and walked slowly to me, always solemn.

Every week, her teacher gave us a writing assignment to work on in the hallway. As we sat down at the end of a long table, I asked her how writing was going, and her response was always a quick “terrible.” She often said “no sabo escribir” or “I don’t know how to write.” What perplexed me most was that Bea was a confident child in kindergarten, always eager to share her newly discovered phonetic knowledge. But now there was a shift in not only her confidence but her identity. Now as a learning scientist, I understand that learning and identity are inextricably connected. They develop via the culmination of experiences in multiple contexts (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Nasir, 2011, Esmonde 2017). Bea’s experiences were evidenced in her solemn walk to the hallway and in her expressions of incapability.

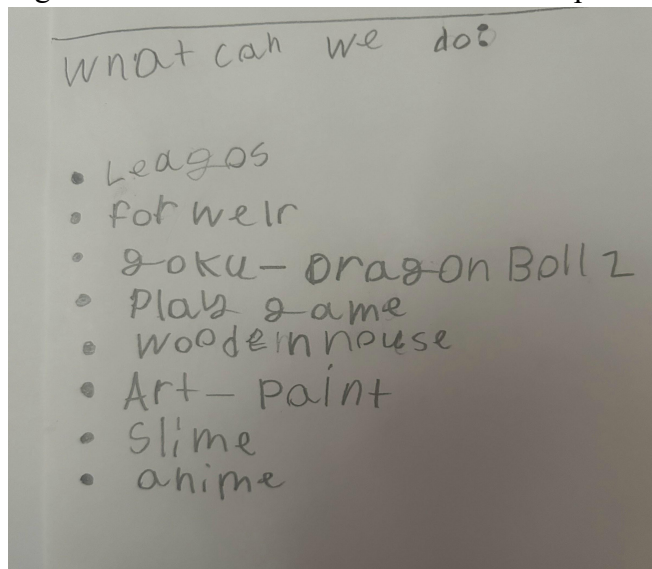
My weekly visits continued for weeks until one fateful day in May when Bea’s courage inspired this study. Just like the preceding weeks, we sat in the hallway. But this time she expressed she did not want to work on the assignment, but rather, she had something to tell me. My instincts were that she had been perseverating on what she was about to tell me for some time. As she looked me straight in the eye, she bravely and descriptively told me of instances where she had experienced harm. I then saw the relief in her eyes. The sequence of events included me informing both the principal and Bea’s mother of what she had confided. The following week she was placed in another class.

Bea’s courageous act incited a desire in me to create something with her—something she deserved, and a place where she could feel joy, safety, and value. Coincidentally, on the same day as Bea’s courageous act, I conversed with my *comadres*, the child partners’ mothers, after school while the children played on the playground. This was routine each time I visited. The conversation turned serious as one mother expressed that her child no longer enjoyed going to school. Another mother added that her son was unhappy in school and felt bored and

unchallenged. They expressed concern about how teachers were treating their children. One of my *comadres* then asked, “¿No puede abrir su propia escuela, Ms. Chávez? Can’t you open your own school, Ms. Chávez?” This question along with Bea’s story sat with me for a week. Slowly the idea for the workshop came into vision—a social-design based experiment (SDBE) as described by Gutierrez, Jurow and Vakil (2020), because the seedling of our project, the request from my *comadres*, emerged from what the authors refer to as a place of hope and possibility. The hope was to rekindle the children’s relationship to learning, and the possibility to reconceptualize what learning is and could be in a co-designed workshop.

For Bea, I wanted to know how to breathe air into her diminishing light and cultivate the joy she once radiated in kindergarten. I proposed the workshop idea to Bea which she immediately approved. As we set out to plan the summer workshop in the hallway, I recruited her to make a list of students that were from our kindergarten class, and who were still present at Esperanza to participate. I then drafted recruitment letters for those students (IRB protocol # 23-0226). Afterward, she and I brainstormed a list of ideas for our workshop in May before school was out for the summer (see Figure 1). The ideas included Legos, making four wheelers, Goku reading Dragon Ball-Z books, playing games, building wooden houses, art and painting activities, making slime, and reading anime books. I asked her what her hopes were for our summer workshop, to which she replied, “to have fun.”

Figure 1. Bea's list of ideas for our workshop



As I began to script out the plan, I wanted not only to ensure that the child partners had fun, but that they also had the opportunity to re-mediate their relationships to learning and reconceive their identities as capable and valuable learners (Gutiérrez, 2009; Jurow, Horn & Philip, 2019; Jurow & Freeman, 2020). For Bea, I hoped for her to have the opportunity to reconnect to her vivacious five-year-old self and to re-envision herself as capable. This desire was also the culprit of tension throughout the workshop as I wrestled with what it looks like for children to re-mediate their relationship to learning and how learning might look different from the skill building, I was used to as a teacher. Therefore, a process of re-mediating my own relationship to teaching and learning became necessary as I, too, was reconceiving my identity as an educator.

To tell the story of our summer co-designed workshop, there is a semi-chronological order to the overall retelling. The children's *equivalent expressions of dignity* that surfaced across time and space are identified below through the retelling of the evolution of our workshop. Equivalent expressions of dignity are a paradox, because often dignity is used as if it

were self-evident. The Right2Learn Dignity Lab sees dignity as a social verb given content in daily social life (conversation with Dr. Manuel Espinoza, November 29, 2024). Therefore, to recognize the children’s equivalent expressions of dignity, I had to listen and watch closely to what they were communicating, and how they were participating. I tried to do this through a dignity lens meaning being able to recognize when a child experienced their worth as a contributing member to our learning community or expressing how they might be experiencing a sense of their worth. I also watched myself taking improvisational pedagogical steps, albeit sometimes awkwardly, as I learned to move in concert with the children’s expressions. My mind and my body were challenged to do things differently—to let go of expectation and the familiar and learn to dance in concert with dignity.

### **Children’s Expressions of Dignity**

#### **A Safe Place to Share Our Stories**

The week before the workshop officially began, I conducted semi-structured interviews at the local library with the children. The first workshop day and the interviews both served as opportunities to understand the children’s desires for learning as well as the experiences that have constituted their understanding of learning. I prepared questions asking what they enjoy learning in and out of school as well as what they desired to learn in the workshop. The six child partners who were once my kindergartner students, and who responded to the recruitment letter (Bea, Angel, Hector, Vicente, Santiago, and Mili) were all interviewed individually before the first workshop day. I interviewed Bea first. Prior to the interview, Bea and I had been meeting at the local library reading and writing together for a month. So, the day of her interview, we began with our same routine of her picking out a book to read and write about.

Bea jumped out of her mother's large red pickup truck with a quiet, soft smile and gripped in her hand the journal I had given her the week before. We entered the local library, side by side, as the automatic double doors opened. The library was chosen as a place still in the child partners community but outside of the school context. I chose the library in hopes that it would feel different than school thus allowing us to re-imagine what learning could be together. Before starting the interview, I asked Bea if she would like to read a book first. She nodded yes. We looked through biographies of athletes, none of which grabbed her attention. Next, we walked to the science area to see if there were any books about rocks or the rainforest which she had expressed interest in on my visits to Esperanza. She shook her head no to every book I showed her. Then we walked by the picture books displayed upright on top of the shelves, where she stalled and stared at the book covers. I asked if she wanted to look at the picture books. She nodded yes. We walked slowly through the rows. I picked up a book in Spanish about a whale. I recommended it because she had once mentioned a picture, she painted of a whale with her neighbor's paints who had recently passed away, and of whom she spoke frequently. She turned down the whale book because, "no sabo leer in español," she couldn't read in Spanish, she explained. We then saw a beautiful book on the shelf titled *Life* by Cynthia Rylant. She flipped through the pages after I handed it to her, and finally, she shook her head yes.

I followed Bea through the library to find a place to read the book together. She took us across the library to a table with two chairs next to a window that looked out to green foliage and a stream behind a trailer park. It was a quiet and peaceful place. She began reading the book immediately, pausing when a word perplexed her either phonetically or semantically. She paused to think about the meaning behind each word and was inquisitive, asking me what words meant or what the author meant. After she finished reading the vividly illustrated book about *Life*, I

asked her if she would like to write about the book. Again, she nodded yes. I moved my chair next to hers so that I could be close enough to provide any writing assistance she might need like I had all spring semester at Esperanza. A reflection from my memo that day:

“I was careful not to interject where I thought she needed help but waited for her to ask when she wanted assistance. Often, I tried to convey a trust in her ability by asking her to isolate the sounds. When the sounds did not match the spelling, I would explain the orthographic explanation for the spelling and write the word on the list of collected words she had received assistance with on the inside cover of her journal” (Memo #1, June 30, 2023).

I asked her what struck her about the book that she would like to write about. She immediately restated a line from the book, “Life is not always easy” (Figure 2). We turned to that page which showed a small bird in a dark forest. I asked her what it was that struck her about this page. She responded, “third grade was not easy.” I turned to the next page that showed the bird flying out of the darkness into light where the sun was shining on a valley filled with roaming animals. It said, “And there is always a new road to take.” I asked her if she had taken a new road. She responded, “yes” and then explained she was moved to a new class. I asked her how that came to be. She shrugged her shoulders, indicating she didn’t know how to answer the question. I asked her, “Did you tell me how you were being treated by your teacher?” She shook her head yes. I asked her, “were you brave?” Again, she shook her head yes. Then in her journal, she wrote, “Life is not easy. I am brave.”

“This moment felt deeply cathartic to me, and I wonder if it felt that way for her. It felt clear to me that she wanted to process the difficulties in life, particularly the mistreatment she endured from her teacher in 3rd grade” (Memo #1, June 30th, 2023).

Figure 2. *Life* by Cynthia Rylant



I then began the interview with a list of prepared questions. I asked, “How did you feel when you were in the classroom?” and “What did it feel like when you walked in the door?” Bea expressed “unsafe” because of her teacher. These feelings surfaced again in circle time on the first day of the workshop which created a context of safety and vulnerability, and where the other children felt compelled to share their stories of harm as well. Initially, we were discussing when and how learning occurs. The conversation shifted when I asked, “Can we help each other learn?”

Excerpt 1

- (1) A: yeah
- (2) B: yeah
- (3) S: yeah (*Vicente and Dylan are rummaging in the LEGOS*)
- (4) Me: tell me how, how can we help each other learn?
- (5) A: By telling them what to do

- (6) S: what to do (*Angel and Santiago responding in unison*)  
 (7) Me: By telling them what to do | does it help when our teachers tell us what to do?  
 (8) S: Yeah  
 (9) B: Yeah (*Angel is slowly shaking his head no*)  
 (10) Me: Angel is saying no, why Angel? (*Bea and Santiago are looking at*  
 (11) *him smiling*)  
 (12) A: Porque te gritan (because they yell at you) | It's like jail  
 (13) B: Some teachers are mean (*looking right at me as if looking for assurance that she*  
 (14) *could share her story*)  
 (15) Me: Go ahead | you can share

Bea then began to tell the children the story she told me about that fateful day in the hallway.

The children fell quiet—an empathetic moment of silence. Vicente and Dylan were no longer rummaging through the LEGOS, and all the children were still. Vicente then began to tell his story of harm.

#### Excerpt 2

- (1) V: I had this one teacher | a music one | yeah | she would be like yelling at us  
 (2) | she would yell at us | and then she would tell us about | she told us we wouldn't  
 (3) make it in life

His little brother, Gustavo, added to the conversation commenting, “school is fun.” I asked if he had just completed kindergarten, and he nodded yes with a smile, but then a memory came to his mind, and his smile disappeared as he retold this story:

#### Excerpt 3

- (1) G: My charter schoolteacher | um | like we're doing computer | and don't go  
 (2) slow (*he uses his hands to show slow and he slows down his speech as well*) |  
 (3) don't go fast | but I go slow | then I was going fast | then I go sl:o:w | then I  
 (4) finished the testing the teacher was mad at me for doing that  
 (5) Me: The teacher was mad at you for doing that?  
 (6) G: yeah | and | and | when we do the test good | we get a sucker | and he didn't  
 (7) give me one (*his voice cracked as he shook his head in disbelief and*  
 (8) *looked down*).

It took me a year to decide to include these stories the children shared that first circle time in the first ten minutes together. My hesitation was cautionary of “damage-centered research,” which Tuck (2009) describes as “research that intends to document people's pain and brokenness” (p.1). As a researcher and as their teacher, I desired to illustrate the brilliance of the children, their ingenuity, and innovation. After several iterations of reviewing this first circle time, it was apparent that these moments did, in fact, illustrate their brilliance—emotionally and intellectually. Their expressions communicated their need to share and process the indignities they had experienced within school to dream and re-imagine something different. The children recognized, before I did, that for us to re-mediate and create something new, we had to confront the unjust histories of harm. As I wrote with my colleagues (Mendoza et al., 2024) on the topic of academic harm, processing the harm from the past in the present moment is meaningful to the potential intersection of healing and learning (p. 7). The children’s sharing of stories proved to be a pivotal moment in the present connecting our pasts to envision our future.

Schooling experiences that had caused the children harm surfaced like unhealed wounds desiring to be healed when someone was willing to listen, and where they felt safe and vulnerable to share. Their story provided the spark that cultivated that space. Angel, asserting that he does not learn when the teachers yell at him, prompted Bea, Vicente, and Gustavo to all share their stories. This sharing time was not planned. I had only planned questions to discuss their experiences of learning, how they understand learning, and what they hoped to learn in the workshop. Naively, I thought this conversation would remain on school topics such as reading, math and writing. However, the above discussion illustrates how keenly aware children are of indignities and the consequences to their learning. This moment of sharing stories felt like a moment of healing, enabling us to re-imagine something different together.

## Feeling Visible by Contributing to the Learning and Sharing Expertise

When I sat down with Angel for his interview, it was as if he had already reviewed the interview questions. He knew exactly what he wanted to share. I asked him first, “How was third grade?”

### Excerpt 4

- (1) A: It was easy in **m:ath** but I had to wait for **e:everything**.  
(2) Me: You had to wait for everything?  
(3) A: Yeah | in math | like | if I didn't | if I finished the equations she  
(4) told me to recheck them and she already knew I got them all right  
(5) Me: So then what'd you do?  
(6) A: Just wait  
(7) Me: And how did you feel then?  
(8) A: **Huh?**  
(9) Me: And then how did you feel?  
(10) A: Like bored because she never treats me nice | Like this kid always  
(11) answers and  
(12) she always calls on him and I don't answer that much | I answer a  
(13) lot **but** when I raise my hand she doesn't answer me and answers  
(14) more kids that do answer  
(15) Me: How does that feel?  
(16) A: Sad because it looks like she doesn't even know if I'm there or not.

Angel's description of waiting for permission to speak and share his mathematical knowledge but being overlooked by his teacher resulted in feelings of sadness and invisibility (line 14). He desired to be seen and heard. I wanted to know how to design in a way that would enable Angel to feel visible.

### Excerpt 5

- (1) Me: This summer when we're doing our learning together how can I make  
(2) sure you feel visible?  
(3) A: Yeah um maybe um like do something that engages people  
(4) Me: How can I make sure it's engaging?  
(5) A: Like when you tell people how to be friends or to not be mean or like  
(6) when don't be scared to tell your teacher that she's not treating you nice.

I wanted to understand what Angel meant by “something that engages people”. Engagement in the context of traditional teaching is often used to describe if children are “on task” and working productively according to the teacher’s planned objective. However, Angel was describing engagement as something different. In lines 5 and 6, he describes the role of the teacher as a cultivator of friendships and community. Engagement, for Angel, also seems to express a feeling of safety and the freedom to express oneself by not feeling “scared to tell your teacher she’s not treating you nice.” In connection to Excerpt 4, Angel seems to be expressing a desire to contribute and to participate meaningfully in the co-construction of learning by sharing his expertise.

When I asked the children to recall something they learned in school, Angel immediately referred to multiplication while also describing his strategy.

#### Excerpt 6

- (1) A: In third grade when I always done the times | and I took like a long  
(2) time to remember  
(3) Me: The times?  
(4) A: Yeah times | and then I'll take a long time to remember  
(5) Me: Like remember what?  
(6) A: Like when what's five times six I always added this | I always do the  
(7) greater number or I always add the smaller number to the bigger  
(8) number  
(9) Me: That's your strategy for figuring it out  
(10) A: Like I'll put four times six then four | I'll put six groups of four  
(11) Me: Yeah | do you do it in your mind or on paper?  
(12) A: in my mind | the teacher always gives me paper and tells me to write  
(13) something but I do it with my mind  
(14) Me: You do it with your mind  
(15) A: Every kid does it with their paper and they go slower than me

When recalling learning at home, he explained:

#### Excerpt 7

- (1) A: Um I learned | um | at home | when I | um | discovered | um | division | when I |

- (2) when I did it | um | I was like | what do we do in division | my brother told me  
(3) to divide it | it's like dividing | like if I do a three divided by six equals two | and I  
(4) always figured it out by um times | um | three times something well three times  
(5) six makes the number | like | what makes six out of three | and I | I'm like three |  
(6) and then six | and then I figured it out and it was two

I asked Angel if he had shared his mathematical strategizing with his friends or with the teacher.

He responded:

Excerpt 8

- (1) A: Yeah but then the teacher's gonna tell me that's uh | uh like um | a slower way  
(2) than the other kids | she tells them it's a faster way | and I always answer first  
(3) than them | and they | and she says theirs is faster and mine's slower

Angel exhibited confidence in his abilities when I asked him to recall something he learned at home, however, he was frustrated because those abilities were not recognized as valuable strategies in class. Mathematical processing, I discovered, was a regular practice at home with his brother and father. Through his interactions at home, he learned to solve mathematical problems in his mind using specific strategies. This was his mathematical practice. However, he expressed that he was not only discouraged from explaining his mathematical practice, but it was also undervalued. This led us back to his earlier comment of “don’t be afraid to tell your teacher she’s not treating you nice.” Angel emphasized at the end of the interview:

Excerpt 9

- (1) A: She never treats us the golden rule  
(2) Me: And tell me about the golden rule  
(3) A: Um treat the other person the way that you want to be treated | she doesn't  
(4) treat me right | so I don't treat her nice  
(5) Me: Yeah and if you could tell her how to treat you | what would you say?  
(6) A: Um that you're not treating me the way as the other kids | you're treating  
(7) me like if I was invisible and I wasn't there

Meaningful participation is “the substantive involvement in socially vital activities” (Espinoza et al, 2020)—was this Angel’s desire? His expressions conveyed a desire to share his mathematical strategizing that he had learned through the mentorship of his older brother and father. He desired to be seen and valued by his teacher and his expertise leveraged (Gutierrez, 2014).

### **Contributing to the Greater Good of our Communities**

When I asked Vicente the last question in his interview, “What are your dreams for the future?” He did not skip a beat in his response:

Excerpt 10

- (1) V: To try and save the planet | like pollution | you heard about pollution, right?
- (2) Me: Yeah
- (3) V: In Colorado | truck pollution | yeah | that's why I want to stop it | yeah | and then
- (4) one day | I want to make | there's only | like | electric cars
- (5) Me: Yeah
- (6) V: I want to make a car that's made out of | that's running on water
- (7) Me: Wow
- (8) V: It runs on water | Yeah | Like | I | do you know | like | steam

Vicente lives in a polluted community located near a major highway that is often crowded with semi-trucks traveling to factories. Additionally, his home and the homes of many Latinx and immigrant families are located near an oil refinery where toxic exposure has created irreversible damage in his community, including illness, death, and deepening degradation of the soil, air, and water. In fact, a group of mothers has organized a campaign, *Cultivando* (<https://www.cultivando.org/environmentaljustice>), to fight for environmental justice for their children and future generations in Vicente’s neighborhood. In the workshop when we designed desired learning spaces, which will be discussed more in-depth later in this chapter, Vicente’s mission for environmental justice and sustainability surfaced again in his projects, indicating their importance in his everyday life.

As an educator of young children, I have witnessed their innate altruism and empathy for the planet, humans, and more than human beings. Robert Cole's (1986) seminal book *The Moral Life of Children* describes how children lead lives of “intense moral awareness.” When we pay close attention, we can see children sorting through these complexities in their everyday lives. This is what I found most evident in the interviews. The children desired to be helpful and to contribute to the greater good selflessly. Vicente was concerned about the future of our planet, specifically his community, and desired to save it from toxins.

Hector was concerned about the safety of people and desired to help keep them safe. In Hector’s interview, I asked him, “what have you learned at home recently?” He described a regular practice of helping his dad:

Excerpt 11

- (1) H: How to work with my dad
- (2) Me: How to work with your dad | What do you do with your dad | Tell me more
- (3) H: Getting the tools | the heavy tools
- (4) Me: Uh-huh
- (5) H: Turn off the machine
- (6) Me: Turn off the machine | What machine
- (7) H: Conversor
- (8) Me: Oh, wow ¿En dónde? ¿En la troca o no?
- (9) H: Yeah | la troca

At home, Hector has learned to be helpful in what most in the US would consider adult activity, but which in much of the world is just what children are invited to be involved in (Rogoff et al, 2015). In Hector’s family it is a cultural practice for children to have a role in family activities like working on trucks. Being helpful is also a value that has been cultivated in Hector’s family and illustrated in the way his mother, a beloved *comadre*, volunteers daily at Esperanza. In the final question about his dreams for the future, he explained:

### Excerpt 12

- (1) H: my dream is to be like | a police officer  
(2) Me: Yeah | How come you want to be a police officer  
(3) H: To help people  
(4) Me: Help people  
(5) H: Yeah I give them good stuff | like in the car | yeah | help people  
(6) Me: And like how you said | when you told me | you can teach people how to be safe  
(7) H: Yeah  
(8) Me: Is it also to help people be safe  
(9) H: Yeah | like the police | to help people be safe | Yeah | for the people to be safe

A question that elicited the children’s desire to contribute to the collective, was, “what is something you would like to teach or share with our group?” This question also elicited Hector’s desire to help people be safe. Hector’s design work also reflected his desires. On our third day of building spaces, we desired to be in, Hector built an elaborate police station with a police car and a helicopter. Interestingly, the police station did not have jail cells or replicate anything carceral, but rather resources to help save people.

