STORIES OF BELONGING:

CHILDREN NEGOTIATING RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEERS

by

JESSICA FRANCES KOBE MILLER

(Under the Direction of Jennifer Hauver)

ABSTRACT

This is a study about twenty-two elementary-aged children negotiating belongings with their peers in a diverse social space. Surprisingly little research exists on how children negotiate belongings in diverse settings, even as children experience increased contact with people from a variety of social and cultural groups. This research contributes to the literature by examining the ways children seek and grant belongings in their local context as they attend a diverse summer camp program in their local community. Narrative inquiry is used to understand the ways these children define and enact their understandings of belonging as they spend time at camp. Their stories reveal the complex ways they defined belonging and used cultural information to negotiate belongings with peers, as well as the conditions that encouraged inclusive work and play. In the end, I argue that children are busy negotiating belongings all day long, but the spaces where they are doing this important work are endangered. Children need educators and scholars who are committed to preserving the integrity of in-between spaces and advocating for the inclusion of creative play-based activities that honor individuals and invite collaboration, so children can continue expanding the range of people with whom they feel comfortable

interacting. In addition, I raise a series of practical, theoretical and methodological questions related to the limitations associated with my study.

INDEX WORDS: civic education, childhood studies, belonging, elementary-aged children, diverse social spaces, peer culture, cultural references, play, social relationships, doing research with children, narrative inquiry, small stories

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to Grandpa Fred

for encouraging me to just do it.

"Stop getting in your own way and finish the thing."

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INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

I carry this angel with me everywhere I go. Ten years ago, Fiona penciled her on a rough-edged, lined piece of paper she tore from her notebook and gifted her to me on my last day as her student teacher.

It was an unseasonably warm May day in Northeastern Ohio, but I didn't mind- we had survived a long, frigid, and snowy winter that I thought might never end. The warm weather was a welcome change. As I led 25 third-graders back into the building after recess, reality started to sink in. Today was my last day of student teaching. My head, heart, and body felt heavy. I wasn't sure if I could last another day, but I didn't want to say goodbye either. We finally had our

quirks worked out—we were rolling. The last thing I wanted to do was interrupt the rhythm it had taken us months to establish.

When I entered the third-grade classroom where I had taught for the past four months, I was sure I had made a wrong turn. The classroom was filled with decorations. The guided reading table was covered in snacks and gifts. The children's desks were set for a party. In unison, the children yelled, "Surprise!" All of the whispering and snickering finally made sense. They were throwing me a surprise party to celebrate our last day together. I couldn't deny it any longer. Today was my last day. This was it.

As our celebration was winding down, I glanced around the room; the children were finishing their snacks, wrapping up their games, and casually chatting about their weekends. I was leaning over the guided-reading-turned-party-table tidying up our mess when I felt a familiar tap, tap, tap on my shoulder. I was going to miss Fiona's gentle yet urgent taps. I turned around, expecting to see a third grader who could have won an award for having the brightest smile. But instead, I was greeted by a piece of notebook paper not even an inch from my face.

The afternoon sun was beating in the window making it impossible for me to see what she had created. In my newly minted teacher voice I said, "It looks like you made something. Do you want to tell me about it?" Fiona's round brown eyes peered over the edge of the paper, and she vigorously nodded her head yes. We took a few steps away from the windows on the second-floor of our un-air-conditioned, classroom perfumed by twenty-five sweaty bodies who had had gym that morning and hadn't cooled down from recess yet.

"It's for you!" she proclaimed, again holding the paper so close to my face that all I could see was white. "Wow. You made this for me?" I responded, "Let's take a look." I gently took the paper in my hands and distanced it from my face. Fiona pointed to the figure she had

drawn, "This is you. You are my angel." Our eyes met. Silence. Fiona wrapped her arms around my waist and looked up at me, smiling so wide her cheeks had to hurt. A tear snuck out of the corner of her eye and slid down the side of her face as my eyes began to well. "Thank you, Fiona," was all I could muster, "I am going to miss you."

The dismissal bell rang. The students scurried about packing their backpacks and lining up at the door. As I did every day, I escorted the third graders down the hallway, down the stairs, and out the side door of the school to board the buses. But, instead of dispersing quickly, the students remained in line. I was overwhelmed with hugs, high-fives, and well wishes. After the buses were loaded, I stood on the sidewalk in front of the school, returning their waves as the buses pulled away, one-by-one.

As I walked back into the school, climbed the stairs, and ambled down the hallway towards the classroom, I kept thinking about the angel Fiona drew. What did she mean when she said I was her angel?

If you have ever taught children, you know they draw pictures for their teachers. But this picture was different. It represented the bond Fiona and I had built over the semester we spent together. Fiona attended elementary school in the large Midwestern college town where I attended college. Due to its proximity to the university and the way the city had been districted, her school was more socioeconomically, racially, and ethnically diverse than the other elementary schools in the system. Around one-third of Fiona's peers were white like her. Another third were black, and the rest were of Asian or Indian descent. Some of her peers lived in apartments and duplexes, some in single-family homes, and others in subsidized housing units. Some of her peers' parents were unemployed, some were graduate students, others worked in

retail, in factories, and on farms. Still others were doctors, nurses, lawyers, teachers, and professors.

Fiona's school was diverse.

Fiona had a strong relationship with her parents and sister. Fiona's parents prioritized family time and their daughters' education. Fiona would often recollect the imaginative games she would play with her older sister after school— sometimes sneaking out of bed to continue playing late into the night. Fiona's mom had a steady minimum wage job that required her to work long hours and often cover the night shift; her father was unemployed. Supporting a family of four on one minimum wage job made it difficult for Fiona's family to pay their bills—causing periodic interruptions in their electricity and water services. During her third-grade year, Fiona's father spent some time in jail for collecting and selling scrap metal to help support his family. No matter what challenges Fiona's family faced, her parents made sure Fiona was at school every day.

Fiona was always eager and ready to learn.

But school was not easy for Fiona. She was diagnosed with a learning disability. She read below grade level; she struggled to solve math problems, convey her thinking in writing, and correctly spell sight words most of her peers had committed to memory. These challenges did not stop Fiona; she approached each lesson with a resolve to do her best and the confidence to ask for help. Her positivity was contagious.

Fiona was a dedicated, hardworking student.

In addition to being conscientious, Fiona was one of the kindest students I ever taught. She enjoyed spending time with all of her peers. She had a knack for seeing the best in others, and she always assumed goodwill. She referred to all of her classmates as friends. If someone

needed help, no matter who they were or what they needed, Fiona would be the first to volunteer. She especially enjoyed helping the Kindergarteners and first graders who were just down the hall. They equally enjoyed her company.

Fiona was not just kind and helpful, she always put others before herself.

But Fiona struggled to build positive relationships with her peers. As the other students started to note and name all of the ways Fiona was different, they distanced themselves from her. She sat alone at lunch. The seats around Fiona would remain unoccupied, until there were no other places to sit. When Fiona attempted to sit next to one of her peers, she would often be told the seat was reserved for someone else. Every time the children had an opportunity to pick partners or form teams, Fiona was chosen last. Most days, Fiona meandered around the playground alone shadowing her peers or chatting with the teachers.

Fiona was continually rejected by her peers.

To make matters worse, Fiona's mom had been assigned to work the night shift. She did not get home from work in time to help Fiona get ready for school. Consequently, Fiona would come to school without brushing her hair and teeth, without washing her hands and face, and often wearing the same clothes for days. During her third-grade year, Fiona became increasingly self-conscious and disheartened. Instead of walking into school with her head held high, Fiona drudged down the halls staring at the floor, her chin resting against her chest.

Fiona's vibrant spirit was deteriorating.

I was worried about Fiona. I knew I had to do something, but I had no idea what to do. Some of my colleagues and I decided to provide her with a toiletry kit she could use in a private bathroom before the first bell rang. My mentor teacher and I integrated more community building activities into the school day. We made a concerted effort to help all of our students,

including Fiona, recognize how they were similar to and different from each other. We created opportunities for them to showcase their positive attributes and talents. When someone said or did something hurtful, we intervened. And when someone said or did something caring, we paused to celebrate. Most of the time I felt like a failure, but I never gave up. Day-in and day-out I did my best to help the students in my class find more accepting ways of being in community with one another. But my efforts never seemed to be enough.

I felt like I had failed Fiona.

So, on my last day student teaching when Fiona drew me as "her angel", I was shocked. Maybe she was acknowledging that I cared about her, believed in her, and tried to create opportunities for her inner beauty to shine through? But this is just what good teachers do. As I continued to think about her use of the word "angel", I felt my insides knot. I did not want to be seen as a teacher who was trying to save her students. Students do not need saving. Is that what she meant?

When I got home, I trimmed away the rough edges, mounted the angel on a blue piece of paper, and secured her in a black frame. I set my framed angel on my desk, and she has remained there ever since. Each time I move, my angel is the last thing I pack. I carefully wrap her in a towel and tuck her snuggly in a box marked FRAGILE. I cannot bear the thought of my hand-drawn angel being left behind, lost in the shuffle, or broken in a move, so she rides shotgun in my car. My angel spent her first four years of life in my elementary school classroom, where I began my career as a public-school teacher.