Figure 3. Hector’s police station



Santiago expressed a desire to help people be *amistoso*. The direct translation of *amistoso* is friendly, however, the message conveyed in the Spanish word is more nuanced. I would translate it as *to be a loving friend*. In our conversation, Santiago conveyed the same.

#### Excerpt 13

- (1) Me: ¿Cuándo tenemos el taller, hay algo que te gustaría enseñar a los
- (2) otros niños? (When we have the workshop, what is something you would like to
- (3) teach the other children?
- (3) S: Como ser amistoso (How to be friendly)
- (4) Me: ¿Qué? (What?)
- (5) S: Amistoso (friendly)
- (6) Me: Amistoso | Dígame más ¿cómo? (friendly | tell me more | How?)
- (7) S: De como **a:mar** | de como divertirse (how to love | how to have fun)
- (8) Me: Yeah
- (9) S: De como ser un amigo | Un buen amigo (how to be a friend | a good friend)

When I asked Santiago to tell me more about teaching everyone to be friendly, he explained “how to love” and “how to have fun,” expressing the central importance of relationships in learning communities (Line 7).

Angel, Vicente, Hector, and Santiago expressed a desire to contribute to the greater good and to participate in finding solutions. For example, Vicente named local environmental concerns he experiences daily and a desire to save the planet. Angel and Hector both expressed the desire for a safe community, emotional and otherwise. Santiago expressed the desire for others to learn how to be a loving friend. These expressions exhibited embers of light in their desire to participate in futures for social and environmental justice.

#### **“Free time”: the Freedom to Move, to Choose, to be Curious, and to Express Oneself**

When discussing school in our first circle time, Angel described school as a place that feels like jail. I later asked the group, “How can we make sure that what we do together doesn’t feel like jail?” All the children began sharing ideas.

Excerpt 14

- (1) A: recess  
(2) S: field day and fun days  
(3) Me: Mili, do you have anything to add? No pressure (*looking at Mili who had*  
(4) *had her chin resting on her hands the entire time, listening and observing*).  
(5) M: fun things (*in a soft almost inaudible voice*)  
(6) Me: What would be fun?  
(7) V: LEGOS  
(8) B: free time  
(9) G: and recess  
(10) A: out of school (*with an annoyed tone*)  
(11) B: free time like kindergarten

The description of school feeling “like jail” provided tangible language for us to re-imagine and dream of something different. What could be the opposite of feeling like jail? Bea responded to the question with the same words that Axel had quickly jotted down the day he slipped me a note in the hallway at Esperanza that said, “Dear Ms. Chávez, I miss kindergarten. I miss *free time*.” The desire for free time led to our first transition to activity on Day 1 of the workshop. We attempted to recreate “free time” like we had remembered it in kindergarten, and where I set out materials the children enjoyed, such as LEGOS, geometric shapes for building, and coloring and drawing materials. They then had the freedom to move and choose what to engage and play with.

I also set up three cameras to capture our learning and exploration. The children were especially interested in the cameras. Immediately they wanted to handle them, so I used one stationary camera to capture the entire class and two smaller cameras near where the children were working and playing, making them available to adjust. This first day initiated the context that the children were researching and learning along with me, blurring the lines between researchers and participants (Jurow & Freeman, 2020).

After reflecting on our first day of recreating “free time” like in kindergarten in coordination with viewing the video data, the content logs described the children moving freely throughout the space. They were free to choose for themselves, free to be curious and free to express themselves inclusive of their full linguistic repertoire (Content log #1, July 3, 2023). The children feeling free to leverage translanguaging practices (Garcia, 2009; Vogel & Garcia, 2017) contrasted with schooling practices at Esperanza, an English-only school, where subtractive linguistic practices push the child partners’ language practices to the margins (Valenzuela, 1999).

As a former educator at Esperanza, I was familiar with the curriculum, and how it was not designed to leverage linguistic and cultural practices, nor the children’s funds of knowledge (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014; Moll et al, 2016; Alvarez et al, 2023). Therefore, my pedagogical intention was to provide space for the child partners to use their voices, ideas, and perspectives in the development of the co-designed workshop. After reviewing the video data and the content logs, I also began to identify my pedagogical innovations that emerged with the intention of respecting the minds, ideas, and experiences of the child partners.

### **Pedagogical Design Innovations in Pursuit of Educational Dignity**

To illustrate an example of providing space for children to leverage their ideas, perspectives, and practices was found when my intention was to enact trust in the children by including them in the decision making for our workshop. For example, the decision on how to arrange our learning space. By asking the children to arrange the tables and chairs in our room in the library, allowed them to try different arrangements that best fit their learning—collectively. We were fortunate to be able to rent a room at the local library, which had tall windows through which natural sunlight illuminated our workspace. When we arrived, the tables were folded

against the wall, and chairs were stacked, leaving a large open space. Vicente and Gustavo were often the first to arrive and, therefore, the first ones to set up our space. I asked them where they thought we should place the tables. As I unfolded the tables, they arranged them in long rows “like a cafeteria,” as described by Vicente. However, after we took the “cafeteria” setup down the first day, they never assembled the room like this again. Rather, the following day and every day thereafter, they arranged four tables in the shape of a square, placing chairs on the outside of the tables, allowing them to see one another (see Figure 4). This setup became their ritual, illustrating the process of re-mediating from the institutional design to a communal design. In the following chapter, I provide an analysis of the significance of this arrangement.

Figure 4. The children’s chosen formation for seating



Over time, I observed that this shape allowed them to not only engage in fluid conversation but also allowed them to see each other's work, thus cultivating a space for communal learning.

Another ritual that manifested was the children's participation in unpacking and packing up our

materials in a blue wagon. When I arrived at the library, whoever had arrived first (most often Vicente and Gustavo), would help me unload our materials from my car into the blue wagon and roll it into our classroom. At the end of each workshop, the children also helped pack up the wagon and the materials into my car. These moments provided time to continue conversations about our plans for the workshop to which they never hesitated to offer ideas and suggestions.

Community routines and practices emerged as the children's participation and contributions were not only encouraged but were given opportunity. With these new developments, I still battled internal struggles of reconceptualizing what learning meant to me. I knew that a few of the child partners, including Bea, struggled in school with "academic" tasks. Consequently, they had acquired deficit labels in schools that inevitably manifested in their relationship to how they saw themselves as competent and capable learners. Bea had mentioned before "no sabo escribir" that she could not write; a message that had been communicated to her either through experience or verbally. In her interview she expressed, "no sabo leer en español." I wondered about a child's self-image who feels they cannot read their mother tongue, and if she felt that she was somehow at fault for this. I knew that the subtractive practices at Esperanza did not allow for the children's mother tongue to play a significant role in meaning-making in their classrooms, but rather English has been positioned as a gatekeeper to "academic" learning (Flores & Rosa, 2020). My public-school teacher self-wanted to provide an opportunity to develop "skills" in the context of academic schooling so that when the children did return to school, they would feel more confident. These feelings were juxtaposed with the desire to respond to what they hoped for in the workshop—to have fun and to have "free time." Were both possible? And if so, how?

After the interviews and our first workshop, it was clear that the process of re-mediating learning experiences in this social design-based experiment was consequential to reconceiving the children's relationship to learning. Experiences of learning, often not central to conversations in public schools, are some of the most consequential to children. Dewey (1938) describes educative experiences as the "continuity of experiences" or "the experiential continuum" (p. 33). The accumulation of experiences that are "worthwhile educationally" provides opportunities for identity development, determines how children engage in future learning activities, thus contributing to their relationship to learning (Dewey, 1938; Barron, 2006; Nasir et al, 2020; Warren et al, 2020). I hoped to facilitate and design learning experiences that affirmed and recognized the children's human dignity and to understand how, I had to consult them.

Therefore, designing questions to understand how children experience learning activities in and out of school and in the workshop was crucial to my learning. My intention was to pay attention to what they were saying and how they were participating in hopes that I might uncover children's equivalent expressions of dignity. After several iterations of reviewing the audio and video data, those equivalent expressions of dignity from the children included their desire to share their stories in a safe place, the desire to be seen and to meaningfully participate by contributing to the learning, sharing their expertise and by contributing to the greater good of their communities. Finally, just as they had in kindergarten, the children expressed the desire to feel free to move, to choose, to be curious, to express themselves freely, and the desire to learn together.

Although I had not yet identified the above equivalent expressions of dignity from the children in real time, I listened to what they were telling me and tried to respond guided by the

principles of respect for dignity (as discussed in the conceptual framework).<sup>7</sup> To begin, I designed a flexible overview of our summer workshop with guiding questions to help leverage the children’s ideas and perspectives, however the original plan changed with the evolution of the workshop. The initial flexible overview was much different than what I was used to regarding planning. For nearly two decades, I began with a standard, and then planned my instructional moves to teach, assess and evaluate the student’s performance of that standard. The flexible plan, however, allowed for us to consciously re-mediate the organization of our learning activity and community.

Below, Figure 5 illustrates the original plan. Asterisks in Weeks 2 and 4 indicate the shift in the plan and what transpired. For example, on week 2 I chose to expand on the children’s work and connect it to their ancestral lineage because the comparisons were remarkable to Mexican biophilic architecture. In week 4, the plan changed completely because week 3 did not go as planned, and instead, I took up the children’s idea. The next section will illustrate the emergence of what Alvarez and colleagues (2023) calls “pedagogical innovations” or opportunities for students to leverage their lived experiences and funds of identity. My pedagogical innovations included 1) designing for social dreaming, 2) designing to leverage ancestral knowledge, 3) designing for collective discovery, 3) flexibility as a pedagogical practice, and 4) designing for process.

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<sup>7</sup> The principles that guided this study regard children as 1) **equal participants** with valuable and consequential epistemologies to the co-construction of design and meaning making (Edwards, 1993; Rogoff et al, 2001; Rosado-May et al, 2020; Petrone, 2020), 2) **free human beings** in the development of capabilities that are consequential to their participation in social life (Nussbaum, 2011; Espinoza et al, 2020), and 3) **capable human beings** with potential that is contingent upon opportunities and the design of learning environments that prioritize human flourishing (Dewey, 1938; Scheffler, 1985; Nussbaum, 2011).

Figure 5.  
Plan of the workshop

Week and Focus	Workshop Overview and Guiding Questions:
<p><b>Week 1:</b> <b>What is learning?</b></p>	<p><b>Establishing community:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Why are we here?</li> <li>- What does it mean to learn?</li> <li>- What is light?</li> <li>- What do we need in order to learn?</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Re-introduction and setting the purpose of the workshop</li> <li>- Materials and artifacts the children had mentioned in the interviews that they enjoyed from kindergarten or enjoyed engaging with at school and home were set out in a workshop style, arranged throughout tables and on the floor.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 2:</b> <b>Architecture:</b> <b>Designing places where we like to learn</b></p>	<p><b>We are architects of our own environments:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What’s a cool shape you want to go in?</li> <li>- Imagine yourself inside a cool building, what would it look like?</li> <li>- What do you want your class to look like?</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- An architectural grad student will guide us through the design process</li> <li>- Observe design spaces and ideas that challenge the everyday linear structure of schools.</li> <li>- Children first draw their ideas and then create learning environments with a variety of materials including modeling clay, blocks, and legs</li> <li>-</li> </ul> <p><b>*Follow-up Phase:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Drawing on their historical and ancestral knowledge, we viewed Mexican architecture both historical and modern to understand their cultural and historical ties to architecture.</li> <li>- We compared the children’s drawings to actual structures in Mexico</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Did you know you are architects?</li> <li>- Mexicanos have been architects for thousands of years</li> <li>- You relatives and ancestors were architects and so are you</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 3:</b> <b>Circuits and light:</b> <b>How do we turn the light on?</b></p>	<p><b>Exploration of Little Bits Kits with partners:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hypothesizing how to turn a light on</li> <li>- Exploring and sharing new ideas and inventive ways of engineering light</li> <li>- How do you think we turn on the light?</li> <li>- Do you need instructions, or do you think you can figure it out on your own?</li> </ul> <p><b>Rocks and Minerals:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I need your help today. I have these rocks and minerals, but I really do not know anything about them. I know you all learned about rocks this past year. Can you help me learn about them? Each partner will get a kit of rocks and minerals. Pick one to research. What can you tell us about it?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 4:</b> <b>What can we teach</b></p>	<p><b>Culminating Week:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What would you like to teach us?</li> </ul>

<p><b>each other and how do we like to learn?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Which activity do you prefer i.e., designing spaces, circuits, or rocks and minerals?</li> <li>- Why do you prefer it?</li> <li>- Which activity do you prefer the least? Why? Can you try it again with a partner?</li> </ul> <p><b>*Research and innovation:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Group choice- marble runs</li> <li>- What makes learning fun and joyful?</li> <li>- What makes learning difficult?</li> <li>- Child-chosen activity</li> <li>- Children collaborated for three days on an on-going creation of three types of marble runs focusing on velocity and accuracy</li> </ul> <p><b>*Last workshop:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- When do you feel smart?</li> <li>- When do you feel smart in school?</li> <li>- When do you feel smart in the workshop?</li> <li>- Would you like to continue the workshop?</li> <li>- How?</li> <li>- What if schools . . . ?</li> </ul>
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### **Designing for Social Dreaming and Leveraging Ancestral Knowledge**

The second week of our workshop, I initially intended to design the week in hopes to understand what kind of spaces the children desired to learn in. To accomplish this, I partnered with my friend, Lema, also a member of Right2Learn, and at the time, a graduate student in the school of architecture at the University of Colorado at Denver. We collaborated on the design of three workshop days where the children would design spaces they desired to be in and learn in. We prepared two presentations that were shared with the children during circle time. On the first day, Lema created the presentation and gave the children a beginning lesson on architecture while stopping periodically to ask for their ideas and desires. She encouraged the children to imagine a shape they liked being in and asked them to describe the shape. She also asked them to imagine their classroom, and what they would add or change. Vicente expressed a desire for more sunlight and Angel described a place with calming waters. Before Lema introduced

bringing in the natural world into our learning spaces, the children were already imagining its role as part of the learning ecology.

Coincidentally, Lema then provided examples of possibilities for creating biophilic spaces, the design of space with the natural world. She explained that most of our buildings have straight lines, but we can expand past the familiar and create curved lines. Figure 6 is an example Lema showed the children.

Figure 6. An example of a biophilic space



After showing the biophilic examples, she asked them, “Could you see yourself learning in a space like that? Why?” Angel expressed concern that children might ruin a place like that and tear the leaves off the trees. Lema responded, “what if you made rules that everyone takes care of (inaudible)” and “what if everyone came together and said I want a beautiful place to learn.” Angel sat thinking (Content Log #2, July 10, 2023).

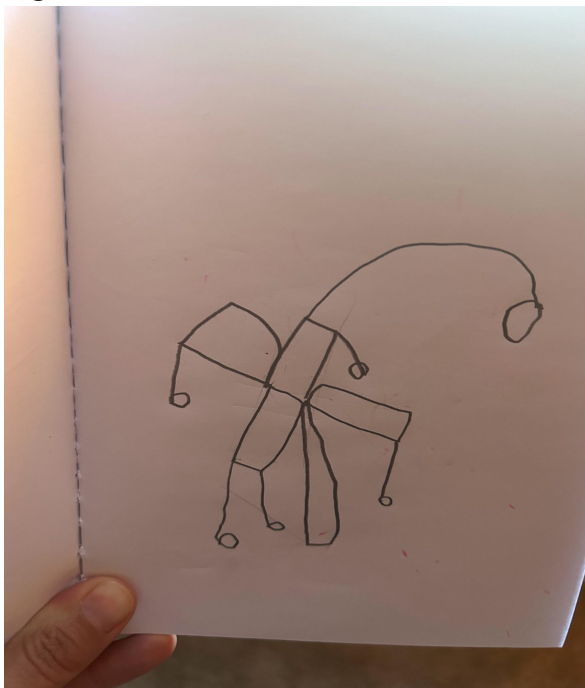
To leverage the children’s ideas, Lema asked three questions to guide their sketches:

- 1) What’s a cool shape you want to go in?
- 2) Imagine yourself inside a cool building, what would it look like?

3) What do you want your class to look like?

She then explained “it's not impossible to imagine something that is different.” The children started sketching in response to Lema’s provocation. She also encouraged them to write five words to describe their space. As the children began to sketch their ideas, we began to see the integration of the natural world in the children’s illustrations. We began to see their hopes take shape in the unconstrained space of possibility.

Figure 7. Vicente’s windmill hotel



Illustrated above in Figure 7, Vicente explained that his shape is a windmill that has drop-down rooms you can stay in, and when you leave “it sucks up the rooms and makes energy again.”

This is the same child who expressed in his interview his desire to save the planet because of the pollution that contaminates his community. This opportunity enabled him to transform his desire to save the planet and his community by designing a space for renewable energy.

Figure 8. Angel's biophilic space

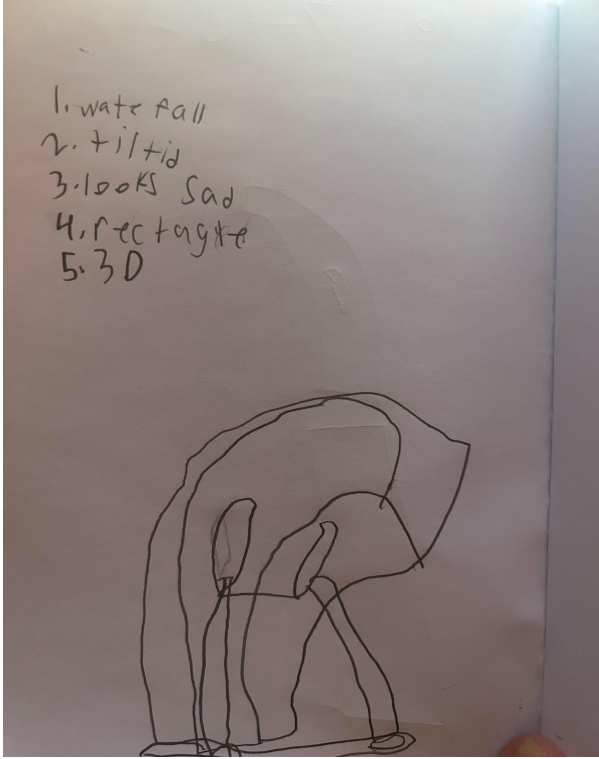
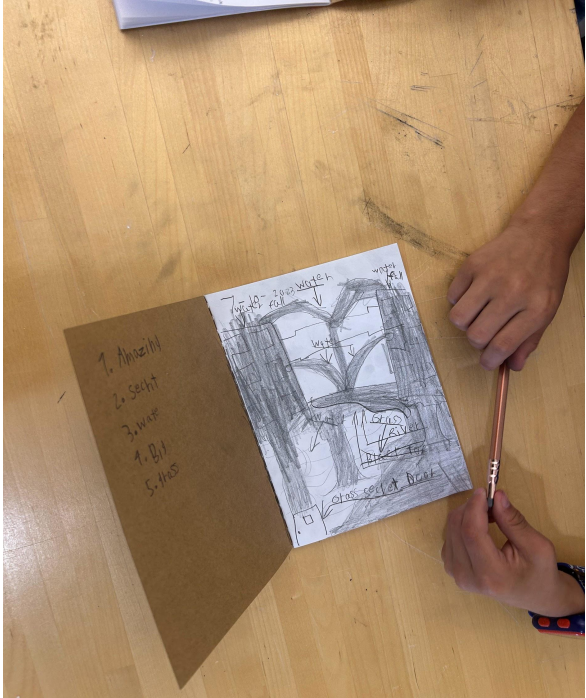


Figure 9. Hector's biophilic space



In Figures 8 and 9, Angel, and Hector both included curved lines and waterfalls. Angel described the biophilic examples as “calm places” with “flowing water” (Content log #2, July 10, 2023). The children’s way of taking up the biophilic ideas was not forced but an offering—a kind of social dream of possibilities. Social dreaming, a “classroom-bound concept” cultivated in joint activity and what Espinoza (2008) explains “would have to be assessed as situated linguistic- interactional phenomena, profoundly limited and shaped by the contexts in which the opportunity to appropriate the concept arose” (p.15). Lema’s profound words, “it’s not impossible to imagine something different” in relation to the offering of biophilic architecture provided a context that lifted the constraints from the children’s imaginations allowing them to dream of possibility and human-nature relations as part of an imagined learning ecology (Marin & Bang, 2018).

While I was researching biophilia, I realized many of the architectural examples we found online were in México. Instantly, I knew that this information was consequential to integrate into the following workshop, because the children are all descendants of brilliance and ingenuity (each of the child partners was either born in México or born to parents from México). Here I leveraged my cultural intuition (Delgado, 1998), *el espíritu Chicano*, to provide an opportunity for the children to connect with ancestral knowledge and to feel proud to be *Mexicanas y Mexicanos*. The pedagogical innovation that I operationalized expanded Lema’s presentation by presenting the children’s illustrations from their journals alongside actual biophilic structures in México, both historical and modern-day, to illustrate their ancestral knowledge that emerged in their drawings (see Figures 10 and 11 below).

Excerpt 15

- (1) Me: Did you know you are architects? (*reading the first slide*)
- (2) Child 1: no
- (3) Child 2: no


- (4) Child 3: Yes
- (5) Child 2: **n:o**
- (6) Me: Do you know why you are all architects?
- (7) Child 1: no

I then read the first sentence on the next slide.