After securing my first teaching job, I was hopeful that I would be able to cultivate a classroom community that was more inclusive— a place where the Fiona's of the world would feel like they belong. To clarify, my goal was never for all of my students to become friends.

Rather, I was committed to helping my students find ways to be in community with one another. I wanted my classroom to be a place where kids listened to each other and cared for each other; where they all felt comfortable to take risks, explore the unfamiliar, and grow—where they could be themselves and part of something bigger than themselves.

Figuring out how to make room for each other in our classroom was intellectual, social, and emotional work. We each brought with us our own experiences, interests, and expectations. As we negotiated ways of being in community with one another, interpersonal tensions emerged. Sometimes the tensions seemed to be grounded in conflicting ideas, opinions, preferences, and desires, like when children disagreed about what game to play or how to complete a task. But, other times the tensions had less to do with what the children were doing or how they were going to approach a situation or task and more to do with if they wanted to interact with a certain person or not. Sometimes members of our community were singled out, made to feel different, or excluded by their peers because of who they were.

Everyone experiences moments when they feel different. Reflecting on the semester I spent with Fiona reminded me of a chapter from Elizabeth Lesser's (2005) book, *Broken Open*. In her chapter titled, "Bozos on the Bus" (a reference to Wavy's Gravy's metaphor about the nature of the human condition), she explained, everyone experiences hurt. And when people tie their hurt to their perceived shortcomings, they experience shame, which in turn causes suffering. In other words, everyone has moments when they feel like the bozo on the bus. She continued,

> In our shame, we feel outcast, as if there is another bus somewhere, rolling along on a smooth road. Its passengers are all thin, healthy, happy, well-dressed, and well-liked people who belong to harmonious families, hold jobs that don't bore or aggravate them, and never do mean things, or goofy things like forget where they parked, lost their wallet,

or say something totally inappropriate. We long to be on that bus with the other normal

people. (p. 28).

But the thing is, there is no normal bus. Lesser (2005) explains, we are all on the bozo bus.

Always. We all have moments when we feel surer of ourselves, more connected, and less like

bozos, but we never get off the bus. We are all imperfect humans living in an imperfect world.

To some extent, everyone bears the weight of carving out a space for themselves in the

social world and making room for one another. But, for some, like Fiona, the weight is

overwhelming. Even oppressive. As I continued my teaching career, I met more Fionas. Take for

instance Robert whose desire to make friends consumed much of his attention. Robert was first-

generation American. His parents were from China and spoke Mandarin Chinese. Robert lived

with his parents, older siblings, and grandmother in a small apartment walking distance from his

elementary school. Robert spent many afternoons at his family's Chinese restaurant. Robert

performed well in school. He participated, completed assigned tasks, and excelled in math and in

reading. He had set his sights on joining a group of boys who had been friends since preschool.

The boys played sports, told jokes, and roughhoused. When it was time to line up, Robert rushed

to the front of the classroom. Unlike some children who wanted to secure a spot near the front,

Robert's goal was to line up with the boys. Robert sat near them at lunch, watched them play

sports on the playground, and volunteered to play math games with them in class. When we

visited the library, he checked out books about the sport of the season, so he could learn how to

play. When the kids were rough-housing in line, Robert joined in their pushing matches, and

when they were telling jokes, Robert offered his own. But Robert's attempts to engage in

horseplay, crack jokes, and play football proved futile. The boys told Robert his jokes were not

funny. They told him he could not play football, because he did not know how to play. After

spending a month reading about football and watching the boys play the game at recess, Robert asked to play. Now, the boys used different criteria to disqualify Robert from participating. Robert was not good enough to play. The boys never told on each other when they were roughhousing in line, but when Robert playfully joined in, they would run to me and tattle.

Although most of Robert's attempts to insert himself into their social circle were mocked, refused, or met with silence, there were moments when he was successful. For instance, when we were engaged in a writing unit about what it means to be a writer, many students decided to co-author books. To my surprise, Robert was working with the boys in the social circle he had been desperately trying to join. Although I am unsure what sparked their collaboration, they spent days co-constructing numerous comic books about aliens and superheroes. What, I wondered, made this moment different? Did Robert bring something unique to group? Robert was creative, a skilled artist, and loved to draw. Did the novelty of the assignment invite collaboration? Usually, the children were required to write independently, so maybe the invitation to work together was encouraging. Or, was it that the project was open-ended and invited collaboration instead of competition? The students selected their own topics and genres, and they had the autonomy to work alone or with their peers. The requirements were simple: write when it was time to write; and, construct a product that can be shared with others. Or was it something else that made this moment different from the rest? I reveled in the moment, but soon it passed, and again, Robert was on the outskirts of the football-playing, joking-telling, roughhousing group of boys he desperately wanted to join.

As I reflected on Robert's experiences, I thought about Fiona. What is keeping these students from being accepted by their peers? Again, Fiona's words echoed in my head, "You are my angel". I had to do figure out how to do more. I strove to help my students cultivate inclusive

ways of being in community with one another, but my attention was pulled in many different directions. At any given moment, I was facilitating a lesson, monitoring engagement, checking for understanding, keeping track of who was in the restroom, documenting student progress, and planning how we were going to transition into the next activity. I tried to encourage the children to develop authentic relationships with many of their peers and expand the range of people with whom they were comfortable interacting. At times, it seemed like my efforts were working. The students were expanding their social circles and playscripts enough to welcome others to participate; but these moments were the exception, not the norm. I started to wonder if the invitations the children extended to invite outsiders in were sincere. Were they genuinely welcoming one another or trying to please me? How did they interact when I was not around? I would lay awake at night, worrying my good intentions were lofty or even ignorant. One night, it came to me. If I was going to figure out how to encourage positive, inclusive, cross-group interactions, I was going to need time and space to inquire deeply into moments when children successfully negotiated ways of being in community with one another. Maybe then I would better understand what is happening in these moments and what role I might play in increasing their frequency.

In 2012, my framed angel moved to Georgia with me. She sits with me at my desk as I read, write, and think, reminding me why I teach and why I decided to pursue my doctorate. She prevents me from giving up when I start to question if I belong in academia or when I question if I have what it takes to finish. My angel travels with me everywhere I go. Sometimes she trails behind me shadowing my every move, encouraging me to keep listening to and learning from kids. Other times we walk hand-in-hand as if we are one. And when my bravery falters or I am

overcome with doubt, I can count on her to take the lead, helping me find my way out of the darkness.

So, here I am ten years later, and Fiona's words continue to echo in my mind. As I sit here and gaze at the angel Fiona penciled in 2008, I notice that the blue ruled lines have faded, but the angel appears untouched. The contrast of the graphite pencil lines against the white background is stark. When I look at Fiona's drawing, I no longer see myself, I see her and Robert—and all of the other children I have taught who were made to feel different. I am overcome by my commitment to help make schools empowering and inclusive places for all children by supporting them in their efforts to carve out a space for themselves in their social world and make room for one another.

I tell these stories because they help define who I am as a person, a teacher, and a researcher. I decided to share this here, so my readers understand the perspective from which I am writing. These moments are always with me. They influence how I view the world, define the purpose of schooling, and frame my commitments, as do my social and cultural locations. I am a white, middle-class, Christian, heterosexual woman who is also an elementary school teacher, teacher educator, and researcher. I occupy a privileged position in the United States of America and the world. My experiences, perspectives, and values may be mainstream, but they are not normal or superior. My social and cultural locations intimately shape my life and work. I cannot shed my privileges, but I can notice when and how they influence what I think, say, feel, and do. One way I monitor my biases is by adopting a constructivist stance. I believe knowledge is transactional and relative. People construct and reconstruct knowledge in their local contexts and meaning-making is always tied to people's individual and collective experiences. People have

the autonomy to act, but their participation is always influenced by their social and cultural locations and the local, regional, and societal systems that govern their communities.

As a researcher, I knew I would never be able to fully understand my participants' experiences or perspectives, but I could grow my understanding of the diverse ways people move about the world, if I listened. I could provide them with opportunities to tell their own stories and speak their own truths, and I could monitor how I hear their accounts. Not only would this enrich my understanding of their experiences and perspectives but also help recognize the partiality of my own. Ultimately, I acted as the "mediator between the knower and known" (Palmer, 1993, p. 29). I decided what I studied and how I studied it; I controlled what I shared and how I shared it. Throughout my study, I continually considered: (1) how I influenced my work, (2) how the current historical and cultural context impacted what I saw (and did not see), (3) how power was at work, and (4) questioned what I would normally take for granted (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, pp. 37-42). I paid attention to how my epistemological frame was influencing my study design and findings (Scheurich & Young, 1997). I tried to be transparent by narrating my process and including the children's voices in my work. I also wove my experiences, reflections, and perspectives into my writing to give readers access to my sense-making process. While these additions made my dissertation longer, I am hoping it also made it richer.