Excerpt 16

- (1) Me: Mexicanos have been architects for thousands of years | Raise your hand if you are Mexicano *(all of their hands go up instantly)*
- (2)
- (3) V: I am Mexican-American *(he says proudly)*
- (4) G: Me too!
- (5) Me: Your ancestors | *antepasados* | are relatives | *parientes* | who lived a long time ago in México *(I continue reading the slide)*
- (6)
- (7) V: No wonder I like LEGOS so much.
- (8) S: Mexicanos today are amazing architects | So | are | you. *(He continued reading the rest of the slide without prompting. I smiled at him)*
- (9)

Figure 10. Mexican biophilic presentation



**Mexicanos** have been architects for thousands of years.

Your ancestors/*antepasados* are relatives/*parientes* who lived a long time ago in México, they were amazing architects. Mexicanos today are amazing architects. So are you.

As we continued to the next slide, the conversation and excitement grew, captured by “Oohs” and “Ahhs.” Angel exclaimed “that’s the one I was talking about!” The children began naming what they saw and as they did Lema gave them the technical language.

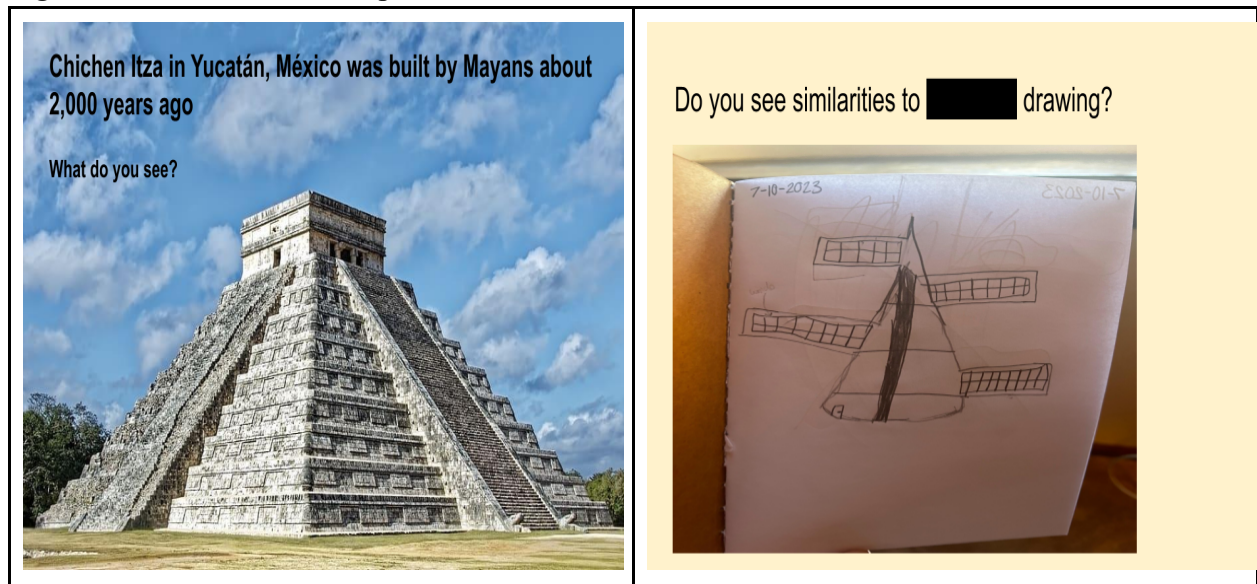
Excerpt 17

- (1) V: I see something that looks like an x
- (2) L: Yeah | if you look from the top | that's called a plan view | anything from the top is a plan.
- (3)

I then continued to the next slide and asked, “Do you see the similarities to Mili’s design?”




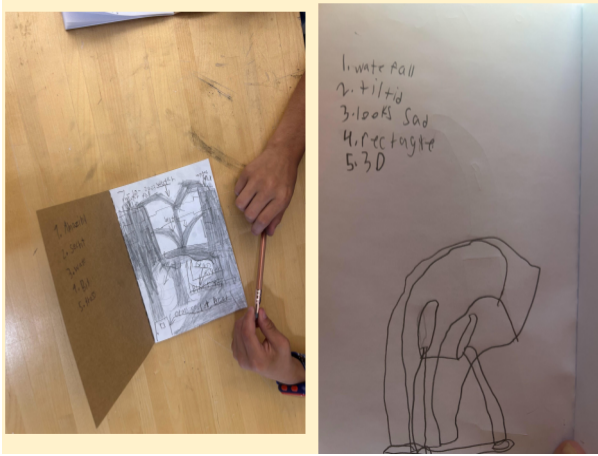
Someone yelled out “Wait, yeah!”

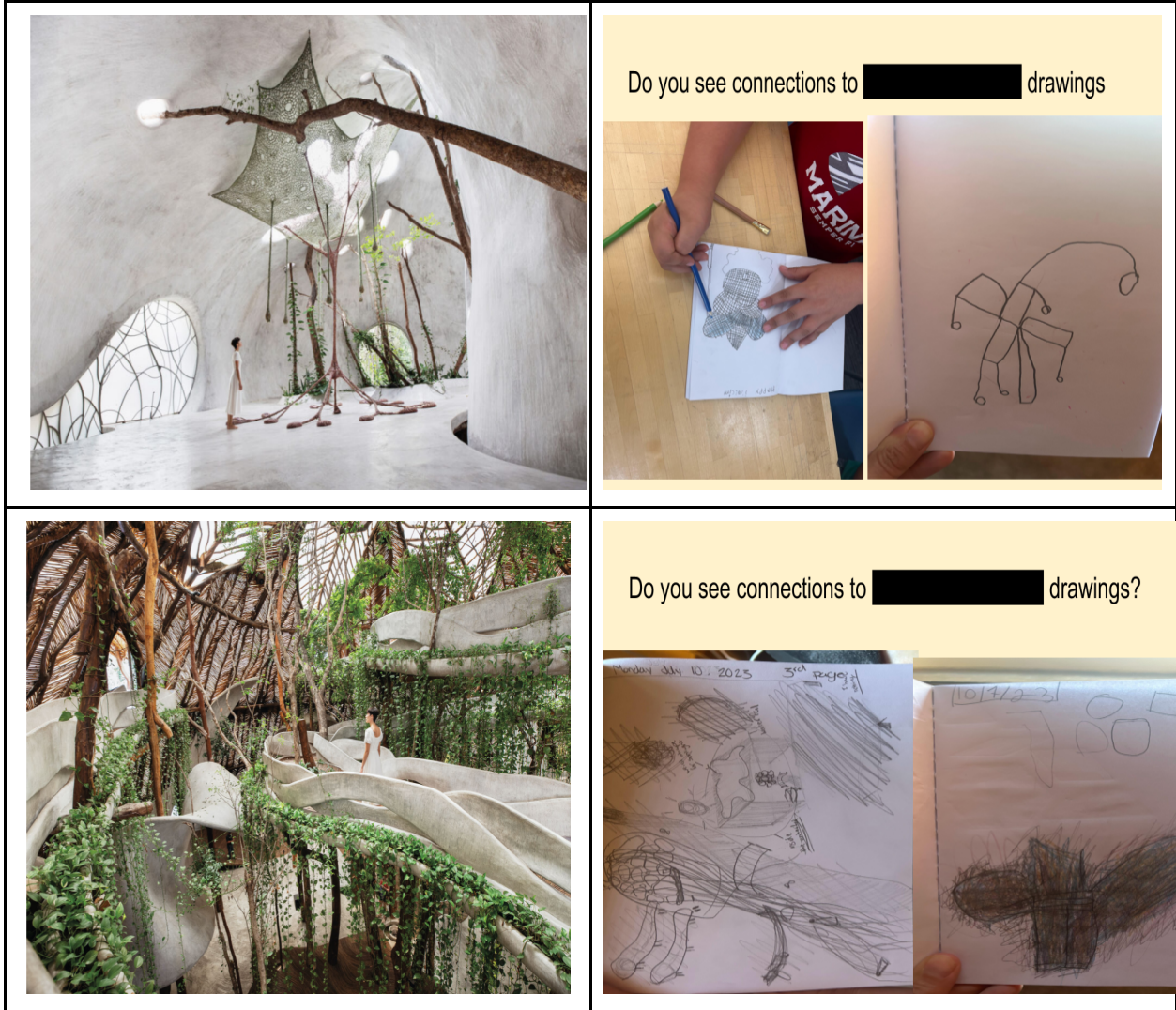
Figure 11. Mili’s sketch compared to Chichen Itza



We continued through the slideshow comparing each child’s drawing to actual structures in México, both historical and modern, focusing on the ancestral knowledge each child leveraged when designing their structures.

Figure 12. The children's sketches compared to actual structures in México

<p>More ancient Mayan architecture and sculptures. What do you see?</p> 	<p>Do you see connections to [redacted] drawings?</p> 
<p>Mexicanos design biophilia in many places today.</p> 	<p>Do you see connections to [redacted] drawings?</p> 

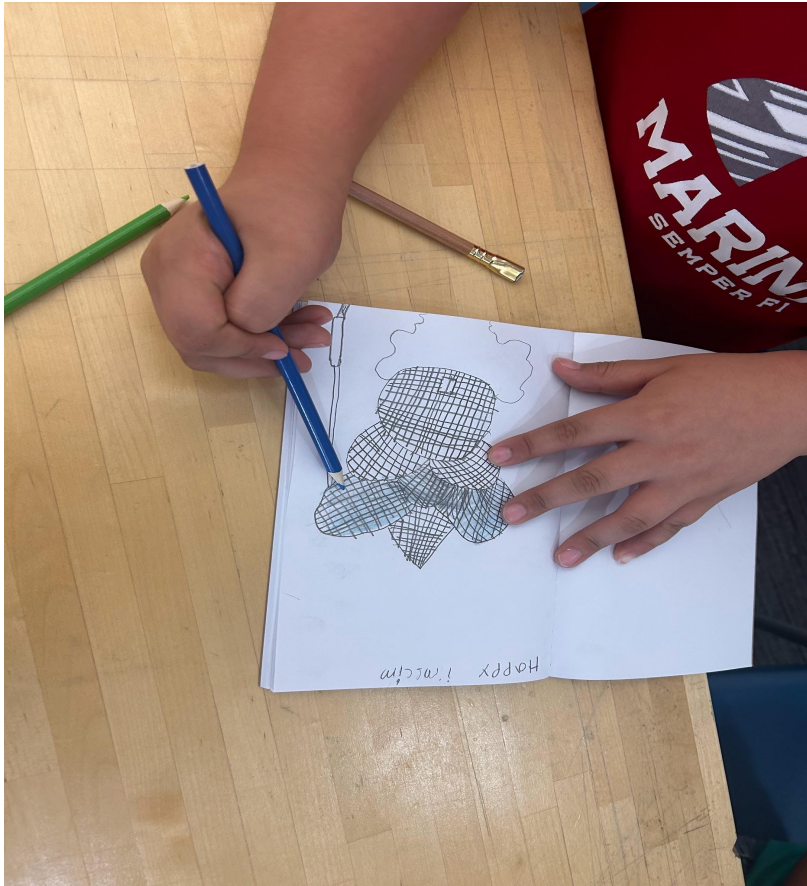


When we arrived at Santiago's drawing, shown in both Figures 12 and 13, I asked him if he chose curved lines or straight lines. He said, "curved." Then Lema explained:

Excerpt 18

- (1) L: You created textures within each layer | do you see that | you made a difference
- (2) between each shape | and that's how a lot of designers basically design

Figure 13. Santiago's textured design



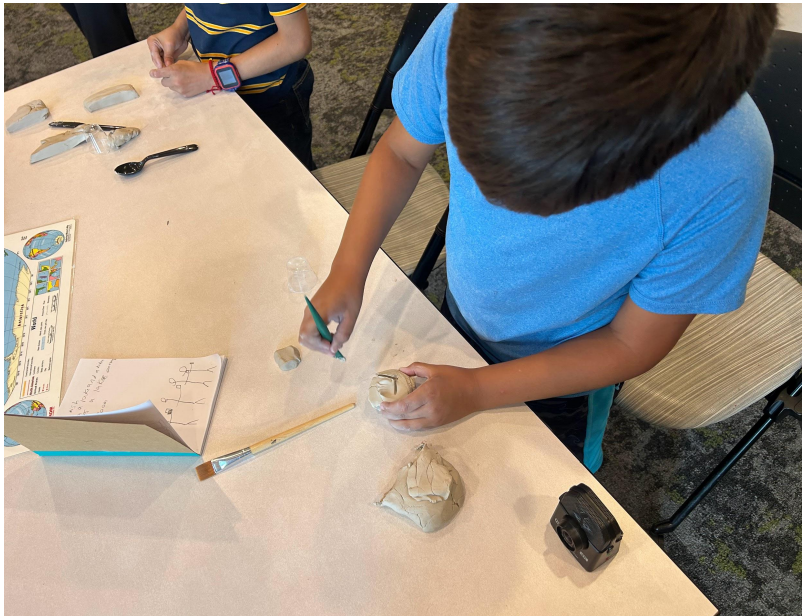
After we recognized their drawings as having historical and ancestral influence, we returned to the questions Lema had proposed the day before:

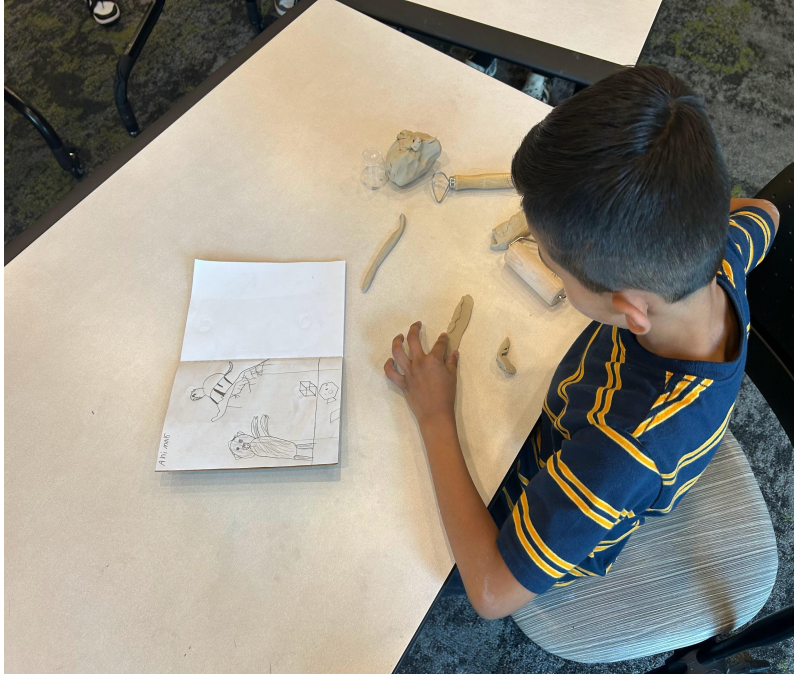
- 1) What's a cool shape you want to go in?
- 2) Imagine yourself inside a cool building, what would it look like?
- 3) What do you want your class to look like?

We explained they had ten minutes to continue their drawings or to begin a new drawing, then we would start sculpting with molding clay. When the ten-minute timer alarmed, no one was ready to sculpt. They expressed a desire to continue their drawings. I thought they would be eager to work with the molding clay, which I'm sure they were however, their concentration silenced the room. I wondered if they were connecting to and leveraging their ancestral knowledge as they designed. We then gave them more time.

While the children worked on their drawings, Lema prepared the molding clay in manageable squares. She then walked around to each of them with the clay and tools when they decided that they were ready to start molding. Once the children had their molding clay and tools, it took a moment for them to ease into the workspace of creation. Many rolled the large squares into balls, pounding them on the table. Lema and I walked around giving suggestions or asking questions individually to assist them in a starting place. Then a shift happened, a concentrated silence once again filled our space as children sculpted their ideas. There was intention behind their every movement, and the tools began to serve a purpose. In Figure 14, we see Miguel, Angel, and Hector sculpting, intently using their tools with their journal opened to their drawings.

Figure 14. Angel, Hector and Miguel sculpting





The children expressed a need for several of the sculpting tools, but we only had one set of each, so Lema guided them in practices of compromise with the tools.

#### Excerpt 19

- (1) L: do you guys prefer rotating or switching materials
- (2) A: switching because then what happens if you rotate something that you need
- (3) M: or something that you don't need
- (4) L: true | ok | um | what's something that you want from his materials that you can
- (5) switch off the roller with when you finish with the roller
- (6) A: the brush and that
- (7) M: el otro

After Lema supported Angel and Miguel in finding a strategy for sharing and compromising, they continued switching materials by vocalizing when they needed a tool, offering another tool to the other. Although the children were working on individual creations and structures, a synergy began which manifested into an ensemble of compromise and support. Their hands, eyes and minds were engaged in purposeful creativity as they sculpted and activated

their imaginations. Before we knew it, we began to run up against time, but rather than panic, Lema decided to give a push to the discomfort by explaining, “some things remain unfinished.”

Instead of prioritizing a finished product, we asked the children what would complete their sculptures if they were not yet complete. The silent working continued. Lema then pressed “Who feels close to done?” We approached Santiago. Although he expressed, he was not finished, he was ready to talk about his sculpture. Lema asked him, “If you were to learn in this shape that you created, why would you like to learn here?” He responded, “To know a lot about nature.” Santiago had sculpted a heart shape with trees, water, and skylights. In fact, many of the children sculpted their inspired classrooms and learning spaces within nature. Mili’s structure was an actual tree, Espe created an entire classroom outside, a peaceful place because in school, she feels “trapped” (Content Log#3, July 12, 2023). Angel continued to sculpt his classroom as part of the natural world with a river running through his curved structure. Integrating biophilia was not a requirement but the offering of an idea for possibility that many of the children took up as a central feature of their design. The alchemy of the linguistic-interactional phenomena of social dreaming, inspirations from biophilia, and the leveraging of ancestral knowledge enabled imaginations to fly like birds being set free from aviary.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The metaphor is inspired by my mentor, Dr. Manuel Espinoza. In his dissertation (2008), he writes, “Too often, however, the experiencing and appropriation of concepts in school like settings can be likened to the flight of a bird in an aviary—a poor simulation of flying in the wild, barely enough space to flap one’s wings, scarcely enough to soar.”

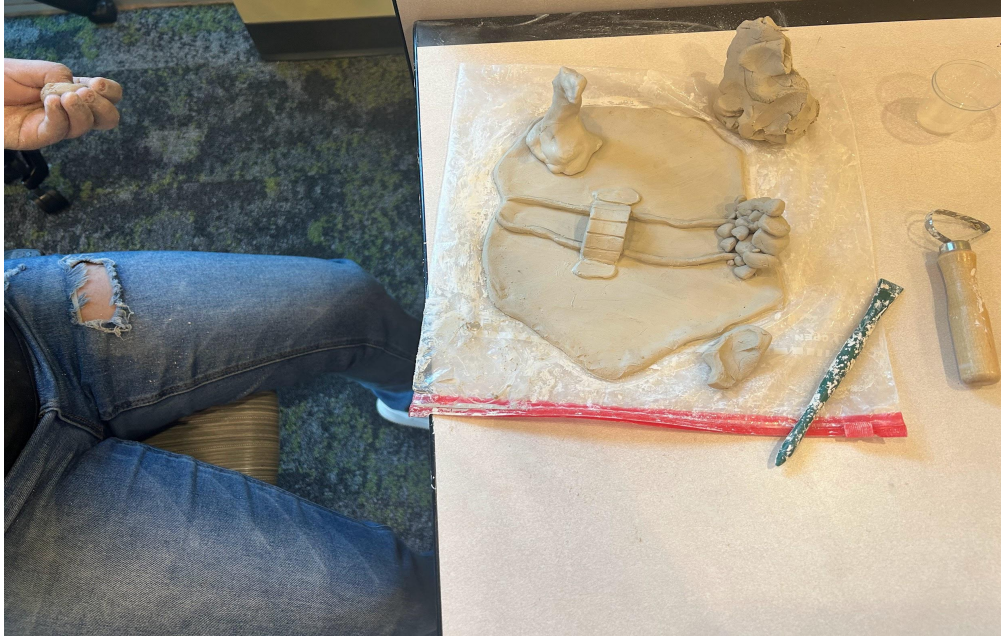
Figure 15. The children’s biophilic designs for learning spaces



Mili’s tree sculpture



Santiago’s heart with trees and water



Espe's classroom in nature

### **Designing for Collective Discovery: Turning on the Light**

The third week focused on leveraging the children's ingenuity by intentionally designing for the opportunity to discover on their own. This pedagogical intention was an effort to express trust in their capabilities. As a provocation, I used engineering kits for children, which included a collection of circuits to invent various projects. Instead of giving the children the directions on how to build the circuits or how to create a step-by-step invention provided in the kit, I showed them a tiny little light and asked them how we might turn it on. Several children said batteries, wires, and energy. Vicente said, "ferrofluid" (Content Log #5, July 17, 2023). I had never heard of this before and asked him to tell us more. He explained, "It's like when there is magnetic fluid with tiny nanoparticles inside." Completely amazed, I asked where he had learned about ferrofluid and nanoparticles. He shrugged his shoulders and then said, "YouTube." Vicente is a child who has always been inquisitive with a thirst to learn about how things are made. YouTube has been one of his many tools to mediate his learning outside of school. School has created many struggles for Vicente. Reading and writing have not come easily to him, consequently, he

has been categorized by deficit labels—labels that do not illuminate his brilliance, curiosity, and his incredible ability to remember complex concepts.