In the remainder of chapter one, I detail the goals of my interpretative study which included: better understanding how children define and enact their understandings of belonging in their local context; exploring the strategies children use to seek and grant belongings as they interact with their peers in a diverse social setting; describing the conditions that seem to encourage inclusive playscripts and playgroups, and creating a space where the children's understandings and experiences are valued and viewed as credible sources of information. Then,

I briefly introduce the children, the research context and my study design. I conclude by providing an overview of my remaining chapters.

Goals of the Study

My study is deeply rooted in my teaching experience and my desire to help children carve out a space for themselves in their social world and make room for one another. My primary research question was: *How do the children define and enact their understandings of belonging as they negotiate relationships with their peers in a diverse summer camp setting?* I conducted a "face-to-face, prolonged, narrative, theory-building" (Graue & Walsh, 1998, p. 22) study the purpose of which was interpretive. I was interested in deepening my understanding of (a) the meanings the children constructed of belonging, and (b) the experiences the children shared as they negotiated belongings with their peers. Thus, instead of focusing on individuals, I looked "between children at the interactions and relationships that make up their lives" (Graue & Walsh, 1998, p. 35). In addition to informing my teaching practice, my study contributes to at least three bodies of literature. As I discuss next, my study serves as an example of how children are actively engaged in the world and their local peer culture as citizens, sheds light on the sophisticated ways children negotiate relationships within and across their social circle groups, and raises questions about how researchers invite young participants to share their experiences and perspectives about the phenomenon they study.

Children Negotiating Belongings

Children are very motivated to negotiate belongings with their peers. Their desire to make friends consumes much of their attention (Paley, 1986). Researchers who study children's social worlds have drawn the following conclusions about the nature and quality of their peer interactions: (a) although children tend to play with other children like them, they do interact

across social circle groups (Thorne, 1993); (b) children care deeply about building relationships with their peers and continually strive to harness control over their lives (Corsaro, 1992; Corsaro, 2015); and, (c) the intentions and strategies children use to interact with their peers in one setting will not necessarily transfer to other settings (Ramsey, 2015). Although my study is firmly grounded in stories of exclusion, we already know a lot about what causes children to be excluded. As will become evident in my literature review, children tend to be excluded when they are not members of the majority group (Garcia-Sanchez, 2011; Moore, 2002; Scott, 2003), they are unfamiliar with the social and cultural norms that govern a space (Garvey, 1984), they are stigmatized for being different (Thorne, 1993), they are not popular (Adler & Alder, 1998), or they do not have access to the cultural resources necessary to engage in exchanges (Nukaga, 2008), play routines and games (Evaldsson & Corsaro, 1998), or talking and teasing routines (Goodwin & Kryatzis, 2011). But we know little about how children negotiate belongings across social circle groups and what conditions facilitate inclusive cross-group interactions. Therefore, instead of inquiring into stories of exclusion, I inquired into stories of inclusion. When do children interact across social circle groups? And, what seems to encourage them to cross boundaries? Before I explain how I inquired into this phenomenon, I define belonging and contextualize it within the United States of America's changing landscape.

Belonging is a multidimensional construct. In general, the term belonging is used to describe the relationships people negotiate with "something outside of the self" (Anthias, 2016, p. 177) including places, people, groups, activities, and even ideas and values. Belonging is cultural. It marks the groups within which people participate, the places where people feel "at home", as well as the boundaries people construct to include some and exclude others. Belonging is both "a personal, intimate feeling of being 'at home' in a place (place-belongingness)" and "a

discursive resource which constructs, claims, justifies, or resists forms of socio-spatial inclusion/exclusion (politics of belonging)" (Antonsich, 2010, p. 4). Although belongings are always being negotiated on many scales and between different individuals, the process is corporeal and often remains veiled because it happens as people go about their everyday (Diprose, 2008). Communities are built by people who feel inclined to spend time together and are able to successfully construct shared meanings. Communities break down when something interrupts their meaning-making process causing people feel less inclined to spend time together and individuals to be excluded (Diprose, 2008). Thus, the process of seeking and granting belongings is connected to the production and reproduction of shared meanings.

Children are actively engaged in the process of seeking and granting belongings with their peers. Their desire to belong is not just about being included or feeling like they fit in; it is also about being part of something bigger than themselves. When children feel inclined to connect with their peers, they are drawn together. Their ability to connect is tied to their ability to construct shared meanings. When children gather, they do not start from scratch. Rather they creatively appropriate information from their lived experiences and the adult world (Corsaro, 2015) to build shared meanings. As children build shared meanings, they form bonds with one another, defining and redefining what it means to belong, and who belongs and who does not.

Children do not just participate in their local peer culture, they also participate in the larger society dominated by adults (Corsaro, 2015). Therefore, the children's participation in their social and cultural communities is best understood when situated within the United States of America's civic and political landscape. Put simply, the United States is becoming more diverse. Yes; Americans have always hailed from a variety of social and cultural groups, but people are moving, migrating, and hybridizing at unprecedented rates (Cohn & Caumont, 2016).

In this new United States, people not only have more frequent interactions with people who participate in a variety of social and cultural groups, they have become more reliant on strangers to access the goods and services they use in their daily lives (Appiah, 2006; Palmer, 2011). People eat food farmed around the world, power their vehicles with foreign-drilled oil, and use foreign-manufactured electronics. When they call tech support, it is likely they will talk with a representative from abroad. Life in the United States would be very different without these faceless strangers. In addition, technological advances, namely widespread internet access, has given people more autonomy to select news sources, research topics of interest, and control with whom they interact. Although access can lead people to expand what they know and understand and connect with a wider range of people, it can also cause people to isolate themselves from unfamiliar people, ideas, and belief systems. One thing is for sure: people's direct and indirect interactions with strangers feed the debate about how they define what it means to belong and how draw lines of demarcation.

Many western nations interpret strangers as a threat. Currently, people in the United States of America are engaged in impassioned conversations about belonging. Should the United States of America build a wall on the United States Mexico border? What should happen to the youth whose DACA status is expiring? How should the federal government respond when asylum seekers seek refuge in the United States of America? Some government officials and community leaders position strangers as dangerous and warn their citizens that their national culture and identity are in jeopardy, often sparking support for stricter surveillance, immigration, and citizenship laws (Amin, 2012). Fortunately, a more hopeful interpretation exists. The United States changing landscape can also been framed as an opportunity (Palmer, 2011). It is possible for people to come together across difference and cultivate ways of being in community with one

another but doing so is not easy. Appiah (2006) summed it up well when he wrote, "The challenge, then, is to take minds and hearts formed over the long millennia of living in local troops and equip them with ideas and institutions that will allow us to live together as the global tribe we have become" (p. xiii). Only then, will the United States of America realize its pluralistic potential as a multicultural democratic society.

Children do not exist outside this reality. They are active participants in today's dynamic, multicultural, interdependent world (Kallio, 2009). As the United States of America continues to become more diverse, children will start to have more direct and indirect opportunities to interact with people who are different from them. Not only will children benefit from becoming more comfortable interacting with a wide range of people (Ramsey, 2015), but the health of the United States of America's democratic state is dependent on it (Banks, 2008). Civic educators and scholars who span the disciplinary spectrum assert that educators have a responsibility to help children navigate the complex civic and political landscapes they traverse in the present *and* prepare them for an uncertain future (Levine, 2012). Historically, researchers have placed more emphasis on preparing children to become full, rights-bearing citizens, than on noticing and supporting the ways children are already engaged in the world as citizens (Lawy & Biesta, 2006). Recently, scholars have advocated that in order to advance the field, researchers must shift their focus by exploring how children are already engaged in the world as citizens (Biesta, Lawy, & Kelly, 2009). They must expand their definitions of citizenship to include the ways children participate in their cultural communities and acknowledge that their participation is always potentially political (Kallio, 2009). Reflecting on my experiences working with children, I knew all children are engaged in at least one civic activity: they are carving out space

for themselves in their social worlds and making room for one another. In other words, children are engaged in the politics of belonging.

Learning from the Children

I knew if I was going to expand my understanding of how the children negotiated belongings with their peers, I was going to need the children's help. Studying children and conducting a study with children are very different endeavors (Graue & Walsh 1998). The first, positions children as subjects under study and the researcher as all-knowing expert. The second, positions children as collaborators and the researcher as facilitator and learner. My commitment to conduct a study with children informed every aspect of my process. It influenced how I grounded my study in existing work, framed my research questions, developed and revised my data generation plan, analyzed my data, and wrote up my findings. I knew involving children in my research project was not just an opportunity but also a responsibility (Dillard, 2000). Of course, the purpose of my study informed all of the decisions I made about my research project, but so did how I view children and defined my role as a researcher (Graue & Walsh, 1998). I designed an interpretive study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) that positioned the children as experts on their own lives (Graue & Walsh 1998).

Narrative Inquiry

I chose narrative inquiry as my methodology, because stories are part of the fabric of human life. In Barthes (1975) words, "narrative starts with the very history of mankind; there is not, there has never been anywhere, any people without narrative; all classes, all human groups, have their stories " (Barthes, 1975, p. 237). Children tell stories, listen to stories, and admire good storytellers (Paley, 2004). Children use stories to make sense of their lives, connect with other people, and distinguish themselves as unique. Framing my study as a narrative inquiry

allowed me to: inquire into the everyday experiences of ordinary children (Clandinin, Caine, Lessard, & Huber, 2016), position narrative as "a way of knowing" (Kramp, 2004), and explore the ways the children lived their lives as stories and shared about their lives in storied ways (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I spent time alongside the children, documenting the stories they lived and told, and inviting the children to share their stories with me. Over time, the children relived and retold their stories with me and one another. In order to make sense of the children's experiences, I contextualized their stories within what Clandinin and Connelly (2000) termed "the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space," which accounts for the ways people's stories are: shaped by the physical and affective dimensions of a space, influenced by their experiences and relationships, and grounded in the past and pointed towards the future. Instead of inquiring into the children's big stories about belonging in their communities, I explored the "small stories" (Bamberg, 2006) the children constructed as they informally chatted and played with their peers. By inquiring into the "living narratives" (Ochs & Capps, 2001) the children co-produced, I had access to both their stories and their process, which helped me understand the moves the children made to connect with their peers and the barriers that inhibited their negotiation process. When read together, the small stories the children produced tell a big story about how they negotiated belongings with their peers.

Research Questions

My main research question was: *How do the children define and enact their understandings of belonging as they negotiate relationships with their peers in a diverse summer camp setting?* I designed a series of subsidiary questions to delve deeper into the children's understandings and experiences. Because we know little about how children engage in this negotiation process, I focused my questions on what the children were doing and how their

words and actions functioned. My first sub question: *How do the children define what it means to belong?* encouraged me to listen to the children's words and actions and explore how they understood what it means to belong. My second and third questions: *What strategies do the children use to negotiate belongings with their peers within and across social circle groups?* and *How do the children use language and their moment-to-moment actions and reactions to negotiate inclusive playgroups and playscripts?* honed my attention on what the children were doing when they were hanging out with their peers and what affect their actions had on how they interacted. I designed my last subsidiary question: *What factors seem to facilitate or hinder the children's participation in this negotiation process?* to focus more intently on the role the physical and affective dimensions of the space played in children's negotiations. Together, these questions helped me explore how the children carved out spaces for themselves in their social world and made room for one another.

The Camp and the Children

The context for my study was a summer camp located in a large college town in the Southeastern United States. According to the 2010 census, the population was just over 100,000 people, ranking as the state's 5th most populous city. The fully-funded, month-long summer camp was in its third year of existence. The camp was sponsored by the local school district, university, and community, and it attracted children in grades K-8 from across the county. The children were organized into three grade level cohorts. I worked with the third through fifth graders. The 3-5 cohort was diverse. The children attended eight different elementary schools. The multi-age cohort was composed of children who identified as white, black or African American, Peruvian, Venezuelan, Mexican, and Korean. Three children spoke Spanish, and five children spoke Korean. About half of the children were boys and the other half were girls. Many

of the children had siblings or cousins enrolled in the K-2 or 6-8 program. A few of the children in the 3-5 cohort were related. Most of the children were veteran campers, but because they attended various schools and were in different grades, many of the children had not seen each other since last summer. The children were excited about many of the camp activities, but they were most excited about spending a month hanging out with their camp friends. Twenty-two of the thirty children in the 3-5 cohort elected to participate in my study. I will elaborate on the details of my study in the methods chapter.

Summary

As outlined in this chapter, the primary goal of my dissertation was to understand how children negotiate belongings across social groups with their peers and what conditions encourage inclusive cross-group interactions.

In Chapter 2, I situate my study within relevant literature about children negotiating belongings with their peers. I begin by broadly contextualizing my study within the field of democratic civic education and explaining why civic educators and scholars need to pay attention to the ways children are already participating in the world as citizens. Then, I demonstrate how viewing belonging as a negotiated process, enables researchers to explore how children negotiate ways of being in community with one another, instead of focusing on what comes of their negotiations. I continue with research conducted by childhood studies scholars about children carving out a space for themselves in their social world and making room for one another. I conclude by describing how my study grows our understanding of the ways children negotiate belongings with their peers in diverse social settings.

In Chapter 3, I define my understanding of doing research with and for children and build a case for why narrative inquiry was an appropriate methodology. I detail the particulars of my

study including my research site, participant pool, recruitment process, and data generation and analysis methods. I explain how my study design emerged in response to what I was learning from the children in the field. I conclude by discussing some considerations and limitations related to my work.

In Chapter 4, I illuminate how the children defined and enacted their understandings of belonging. I begin by revealing how the adults and children had different priorities. The adults were interested in teaching the children about their community while the children were interested in refining their capacity to participate in their immediate context. The children's sense of belonging was embodied. They attributed it their relationship with significant objects, places, people, and activities. But belonging was not a status they achieved it was a way of being they constantly negotiated. The primary mode through which the children negotiated belongings with their peers was by constructing and exchanging cultural information.

In Chapter 5, I turn my attention to describing moments when the children negotiated belongings across social circle groups. I explain the significance of in-between spaces by showing how the children were more likely to extend and accept invitations to interact with a wider range of peers when they were participating in emergent, low-stakes, process-focused activities that invited individual participation, but required collaboration. I illuminate how the three typologies typically used to qualify a person's actions as civic or political in nature do not account for the ways the campers participated, and thus I introduce an alternative typology.

Finally, in Chapter 6, I summarize my major findings and identify some ways this work can be continued. I demonstrate how my study builds on existing literature about children negotiating relationships with their peers and the conditions that seemed to facilitate boundary crossing. I acknowledge the shortcomings of my study and raise some important practical,

theoretical, and methodological questions teachers and researchers should consider if they are interested in helping children carve out a space for themselves in their social world and make room for one another.

CHAPTER 2

CONVERSATIONS WITH THE LITERATURE

As mentioned earlier, belonging is a popular topic of inquiry that has roots in many

disciplines. In an attempt to locate literature about children negotiating belongings with their

peers, I wove together theoretical and empirical work from a variety of fields including civic

education, geography, and childhood studies. I only selected work that positioned children as

active participants in the world who shape and are shaped by the civic and political landscapes

they navigate on a daily basis. To begin, I briefly introduce the history of democratic civic

education in the United States of America, tracing its evolution from the early 20th century to

present day highlighting its promise and shortcomings. Thereafter, I introduce some of the

proposals offered to strengthen the quality of civic education programs, concentrating my

attention on the one I find most promising: reframing the curriculum to reflect and build upon

children's lived experiences. Then, I detail how the civic education community has begun to

recognize children's claims to citizenship, acknowledge that civic learning happens both inside

and outside the classroom, and expand their definitions of what counts as civic and political

participation. In the second half of this chapter, I lean on work in the fields of geography,

immigration, and childhood studies to theorize belonging and describe how children negotiate

belongings in their local peer cultures. Finally, I close by explaining how my study deepens our

understanding of how children negotiate belongings in diverse settings as they interact across

social circle groups.

Democratic Civic Education

Most democratic civic education scholars within the field of social studies education agree that the main purpose of schooling is to help create citizens who are prepared to cultivate America's pluralistic, participatory democracy (Hess, 2009; Newmann, Bertocci & Landness, 1977; Parker, 2003; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). These scholars conceive of democracy in a very particular way. Their vision is rooted in the definition John Dewey (1916/2011) advanced in the early 20th century. As Dewey (1916/2011) explained, "A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience" (p. 50). In a similar vein, Jane Addams (1902) argued that democracy, although messy and challenging, is the only sustainable way to live in community with diverse others. In other words, democracy is not something that can be achieved; it is a way of living in community with others that must be constantly nurtured.

A Brief History of Democracy in the United States

Throughout the 1900s, scholars and activists including Addams (1902), Dewey (1916/2011), Du Bois (1945/2007), and Woodson (1921) agreed that America's democracy was failing, yet their belief in the democratic potential was steadfast. As Du Bois (1956) put it, "Democracy is dead in the United States. Yet there is still nothing to replace real democracy" (para. 9). They advocated that the United States of America would not realize its democratic potential until all people including African Americans, immigrants, woman, and the poor and working class were granted full citizenship rights. At the same time, they cautioned that while more and more groups were legally gaining said rights, their positions as second-class citizens were being preserved. For instance, Woodson (1921) explained,

The citizenship of the Negro in this country is a fiction. The Constitution of the United

States guarantees to him every right vouchsafed to any individual by the most liberal

democracy on the face of the earth, but despite the unusual powers of the Federal

Government this agent of the body politic has studiously evaded the duty of safe-

guarding the rights of the Negro. (p. 1)

Top-down efforts, like extending citizenship rights to more groups of people and creating laws

that prohibited hate crimes, were important but inadequate. People who belonged to marginalized

groups continued to be treated as second-class citizens. The culture would only change when

members of privileged groups started treating people who belonged to marginalized groups as

equals. They needed to embrace democracy as both "a rule of living as well as a test of faith"

(Addams, 1902, p. 24) and overcome their fear that "wealth and happiness are so limited that a

world full of intelligent, healthy, and free people is impossible" (Du Bois, 1945/2007, p. 302).