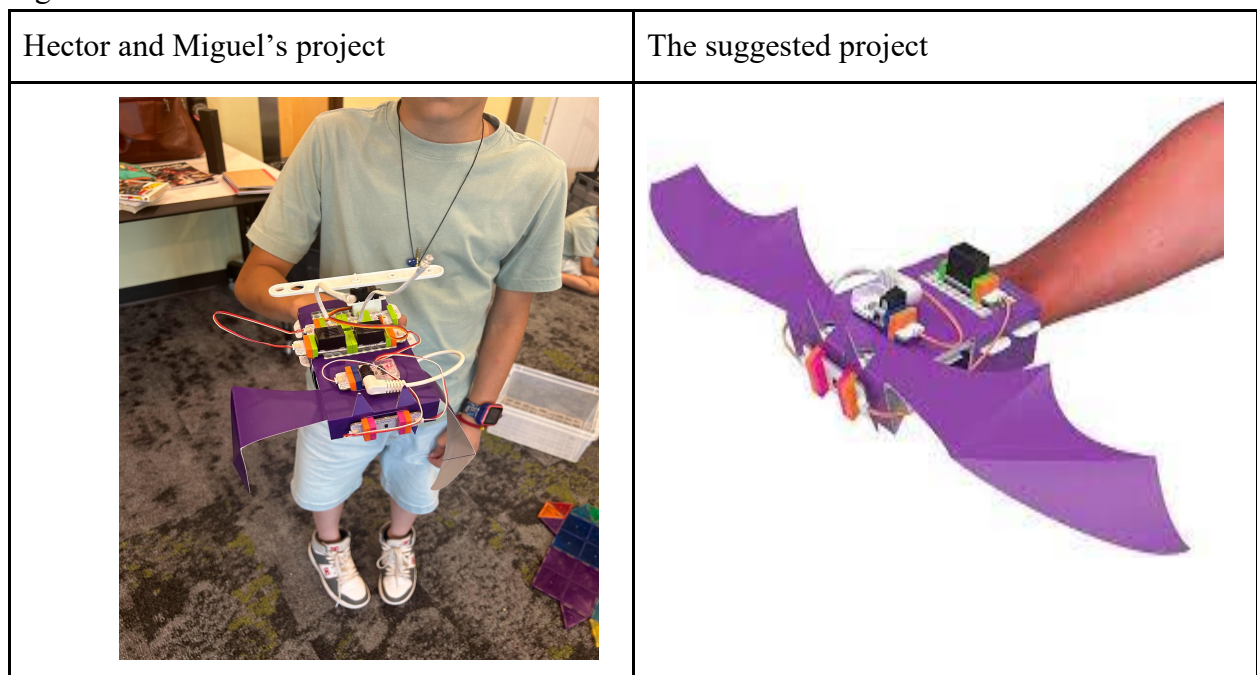
Once the children were settled at the tables with their partners and kits, they began exploring and playing with the pieces. Vicente was immediately determined to figure out how to turn the light on. His brother, Gustavo, sat next to him chatting away and then handed him a power cord to which Vicente responded, “Oh thank you. I needed this.” It was as if Gustavo knew. Ten seconds later, Vicente succeeded in turning the light on. He gasped, looked up and said in an airy exclamation, “Miss!” I responded, “Oh what did you figure out?” Vicente exclaimed, “How to work the light!” I then asked him to explain to us the steps he took and the parts he used. Explaining step-by-step how he discovered how to turn on the light, Vicente radiated with confidence. I wondered what school could be like for Vicente if he had more opportunities to share his discoveries and his rich and complex understanding of concepts such as nanoparticles in ferrofluid.

Figure 16. Vicente’s discovery



The choice to not give the children the directions, but rather the opportunity to discover on their own manifested a new kind of orientation to learning which I will analyze in the next chapter. However, to paint the picture, after each discovery i.e., figuring out how a piece moves, or how a piece makes a sound, etc., the children would get up and move to learn from the child that had made the discovery transcending that discovery to the collective. This collective discovery was contingent upon the freedom of movement so that they could learn from one another. This also created excitement and collaboration resulting in expansive learning opportunities (Engeström & Sannino, 2017). For example, Hector and Miguel asked to create the image on the box (a suggested invention). They used my computer to follow the step-by-step directions on YouTube. Once they completed the project, they did not stop, but rather, they enhanced their project by adding lights, additional sound gadgets and a propeller (see Figure 17). I wondered if the time given for exploration and collective discovery inspired their creativity and expansion of the suggested projects.

Figure 17.



## Designing for Process and Possibility

To explain the intention behind the plan for the rocks and mineral workshop day, I'd like to return to Vicente's interview. I had asked Vicente to tell me about a time he learned at school.

Excerpt 20

- (1) V: Oh yeah | volcanoes  
(2) Me: Tell me about it  
(3) V: Volcanoes came from molten magma from the earth  
(4) Me: Oh | Where'd you learn about that? In third grade?  
(5) V: Yeah.  
(6) Me: Tell me | Tell me more about that  
(7) V: It's just melted rock | And then if it's like really hot | and there's too much  
(8) pressure | **boom** | It comes out of a volcano | until it cools down | I forgot the stone  
(9) of it | but it's cool

Vicente explained that after learning about volcanoes, lava, and rocks in school, he went home to inquire more on YouTube. He enthusiastically told me that titanium is the strongest metal on earth exclaiming, "it's stronger than bullets!" Vicente was not the only child who mentioned learning about rocks in third grade. Bea had also mentioned that it was one thing she enjoyed learning. Since they both expressed an interest in rocks and crystals, I decided to check out rock and mineral kits from the Colorado School of Mines Museum of Earth Science. Each kit had a set of rocks, minerals and crystals with tools to explore. They also came with suggested lesson plans which I decided not to utilize and instead, just like with the engineering kits, I introduced the lesson with a provocation. I explained to the children that I needed their help in identifying the rocks in the kits. I gave each pair of children a kit and spread-out books on the tables. I asked each pair to choose one or two rocks of their choice. After they chose their rocks, I encouraged them to research their rocks in the books, so that they could teach us about them. This pedagogical decision was to also express trust in their capability of researching and teaching us just like they had with the little light bulbs in the engineering kits. However, as the day unfolded

and after several iterations of reflection since this day, I wondered how I could have presented the minerals and rocks kits in a way that invited more creativity and exploration. I also wondered if I had given them enough structure to conduct the research. Nevertheless, this workshop day proved to be the most perplexing and difficult for me, because it did not work out the way I had anticipated.

All but Angel expressed excitement to explore their rock kits. Rather, Angel confessed, “I don’t like rocks. We already learned about them” (Field note #7, July 13th, 2023). Immediately the others carried their kits to the tables, then opened the kits and used magnifying glasses to explore each rock carefully. Angel wandered to the table with the engineering kits. He was absent the day we explored them and expressed a desire to work with it instead. He took an engineering kit to the table and began investigating each piece carefully. Santiago looked up from his rock kit and immediately asked if he could work with Angel instead. I said yes, and I also wondered what it means when children feel they must ask for permission to choose something different instead of the proposed activity or lesson.

While Santiago explored the engineering kits with Angel, his brother Dylan was left alone with the rocks and mineral kit. I asked if he wanted to explore together and be my partner. He said yes and brought his rock kit over. The following twenty minutes felt as engaging as the workshop with the engineering kits. We were testing rocks on paper to see which ones left a mark and using magnifying glasses to identify transparent crystals. We also tried to match rocks to pictures in books to identify their name and type of rock e.g., igneous, metamorphic, etc. Initially, my suggestion was that they pick a rock to research and then teach the rest of us about that rock. Although the children were excited to explore the rocks, it was short lived. Their interests quickly shifted to returning to other materials such as LEGOS, molding clay and the

engineering kits. I asked if anyone was ready and willing to share what they learned about their rocks, but no one took me up on the offer. Instead, they abandoned the rock activity altogether. At this moment, I felt I had a choice—to move with the movement of the group or to reinforce the initial activity. I chose to remain flexible, and I followed the children.

In the end, all the children chose to return to molding clay and Little Bits kits. After reflection, I wondered if the reason was in the possibility or constraints the children found in the materials. Shea (2022) found that material possibility invites the imagination because of the potential in the material. Perhaps I did not present the material in a way that invited possibility and the children found constraint in the structure of the provocation.

When the children switched to molding clay, however, there was no proposed purpose behind the sculpting but rather the children decided their own purpose. The two youngest children, Dylan, and Gustavo, set up a working space together. They decided to sculpt people. The room fell quiet, and everyone was focused. Trying to understand what was happening and what the children's choices were communicating, I started to ask questions. While we conversed, they all remained focused on their sculptures.

I asked Gustavo and Dylan about how they felt about reading and writing in the workshop. I asked this because part of the rocks and mineral activity included reading about the rocks. Gustavo said, "it's too hard," he continued, "it's hard to think and read." I asked, "what are we doing in the workshop right now?" Gustavo responded, "we are doing clay and LEGOS, and even some (inaudible)." I asked if they are creating things and using their imaginations. They responded "yes." I asked if that is learning? Once again, they automatically responded "yes," but I'm unsure if these were automatic responses to a teacher to pacify her.

I then turned around to see what was happening at the table behind me. I found that the molding clay activity had turned into an experiment to see what happens if one keeps adding water. Before I knew it, molding clay streams were running off the table onto the carpet and chairs in the rented library room. Children's hands were covered in sloppy molding clay mud. As they ran to the bathroom to wash their hands, small handprints were left on the doors and walls. It was an exhausting effort to clean up that day as we wiped down walls, chairs, and carpet. Because of the mess, we ran a little late that day, so the children helped me pack up the wagon and roll it to my car. As we were packing up my car, the children spotted a large bin of marbles inside. Angel asked what it was for. I explained that my husband had given it to me as an optional material for our workshop, but I just hadn't thought about how to use them yet. Angel then proposed that we make marble runs in our next workshop. Bea and Santiago agreed enthusiastically (Field note #3, July 10, 2023). My plan for the last week was to have an open workshop (documented in Figure 5 above) where the children could continue to expand on their projects of choice i.e., molding clay and building materials, the engineering kits, and rock kits. However, since the children proposed the marble run idea, I decided to follow their lead. Now I realize that they saw possibility in the material (Shea, 2022).

This workshop day felt like it fell apart. I'm still unsure if the rock activity just did not have enough structure. My teacher's perspective thought perhaps I needed a graphic organizer to collect specific information about each rock, and perhaps I should have reviewed those lesson plans that came with the kits. Perhaps the activity was too much like school. Gustavo expressed that reading and writing felt hard. The rock activity did include finding information in books and possible writing. Perhaps I could have given them support in collecting the information instead of setting them off to explore. Nevertheless, re-mediating our learning experiences included

doing things differently, and the activity was quite like schooling practices. Perhaps this was the resistance. What left me perplexed was how could I help the child partners reconceive their relationship to reading and writing? Albeit I tried to remain flexible by following the children's lead and taking up their idea for marble runs which proved to be a generative learning experience for us all.

### **Designing for Process: Some Things Remain Incomplete**

The last week of the workshop focused completely on the construction of the marble runs. I collected an array of materials and then showed the children examples of marble runs I found online. I suggested that they consult with their partners on the choice of materials first, and then they could begin collecting once they decided what they needed. Immediately everyone wanted foam noodles, so Angel leveraged his dividing skills that he had learned from his dad and brother to assist us.

Excerpt 21

- (1) Me: Can we divide the noodles into three groups?
- (2) A: wait | three groups and how many noodles are there | *Angel and Miguel begin counting the noodles and arrive at 26*
- (3) *counting the noodles and arrive at 26*
- (4) Me: I think there are actually thirty | so | what's thirty divided by three
- (5) A: **ten**

Angel expressed in his pre-interview that he desired to share his division expertise in his third-grade class which was left unfulfilled. But in our workshop, the opportunity surfaced as he helped organize and create a structure of equality and material distribution. After collecting their ten noodles, the children hurried to their chosen corners and began immediately collaborating. Mili and Bea began setting up right in front of the camera. Although the camera in front of them captured their movements and the development of their marble run, I could not hear their dialogical interactions which were soft and succinct whispers. So, I reviewed the smaller camera

that was placed near them on the table, I could then hear more clearly the communicative system they had co-created.

#### Excerpt 22

- (1) B: *(moves the camera on the table towards their marble run)*
- (2) Me: Cinco más minutos mis amores (five more minutes my loves)
- (3) M: **N:o**
- (4) B: Oh MH luego como **así** (oh Mili later like this) *(Bea walks to where Mili is sitting on the floor. Instead of taking the foam noodle that Mili has in her hand, she demonstrates with another foam noodle showing her where to tape it on the board)*
- (5)
- (6)
- (7)
- (8) M: Ah **así?** (like this?)
- (9) B: Es más fácil / Sí así (it's easier / yes like that)
- (10) M: *(moves the piece and cuts a new piece of tape)*
- (11) M: **así?** (like this?)
- (12) B: Sí *(skips over to Mili on the carpet)*
- (13) M: tienes cita? (do you have tape)
- (14) B: *(grabs the tape on the floor, sits next to Mili cutting small pieces of tape and handing them to Mili)*
- (15)

Figure 18. Bea demonstrating for Mili



Bea assisting Mili



On two occasions this day, Bea moved the cameras to capture their action. First, she asked if she could move the larger camera so that it captured everyone. She explained that Santiago and Dylan were not visible after she checked by looking through the camera. Then in the above interaction, she moved the smaller camera to face her and Mili's work. The above interaction illustrated in Figure 18 captures Bea's supportive guidance as she demonstrates for Mili instead of taking over (line 4). Children's expressions are not only verbal but are also captured in their actions, interactions, and movement. By taking the time not only to listen to the children but to also watch their ways of interacting, communicating, and moving helped me understand their ingenuity and sophistication (Rogoff, 2018).

Just like the day Lema guided us through using molding clay to create their desired learning spaces, the children were not finished with their projects when our time was ending. I

reminded them of this, and how Lema had taught us “some things remain incomplete.” What did we learn from the incompleteness? Perhaps we learned to treasure the process—evidenced in the readjustment of a camera and in the emergence of communicative and collaborative practices. Process represented possibility (Valsiner, 1997). Through the mutuality of co-construction and social dreaming, the children worked feverishly towards actualizing their imagined marble runs but remained within the possible as it expanded with each idea and collaboration. Here is where capabilities develop—within the ever-expanding possibility.

### **What if Children were Free?**

Our summer workshop felt incomplete as it came to an end on our last day. We all desired to continue. I collected a questionnaire from the mothers asking if they would like to continue the workshop during the school year once a month, next summer, or if they would like to end their workshop experience here. Every mother chose to continue throughout the school year and next summer. In our last circle time, I asked the children what they desired. Angel expressed, “workshop, four times a week.” Hector asked if we could have a workshop with water. Ever since designing biophilic spaces, the children expressed a desire to work with and near water.

For our closing circle, I decided to read aloud a book in Spanish called *Y Si* by Sarah Perry (in English *If*), which also reminded me of Lema and a question she posed to Angel, “what *if* everyone came together and said I want a beautiful place to learn.” The book choice was inspired by a project I participated in as a graduate research assistant led by Dr. Adriana Alvarez. She had chosen this text to read with a group of sixth graders to provoke their imagination and to dream of possible futures. After reading the book, I offered one last provocation by asking the children, “*Y si las escuelas . . .*”, or “And *if* the schools...”

Excerpt 23

- (1) S: fueran **cool** (were cool)  
(2) H: fueran divertidas (were fun)  
(3) A: fueran de agua (were made of water)  
(4) S: if it rained out | we could go outside  
(5) B: we could do whatever we wanted  
(6) Me: **Oh** | what if kids were free  
(7) H: **Yeah**  
(8) B: **Yes**  
(9) M: se quedan afuera (they'd stay outside)  
(10) Me: Did you feel free in workshop?  
(11) B: yeah  
(12) Me: why?  
(13) B: we could do whatever we wanted

I have been reflecting for some time on the meaning of “free time” and “doing whatever they wanted.” We had a structure in our workshop with planned activities, although not as structured as my daily lessons as a teacher. This was in part due to the desire to harbor space for the children’s ideas, perspectives, and choice in the development of the workshop. Did having a say in the decision-making, and having their ideas and perspectives taken seriously feel like they could “do whatever they wanted?” Consequently, did the intention to consult and include their ideas and perspectives cultivate a sense of their dignity and a feeling of freedom? Is freedom and the right to learn where children’s identities and ideas serve as valuable contributions to the design of learning? Is the right to learn valuing the process and transformation over an outcome? Espinoza et al (2020) explain that a fundamental right to education is “composed of an armamentarium of capabilities or exercisable social powers such as plying one’s imagination or forging empathetic relations with others” (p. 20). As I watched Bea carefully demonstrating and encouraging Mili’s work, their imaginations worked in tandem to co-create complexity—two free human beings realizing their intellectual capabilities in the emergence and incompleteness of possibility. At this moment, I saw the Bea I knew in kindergarten.

CHAPTER VI  
*LA PERSISTENCIA / PERSISTENCE*

**Meaningful Participation: Expressions of Dignity**

In the previous chapter, I took us on a journey through the evolution of the co-designed workshop, beginning with the impetus. As I went back in time and reviewed the individual pre-interviews as well as a chronological review of the video data, I hoped to understand, from a second-hand perspective, the evolution of our co-created learning community. From the interviews and the expressions of the children in our workshop, I identified five equivalent expressions of dignity articulated by the children. Equivalent expressions were identified in the children's expressed desires for learning and how they participated in the workshop. These expressions included a safe space to share their stories, to feel visible by contributing to the collective learning and by sharing their expertise, the opportunity to contribute to the greater good of their communities, to experience free time as the freedom to move, to choose, to be curious and to express oneself, and finally, to learn together. All these expressions led me to one conclusion—the children desired and deserved to meaningfully participate in their learning communities.

Espinoza and colleagues (2020) define meaningful participation as the “unambiguous effective involvement in socially vital activities structured by dialogic social relations” (p. 2). They explain that cultivating an environment that affirms one's dignity and one's right to learn, affirms one's participation rights. Examples given include having a say in decision-making and exercising one's voice. As the children expressed the desire to be seen, heard, and contributors to the community, I realized that I had to reconceive my role as a facilitator of the workshop to ensure this experience and affirm their participation rights. My question was then, how could I

recognize that the children were exercising their participation rights and experiencing a sense of their dignity?

I have come to understand learning as fundamentally cultural, and how people participate in culturally constructed activity is essential to understanding how we learn and grow as human beings (Lee et al, 2020; Lee, 2017; Nasir, 2012; Pea, 1987, 2004; Rogoff, 2003). In this vein, learning is the transformative process of becoming—a constant process of development across participation in varying ecologies. Dimensions of participation include dialogical sequences, the roles we take up, and physical arrangements (Nystrand, 1997; Rupert Herrenkohl & Guerrero, 1998; Polman, 2004; Rogoff, 2016). Therefore, I, too, was in the process of transformation while in pursuit of understanding my role in co-constructing an ecology where education dignity is made possible.

Calabrese Barton and Tan (2020) found that when teachers commit to youth and children in acts that challenge and transform participation, re-authoring rights to children and youth as valuable contributors are made possible. This orientation, they assert, is integral to what it means to learn. Did we accomplish this? Did we challenge and transform participation, and therefore reauthor the right to learn to the children by cultivating an ecology where they felt free to exercise their participation rights? These questions, I hoped, would help guide me in analyzing how the children experienced our co-designed workshop, and if I could see the *light*—the evidence of educational dignity.

### **Educational Dignity and Developing New Consciousness as Historical Actors**

Prior research on the empirical observation of the experience of educational dignity was found when 1) learners' minds were taken seriously by elders and peers, 2) substantive intellectual engagement found expression through efforts to understand the meaning perspective

of participants, 3) “recursive pedagogical looping” involved archiving and returning to participants’ concerns, 4) disagreement was treated as an opening for collective growth, and 5) poetic talk and interaction generated a sense of community and solidarity (Espinoza et al, 2020). The authors observed these enactments by closely listening and analyzing audio transcripts from voter education workshops at the Highlander Folk School in 1962 and audio-video recordings of a Migrant Student Leadership Institute at UCLA. I closely listened and watched 54 hours of audio and video data of the evolution of our workshop, an ecology we co-created via our collective dreaming of something different than school as we knew it.

After several iterations of observing the video data, I began to identify moments where participation began to shift in new ways. When Gutiérrez and colleagues (2019) identified shifts in participation, they described this transformation as a process of *becoming historical actors*. The concept of historical actors (Espinoza, 2003) discusses how transformative agency manifests as youth re-organize participation structures in part due to the oppressive practices and structures that do not feel good to them—in our case, the structures of schooling and classroom practices that subordinate and silence children. This has been evidenced in how youth negotiate and push against power structures and resist local and historical socio-political inequities. In the authors’ examples of becoming historical actors, the youth were young adults and budding teenagers. In my study, children as young as five years old demonstrated this process of developing *new* consciousness as historical actors. *New* is italicized here to emphasize that as human beings living political lives, including young children, we are all historical actors taking action in our daily lives while also navigating social injustices. The *new* describes how through collective dialogical processing and the cultivation of interdependent learning, the young children developed new ways of participating in the re-mediated culture we were co-constructing.