The ordinary actions of individuals matter, because "Citizenship involves the art of being with

others, negotiating different situations and identities, and articulating ourselves as distinct yet

similar to others in our everyday lives, and asking questions of justice" (Isin, Brodie, Juteau, &

Stasiulis, 2008, p. 7). Without the efforts of everyday citizens, the United States of America

would never realize its democratic potential.

During the Civil Rights era a more participatory form of democracy gained momentum.

Instead of focusing solely on top-down efforts to make citizenship rights like voting accessible to

more people, bottom-up efforts began to emerge. For instance, Ella Baker who argued that

"strong people don't need strong leaders" understood democracy to be "an outgrowth of active

participation in the process of political struggle" (Mueller, 2004, p. 81). She spent her career

supporting ordinary people as they fought for their rights. According to Payne (1989),

She was associated with whatever organization in the Black community was on the

cutting edge of the era- the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) in the forties, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in the fifties, and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Council (SNCC) in the sixties. (p. 845)

Baker advocated for "grassroots involvement by people in the decisions that affect their lives; the minimization of hierarchy and professionalization in organizations working for social change; and direct action on the sources of injustice" (Mueller, 2004, p. 82); a kind of participation that later became known as participatory democracy.

Into the 21st century scholars have extended the argument that democratic life is "an ongoing way of shared living rather than an achievement that needs only protection and celebration" (Parker, 2003, p. 24) to reflect the diverse, heterogeneous needs and interests of the American public (Banks, 2008; Collins, 2009; Parker, 2003) and the interdependent nature of the world (Appiah, 2006; Palmer, 2011). As Banks (2008) pointed out "never before in history has the movement of diverse racial, cultural, ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups within and across nation-states been so extensive, so rapid, or raised such complex and difficult questions about citizenship, human rights, democracy, and education" (p. 132). Oftentimes the ideal multicultural democratic society is imagined as a community within which citizens build strong social ties, adopt shared values, acknowledge their obligations to one another, and join forces around issues of equity and justice. While these are worthy ideals to strive towards, it is unrealistic and potentially counterproductive to expect people to come together across difference and adopt, or even develop, a common set of beliefs, values, and practices (Amin, 2012; Appiah, 2006). As Amin (2012) explains, "Envisaging the good society as the society of responsible citizens and collaborating communities… recommends the exclusion or domestication of the

stranger, the revival of core national values, and the strengthening of ties among and between communities" (p. 3). Expecting people to abandon their cultural values and practices or accept the values and practices of other cultures may actually thwart pluralism. Instead, citizens must band together across difference and unceasingly nurture democratic ways of being in community with one another, making and remaking society in ways that consider what is best for them and those closest to them while privileging what is best for community at large.

Democratic Civic Education in Schools

In pursuance of this vision, civic education scholars have argued that children must be taught how to do democracy (Hess, 2009, p. 15), and schools have a responsibility to provide all students with a democratic education. Rooted in the ideals of early twentieth century scholars including Addams (1902), Dewey (1916/2011), and Woodson (1933), the civic education community has emphasized the importance of children having opportunities to think and act as democratic citizens (NCSS, 2013). Put simply, the practice of civic education is built upon four principles: (a) civic competence can be nurtured and taught; (b) democratic ways of being must be cultivated; (c) schools should provide all young people with opportunities to develop their civic and political capacity; and (d) what students learn and experience in school related to civics, government, and politics has the potential to influence their lives as adults. When students learn about democracy, acquire strong civic identities, and develop democratic skills and dispositions, it is more likely they will become active citizens as adults (Sherrod, Torney-Purta, & Flanagan, 2010). But as Campbell (2012) explained, consensus breaks down as soon as civic education scholars discuss what ideas, values, and practices these programs should promote.

Definitions of citizenship. Civic educators largely agree there are three kinds of citizenship fostered in schools. Though they give them different names, they use the same tenets

to organize the types into three tiers. Most civic education programs promote "minimal citizenship" (Banks, 2008) or "personally responsible citizenship" (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Within these programs, children are exposed to nationalistic narratives that encourage obedience, assimilation, and spectatorship. Good citizens take care of themselves, blindly follow rules, and vote. They learn that citizenship is a status they will earn once they turn eighteen, and that America's republican form of government is an accomplishment in need of protection (Parker, 2003). Less frequently, children experience civic education programs that promote "participatory" (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004) or "active" (Banks, 2008) forms of citizenship. They "are designed to support and maintain—but not to challenge—existing social and political structures" (Banks, 2008, p. 136). Good citizens do not just vote, they participate in letter writing campaigns and protests, write op-eds, make public speeches, and contribute to charities. They organize and participate in community events. They are taught that citizens must work with the government and community organizations to make society a better place for all. Even fewer children experience civic education programs that promote "justice-oriented" (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004) or "transformative" (Banks, 2008) forms of citizenship. They are taught that being a good citizen requires more than compliance and participation. Good citizens "question, debate, and change established systems and structures that reproduce patterns of injustice" (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004, p. 240). In addition to learning about how adults are challenging "existing laws, conventions, or structures" (Banks, 2008, p. 136) that perpetuate inequities, they are encouraged to act now. They learn that being a democratic citizen is more than a status people earn; it is a duty they are obligated to uphold.

Pedagogical practices that facilitate civic learning. Most civic education scholars agree that programs that encourage active, participatory, justice-oriented, and transformative kinds of

citizenship better prepare young people to be civically and politically engaged (Castro & Knowles, 2015). Pedagogical practices including, "Experiential civic education, classroom discussion, student participation in school governance, digital civic media production, current-events lessons, media literacy curriculum, and service-learning are all effective means by which schools can increase students' civic knowledge, engagement, and identity" (Levinson, 2012, p. 248-249). Researchers have found children and adolescents can benefit from having opportunities to: a) participate in discussions (see Hess, 2009; Parker, 2010) and cross-cutting political talk (see Mutz & Mondak, 2006) about topics of public concern (see Avery, Levy, & Simmons, 2014; Beck, 2003; Bickmore, 1999; Hess & Posselt, 2002; Hess, 2009; Kawashima-Ginsberg & Levine, 2014; Tyson, 2002) and (b) address issues their communities are facing by engaging in service learning (see Ohn & Wade, 2009; Wade, 2000) and civic action projects (see Blevins, LeCompte, & Wells, 2016; Rubin, 2007; Rubin and Hayes, 2010; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004; Kahne & Westheimer, 2006). Unfortunately, these opportunities are not distributed equitably. In fact, "students whose parents are of relatively high socio-economic status (SES), who are White, and who are academically more successful are far more likely than others to experience civic learning opportunities" (Kahne, Hodgin, & Eidman-Aadahl, 2016, p. 24), which raises questions about if civic education programs are really designed to serve all children.

These practices are most effective when children and adolescents: (a) feel free and safe to speak their mind and believe that their ideas and interests will be taken seriously (Banks, 2008; Collins, 2009; Levinson, 2012); (b) have trust in themselves, others, democratic practices, and their immediate civic institutions (James, Kobe, & Zhao, 2017; Rubin & Hayes, 2010); (c) experience equal status, share common goals, cooperate rather than compete, and have the support of an authority figure and/or access to a structured set of norms that help guide their

interactions (Banks, 2008); (d) have authentic opportunities to engage in civic and political activities because they are invested in addressing a particular issue, they feel connected to the affected parties, and they believe that their participation might make a difference (McIntosh & Youniss, 2010; Zaff, Kawashima-Ginsberg, & Lin, 2011); and, (e) have opportunities to confront the obstacles that make real-world problems hard to address (see Rubin & Hayes, 2010; Kahne & Westheimer, 2006). While these initiatives have been shown to help shrink "the civic opportunity gap" (Kahne & Middaugh, 2008) and "the civic engagement gap" (Levinson, 2010), many children and adolescents, especially those who belong to marginalized groups (Banks, 2008), remain apathetic and disengaged.

Biased practices. Some scholars have reasoned the "best" practices embedded within civic education curricula including discussions and community-based projects are more successful in homogenous settings (Levinson, 2012) and with young people who see the ideals of democracy reflected in their lived experiences (Rubin, 2007) because they privilege white, Eurocentric, middle class values and norms (Banks, 2008). As Junn (2004) explained, these practices are "loaded with a set of assumptions about individual agency, a faith in the causal link between citizen behavior and political outcomes, and a relatively fixed notion of an American democratic creed" (p. 253). They are built on the false assumption that all people are endowed with equal levels of political agency and efficacy. And thus, the practices endorsed in schools do not reflect and build on all students' lived experiences.

Middle-Class and working-class communities. Generally speaking, Americans share the same goal: to have their voices heard and concerns addressed. But, as Schutz (2008) illuminated, they do not always use the same techniques to have their concerns addressed. Middle-class communities tend to privilege discursive practices that encourage individuals to calmly and

rationally contribute their ideas and consider the perspectives others share ultimately striving for consensus, what Schutz (2008) refers to as "discursive democracy". In contrast, Schutz (2008) explains, working-class communities favor embodied, tacit practices that require individuals to put their differences aside and unite around their common interests. As a community, they make collective demands and take collective action, which Schutz (2008) refers to as "democratic solidarity". Each community's strategy is effective in their context. Their privileged status as members of the middle-class makes dialogue an effective means for members to express their needs and interests. Aware of their marginalized status, members of the working-class know their collective actions are much louder than their individual voices, so they act instead of talk.