In this chapter, I consulted with the indicia of becoming a historical actor put forth by Gutiérrez and colleagues (2019) to structure and explain the sequence of transformation of participation. The indicia included 1) feeling and experiencing a double bind which will be defined below, 2) a breach in the social order, 3) cycles of social experimentation, and 4) the object of activity is expanded (Gutiérrez et al., 2019, p. 293-294). To understand and analyze how the child partners participated and found new ways of orienting themselves as historical actors in the workshop, I began a process of content logging the video and audio data. This process included documenting the actions and interactions of all participants in the videos. Following this process, I reviewed the content logs and identified the way the children participated that became cultural practices in our newly constructed ecology. Practice in this sense is described as “actions taken habitually” (Erickson, 2004) which I later analyzed. A first notable way of participating was evidenced in the way the children shared their stories which opened the dialogue to identify a dilemma, a structural political daily struggle for the children when in school, and then collectively, we set out to re-imagine and co-create something new. While viewing the data, I also identified “hot-spots” or moments to return to for analysis in a second-by-second process (Jordan & Henderson, 1995). Through this process, I uncovered examples of not only the children’s development of becoming historical actors but also how they enacted new and innovative ways of demonstrating that consciousness.

### **Identifying the Double Bind: The Contradictions of Oppressive and Subordinating Practices**

Bea is a deeply intuitive child who identified a *double bind* when she was in third grade. Double binds occur “when individuals face unacceptable alternatives in an activity system,” inciting internal feelings of contradictions (Meléndez, 2019). These internal contradictions were

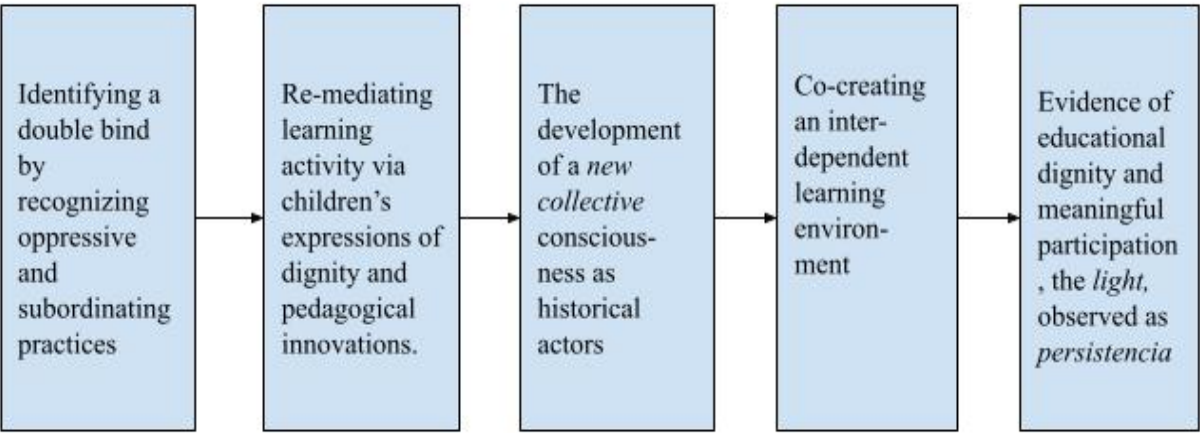
described in the treatment she endured by a “mean teacher” (Content log #2, July 10, 2023). The subordinating and oppressive practices that Bea and the other children expressed are perpetuated in the classroom but are also sustained at the systems level of schooling (Meléndez, 2019; Engeström & Sannino, 2011). I felt similar contradictions as their kindergarten teacher when I was required to implement assembly line instruction as described by Rogoff (1994), also known as a banking model of teaching and learning; a familiar structure where teachers deposit prescribed curriculum into students as though they do not possess valuable knowledge systems (Freire, 1970). These structures position children as intellectually inferior, which is a violation to their dignity, intellectual capacity, and knowledge systems. After reading *Perceiving Learning Anew: Social Interaction, Dignity, and Educational Rights* (Espinoza & Vossoughi, 2014), the summer before the child partners began kindergarten, my new understanding of human dignity intensified these contradictions I wrestled with daily. I began to find myself in a daily double bind of what was required of me as a teacher in a public school system, and what I began to understand children deserved as dignity-bearing human beings.

In our workshop, the identification of the double bind occurred in our first circle time in the slow shake of Angel’s head when he disagreed with the comment that we learn when teachers tell us what to do (see previous chapter in Excerpt 1, lines 9-10). As documented in his interview, Angel was critical of teachers using power to silence and subordinate him. He emphasized that teachers should abide by the golden rule and treat children with the same respect that they expect (Excerpt 9). Finally, his description of school feeling like jail (Excerpt 1, line 12) provided the tangible language that described the dilemma of how children experienced school, which was in contradiction to what they desired and deserved as human beings. This then served as the catalyst to re-imagine what learning could be. It provided opportunities for us to

collectively dream, imagine, and ultimately create an environment where the children felt free, as described by Bea on the last day of the workshop (Excerpt 23, lines 10-13). Gutiérrez and colleagues (2019) explain that identifying the problems and dilemmas manifests “productive problem-solving practices” and “actions driven by individuals’ interests in collectively enhancing their life circumstances” (p. 293). These problems and dilemmas in school were not small problems but consequential to the educational trajectory of the child partners. The social construct of schooling practices that continually subordinate and marginalize immigrant children is their political struggle. How the children re-oriented towards learning was both political and liberating from the experiences of being in school for just four years.

Figure 19 illustrates the sequence of transformation over the course of the month-long co-designed workshop with the child partners. The first day of our workshop, the children collectively identified a double bind when they shared their individual stories of educational harm, and they began to identify the hurtful moments in school that violated their dignity. From there, we intentionally made collective decisions on what practices we would re-mediate in pursuit of a kind of learning the children desired—one in concert with their dignity. The process of re-mediation enabled the development of a new collective consciousness of becoming historical actors as students began to express their desires, perspectives, and ideas freely and frequently via hybrid heteroglossic practice leveraging their full linguistic repertoires (Gutiérrez et al, 1995; Blackledge & Creese, 2014). Ultimately, I witnessed a transformation empirically observed by what I have described as *persistencia*, the children’s uninhibited persistent effort manifested from interdependent learning and collaboration (Valsiner, 1997; Alcalá et al, 2018).

Figure 19. The sequence of transformation throughout the workshop



**Developing of a New Consciousness as Historical Actors: A Breach in the Social Order**

The children’s collective identification of the double bind, their experiences of indignities in school, was a catalyst to our re-imagining of a learning environment they desired. This re-imagining or re-mediation, we found, evoked what Gutiérrez and colleagues describe as *a breach in the social order* or “where individuals or the collective challenge the status quo and normative practices.” The normative practices they identified were the systemic injustices that are perpetuated within classrooms down to the micro-interactional moments of control of students by teachers (Calabrese Barton & Tan, 2020). Teacher-dominated discourse in classrooms as a normative practice is often observable when teachers control the conversation and participation of children, like Angel, who are left waiting for their moment to share their knowledge on the margins (Jurow & Creighton, 2005).

I knew we had to do things differently, however, I was unsure how to approach re-mediating in the moment—did I trust myself to make the right improvisational moves in the moment? Documented throughout the content logs, I observed my own pedagogical

improvisations in relation to the memos I had recorded after each workshop. I identified a consistent commitment to the children having a voice in decision-making. With this pedagogical innovation—involving the children in decision-making—I began to see a shift in our conversational practices. For example, teacher-dominated discourse as the social norm was challenged on our first day. Documented below, I capture the first and last circle time, illustrating through transcripts how we move from a dyadic discourse between myself and one child at a time to a heteroglossic (multi-voiced) community of fluid and frequent expressions of thought, opinion, and experience.

### **Should We Raise Our Hands or Just Talk?**

I was so nervous on the first day of our summer workshop. I felt unprepared without my meticulous lesson plans with a learning target, success criteria, and an expected outcome to be later evaluated by sorting children's work in piles of who met the standard and who didn't (Field Note #2, July 3rd, 2023). This wasn't what I wanted for the children, and yet I felt as though I was failing them without a minute-by-minute plan. In contrast to my past practice, I had created a much more flexible workshop overview (Figure 5 in the previous chapter) beginning with circle time, where I would ask the children prescribed questions to elicit their ideas, perspectives, and reflections. Loosely planned activities provided a shell to our summer workshop based on the articulated interests of the children and their desire for "free time." Erickson (2011) explains that this loose structure leaves space for the possibility of joint improvisation, which, to me, feels like a dance—a dance with children. Our improvisational dance evolved each day, manifesting new ways of participating, interacting, engaging, and moving, sometimes as a collective, sometimes as a duet, and sometimes as soloists, but always interdependent.

With the intention of setting a precedence of equality and decentering my role, I joined the children on the floor for our first circle time, just like I had in kindergarten. I prepared four questions to initiate our first conversation:

- Why are we here?
- What does it mean to learn?
- What is light?
- What do we need to learn?

These questions were to inquire the children's understanding of why we had come together to co-create our workshop, to understand their conceptualization of learning and if that had a connection to their definition of light. As we began our first conversational dance together, immediately traditional schooling practices took shape after I posed the first question, and the children began raising their hands.

Figure 20. First circle time formation



Excerpt 24

- (1) Me: Why are we here? (*Vicente raises his hand*) That's a question | should we raise
- (2) our hands or just talk?
- (3) V: Talk | it's for something

- (4) Me: mmmm (*smiling and looking at Vicente*)  
(5) V: i:t's for  
(6) B: So you could learn (*she says softly*)  
(7) Me: So, I could **learn**? And who else?  
(8) B: (*shrugs her shoulders*)  
(9) Me: So **I** could learn? (*looking right into Bea's eyes, smiling and nodding*)  
(10) B: We  
(11) Me: So **we** could learn? (*looking right into Bea's eyes who is sitting next to me and smiling*)  
(12) B: yeah  
(13) Me: yeah | but what **kind** of learning?  
(14) V: (*raises his hand*)  
(15) Me: Go ahead and just talk Vicente  
(16) V: Um | designing stuff  
(17) Me: Designing stuff (*Looking at Vicente, smiling and nodding*)  
(18) V: Yeah  
(19) Me: Yeah (*smiling and nodding*)

The back-and-forth dance between myself and the children presented as a traditional IRE classroom conversation where a teacher “initiates” a question, a student “replies”, and then the teacher “evaluates” the response (Mehan, 1978; Cazden, 2001). However, my intention was to initiate a process of re-mediating this power structure. For example, my pre-scribed questions did not have a “correct” answer, but rather I was eliciting the children’s insights and perspectives while also attempting to position myself as a learner. Another enactment towards re-mediation is evidenced when I asked the question, “That’s a question | should we raise our hands or just talk?” (lines 1-2) when the children began raising their hands. Vicente quickly responded, “talk” (line 3). Bea then shared without raising her hand, “So you could learn” (line 6), indicating that she knew that I was also learning from our workshop. Then, Vicente raises his hand again (line 15) even though he had made the decision that it was not what he wanted to do, illustrating that these habits are not easy to change. I responded, “Go ahead and just talk, Vicente” (line 16). This

moment felt like we were tiptoeing slowly in the dark together towards something, cautiously, and yet with curiosity and excitement.

Another improvisational move towards re-mediation was found in my responses to the children. For example, instead of evaluating or giving feedback to what the children said, I responded by what Michaels, O’Conner and Richards (1996) describe as re-voicing (lines 11-12, line 18) or restating what the children had said and giving them the opportunity to agree or disagree with the rephrasing. These improvisational moments were not planned, of course, but were enacted with the intention to harvest the children’s perspectives and to give them an opportunity to contribute to the co-creation of our environment. I did not know in real time what pedagogical moves to enact to re-mediate our IRE conversation. I just hoped to re-organize conversations that felt more aligned with what the children needed; space to share freely, to feel validated, and regarded as valuable contributors. I could not predict what this social experimentation of conversation would evolve into, but I knew it was necessary based on Angel’s interview discussed in the previous chapter. He expressed frustration and feelings of invisibility when he had to wait for his teacher to call on him just to be overlooked (Excerpt 9, lines 6-7). These improvisational moments and attempts to re-mediate conversation, I now recognize as a breach in the social order beginning with me taking the first step by asking if the children wanted to raise their hands or just talk—an enactment of commitment to equality and to human dignity.

### ***Y Si: And If Children Could Express Themselves Freely?***

The final analysis of our last circle time conversation, the day we closed with the read-aloud *Y Si* by Sarah Perry, I captured a multi-voiced conversational practice that emerged over time, evidenced in the overlapping talk indicating two or more children speaking at the same

time (Erickson, 2004). It is also an example of a breach in the social order to the traditional IRE classroom conversations because the children’s curiosities, connections, and opinions are guiding the conversation rather than the traditional teacher-controlled conversation and the practice of raising hands (Gutierrez et al, 2019). When I reviewed the content logs for circle time, it was documented that the children were still raising their hands on the second and third days of the workshop. However, in the “Noticing” column where I documented patterns in participation, I saw an increase in children expressing themselves “freely” by day four. I also saw an increase in my asking for their perspectives and reflections. Children no longer raised their hands and just began to share their thoughts. Here is an example of our last conversation.

Figure 21. Last circle time formation



Excerpt 26

- (1) Me: Y si los sapos comi:e:ran arco iris (And if frogs could eat rainbows)
- (2) [B: Oh on Wednesdays / on Wednesdays there were sapos and
- (3) M: Si
- (4) D: **No / No co:men** (they don't eat them)]
- (5) [B: they were in my cousin's house
- (6) M: (*explaining something in a soft voice to Dylan, his hands extended toward the*

- (7) *book*]
- (8) [H: yesterday (*says softly*)
- (9) B: the one's at my mom's work]
- (10) Me: Big ones or little ones (*looking at Bea smiling while Dylan is shaking his head at*
- (11) *Miguel*)
- (10) B: small ones
- (11) [Me: What Hector? *Looking back at Hector*
- (12) B: I call it sapo]
- (13) H: it was yesterday (*he says softly*)
- (14) Me: **Huh?**
- (15) H: it was yesterday
- (16) [Me: it was yesterday (*smiling at Hector while I'm turning the page*)
- (17) A: Y si los perros fueran montañas (and if dogs were mountains)]
- (18) Me: Gracias, Angel (*smiling at Angel*)
- (19) A: it looks like that one's drinking water
- (20) [B: oh yeah
- (21) H: (*comments but I am unable to hear him*)]
- (22) M: Oh yeah the first one (*gets up to point to the page*)

The shift from the first circle time conversation to the last circle time can be observed in the multivoiced expressions occurring simultaneously, illustrated with brackets in the above transcript (lines 2-4). After reading the page about frogs eating rainbows (Line 1), overlapping talk is illustrated when Bea, Miguel, and Dylan are all speaking at the same time but having different conversations. In a traditional classroom conversation, overlapping talk is often considered interrupting, as only one speaker at a time is typically allowed to speak (Erickson, 1996). However, these multiple conversations can be seen when Bea brings in a personal connection to seeing *sapos* or frogs on Wednesday (line 2) because it had rained. Meanwhile, Miguel and Dylan are arguing whether it is possible for frogs to eat rainbows (lines 3-4). In just a few seconds time, a child shares a personal experience, and two children express opposing opinions. All conversation was provoked by the text and not the teacher.

The emergence of a co-created heteroglossic (multivoiced) community provided children the opportunity to share freely what the specific page in the text brought to their mind. This is different from what Erickson (2004) describes as “turn sharks,” where children wait for the designated speaker to miss the expected timing to speak, and the “turn shark” strikes by calling out the teacher’s name or the expected answer to snatch the moment. Our heteroglossic community was not to get my attention or to answer a question. Rather, Bea was making a personal connection to the text (line 5), Miguel and Dylan continued their disagreement about frogs eating rainbows (lines 6-7), and then Hector entered the conversation to explain to Bea that Wednesday was just yesterday (line 8). In this heteroglossic conversation, I witnessed sharing a connection, expressing an opinion, or disagreement, and explaining within a three-second window. Then, as I turned the page, the rhythm shifted to the next expected moment, where the teacher typically reads the page aloud. However, Angel entered and read the page aloud for us “*si los perros fueran montañas*” (line 17). The teacher turning the page in the social organization of a read-aloud would indicate she is going to read the next page, whereas in our community that day, Angel stepped in to read while I was still listening to Hector’s explanation. In this co-created environment, Angel was acting as what Erickson (1996) defines as a “turn dolphin” where he entered to help and support the learning, rather than a “turn shark” and snatching the moment. By doing this, Angel kept the reading and conversation in its rhythmic pattern.

In our re-mediated circle time and conversation, the child partners did not raise their hands or wait for permission to speak. We re-mediated this practice on Day 1. However, the rhythm of reading aloud a text kept the conversations about the text moving even in the absence of the teacher controlling the conversation. The breach in the social order and social experimentation of re-mediating classroom conversation created opportunities for the children to

express themselves freely and frequently. As captured in Excerpt 26, the children were fully engrossed in conversation about the text. For example, after Angel read the page for us (line 17), and then made a comment about the illustration (line 19). Miguel agreed with Angel and then got up to point to where Angel referred to in the illustration (line 22). Throughout all preceding video data, Miguel's voice was one of the quietest. However, in this newly organized conversation structure, Miguel expressed an opinion, argued, and explained all within a one-minute conversation—evidence of how his participation transformed over time.

At the end of this transcript, Hector muttered a comment after Angel made his observation (line 21). I was unable to hear what Hector said, however, he sat next to Angel, who very well might have been his intended audience. Here the children did not share to respond to a teacher-initiated question in search of the right answer. Rather, they discussed their thoughts, opinions, and observations of the text. They engaged one another in intellectual conversation by expressing themselves freely—evidence of how their participation transformed as they developed a *new* consciousness as historical actors.

### **Learning to Understand Children's Expressions and Recognize Their Development of a *New* Consciousness as a Historical Actor**

The development of a *new* consciousness as a historical actor was evidenced in the children's practice dialogical participation of freely and fluidly expressing themselves. This was observed in the content logs when the children expressed curiosity, their emotions, desires, experiences, discovery, enacting choice, skepticism, and affection. The day of the rock and mineral exploration when Angel expressed, "I don't like rocks. We already learned about them" (Field note #7, July 20th, 2023), I knew it was a consequential moment even though internally I was totally uncomfortable in the moment. His response to the rock activity illustrated how, as a teacher, I was unsure how to respond. Below I describe giving him a choice.

In Angel's interview he conveyed that he felt invisible in 3rd grade because his teacher would teach things he already knew and he would finish work early, but she would never allow him to share his knowledge or challenge him further if he was bored. So, I decided to give him two options. I explained that he could support Bea and Mili in identifying their rocks and share his knowledge with them, or he could begin working with the engineering kits. He chose the engineering kits (Field note #7, p.2, July 20th, 2023).

Now when I read this, I find that my language still asserts power portraying how multilayered this reflection process can be. The above memo is a reflection as well as this moment when reading the memo. I wonder how I could have responded as a facilitator of learning and not as someone who gives Angel choices. Perhaps I could have said, “What do you prefer today, Angel?” or “What is your curiosity calling to you?” Would these responses be more aligned to reauthoring his rights as a capable learner? While reviewing the video data from our first circle time, I found what might have led to this moment and Angel’s honest expression.

Excerpt 27

- (1) Me: let’s have free time for about an hour and then let’s come back and talk about how  
(2) that went | what do you think?  
(3) C1: Yeah  
(4) C2: good  
(5) Me: and you’ll be honest with me and say this part was great Ms. Chavez | this  
(6) part was not so great Ms. Chavez | Angel | you’ll be honest  
(7) A: Yeah | I’m really honest | but I wasn’t honest with Ms. (teacher’s name from third  
(8) grade)  
(9) Me: Can you be honest with me?  
(10) A: *nodding his head yes and smiling at me*  
(11) Me: You can be honest with me | ok | Should we go play?  
(12) C: **Yeah** *the children all yell in unison*

After discovering this interaction, I finally understood Angel’s feedback the day of the rock activity. In my memo, I wrote, “he resisted the activity.” Now I understand that it was an honest expression, just as I had encouraged. We set up our environment to do things differently from school, which the children took up enthusiastically. However, I was the one struggling to

transform my role and participation, as evidenced in my interpretation that Angel had resisted the activity. On the contrary, he was being honest, and exhibiting his newly developed consciousness as an historical actor. I understand now that Angel's reaction was also a breach to the social order of my plan and expectation of how the children would participate in the activity. As the children were brought into the decision-making throughout the workshop, it also opened opportunities for them to freely express themselves demonstrating the development of their *new* consciousness. In this case, it was honest feedback on the planned activity. He did not want to do it. To take this feedback and respond was difficult on my part. In the memo, I continued, "Now sifting through these struggles as they surface in workshop, I am learning a new way of being. It is uncomfortable, terrifying, and emotional labor because it is *change*" (Memo #7, July 20, 2023). The breach in the social order enacted by the children as they developed this *new* consciousness evidenced in their expressions meant I had to learn *new* ways of understanding those expressions. I had to learn a new way of dancing.

### **The Manifestation of *Persistencia***

Manifestation of the children's development of a *new* consciousness as historical actors was documented in patterned ways of participating that emerged in the content logs. The most observed way of participating I documented I had labeled "persistence". According to *Oxford*<sup>9</sup>, the noun persistence is defined as "firm or obstinate continuance in a course of action in spite of difficulty or opposition." Not completely satisfied with this definition, I sought to find one in Spanish. In Uninorte<sup>10</sup>, I found *persistencia* defined as:

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<sup>9</sup> <https://premium.oxforddictionaries.com/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.uninorte.edu.co/en/web/jovenuninorte>

*“La fuerza y energía que nos empuja a esforzarnos para alcanzar nuestras metas, superando los obstáculos y las dificultades que se presentan en el camino, al tiempo que aprendemos de los errores cometidos.”*

Translated as “The strength and energy that pushes us to strive to achieve our goals, overcoming obstacles and difficulties that arise along the way, while learning from the mistakes made.”

This definition of *persistencia* provided the description of what I had been observing as a patterned way of participating. In the content logs, I documented *persistencia* when I observed the children demonstrating continual and uninhibited effort, seeking assistance from others and or material and technological resources, struggling but not stopping, and demonstrating careful attention to the task. *Persistencia* was documented most frequently during activity time and was especially prevalent at the end of each workshop. Initially, my intention was to have a closing circle for reflection at the end of each workshop, however, the child partners were so engrossed in activity, *persistencia* was documented due to their desire to continue working on their projects. Daily activity and projects never reached a point of completion as the child partners desired to extend and evolve their projects. Take for example, the day we initiated the marble run project, Bea and Mili immediately chose to work together. In my memo from this day, I wrote,

“Mili and Bea immediately took their board to the table and propped it up against the marble container. It appeared as though they were building to have a slant with varying runs. They worked quietly in concert. *Observe comment: I am also eager to review the recording of this collaboration. They work so quietly that it was difficult in all the business to take in what they were doing and how they collaborated*” (Field note #9, July 26, 2023).

There were two cameras capturing Mili and Bea as they fluidly collaborated. Alcalá and colleagues (2018) define fluid collaboration as an ensemble of mutuality by building on each other’s ideas, a fluidity of roles and flexible coordination. The main camera placed in front captured the entire room allowing me to see Mili and Bea’s fluid collaboration more clearly. A

smaller camera placed in closer proximity on a table behind their marble run allowed me to hear their dialogical interactions—their co-created communication system. In Excerpt 22, I captured the interaction between Mili, and Bea coded as *persistencia* when Mili and Bea continued to elaborate on their marble run despite time running out. As defined by *Oxford*, persistence is firm or obstinate continuance. Although obstinance can be interpreted negatively, obstinate continuance exhibits an internal desire to achieve or fulfill. Mili and Bea were demonstrating *persistencia* as continual and uninhibited effort as they struggled to construct a successful run and never gave up.

Child expressions were also documented when Mili responded to me with “N:o” (line 3) in response to my request for them to begin cleaning up. I interpreted this as an expression, because I sensed disappointment and a desire to continue. Also documented was collaboration illustrated when Bea gave Mili a suggestion on where to extend their marble run (line 4). Mili then confirmed with her to make sure she was understanding (line 5). The collaboration continued when Bea retrieved tape and began cutting it for Mili as she assembled the extension (line 11).

The concerted and fluid effort in the movement of hands was captured immediately when Bea and Mili first began their marble run. Figure 21 below shows Bea taping together the two noodles while Mili holds them together. This kind of partnership illustrates Rogoff’s description of sophisticated collaboration as one mind and four hands work in unison (2019), which served as the infrastructure for the development of their complex marble run. The evidence of a *new* consciousness as historical actors developed from the intersubjective illustrating their *persistencia*—a continual and uninhibited effort. Bea and Mili’s interpersonal collaboration also illustrated joy as Bea skipped joyfully from the top of the table down next to Mili. This joy, I

now see as Mili and Bea engaging in Vygotsky’s definition of play (1978). This encounter was not a fortuitous encounter, but rather a place where Mili and Bea learned to collaborate with each other, and where they had to exhibit self-control and coordination to continue to play out their ideas and roles they imagined for themselves.

Figure 22. Mili and Bea collaborating



*Persistencia* also manifested on the day we engaged with the engineering kits as the child partners created innovative and ingenious expansions of the intended activity (Gutierrez et al, 2019; Engeström, & Sannino, 2017; McDermott & Raley, 2011). I documented *persistencia* in the content logs when the children’s hands never stopped assembling for an hour and a half (Content log #7, July 26, 2023). Initially, I had designed for discovery amongst pairs. This intentionality left space for children to explore and discover how to work the circuits with their partners. The children once again demonstrated a *new* consciousness as historical actors by expanding the objective of the activity from learning to turn on the light to refiguring the purpose

of cultivating a culture of teaching and sharing with one another—an interdependent learning community.

### **The Physical Arrangement**

Also discussed in the previous chapter, the children first established an orientation towards communal learning illustrated in the way they physically arranged our learning environment. The children initiated the routine of setting up the tables in a square where chairs sat around the outside so that they could see one another and maintain conversation. In Figure 23, we see that I, too, was part of this arrangement.

Figure 23. My part in the configuration



As the children went to work with their partners at the tables after circle time, the physical arrangement enabled a shifting of roles as both teachers and learners. The face-to-face setup, also known as an “F-formation” by interaction analysts (Kendon, 2009), has been found to function as “part of the way participants in conversation preserve the integrity of their occasion of interaction” (p.1). As they observed someone make a discovery, another would express a desire to learn from them. The child who desired to learn would then stand up and walk to the child who made the discovery which will be discussed in depth below. The collective decision of

the physical arrangement was one of the first observations I made of the children's development of a *new* collective consciousness as historical actors and a breach to the social order. Kendon (2009) explains that arrangements also authorize different rights. For example, a teacher who holds a spatial orientation in the front of the classroom, and to whom the students are to give all their attention, illustrates a variance in rights. In the co-designed workshop, the children co-constructed the environment for their interactional needs, their learning needs, which re-authorized their rights as equal participants in the teaching and learning activity. The children's commitment to seeing one another to learn from one another was maintained in this shared inner space where they claimed what Calabrese Barton and Tan (2020) define as their rightfulness as valuable contributors to the learning. Within this inner space, they brought meaningfulness to the environment they were co-creating—a cultural environment of intersubjectivity—a shared system of meaning-making (Valsiner, 1997, 2000).

### **Can I Learn from You?: Leveraging Cultural Practices**

It began with a loud and startling buzzer sound. Everyone looked up with a startle with all eyes on Hector. I asked him to lift the pieces he had and to explain to us how he was able to make the sound. In Figure 24, you can see how the physical arrangement enabled everyone to see that the sound came from Hector. Santiago standing in the yellow shirt observes as Hector explains.

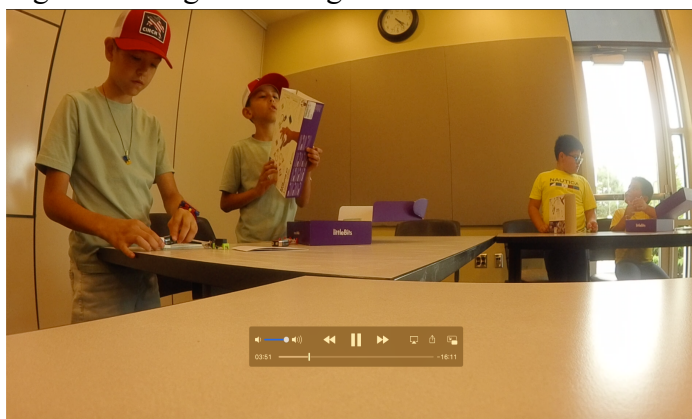
Figure 24. Santiago observing Hector



Hector explaining to the group how he produced the buzzer sound

As Hector described the pieces, he used to produce the buzzer sound, his brother, Miguel, who was always by his side, found the names of the pieces on the Little Bits box. In Figure 25, we can see Miguel reading the labels to Hector as Hector explained the process—an example of what Vygotsky (1978) calls “the zone of proximal development where a child can achieve just beyond their development with assistance. Here Miguel is assisting his brother dialogically by reading the technical terms of the circuits enabling Hector to explain clearly his step-by-step process.

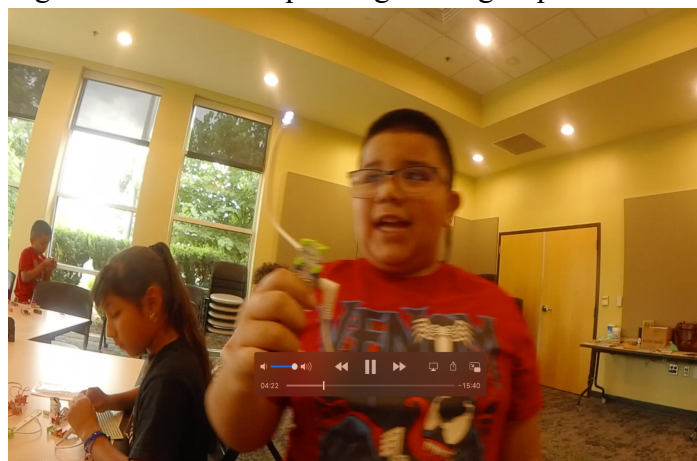
Figure 25. Miguel reading the labels to Hector



Miguel reading the names of the circuits to Hector

Within thirty seconds of Hector explaining the process of producing the buzzer sound, I heard “Miss” in an airy voice. Vicente had discovered how to turn on the light.

Figure 26. Vicente explaining to the group



Captured in Figure 26, we then see Vicente explaining to the group the circuits he used to turn on the light. He was so excited he jumped from his chair and walked to the front of the room.

#### Excerpt 28

- (1) V: ok | let me tell you the parts | you have to get one battery | then you  
(2) have to get one of these wires | connect them together  
(3) H: uhuh  
(4) V: and take this that has a little hole  
(5) Me: I think that’s the power bit | right?  
(6) V: yeah | its the power bit  
(7) Me: Yeah | that’s the power bit  
(8) D: Como lo hiciste? (*how did you make it*)  
(9) V: And then you can magnetically  
(10) Me: I’ll have him come show you | he’ll go over there *I was explaining to Dylan*  
(11) *A buzzer went off and everyone paused and looked at Bea.*  
(12) V: huh? *Vicente whips around smiling looking at Bea*  
(13) Me: Bea figured out the buzzer bit *smiling at Bea*  
(14) V: and you can do that | you just need two circuits *Vicente continues explaining how to make the light turn on*  
(15) *Vicente then walks over to teach Dylan how to turn on the light.*

As Vicente explained his process of figuring out how to turn on the light in Figure 27, Dylan

asked him how he did it when suddenly a buzzing sound went off as Bea had also discovered how to make the sound. This ignited a curiosity in Vicente as he had not yet discovered how to produce the buzzing sound. Therefore, after demonstrating to Dylan how to turn on the light, Vicente walked over to Bea and asked her to teach him how to make the buzzer sound (Figure 27).

Figure 27. Vicente explaining the process



Figure 28. Vicente whips around at the sound of the buzzer



One minute later, Hector looked up and said, “it’s moving,” in astonishment. He then lifted the circuit to show us how it was rotating. Vicente then walked over to him and said, “Wait, hey, can I, can I learn from you how to make the thing?” Hector responded, “yeah” and then explained, “you need to start with these” (Figure 29). He then sent Vicente off to collect all the circuits he

needed to make the rotating device function. Dylan, the youngest of the group, then walked over to observe (Figure 30).

Figure 29. Hector explaining to Vicente



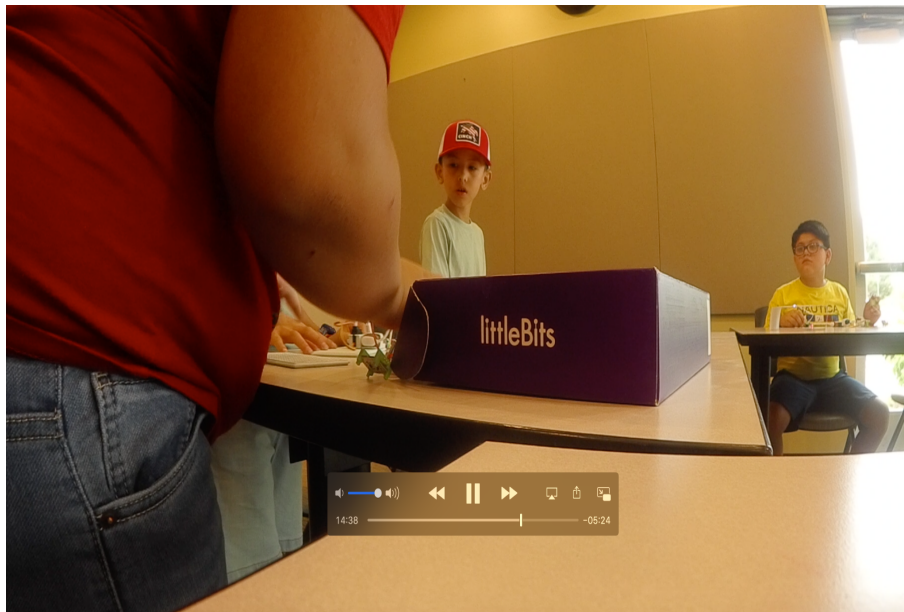
Figure 30. Dylan observing Hector and Miguel



Vicente walked back with the pieces Hector instructed him to get. Hector then explained step-by-step to Vicente on how to create the rotating device. Santiago can once again be seen watching from where he is sitting in Figure 31 illustrating how the physical arrangement that the children created provided the opportunity for interdependent learning. Minutes later, Santiago also had his

rotating circuit moving.

Figure 31. Santiago observing



Vicente then walked away to retrieve a few more pieces from his kit. Hector and Miguel's table quickly became the table where the others sought support. Dylan walked back over and stood next to Hector who placed his hand on Dylan's shoulder and asked him gently, "Qué necesitas tú?" or "what do you need?" (Figure 32). Dylan responded, "esto" and pointed to the pieces that Vicente had left on the table. Hector gently explained that they belonged to Vicente, so Dylan returned to his table to see if he could also find the pieces in his kit.

Figure 32. Hector places his hand on Dylan's shoulder



In the previous chapter, I discussed how Hector expressed a desire to be helpful—a cultural practice in his family. I connected this desire to his response when I asked him what he had learned recently at home in his interview. He explained how he likes to help his dad work on the truck by getting him the heavy tools he needs or by turning off the converter (Excerpt 11). Hector enacting those same embodied cultural practices when he assisted Dylan, a younger member of our learning community. In this instance, Hector is playing the role of his father by leveraging the assistance his father has given him to assist Dylan. I also observed that he adapted his direct assistance depending on the person. For example, when supporting Vicente, he gave verbal instructions in English, rarely demonstrating or placing his hands on Vicente's circuits, but just explaining verbally. However, when Dylan came to the table, he switched to Spanish, demonstrated for him, and instructed him to get pieces as he modeled how to put circuits together as captured in Figure 33. Hector's assistance illustrated what Vossoughi and colleagues (2020) call embodied pathways as his assistance transcended from relational histories from supporting his father. He leveraged this cultural practice to support his fellow collaborators which became consequential to our collective learning.

Figure 33. Hector demonstrating for Dylan as he observes



The intention behind the design of this day was to enact trust in the children’s capabilities. A trust in the process of discovering, exploring, and trial and error. This trust in their capability cultivated an ecology of interdependent heterogeneous learning—where children were both teacher and learner. Heterogeneity emerged when trust in their capabilities created opportunities for the children to leverage their cultural practices, which was consequential to the ecological development of our learning community (Alvarez, 2023; Rosebery et al, 2010).

*Persistencia* manifested in the interdependent collaboration (Alcala et al, 2018; Valsiner, 1997). Below in Figures 34 and 35, you can see how the brothers, Hector and Miguel, worked side-by-side in concert, their hands moving together in unison. They spoke so softly to one another that the cameras on the table did not capture their soft whispers. However, as I observed them, their hands indicated a fluidity of movement between roles as to who was guiding the work and who was assisting but always maintaining a role as they collaborated towards reaching their shared goal. For example, in Figure 34, Miguel on the right is leading with his hands. Then in Figure 35, Hector, on the left, steps in as Miguel begins to struggle. All four hands are still working and touching the circuits, but the leadership shifts fluidly. This “ethical perception,” as

described by Vossoughi and colleagues (2021), is embodied in the ways that Hector and Miguel's hands and eyes supported the “generative distribution of expertise, and the cultivation and experience of capability” (p. 2). This, I believe, is evidenced in their *persistencia* as their continual, uninhibited, and focused collaboration enabled them to learn how to assemble the circuits. Then, in turn, it enabled them to teach the others.

Figure 34. Miguel is leading in joint activity

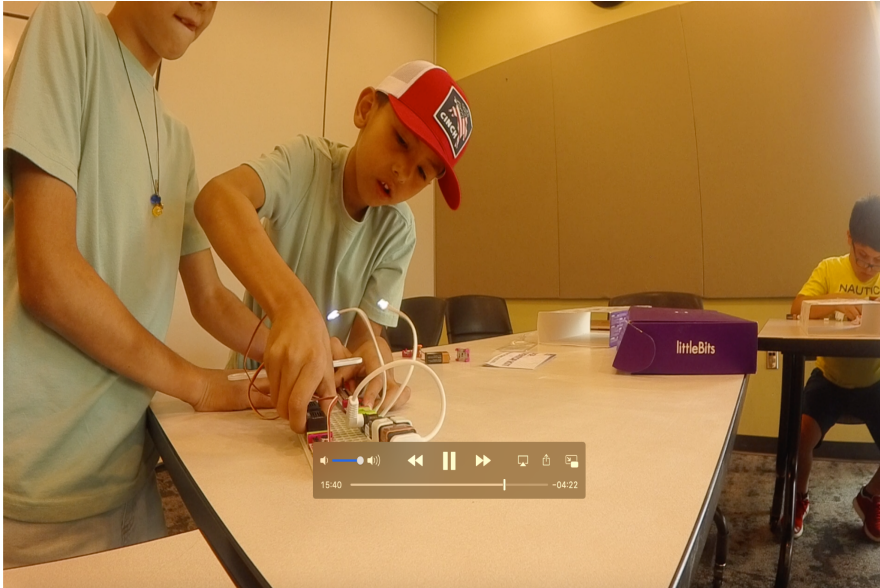
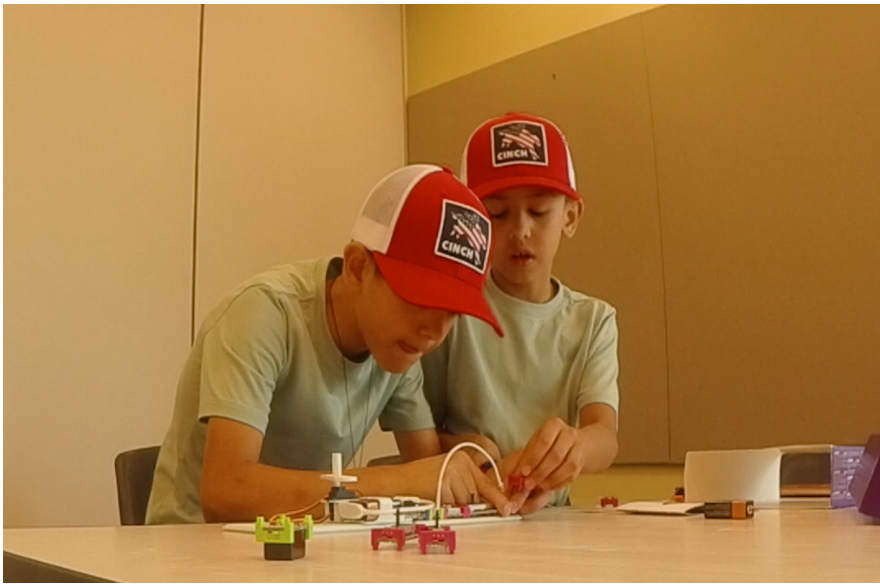


Figure 35. Hector steps in



The cultural practice of interdependent collaboration between two brothers was a salient component of the cultivation of *persistencia*—the continual and uninhibited effort towards shared goals. For example, as part of the marble run development, the children consistently tested their runs by sending a marble down their run to test its effectiveness. After testing, the children would then collaborate dialogically identifying the flaw in the run and discussing the plan to reassemble for the accomplishment of the marble reaching its target. It was a continual effort and an example of *persistencia* as the children never gave up until it was time to go home.

Figure 36. Dylan sending the marble down

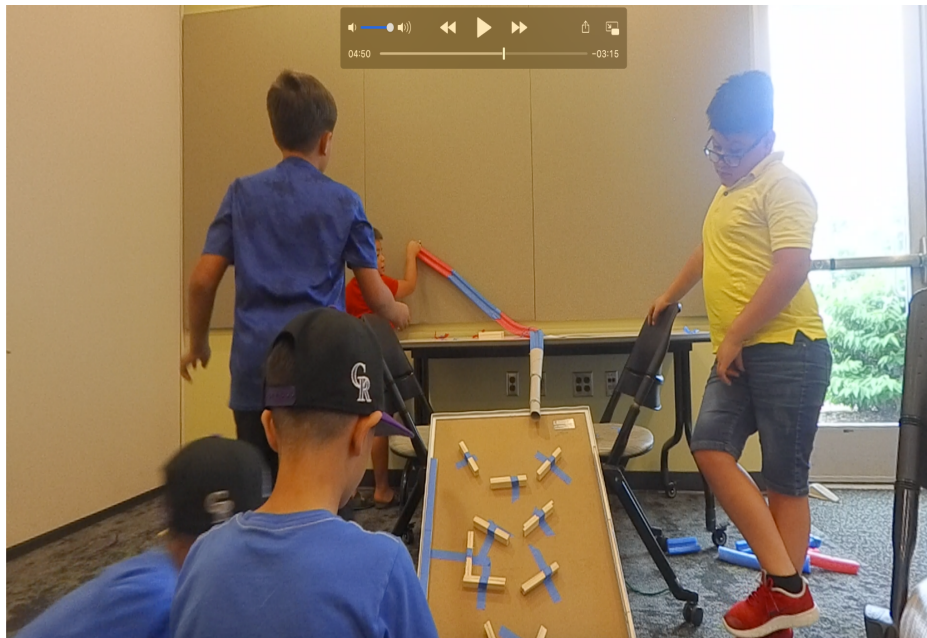


Figure 37. Miguel evaluating the run



Figures 36 and 37 illustrate how roles were taken up by younger members of our community as they were given the opportunity in having a role towards accomplishing the shared goal. The marble run constructed by Hector, Miguel and Angel can be seen in the above Figures. Dylan and Santiago then walked over to observe the final testing phase. In Figure 36, Angel gave Dylan, the youngest member, the honor of sending the marble down the run as a way of including his participation. After a missed shot into the cup and a bounce off the board, in Figure 37, Miguel then suggests the next step to readjusting the pieces of the marble run for a more accurate possibility. This process of collaborative designing, testing, evaluating, and readjusting were all part of the processes that manifested *persistencia*. This was made possible as the children collectively developed a new consciousness as historical actors by taking on active roles, transforming their participation as they moved freely throughout our learning ecology, expressing themselves fluidly and frequently, and leveraging their cultural and linguistic

practices to contribute to the shared goals.