     African-American and Latina/o communities. Members of marginalized racial and ethnic groups including African-American and Latina/o communities embrace people-centered, action-oriented approaches to civic participation that align more closely with Schutz's (2008) description of "democratic solidarity" than with the discursive practices embraced by the majority. Members of marginalized racial and ethnic groups harness the "power within [their] communities" (Cohen, 2004, p. 42) by cultivating a shared vision of their community's needs and interests (Flores, 2003). United, community members mobilize by participating in "structured, coordinated, and seemingly purposeful acts" (Cohen, 2004, p. 31), conforming to "the dominant norms of society" (Cohen, 2004, p. 31), hiding instances when community members display nonconformist and deviant behaviors (Cohen, 2004, p. 31), publicly sharing their opinions (Cohen, 2004, p. 32), and performing collective acts of resistance (Flores, 2003), "deviance" (Cohen, 2004, p. 42), and "politized resistance" (Cohen, 2004, p. 42). Members of marginalized racial and ethnic groups goals are two-fold: securing their rights as first-class citizens and maintaining their connections to their cultural groups.

Larger trends. Scholars committed to ensuring all citizens are treated as full-rights bearing citizens and are protected by the government, recognize, "more democracy in its current form will not necessarily cure the ills of inequality present in its current form" (Junn, 2004, p. 255). The same can be said for many civic education programs. More of the same, will not produce different results. It may cause children and adolescents "who identify with groups that have been historically excluded from civic and political life to experience alienation" (Kahne, Hodgin, & Eidman-Aadahl, 2016, p. 26) and "may lead some more privileged youth to be unaware of the ways in which such dynamics create and maintain not only alienation from civic and political life but also social inequities" (Kahne, Hodgin, & Eidman-Aadahl, 2016, p. 26). Change is necessary.

Like many civic educators and scholars, I hold steadfast to the belief that, "multiplicity, solidarity and common provision remain valid principles to address a future that can only become more hybridized," (Amin, 2012, p. 11) while recognizing that, "To yearn for purity is to close off possibility" (Amin, 2012, p. 11). Because universal definitions of citizenship like "minimal citizenship" (Banks, 2008) and "personally responsible citizenship" (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004) assume all people have access to the same opportunities and protections and encourage blind obedience, they are insufficient (Young, 1989). "Participatory" (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004) and "active" (Banks, 2008) forms of citizenship do not go far enough either. Although they encourage active participation and vocal advocacy, they do not urge people to challenge the status quo. Critical definitions of citizenship like "justice-oriented" (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004) or "transformative" (Banks, 2008) forms of citizenship are necessary to address the needs and interests of the United States of America's diverse populous. Critical definitions of citizenship embody feminist, social, cultural, queer, reconstructivist, cosmopolitan, and

transnational discourses that strive to remedy "exclusions based on gender, culture, ethnicity, nationality, race, sexuality, or socioeconomic class" (Knight Abowitz & Harnish, 2006, p. 666) need to take their place. These discourses acknowledge people's participation in multiple local, cultural, regional, national, and global communities (Banks, 2008) and expand how civic membership, identity, and engagement are defined (Knight Abowitz & Harnish, 2006). More specifically, people, over the course of their lifetime, participate in a variety of civic, political, social, and cultural communities that span local, regional, national, global, and virtual spaces. It is their engagement within and across these spaces that accounts for how they view the world and participate in it.

But even these critical definitions of citizenship do not necessarily include children, because, they still emphasize individuality, autonomy, equality, and sameness (Moosa-Mitha, 2005). As Larkins (2014) explains, "Children have an unsettled relationship with the status of citizenship, being given some rights, responsibilities and opportunities for participation, and being denied others" (p. 7). Politically speaking, it is unlikely children will ever be given the same rights and responsibilities as adults. But this does not mean that children do not participate in the civic and political sphere or that their participation is inconsequential. It is just that many of the characteristics used to categorize someone as a citizen in the United States, like autonomy, freedom, and the capacity to perform specific tasks, are not available to children (Moosa-Mitha, 2005). When instead presence, agency, and ability to act are used as qualifiers, citizenship becomes available to children (Moosa-Mitha, 2005). Children are active participants in their cultural communities and their participation is always potentially political (Kallio, 2009). Because cultural definitions of citizenship are built on the assumptions that citizenship is: a) "a complexly negotiated set of cultural practices" (Reynolds, 2013, p. 478) which are always being

made and remade in response to the affordances and constraints people encounter in their local contexts; and b) civic participation is about "being-made" and "self-making" (Ong, 1996), one's age does not prohibit someone from being classified as a citizen. From this perspective, "children can be firmly seen as citizens in the sense that they are social actors, negotiating and contributing to relationships of social interdependence" (Larkins, 2014, p. 7). Children participate in their communities and their participation is valid and influential.

Digging into the history of democracy and civic education in the United States of America helped me understand the diversity of people's experiences. There is no single definition of what it means to live in America. People's social and cultural locations intimately shape their experiences, how they participate in the world as citizens, and even how they interpret the democratic creed. Although critical definitions of citizenship are more inclusive because they recognize a wider range of ideals and practices as legitimate, most of them still exclude children. Cultural definitions of citizenship are different because they are built on the premise that everyone, young and old, are active participants in their cultural communities and their words and actions are always potentially political.

When designing and implementing my study, I predicted that the children would have a variety of perspectives and experiences. I knew I needed to design an open and flexible study that would allow them to speak their truths and would allow me to hear their stories. I knew their perspectives and experiences would likely differ from mine. Not only am I an adult, I am a millennial. My participants were children and members of generation Z. When they made pop culture references, I had no idea who or what they were referencing. I grew up in the north and they are growing up in the south. I am from Ohio and most of them have lived in Georgia for much, if not all, of their lives. In addition, we often participated in different social and cultural

groups. In many ways, I was an outsider. But, by familiarizing myself with the priorities and practices of different social and cultural groups, I was better prepared to listen. In addition, I knew what the field of civic education needed. They needed to grow their understanding of how children are already participating in the world as citizens. One of the spaces where children consistently define and enact their understandings of citizenship and community is when they are participating in their cultural communities. Therefore, I set out to explore how children carve out spaces for themselves in their social world and make room for one another.

Inquiring into the Situated Nature of Civic Development

For decades, scholars have recognized that children affect and are affected by their communities, but they often overlook when and how their participation becomes political. For instance, scholars in the field of childhood studies have explored the ways children actively participate in the world and influence matters that affect their lives, but they rarely theorize their participation as political. Civic education scholars overlook children's political participation for a different reason. They wrongfully assume that children only become politically engaged when their words and actions mirror adult participation; when, in reality, children's political understandings and enactments often differ from those of adults (Kallio, 2009). In recent years, scholars in these communities and others have realized that children's participation in their communities is always potentially political because "civic learning is a situated endeavor embedded within settings with particular political, historical, economic, and social dimensions" (Rubin & Hayes, 2010, p. 374). This realization has sparked interest in exploring how children participate in the world as already citizens.

Many members of the civic education community, including myself, assert that in order to improve the quality of the civic education all children receive in school, we need to know

more about how children define and enact their understandings of citizenship in their local contexts. By and large, civic education scholars agree that: a) civic learning and development happens both within and outside of the school building (Zaff, Kawashima-Ginsberg, & Lin, 2011); b) children are not citizens-in-waiting, but citizens in their own right (Lawy & Biesta, 2006); c) civic and political participation looks different across communities and generations (Levinson, 2010); d) democratic societies need citizens who are ready and willing to contribute in a variety of indirect, "duty-based" and direct, "engaged" ways (Dalton, 2008); (e) citizenship is a "practice" people engage from birth to death rather than an "achievement" they attain after moving along a particular developmental trajectory (Lawy & Biesta, 2006). In short, children actively shape and are shaped by the communities within which they participate. And thus, in order to transform their civic education work to better support all students, educators and scholars need to develop "a more thoroughgoing understanding of the ways in which young people actually learn democratic citizenship through their participation in the communities and practices that make up their everyday lives" (Biesta, Lawy, & Kelly, 2009, p. 8). They have started to expand their research trajectories to explore how children develop and enact their understandings of what it means to be civically and politically engaged by pursuing three lines of inquiry.