### **Play and the Invitation of Materials**

The development of this new consciousness as historical actors began with the intentions to re-mediate the organization of learning by consulting the children's ideas, perspectives, and feedback. The re-organization of learning involved two components that I did not realize in the moment but discovered when observing the video corpus in relation to socio-cultural learning theories (Vygotsky, 1978; Rogoff, 1994; Vossoughi et al, 2020). These two components were 1). the role of play in the re-mediated ecology, and 2). the invitation of the material. As theorized by Vygotsky, children operationalize play to make meaning in imagined situations that are structured by rules within which they take up roles. These imagined situations also construct zones of proximal development where children can make their desired roles and identities realizable through play. The workshop days of the rock activity and the Little Bits engineering kits presented the materials in contrasting ways. For example, on the engineering day, the materials were presented as an invitation to play, explore and with expansive possibility. Whereas the rocks were presented in a research format to collect and report information on rocks. Although both have roles in learning, the gravitation to the Little Bits kits manifested *persistencia*, because it invited imagination.

I am still reflecting and learning from these two very different responses from the children. In the chapter that follows, I will discuss how my own development of a new consciousness as a historical actor in community with the child partners is a continual process. From their kindergarten teacher to the facilitator and co-designer of our workshop, I continue to learn to dance anew in coordination with children. Sometimes I stumble and step on their feet, and sometimes I understand the next step.

## CHAPTER VII

### CRITICAL REFLEXIVITY: A TEACHER'S REFLECTION

*Education is really a lifelong learning process – it is a permanent state of reflection, of critical thinking and self-correcting; it is thus a permanent process of self-education.*

- Liutauras Degėsys(2011)

How do you reconcile the contradictions of a system designed to educate children but not designed for the respect of their dignity? The current structure of schooling, created to uphold unjust power over the young lives in our classrooms (Freire, 1970; Vossoughi & Gutiérrez, 2016), became overwhelming and agonizing not only as a witness but also as a participant. I believe in the possibility of public education to uphold democratic ideals of equality and fundamental human rights, yet the current structure feels so contradictory to these ideals. In this study, I wanted to explore what the possibilities could be outside the confines of public schools and within a collective third space with my child partners. But first, I had to commit to reconceiving who I was in community with children, and what that means in interaction with them. How would I know if I was transforming and becoming who I needed to be for the child partners to experience their rights as dignity-bearing beings? How would I interrogate my own power that has the potential to silence and subordinate a child?

Leaving the classroom as a public-school teacher after nineteen years to study the phenomenon of human learning and human dignity has transformed me. Part of the idea behind the SDBE was to apply my learning of sociocultural learning theories and human dignity through a process of co-design and reflection with my child partners—a mediated praxis (Vossoughi & Gutierrez, 2010; Mendoza, 2014) that required feedback from the children, their ideas, and perspectives. My reflective processing in collaboration with children's feedback was when I

truly felt the transformation. Design Researcher Transformative Learning (DRTL) speaks to "the immersive nature" of Design Based Research because it:

“May also shape how researchers experience the notion of design knowledge (Kali, 2016). DRTL describes a series of ‘a-ha moments’ that enable design researchers to develop new conceptualizations of how they position themselves as actors within the situation, they are exploring” (Kali & Hoadley, 2020, p. 10).

These “aha” moments at times were uncomfortable, confusing, and other times joyful and breathtaking. It was and is a continual process of critical reflexivity contingent upon insights from children as I learn new ways of coordinating with them.

Video analysis enabled a more in-depth reflection when I returned to the indexed segments to capture the moment-to-moment unfolding of interaction between the children and myself (Paley, 1986). This process helped me to see the unconscious and internalized institutionalization within me. It was visible when I went back to observe my immediate reactions and documented interpretations of children’s actions. Iterative processes of viewing the video data in dialogue with my memos unveiled contradictions of what I thought I observed and what I saw happen when I looked closer, thus, contributing to my development of a new consciousness and transformative learning. SDBE as an approach “seeks a design process that strives to be a part of the process of fundamental social transformation” and “the development of consciousness” (Gutiérrez & Jurow, 2016, p. 566). What I found is that my transformation was contingent on the development of consciousness in relation with my child partners and through a practice of critical reflexivity. The iterative analysis of video data contributed to the continuance of developing consciousness via a practice of critical reflexivity. First, I analyzed two instances which included my interpretations of what happened in memos and in the content logs, and then a micro-analysis of what I observed in a second-by-second observation of video segments.

## Conflicted

*I remember you was conflicted, misusing your influence - Kendrick Lamar*

An example of critical reflexivity occurred when I returned to the indexed hot spots in the video data to look closer at the interactions where I had coded conflict. In the codebook (see Appendix B), conflict was coded when I observed antagonizing, excluding, physical aggression, tensions, ignoring, frustration, and arguing. I returned to specific indexed segments where I felt uneasy and perplexed about my reactions in the memos and the content logs. The first segment occurred on the second to the last day of the workshop. I was unaware of the interaction between the children and felt uneasy observing and documenting it in the content log. My initial response when I reviewed this interaction was that I wished I had been aware of the interaction, so that I could have intervened. I reviewed the moment in a second-by-second replay in four consecutive iterations documenting each child's movement, gesture, facial expression and verbal expression.

A natural history approach to inquiry and my own curiosity of how the moment unfolded guided my viewing (Erickson, 1982; Paley, 1986). The second-by-second replay was an attempt to understand my own mental processes when observing the children's interactions, and to confirm or disconfirm what I thought I observed. It began when five children (Angel, Hector, Miguel, Santiago and Dylan) approached Bea and Mili in what I documented as conflict in the form of antagonizing (content log #7, July 26, 2023). Here is a moment-by-moment unfolding of that interaction:

Excerpt 29

- (1) Miguel: ¿Para aquí porque está tan alto? (Right here, why is it so tall?) (*Miguel looks at Angel while asking B and laughs*)
- (2)
- (3) Bea: Porque **sí** (because it is)
- (4) Miguel: ¿Por qué no lo tiene aquí para que esté más alto? (Why don't you have it here so that it's even more tall?) (*Mili is smiling and looking at Miguel.*
- (5) *She starts to laugh too*)
- (6)

- (7) Angel: ¿Por qué está un hoyito allí? (Why is there a little hole there?)  
 (8) *touches the tube, it falls over and the four boys start laughing*  
 (9) Mili: **Ya don't move esa** *she is still smiling*  
 (10) *voice at Angel to not touch their run, Bea fixes the tube*  
 (11) *moves to observe the end of Mili and Bea's marble run*  
 (12) Miguel: ¿Por qué se va por aquí o por acá? (why does it go that way and this way?)  
 (13) *he says this looking at Angel who laughs*  
 (14) Miguel: ¿Por qué es así? (Why is it like that?) *He says this laughing, looking at*  
 (15) *Angel who is also laughing, Mili sits looking off with a frown on her face.*  
 (16) *Dylan stands in front of their marble run looking at it and laughing,*  
 (17) *Angel and Miguel walk away still laughing*  
 (18) Mili: No esta listo (It's not ready) *(she says in a soft voice meanwhile Bea is*  
 (19) *fixing the tube that Angel had knocked over. She looks at Marisol, smiles,*  
 (20) *and sends another marble down the run.*

I knew Bea and Mili had worked hard on their marble run, and, in my first viewing, Miguel appeared to be orchestrating a smear campaign against this effort, making fun of the intricate design while the bystanders laughed at his commentary and questions (Figure 38; lines 1-2 and lines 11-17). This is when I documented conflict. At first, Mili was laughing with the others (lines 5-6), but once Angel touched the tube and it fell, she yelled at him (indicated by the bold font) not to move it (line 9). She then sat patiently and listened with a frown on her face as they continued to question the design of the marble run (Figure 38; line 15). As the group of five walked away, she said softly “No está listo” or “it’s not ready” (line 18).

Figure 38. Miguel questioning the design

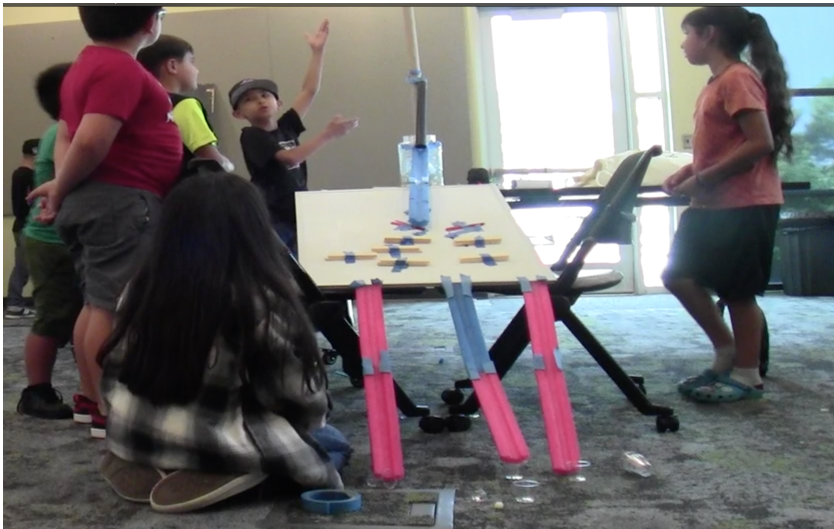


Figure 39. Mili frowns after Miguel questions the design and the others laugh



Figure 40. Bea and Mili continue to collaborate after the others walk away



If I had only reviewed the one camera which illustrated Figure 38, I would not have seen the interaction that followed. Bea looked at Mili, smiled, and sent a marble down the run playfully. Mili then returned to reassembling the three-track run at the end of their board, and Bea continued to send down marbles to test their design. This *persistencia*, as discussed in the previous chapter, was illustrated in their uninhibited and continual effort even though Miguel was questioning the design, and Angel had knocked over a part of the marble run. Mili and Bea found solidarity in the lock of their eyes, smiling at each other as they persisted in their collaboration (Figure 40, lines 19-20).

What I initially witnessed was what I thought was antagonizing, and I had wished I was aware of the interaction so that I could have intervened. However, in the moment-to-moment unfolding of the brief encounter, I saw Mili, and Bea unite as a collaborative duo reassuring one another through a lock of eyes and a smile. Through this process, I became skeptical of the lens through which I had been observing the videos during the content-logging phase. I wondered if I labeled these moments as conflict, because I was conflicted and felt uncomfortable. I wondered,

what was the root cause of my discomfort? And if this internal conflict was evidence of my unconscious socialization in schooling practices of control?

While reflecting on the above interaction, I was reminded of Rogoff's (2014) LOPI theory that children learn through community participation. She emphasizes that if there is no conflict there is no community because conflicts are opportunities for communal learning and growth (Petroni, 2020). Rogoff contrasts LOPI with assembly line instruction where the cultural practice of schooling entails teachers controlling both the learning and the students. Conflict is then mediated by classroom management practices in the form of rewards and punishments—practices that contribute to a cultural construct of schooling with which I am most familiar. Perhaps this is why I had a visceral reaction when observing Miguel's heckling and the frown on Mili's face. In a community of learners, however, children are free to explore and move, cultivating more opportunity for social interaction in all its forms (Rogoff, et al, 2001). This includes interactions that are often not allowed or even made possible within a classroom where children are controlled and given assigned seats.

In the above example, the five children walked over to Mili, and Bea's marble run freely. I was completely unaware of this interaction when it happened. I'm not sure how I would have responded if I had witnessed the interaction. Would I have intervened in some way that was not helpful, or even presumptuous or harmful? Did the children experience the interaction how I had interpreted it? I returned to the code book from the content logs to see if I saw a pattern when I documented conflict. I found that as the children developed new consciousness as historical actors and their participation transformed as the workshop evolved, I documented conflict more frequently. For example, when children argued or wrestled each other I labeled it conflict. Was it even conflict? Was I the one who was conflicted?

**Looking Closely to Understand**

This reflection reminded me of a situation that occurred on our first day of the workshop where I had intervened in what I thought was “conflict”. I went back into the content log to read what I had written on the first view of the incident in the content logs. Here is what I had documented:

Figure 41. Content log identifying conflict

Time	Activity
78:00-80:00	Dylan and Gustavo collect the balls in their shirts, Mili begins to collect them too. Dylan and Gustavo go to Mili’s structure and start placing balls in like her. Then they start throwing them until the structure collapses. Mili looks down. Me: "Mili did you say they could do that?" She doesn't respond so I ask again and she shakes her head yes but is quiet. I go and sit next to her to ask her again quietly. She just shakes her head. I ask Gustavo and Dylan if they asked her if they could break her structure and try to process with them to understand the situation.

Curious if I had captured this interaction in my memo, I went back and read what I had written that day and found that I had indeed written about it. Here is how I captured the incident in the memo:

She (Mili) went to the carpet to make another tower with the magnetic geometric colorful block. It looked almost complete when I noticed Gustavo and Dylan had another material, they were using to crash her creation. I went over to ask her if that was okay, and she turned her head down looking towards the floor and nodded yes. I wasn’t sure if this was the case. So, I rephrased the question and asked if she had given them permission to crash her creation. She did not respond. So, I asked Gustavo and Dylan if they had permission to crash her creation and they both said no. I asked if they thought they should ask permission next time and they responded yes. Observer comment: *I am not sure if this was the right thing to do - interfere in what appeared to be some tension. I was gentle and kind in my approach. I tried not to be accusatory but to bring recognition to their actions. I also worried that Mili was not happy or enjoying herself, and I worried that having younger little boys destroying her things might make her not want to return.*

*She has always been a shy and reserved child, so I wanted to make sure her feelings are recognized. (Memo #2, July 3, 2023)*

In the memo I write, “they start throwing them until the structure collapses,” and in the content log I write, “they were using to crash her creation.” In both artifacts, I documented that Dylan and Gustavo had intentionally “crashed” or “collapsed” Mili’s creation. Was this really what happened? How was I so sure? After reviewing these artifacts, I wanted to return to this moment that had remained etched in my mind. There was only one way to find out, so I returned to the video and analyzed the second-by-second unfolding of the moment while carefully documenting each child’s movement. Here is what I found:

Figure 42. Two second moment-by-moment playscript

<b>Time</b>	<b>Activity</b>
78:00-78:14	Dylan and Gustavo are collecting little balls from a box in their shirts.
78:14-78:34	Mili goes over to the same box and starts collecting the little balls too
78:34-78:40	Mili goes over to her structure with a handful of little balls and starts inserting them into her structure where they are collecting on a top floor
78:40-78:44	Dylan stands up and his little balls start falling out of his shirt and he begins to screech
78:44-78:48	Mili gets up, walks over quietly and begins collecting the little balls that Dylan dropped and then collects more from the box.
78:48-79:00	Dylan collects his little balls, runs to the corner of the room and collects a pile while Gustavo and Mili continue to collect the little balls from the box
79:00-79:22	Mili gets up and starts inserting more balls into her structure. Dylan sees her, gets up, collects his little balls and joins her
79:22-79:28	Gustavo looks up with his shirt filled with little balls and walks over to Mili’s structure. When he arrives, he opens his shirt and all the little balls drop, bounce and dance around the floor. Mili jumps to collect them.
79:28-79:30	Gustavo joins Mili in collecting the little balls

79:30-79:32	All three (Gustavo, Dylan and Mili) begin inserting the little balls into small compartments of the structure
79:32-79:34	<b>The structure falls when Mili places a ball on her side of the structure</b> and Dylan screeches
79:34-79:36	Me “Oh did she say you could do that?” Dylan stops moving and looks at Mili.
79:36-79:38	Me, “Mili, did you say they could do that?” Mili does not respond as she continues to dismantle the structure
79:38-79:40	Me, “Mili was that ok?” She shakes her head “yes”

Figure 43. Mili, Dylan and Gustavo playing



What I discovered after multiple viewings left me breathless. In time segment 79:32-79:34, I realized it was by mistake that Mili had knocked down the structure with her own hand when engaging in joint activity with Dylan and Gustavo. Together, they playfully inserted the little balls into the top floor of Mili’s structure. Although she never spoke a word, her actions revealed an invitation to play with her. For instance, in time stamps 78:44-78:48 and 79:22-79:28, Mili joined Dylan and Gustavo in collecting the little balls they had dropped and inserted

them into her structure. I assumed that Dylan and Gustavo had knocked it down intentionally because of their playful reactions and young age: “I worried that having younger little boys destroying her things” (Memo #2, July 3, 2023). I assumed Dylan’s screeching with excitement was due to having destroyed Mili’s structure. When at closer look, it appeared Dylan and Gustavo were responding to the invitation to play with her. In the above memo I state, “I tried not to be accusatory but to bring recognition to their actions.” However, after several viewings of the video, I realized that I made assumptions, and it was documented in the memo. I felt some sort of obligation to bring “recognition to their actions” when in fact Dylan and Gustavo were engaged in playful joint activity by Mili’s invitation. This explains the unsettled feeling I have had about this moment since it occurred. I was wrong all along.

I also question my interpretations of Mili. In the memo above, I describe her as reserved and concerned about her feelings. Was I positioning her in a helpless position of needing rescuing? Did my interference inhibit the full capacity of her agency? In the first example, when I was unaware of what I deemed as “conflict”, Mili did assert her agency and did not let criticism deter her from *persistencia*. What needed to be brought to recognition was how I was “seeing” the children and thus misinterpreting their actions.

### **Critical Reflexivity**

These two examples of revisiting the video data to examine my own assumptions and judgments has helped me understand the multifaceted process of critical reflexivity, “an ontological endeavor which can be used in an empowering process of social transformation” (Coburn & Gormally, 2017, p.113). Thus, for social transformation and educational dignity to be given the opportunity to exist, my commitment to examining my reactions and interpretations for the continual development of consciousness is necessary ontologically.

I wonder if I had not returned to the video segment to examine the second-by-second unfolding of the above interaction, would my assumptions and judgment of both Dylan and Gustavo based on their age and gender (Figure 41) remain unchallenged in my mind. The iterative process of reviewing the moment-by-moment unfolding of the interaction enabled me to see that my vision was skewed. Consequently, my assumptions were harmful, because I judged Gustavo and Dylan based on their gender and young age. It also unveiled my unconscious institutionalized socialization of feeling the need to control children's behavior, and despite my intentions to affirm the children's dignity, this internalization was still evident. Therefore, this work is constant if I am to remain committed to cultivating spaces that affirm human dignity. I also realize it is not always possible to review video in such a close and methodical way, nevertheless, we must commit to turning inward and critically analyze how we react to and interpret children's actions and interactions.

### **Unlearning as Transformation**

I desired to decenter my role as a teacher while also recognizing my role of being an elder was still critical in the co-creation of an interdependent learning environment. I honestly thought it would feel liberating to be in community with my child partners in our co-created third space, but the transformative process was much more difficult than I could have imagined. It was a process of unlearning the institutionalized practices that had become part of me (Mendoza, 2014). This required a process of critical reflexivity which proved to be more difficult than I had imagined. I had to let go of an expected outcome and embrace where the journey took us based on how the children responded and participated. An example was in week three, workshop day six, when our deliberation in circle time changed the course of my plan as documented in Chapter V under the header "Designing for Process and Possibility." My response to the Angel's

resistance and the messiness of the workshop created intense internal conflicts for me. After processing these intense reactions with my dear mentor and friend, Dr. Liz Mendoza, I wrote this in a memo:

I realize that this is very deep healing work from a 20-year career of not feeling enough—not feeling enough, not doing enough, not being enough. Now sifting through those struggles as they surface in workshop, I am learning a new way of being. It is uncomfortable, terrifying, and emotional labor because it is *change*. Continually doing what is familiar and what I know is comfortable, almost effortless. But they resisted on Thursday. Thoughts ran through my head, “What if they aren’t learning?” “What if they do not get anything out of this time together?” “What if their parents think we are just messing around?” “What if they do not have the opportunity to advance a skill, to feel *capable*?” “What if the workshop or I are not enough?”

The above memo is an example of critical reflexivity, and the process of realizing how I have been conditioned to see learning. I had been carrying feelings of guilt and shame as a teacher due to a standards-based system that narrowly defines learning. I realized through a process of reflection with Liz that part of my transformation required deep healing from a system that continually makes our identities and ways of knowing invisible. Part of the process of reconceiving my role from a teacher to a facilitator/ researcher, was learning how to coordinate with children and unlearn the practices of control. This did not mean relinquishing all control to children, but rather not trying to *be* in control. It was a process of unlearning the assembly-line instructional practices that were stubbornly part of my pedagogical practice after two decades of teaching. It was learning to dance anew by recognizing when and how to either guide or follow. I was learning how to dance in coordination with my child partners rather than leading the dance.

### **Love, Freedom, and Critical Reflexivity**

In *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (1994), hooks explains that teaching and educating are fundamentally political because they can either be rooted in

antiracist and social justice struggle or sustain and perpetuate power structures of domination and oppression. She described teaching and learning as revolutionary when it is designed to nurture the intellect so that young people may become scholars, thinkers, and cultural workers. The role of the teacher and school system at large, hooks explained, is to ensure that children and youth “fulfill their intellectual destiny” (p.2) which is made possible when relationship is at the center of teaching and learning, and our mission is to truly know our students in a way that enables them to feel seen and valued. The centering of the relationship, I have learned, also involves examining how I see a child and consequently regard them in interaction and in the facilitation of learning.