Children as Civic and Political Actors

One group of scholars has studied how children and adolescents respond when invited to participate in programs designed to help them address issues of public concern in their communities (see Abu El-Haj, 2009; Cammarota, 2008; Cowhey, 2006; Love, 2014; Paley, 1992; Souto-Manning, 2009). The children and adolescents involved in these studies deepened their understanding of the issue at hand and what contributed to its perpetuation, empowering

them to act. The second group of scholars have explored how children and adolescents insert themselves into the civic and political sphere by becoming involved in community activist groups (see Bosco, Aitken, & Herman, 2011; Jenkins, Shresthova, Gamber-Thompson, Kligler-Vilenchik, & Zimmerman, 2016; Torres, Rizzini, & Del Rio, 2013). Across all three studies, the children and young people had a strong vision of how they could make their communities more just and equitable places for all. As they joined forces with their similarly committed community members, they identified what needed to be done and which practices and strategies might prove helpful. Then, they did everything in their power to work towards those ends. A third group of scholars has focused their attention on how children and adolescents navigate their mundane, everyday lives in civic and political ways (see Bartos, 2012; Ellwood & Mitchell, 2012; Lester, 2013). The researchers noted instances when the children and adolescents with whom they worked positioned themselves as social and political actors in their home, school, and community spaces. In all cases, the children actively participated in their communities by working within and around the structures adults had established to "protect" and "provide for" them to have a say in matters that affected their lives.

Although civic education scholars in the United States of America have started to expand their understanding of how children participate in the world as citizens, they continue to endorse citizenship typologies that do not reflect and build on children's lived experiences. Many members of the international community have taken their work a step further. They advocate, as Lucio & l'Anson (2015) explain,

> Acknowledging children as citizens involves not only a recognition of the ways in which
> they conform to more or less standardized ways of relating to the world, of participating
> at the civic and political level and consuming cultural products, on the one hand, but also,

on the other, recognizing their innovations, their creativity and even their negation – or

subversion – of traditional models of participation and citizenship. (p. 131)

They no longer debate if children are political actors, but instead focus their attention on when

their everyday acts become political. And therefore, they look to the "realm of small, banal, low-

key, daft, happenstance things, moments, events, practices, experiences, emotions, complexities,

quirks, details and who-knows-what-else?" (Horton & Kraftl, 2005, p. 133) for evidence of

children's political activity.

In sum, scholars who are committed to supporting children as citizens, foreground the

cultural dimension of citizenship. They recognize that: citizenship is about cultural participation;

and cultural participation is political. Consequently, they hone their attention on children's

cultural practices, which Nasir and Kirschner (2003) define as people's "local moment-to-

moment social interactions" (p. 141). By inquiring into children's moment-to-moment

interactions, scholars are able to observe how children negotiate ways of being in community

with one another. And because no two enactments are ever quite the same, they argue, "a

sensitivity to practices might help us to see the world somewhat anew; to realise how many

ostensibly inevitable, commonsense or fixed things in the world are actually always ongoing and

constantly reformulated in and through practice" (Horton & Kraftl, 2006, p. 75). Although they

acknowledge that practices are always potentially political, they do not regard everything

children say and do as political. Rather they consider a child's words and actions political when

they are "purposive, oriented, and intentional" but not necessarily, "interest-driven or reflexive in

a sense that the children themselves or anyone else would readily identify it as politics" (Kallio

& Häkli, 2011, p. 106). For instance, when children call on the resources available to them to

"reconfigure the existing order of the world to satisfy their own urges" (Lester, 2013, p. 28),

"challenge positions and identities offered to them by adults or peers" (Kallio & Häkli, 2011, p. 105), or "negotiate and occupy unsupervised spaces" (Kallio & Häkli, 2011, p.105) their actions become political because they are shaping their experiences and the experiences of others.

The civic education community in the United States would benefit from additional studies about how children navigate their everyday lives as civic and political actors. We can learn a lot from our international counterparts who have spent the better part of twenty years exploring when children's participation in their everyday lives become political. They have learned that children are more politically active when they have the space and time to participate in their communities. Children more consistently assert themselves as political actors, "beyond the gaze of adults, within informal, domestic, non-politicised liminal spaces" (Wood, 2012, p. 341) where they have more autonomy to decide how they spend their time. Sometimes children have the luxury of distancing themselves far enough from adults to create self-governed hang out spaces where they can relax with their peers (Matthews & Limb, 1999); but more often than not, children have to secure momentary control over their lives within adult-regulated spaces like playgrounds, hallways, and lunch tables (Matthews & Limb, 1999) by diverting the structures adults have created to protect and provide for them (Horgan, Fords, Martin, & Parkes, 2017). Whether children are able to escape the gaze of adults for a moment or an extended period of time, they locate opportunities to play both in a literal and metaphoric sense. Children's play, "serves its own ends and actualizes wherever there is space for it" (Kallio, 2009, p. 8). Children play competitive, collaborative, and imaginative games (Evalddson & Corsaro, 1998), but they also play with the rules adults expect them to follow and roles adults expect them to assume. Children play to make sense of and garner control over their current situation. As Lester (2013) explains, "Playful moments transform bordered spaces into participatory spaces" (p. 29) where

children can "resist, conform and negotiate on their own terms" (Kallio, 2009, p. 6) by exercising their "embodied and embedded collective agency to credibly assemble bodies, time/space and material for their desires" (Lester, 2013, p. 37). Children need more opportunities to participate in their cultural communities, and they need adults to recognize that their participation is always potentially political.

Reading widely, helped me make theoretical and methodological decisions about how to frame my study. Recognizing that children are already citizens (Lawy & Biesta, 2006), compelled me to inquire into how children engage in the world on their own terms instead of crafting a curriculum that invited the children to participate in specific ways. Children continually define and redefine what it means to belong and who belongs and who does not, which, by nature, is political work. Further, if I implemented a curriculum, I might inadvertently encourage the children to interact in ways that do not reflect the approaches and strategies they use to navigate their social and cultural communities (Levinson, 2010), but instead match my expectations. When considering where I might conduct my study, I did not have to narrow my focus to traditional school settings, because civic learning is always happening (Zaff, Kawashima-Ginsberg, & Lin, 2011). I could caste a wide net. I also knew the field would benefit from learning more about what happens in diverse spaces. I intentionally researched potential sites where children from different social and cultural groups gathered. Thus, I designed my study to inquire into how the children define and enact their understandings of belonging as they interact with their peers in diverse social settings, paying special attention to the moments when the children negotiated inclusive playgroups and playscripts. Following, I define belonging and synthesize what is known about how children negotiate belongings with their peers.

Belonging as a Theoretical Construct

It is not surprising that scholars in the fields of geography and immigration studies have theorized belonging. They study movement, migration, and the ways people and places interact. The notion of belonging is central to their work. While they do not all speak specifically to children's experiences, I will demonstrate how their theorization parallels one of the theories childhood studies scholars use to describe how children carve out a space for themselves in their social world and make room for one another. But first, let me describe how geographers theorize belonging. They understand belonging to have an internal and an external dimension. As Jones and Krzyzanowski (2011) explain, "At some level belonging is a way of describing how individuals interpret a huge range of imagined and lived attachments and memberships" (p. 50). But belonging does not just represent how people position themselves and where they feel like they belong, it also represents how other people position them and where other people say they belong. The feeling of belonging cannot be separated from the politics of belonging. As I detail below, belonging is experienced and performed on four major analytical levels.

Belonging is relational. People formally and informally participate in a variety of groups that "are multiple and span a number of terrains such as those of gender and class as well as ethnicity and nation, political and value systems" (Anthias, 2008, p. 15). It is helpful to think about a person's identity markers, affiliations, and memberships as their social and cultural locations (Yuval-Davis, 2006), because it shifts attention away from categorizing individuals into static groups and instead accentuates the commonalities that bring people together while preserving the differences that differentiate members from one another. Although social and cultural locations have a degree of permeability, people do not get to choose all of their locations (Calhoun, 2003). Some locations, like a person's race, are ascribed to them and "stay with people

in all situations for their entire lives" (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001, p. 32). Other social and cultural locations, like a person's occupation, role as a parent or sibling, and hobbies and interests become more or less salient across time, space, and contexts. Thus, a person's social and cultural locations "are neither simply fixed nor simply fluid but may be more fixed or more fluid under different circumstances" (Calhoun, 2003, p. 537), and "seldom contain whole persons or command all of their allegiance" (Calhoun, 2003, p. 547). In summary, people occupy multiple social and cultural locations that overlap, intersect, and, at times, contradict one another, undoubtedly influencing their experiences of belonging.

Belonging also has an affective dimension. It marks the places where people feel "at home" or like they fit in. As Jones and Krzyzanowski (2011) explain, "belonging can be considered a process whereby an individual in some way feels some sense of association with a group, and as such represents a way to explain the relationship between a personalized identity and a collective one" (p. 44). In this case, belonging accounts for an "individuals' identifications and emotional attachments to various collectivities and groupings" (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 199). There are five factors which influence whether or not a person feels "at home" or like they fit-in (Antonsich, 2010). People's past experiences and memories (auto-biographical factors) as well as their personal and social relationships (relational) tie them to certain places. When people speak the same language, eat the same special foods, and practice the same traditions (cultural factors) they are more likely to feel at home. People also experience a stronger sense of belonging when they are able to contribute to their community and provide for themselves and their family (economic factors). People feel safer and more secure when they are legally categorized as a citizen (legal factors). But belonging also involves a degree of "longing"

(Antonsich, 2010). Belonging is as much about the places where people feel like they belong as it is about the places where people want to belong.