To be in relationship with a child is to love them. hooks (2001) theorizes that a love ethic presupposes everyone has the right to be free, to be loved fully, and to be fully accepted. To love a child is to regard them as free, capable, and complete with the right to the full development of their capacities. I have found through this study that for a love ethic to exist and for children and youth to fulfill their intellectual destiny, the practice of critical reflexivity is imperative. Reinventing myself in our third space meant developing a consciousness of my tendencies to want to control children and the situation, and these tendencies have the likelihood of extinguishing the light—*la persistencia*. To nurture the light, the practice of critical reflexivity, deliberating with children and analyzing the video data enabled me to interrogate the lens through which I see children, so that I may love them fully and cultivate possibilities for educational dignity.

## CHAPTER VIII

### CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This dissertation is my story as a teacher, and how I recognized similar feelings of inferiority and incapability in my students that I had also felt as a child. I could no longer participate in the maintenance of ideologies that perpetuate and sustain these feelings, particularly for children whose identities, knowledge systems, cultural and linguistic practices and lived experiences have been historically marginalized. When I left our kindergarten classroom, I promised my students that I would learn to do better and be better. When I returned to them three years later, I asked for their help in understanding what “doing better” means. I wanted to understand how to design alongside children in pursuit of the experience of educational dignity—their fundamental right to learn.

In Chapter V, I began to retell the story of our summer co-designed workshop by consulting my memos, the content logs and video corpus. Through this process, I was able to chart the children’s expressions of dignity expressed through their *testimonio* in both the interviews and in circle time. I also began to identify pedagogical innovations that emerged when I learned to coordinate with children rather than trying to control them. Through this storytelling approach of presenting our workshop, in Chapter VI, I was able to identify the sequence of transformation (See Figure 19 in Chapter VI) beginning in our first circle time discussion when the children identified the double bind—the contradiction of schooling practices that are oppressive and subordinating. As I brought the children into making collective decisions as a process of collective re-mediation to respect their dignity, I also began to witness the development of a new consciousness as historical actors exhibited in their transformation of participation. This transformation of participation constituted our newly created heterogeneous

interdependent ecology—a place where their cultural and linguistic practices became consequential to the collective learning. This is where I discovered the *light*, the evidence of educational dignity demonstrated in the children’s *persistencia*, their uninhibited and persistent effort. Finally in Chapter VII, I identified the role of critical reflexivity, a salient continual practice, as I also developed a new consciousness to understand my role in the co-construction of our environment and the possibility of educational dignity to be experienced. The following sections include a summary of the findings from Chapters V-VII, followed by the contributions from this study to the field of learning sciences. Finally, I offer a discussion on how we can respond to what the child partners have taught us about what it means to experience our fundamental right to learn.

### **Expressions of Dignity: A Child’s Right to Meaningful Participation**

To understand a child’s fundamental right to learn and how it is experienced from their perspective, I carried out a social design-based experiment via processes of co-design with children. From the children’s *testimonios*, they expressed a desire to meaningfully participate in the co-construction of learning. To Bea, this meant having a safe space where she could be vulnerable, share her stories of harm, and participate in creating a place where she felt safe, capable and joyful. As Angel articulated so clearly, it meant feeling visible by contributing to the collective learning and sharing his expertise. To Vicente, it meant contributing to the greater good by exploring and imagining sustainable ways of living to reduce the pollution that plagues his community. For Hector, it was to be helpful to his community and Mili just wanted to have fun and play again. All the children expressed a desire for free time which I have come to interpret as the freedom to move, to choose, to be curious, to express oneself, and to

meaningfully participate. Designing for meaningful participation and educational dignity is designing for liberation.

### **Design Innovations in Pursuit of Meaningful Participation and Educational Dignity**

As part of the co-design of our workshop, there were no grades attached to their contributions, no awards or competition to see who could perform first, but rather, we developed a shared goal of collective learning which was made possible by joint activity and distributed expertise (Brown et al, 1993; Paradise & Rogoff, 2009). The children quickly embodied these practices while shedding the individualized, competitive, and evaluative environment that had fractured their love for learning. The needs of the community took precedence as ingenuity and innovation became a communal goal (Rosado-May et al, 2020). Thus, designing meaningful participation is to design with trust in children's capabilities, and provide opportunities for heterogeneity, flexible roles in leadership, and epistemic equality (Walker, 2019). To respect a child's mind and to believe in their capabilities creates opportunities for them to leverage their embodied practices and enables their participation in the social processes of learning. The design innovations that manifested to recognize the children's right to meaningfully participate contributed to the emergence of our heterogeneous interdependent learning community.

These innovations included *designing for social dreaming and re-imagining*. This innovation was in response to when the children began to share stories of harm in school including Angel's description of school feeling like jail. At this moment I leveraged Angel's language and asked the children how we could make our space not feel like jail. From there, our social dreaming and re-imagining began to guide the co-constructed ecology that we nurtured jointly.

To aid in understanding how to co-create an environment where children desired to learn, I invited my friend Lema to help me co-design a workshop on architecture. Our intention was to leverage the children's imaginations in the design of such desired places. From this partnership, the design innovation *designing to leverage ancestral knowledge* emerged. It manifested from the children's response to Lema's introduction to biophilia, designing in relation to nature. The children quickly took up this idea and began drawing spaces in nature. While planning for the next workshop, I discovered that biophilia exists in many communities throughout Mexico, historically and in modern-day. I then realized that the children's drawings and actual structures in México had significant similarities, so I leveraged my cultural intuition to showcase this in a presentation where I placed the children's illustration alongside the structures they resembled as evidence of their ancestral knowledge. In their drawings, the children illustrated soft curves found in of nature expressing a desire to be in nature.

In response to the children's expressed desire to learn together, I intentionally designed for *collective discovery* on the day of the engineering workshop by leveraging the children as teachers. When each child discovered something new with the circuits, I guided them to teach the others. What manifested from there, I could not have predicted. When Hector was given the opportunity to be centered as a knowledgeable teacher in our co-created interdependent learning ecology, he leveraged his father's gentle touch, guiding Dylan and Vicente through circuit building while differentiating his direct assistance. His patience and adaptability cultivated an interpersonal coordination that moved the group to achieving a shared goal of discovery. Hector taught us that cultural practices are embodied and embedded in relational histories (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003; Vossoughi et al, 2020), and when leveraged the collective learning flourishes.

*Designing for the value of process* was identified while reviewing the video data as it naturally emerged from the children's desire to continue to work towards their collective goals. Whether it was designing their imagined dream place to learn, exploring engineering invention kits or creating elaborate marble runs, they focused on process more than outcome (Roque, 2023) which ultimately led me to see the evidence of educational dignity in the way the children persisted through play and collaboration.

### ***Persistencia: Evidence of Educational Dignity***

In four short weeks, I began to witness the children's development of a new consciousness as their ways of participating transformed. Hector and Angel leveraged their cultural practices in becoming both teachers and leaders, Vicente designed spaces for sustainability for his community, and Mili and Bea co-created processes of collaboration and communication. This new consciousness and transformation of participation manifested in the children's *persistencia* as their play created zones of proximal development where assistance was offered via cultural practices. Their unquenchable thirst to persist was the empirical evidence of educational dignity and meaningful participation. Espinoza et al (2020) describe this evidence as one's mind, humanity and potential recognized and affirmed via substantive involvement in socially vital activity (Espinoza et al, 2020). Their desire for learning was ignited, and the light became visible as their involvement became consequential to the collective learning.

*Persistencia* was observed in the assembling and reassembling of projects, and in the response of "NO" when asked to clean up. Throughout the workshop, the children never arrived at finished products, but desired to continue and persist. In each workshop there always remained something incomplete illuminating learning as a continual social process (Nasir et al, 2020; Roque, 2023).

*Persistencia* emerged in the co-created ecology of interdependence and where they could actualize the learning of their desire.

One day while visiting the children at Esperanza the following year, I asked them what they learned from our workshop. Bea responded, "to never give up." I interpret this as another way of expressing *persistencia*. Mike Rose encouraged us to study "the experiences when the light goes on, when a person is not regulated and regimented in school but finds it meaningful and is drawn to it" (Rose, 2022, p.4). When the child partners were drawn to the learning either through imagined situations or in the invitation of imagination, I observed *persistencia*, their uninhibited and persistent effort as they independently sketched or sculpted visions of desired learning environments or collaborated on the co-construction of engineering and marble innovations as part of an interdependent learning ecology.

### **Axiological Contributions to the Learning Sciences: The Role of Critical Reflexivity in the Process of Re-mediating for Educational Dignity**

Affirming the right to learn as the axiology of education centers the human being as the goal of education—the full development of one’s potential within the collective. The right to learn must guarantee the experience of one’s intellectual capacity and their valued role as part of a community. Axiology is a subfield of philosophy, and studies the values that socially construct environments (Nzinga, 2022). In this case, an environment designed for children’s learning. In a humane system where the axiology of learning is to respect human dignity, children are regarded as free, capable, and intellectual. Therefore, their ideas, perspective, expertise, cultural and linguistic practice, and experiences are leveraged and regarded as consequential to the collective learning (Gutierrez, 2014), thus cultivating a heterogenous interdependent learning ecology.

Over the course of the month when coordinating with my child partners, I began to witness a transformation of participation. For example, our circle time became a hybrid heterogeneous conversation. Children did not hold back from speaking but rather, spoke when they had something to share leveraging their full linguistic repertoires. As difficult as it was for me, children spoke their truth like when Angel expressed resistance towards the rock activity, because of the reminder of an experience in school. As their new consciousness as historical actors emerged, so did their cultural and linguistic practices which became consequential to our collective learning. They also began to work towards generating ideas in relation to their social dreaming for their communities. Take for example Vicente's innovation for sustainability to improve the ecological health of his community. I found that when the axiology of the design is to affirm human dignity, those human persons express values of care and concern for the common good of the collective.

The process of re-mediation involved a sociohistorical approach to the analysis of the children's expressions of their learning experiences in schools, and how they contributed to their relationship to learning and their conceptualization of learning (Cole & Griffin, 1986, p. 110). Efforts towards re-mediation shifted the analysis to how the mediated devices, i.e., ideational, material and relational, regulate coordination within the environment (Nasir, 2012; Jurow & Freeman, 2020). In this study, the shift in organization included my role as their teacher from a traditional setting to a co-participant in a *third space* (Gutiérrez, Morales, & Martinez, 2009), where I hoped to learn how to coordinate with children rather than try to maintain control.

Re-norming for the recognition of human dignity in this study called for creating new forms of coordination to heal the harms inflicted by deficit practices of controlling and labeling children. My effort to re-mediate my role and the design of learning was guided by a continual

practice of reflection in relation to the principles of respect for children's dignity, an ideational resource, requiring an analysis of my own actions in coordination with the child partners. As documented in the previous chapter, the learning was continual for me especially after the workshop when I revisited the video corpus. The iterative process of video analysis developed my own new consciousness in unexpected ways. I have learned the salient role of critical reflexivity, the analysis of my reactions and interpretations, when co-designing and re-mediating for an axiological outcome of educational dignity, and environments that guarantee the flourishing of children's capabilities and their spirits.

### **The Fundamental Right to Sanctuary**

In August of 2023, the month after our summer workshop, I returned to public education. I was hired to be an instructional coach at a newcomer center just about a mile from Esperanza. I have been working there throughout my process of video analysis and writing this dissertation. The iterative process of video analysis, critical reflexivity, and what the children have taught me contrasts daily with the culture of public schools. Once again, I find myself in a double bind, trapped in a cycle of contradictions without any possible alternatives (Meléndez, 2021). I work with the most vulnerable and most resilient youth I have ever known—recently arrived immigrant children who have taken great risk to be here, some with family and some alone.

Now in 2025, just weeks following the Trump inauguration, the executive order for mass deportation of undocumented immigrants, and the effort to rescind laws that ensure schools as safe places from immigration raids, children and youth are living in unimaginable uncertainty for their safety and future. I dream and imagine every day about what they deserve as rights-bearing beings, and I carry the lessons from my child partners of what they desired for learning—a safe space to share their stories, to feel visible by contributing to the collective learning, sharing their

expertise, the opportunity to contribute to the greater good of their communities, to experience free time as the freedom to move, to choose, to be curious and to express oneself, and finally, to learn together. These desires are to be liberated. However, constraints of a standardized education keep that dream out of reach though I never lose sight of it. I long to create a sanctuary for our newcomer students, a co-created world where they are each regarded as valuable contributors, irreplaceable pieces to the whole, and free to bring their full humanity into the learning process.

What I witness now are words of possibility like equity become platitudes when used in everyday conversation, but our practices remain stagnant. In the absence of critical reflexivity on our pedagogical design and practices, and in the absence of reflective deliberation with young people, how do we know if children are experiencing equitable learning? These absences maintain the stagnancy rather than progress towards the ideals we hope to accomplish. *We* remain stagnant. As I write this dissertation, I worry that the humanist language of human dignity and meaningful participation will also become platitudes in the absence of critical reflexivity and reflective deliberation with the communities and children we serve. This work cannot be done without them, their ideas, perspectives, knowledge systems, and lived experiences.

Efforts towards equity, as I have experienced in public education, have come to mean closely monitoring teachers' effectiveness based on predetermined outcomes on standardized assessments—tests that maintain the normative as whiteness and English-only. When children fail these tests, so do schools, and communities are penalized either by school closures or state initiatives of rote teaching methods without ever consulting the desires and epistemologies of the children and their families. Equity has become an effort to get everyone access to a set of

standards that do not include, represent, or leverage knowledge systems and cultural and linguistic practices of the children and youth whom we serve. The standards are taught and assessed rather than knowledge being co-constructed via pedagogies of meaningful participation—an expressed desire of my child partners.

Efforts towards culturally sustained or culturally responsive education, as I have experienced them, are organized in the form of “multicultural” nights where students and their families are invited to bring a dish from their respective cultures one night out of the entire school year. These efforts, even with good intentions, keep us spinning, sustaining archaic structures masked by misconceptions of cultural representation while our ideologies and subconscious remain untouched, but sustain the cultural construct of schooling. The schooling that the child partners described as jail.

If we desire a humane society, we must have humane schools that strive to enact humane teaching practices that commit to the principles of respect for humanity by codifying education as a fundamental right in our state constitutions. But this step is just the beginning and must be followed by the work of critical reflexivity and reflective deliberation to understand our role in guaranteeing the experience of educational dignity. The current cultural construct of asserting authoritative powers over young people results in either obedience or resistance. If we are appalled by the most recent executive orders that rescind policies protecting schools as places of sanctuary for immigrant youth, then we should be appalled at practices that subordinate them, treat them as less than human, and deprive them of opportunity to leverage their full humanity in the co-constructed processes of learning. This is our fundamental right as sacred, dignity-bearing beings—to find refuge in sanctuaries, and places where we can be free and joyful.

*Mis queridos niños,*

It is your right to be free,

to move without restraint or control, to follow your curiosities, explore the  
uncharted paths of discovery and marvel in the promise of new  
possibilities,

It is your right to be joyful,

to play and squeal in delight, and to relish in imagination and creativity,

It is your right to express yourself,

your ideas, perspectives, dissent, and joy using *all* your languages,

It is your right to feel safe,

from judgement, from harm, humiliation, and degradation,

to share your story, your experiences and for them to be held with care,

It is your right to make mistakes,

and to be guided and nurtured through the learning,

because mistakes are part of the process of learning,

It is your right to feel valued,

to be regarded as a valuable contributor to the collective learning,

and to feel your worth as part of a community,

It is your right to address the needs of your community,

to leverage your innovation and ingenuity in finding solutions

for the sustainability and care of your natural environment,

and solutions for human flourishing and wellbeing,

It is your right to be who you desire to be.

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## Appendix A

### The Rose Capacities

A child's right to an adequate education is a fundamental one under our Constitution. The General Assembly must protect and advance that right. We concur with the trial court that an efficient system of education must have as its goal to provide each and every child with at least the seven following capacities. (i) sufficient oral and written communication skills to enable students to function in a complex and rapidly changing civilization; (ii) sufficient knowledge of economic, social, and political systems to enable the student to make informed choices; (iii) sufficient understanding of governmental processes to enable the student to understand the issues that affect his or her community, state, and nation; (iv) sufficient self-knowledge and knowledge of his or her mental and physical wellness; (v) sufficient grounding in the arts to enable each student to appreciate his or her cultural and historical heritage; (vi) sufficient training or preparation for advanced training in either academic or vocational fields so as to enable each child to choose and pursue life work intelligently; and (vii) sufficient levels of academic or vocational skills to enable public school students to compete favorably with their counterparts in surrounding states, in academics or in the job market.

## Appendix B

### Code Book of Practices Observed from Content Logs

<b>Teacher Practices</b>	<b>includes:</b>	<b>How many</b>	<b>Child Practices</b>	<b>includes:</b>	<b>How many</b>
Questioning	for child's perspective, opinion, in-put, developing norms, explain thinking, elaborate, to understand child, to negotiate	<b>347</b>	Child Play	together, individually, imagination, laughter	<b>167</b>
Encouragement	share thinking, ideas, perspective, experiences, contributions, creativity, imagination, dreaming, expertise, desires, feelings, collaboration	<b>225</b>	Contributing	giving assistance, discoveries, setting up, cleaning up, ideas, perspectives, experiences, taking initiative, negotiating, developing processes	<b>332</b>
Teacher Expressions	affirmation, value for child's ideas, contributions, trust, reassurance, excitement, gratitude, celebrations	<b>157</b>	Child Expressions	curiosity, emotions, desires, experiences, capability, discovery, joy, smiling, enacting choice, skepticism, affection, celebrations	<b>589</b>
Translanguaging	communication, collaboration, to clarify	<b>221</b>	Persistence	effort, seeking assistance/ resources, struggle, attention, focus, engagement, exploring, investigating, assembling, re-assembling	<b>591</b>
Offerings	choice, ideas, suggestions, options, assistance	<b>138</b>	Observing	peers, teacher, looking at each other's work for ideas	<b>205</b>
Documentation	process, collaboration, final projects	<b>101</b>	Movement	freely, to gather, purposeful, intentional, aggressive, change of activity,	<b>237</b>
Teacher Play	laughter, silly	<b>33</b>	Translanguaging	communication, collaboration, fluid conversation	<b>214</b>
Guidance	to gather, reflective discourse, problem solving, directing	<b>239</b>	Conflict	antagonizing, excluding, physical aggression, tensions, ignoring, frustration, arguing	<b>223</b>
Teacher Explaining	teaching, presenting materials, presenting problem, modeling	<b>240</b>	Child Explaining	describing, teaching	<b>148</b>
Teacher Intervening	in conversation, Conflict, implementing structure	<b>67</b>	Collaborating	gathering, many hands working together, taking turns, building, joining, discussion, side by side,	<b>561</b>

				joint activity	
Making Connections	cultural, historical backgrounds, children's contributions, children's work	<b>18</b>			

## Appendix C

### An Example of a Content Log

	A	B	C	D	E
1	<b>Content Log for July 3, 2023</b>				
2	<b>Learning objective:</b> To re-establish ourselves as a community, explore "free time" and "playtime", share ideas for workshop, and express desires for workshop.				
3	<b>Actors:</b> MH, AH, BS, OG, SG, MO, MG, EG				
4	<b>Context:</b> This is our first workshop day together. We are re-establishing our community and expressing desires, ideas and hopes for the workshop. This was my first day and time with MG and OG.				
5	<b>Artifacts &amp; Tools:</b>	Cameras, magnetic tiles, legos, binomial and trinomial cubes, cuisenart rods, colored pencils, geometric templates, journals, little bits kits, geometric blocks,			
6	<b>Location:</b> Anythink Library in a rented classroom surrounded by windows and natural light. It is summer, warm and sunny				
7					
8	<b>Video (Canon)</b>				
9	<b>Time</b>	<b>Activity: Circle time</b>	<b>Noticings</b>	<b>Patterns</b>	<b>Observer Comments</b>
10	0:00-2:00	Setting up cameras with AH. OG following jumping up and down in front of cameras. MH following and watching. EG and MO talking sitting on the floor. MH watching. The room is quiet, students sitting or standing. I go to the floor "where should we circle up? right here?" Children come quietly to the carpet. AH directs us to move so the camera sees us. the circl moves in unison willingly.	Questioning for input	Contributions valued	OG, SG, and MO were very curious about the camers which preoccupied much of their time. I wish I would have harnessed this curiosity more perphas involved them and documentation more into the following workshops. This day was also especially interesting because BS and MH were very quiet and shy.
11	2:00-4:00	Circle time starts. I start the conversation "do you know why we are here" Gathering to establish purpose of workshop. S talks - "It's for something." Establishing circle time norms. "should we raise our hands or just talk?" Discussing why we are here.	Questioning, establishing our own norms i.e. should we raise our hands or just stalk? asking for children's input	Contributions valued, choice in ways of participating	
12	4:00-6:00	Discussing why I asked them to participate and why they participated. Discussing kindergarten. Discussing why siblings are participating. "Do you all know each other" "I forgot about her." S " this is like a club." Saying names in a circle. MG shy to share.	Questioning		
13		Set the stage for the day. Getting to know one another. Share the title of workshop "Buscando la luz" SG translates. "What does it mean to look for light?" Children share	Establishing purpose of workshop, shift in	encouraging their ideas	there is a shift in conversation participation from raising hands to
+ ≡ Video 1 ▾ Video 2 ▾ <					