Belonging is also political; because it requires boundary drawing and policing (Anthias, 2016). Boundaries are drawn on different scales and with varying degrees of transparency to include some and exclude others. On the microlevel, people use their "ethical and political value systems… [to] … judge their own and others' belongings" (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 199) and control who has access to opportunities, resources, and spaces. Everyone encounters boundaries, but people navigate them in different ways. Often, people who occupy more powerful social and cultural locations, meet fewer boundaries and navigate the boundaries they do encounter with more ease. They also have more say in when and how boundaries are drawn, causing them to have at least some influence over other people's experiences of belonging (Anthias, 2016). When people occupy less powerful social and cultural locations, they use more subversive means to navigate, create, and break the boundaries they encounter.

Belonging is always cultural, even though scholars often overlook this dimension in their work. As Antonsich (2010) explains, many theorizations assume that a person belongs when they are with other members of their identity groups or when they are officially recognized as a citizen. Others assume people always already belong, because they are intimately connected with all of humanity (Antonsich, 2010). All three theorizations fall short of representing the ways belonging is lived, felt, and experienced because "No one lives outside particularistic solidarities" (Calhoun, 2003, p. 546). They are lacking because they are "individualistic in ways that obscure the basic importance of social relationships and culture" (Calhoun, 2003, p. 546). Spending time with people who belong to one's social and cultural groups provides people with "networks of mutual support, capacities for communication, frameworks for meaning" (Calhoun,

2003, p. 537), which helps people feel like they belong. But people also connect with people who do not share their social and cultural locations (Antonsich, 2010). A person's citizenship status can affect whether or not they feel like they belong, but a person does not have to officially be considered a citizen in order to participate in a group; and a person's status as a citizen does not guarantee they will be welcomed into a community (Antonsich, 2010). Although every person is a part of humanity writ large, they do not necessarily feel connected to people across the globe, but rather to people with whom they have formed "particularistic solidarities" (Calhoun, 2003 p. 546) due to their shared interests, experiences, occupations, and/or social and cultural locations. People are "situated in particular webs of belonging, with access to particular others but not to humanity in general" (Calhoun, 2003, p. 536). Diprose (2008) offers an alternative theorization that foregrounds the social and cultural dimensions of belonging by tying the notion of community to being together in places instead of to a having shared identity markers.

Belonging, as Diprose (2008) explains is about being in community with others. Like all definitions of community, Diprose's (2008) definition has the same roots: "community is about sharing meaning (through shared practices, language, concepts, laws, beliefs, and so on) through belonging together" (p. 37). But instead of supposing that people have to belong to the same cultural groups to form communities or that people can detach themselves from their social and cultural locations and operate freely as individuals, she argues, belonging is always possible as long as people are building shared meanings. Belonging, according to her theorization, is "lived at a prereflective, felt level rather than explicitly negotiated or easily recognized. And it is both engendered and transformed by other bodies (both human and nonhuman)" (p. 37). From this perspective, community formation is always possible, and belonging is about exploring and constructing shared meanings. Diprose (2008) elaborates,

Community, then, is not a bond of recognition between bodies coded in fixed hierarchical terms, nor a unity of shared identity predicated on the exclusion of those categorized as Other. Rather, community is the sensibility of belonging as inclination toward others and the attendant expression of the uniqueness of bodies. (p. 46)

Communities form as a result of people being drawn together, and communities are held together by people who are committed to building shared meanings. Thus, belongings are not inherited or furnished, they are "built and undone through affective bodies" (Diprose, 2008, p. 36). Because shared meanings are collaboratively built, participation is always possible. Even when people do not have the cultural knowledge necessary to participate, they can develop it; or the community can adjust their practices to accommodate new ideas and values. The same openness that makes communities accessible and inclusive also makes them vulnerable and exclusive. When something interrupts their meaning making process, the stability of a community is threated, and individuals may end up being left out. In other words, when meanings breakdown, communities are at risk of breaking down too. Whether or not someone belongs is tied to their ability to participate in the production of shared meanings.

In summary, belonging is not a given, rather it is socially and culturally produced and reproduced. Belonging is best framed as a negotiation process. In Antonsich's (2010) words, "Every politics of belonging involves two opposite sides: the side which claims belonging and the side which has the power of 'granting' belonging" (p. 13). People are constantly seeking and granting belongings as they navigate their everyday lives. And, they are being granted and denied belongings by other people. When researchers focus their attention on the ways people negotiate belongings in their local contexts, they pay attention to how people and structures interact. Building on work in the fields of intersectionality, citizenship, and multiculturalism,

Anthias (2002) introduced a new framework that she termed translocational positionality. In her words, "The notion of translocational positionality not only focuses on the crisscrossing of different social locations, but also relates to the shifting locales of people's lives in terms of movements and flows" (Anthias, 2002, p. 17). Anthias used the term "translocational" to emphasize the powerful role context plays in people's experiences of belonging. As she explained, "The focus on location (and translocation) recognizes the importance of context, the situated nature of claims and attributions and their production in complex and shifting locales" (Anthias, 2002, p. 502). Anthias paired the term translocational with the term positionality to draw attention to how people participate in this interactional space. People might reproduce existing boundaries and consequently perpetuate what is, or they might manipulate the boundaries they encounter to realize new possibilities. Researchers can deepen their understanding of how people negotiate belongings by inquiring into how people navigate, reproduce, and manipulate the boundaries they encounter in their everyday communities.

Children Negotiating Belongings

Researchers in the field of childhood studies agree, paying attention to how people navigate boundaries is telling. They use a theory called interpretative reproduction (Corsaro, 1992) to deconstruct how children participate in this process. They argue that children, like adults, both reproduce what society tells them is good, right, and fair, and reimagine these definitions to fit their needs, interests, and desires. Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001), agree that, "Children, like all human beings, actively reshape, blend and synthesize elements of the preexisting patterns around them—in families, other social settings, and the mass media" (p. 20). But their process differs from that of adults because children participate in two social worlds: the one dominated by adults and the one they govern themselves. As Corsaro (2015) explains,

"children are active, creative social agents who produce their own unique children's cultures while simultaneously contributing to the production of adult societies" (p. 3). It is their participation in both social worlds that informs how children define and enact their understandings of belonging.

According to the theory of interpretative reproduction, three factors mediate the ways children negotiate belongings. One, children affect and are affected by society. Although children are "constrained by the existing social structure and by social reproduction" (Corsaro, 2015, p. 18), children "do not simply imitate or internalize the world around them" (Corsaro, 2015, p. 23). They actively and creatively navigate the boundaries they encounter, expressing their desire to belong and extending invitations to others. Two, children are not isolated individuals who are plodding along linear developmental paths but rather social beings who are collectively producing and reproducing evolving memberships, capabilities, and understandings. As children navigate their face-to-face interactions with one another in shared social spaces they collaboratively imagine and reimagine a set of "routines, artifacts, values, and concerns" (Corsaro 2015, p. 122) that define what it means to belong and who belongs and who does not. And three, their participation is both performative and pedagogical. Children use "language and moment-to-moment actions and reactions" (Madrid & Kantor, 2009) to "creatively appropriate" (Corsaro, 2015) belongings for their own purposes. But their participation is also educational. Children's experiences negotiating belongings in the present are likely to inform how they negotiate belongings in the future. In short, using interpretative reproduction as a lens to study how children participate in their "local peer cultures" (Corsaro, 2015) can help researchers recognize what children say and do to carve out a space for themselves in different contexts and make room for one another.

As explained earlier, negotiating belongings is a relational process. The situated nature of how people seek and grant belonging in their local contexts has caused many researchers to study how children who participate in different gender, race, ethnic, and class groups negotiate belongings in their local contexts. All children (ages two through thirteen) share at least two desires: spending time with their peers and gaining control over their lives (Corsaro, 2015). Although all children prioritize "doing things together" (Corsaro, 2015, p. 154) and achieving "autonomy from the rules and authority of adult caretakers" (Corsaro, 2015, p. 167), they do not use the same sets of routines, rituals, and kinds of talk to achieve these goals.

For instance, children, at different ages, interact with their peers in different ways and with different intentions. As Corsaro (2015) explains, toddlers engage in coordinated, non-verbal play routines. They focus their attention on working together to achieve a common goal. Their focus is not on what they are doing or with whom they are working, but rather on accomplishing a shared goal like dumping out all of the toys. Preschoolers engage in more sophisticated play routines. They are concerned with establishing and protecting interactive spaces. After developing a play routine, like playing house or building a racetrack, children focus most of their attention on "sharing what they are already sharing" (Corsaro, 2015, p.159) and protecting their established activities from intruders. Elementary-aged preadolescent children are still interested in doing things together, but they shift their attention away from developing and protecting play routines to establishing and preserving relationships with specific children. They are less interested in playing certain games and more interested in playing with certain peers.

Because I worked with seven- to ten-year-old's, I focus the remainder of my review on studies about preadolescents (children ages 7 to 12) negotiating belongings with their peers. I only reference studies conducted with younger children (preschool to grade one) when the

researchers drew conclusions that seemed relevant to preadolescents' lives. Instead of providing an exhaustive review, I have featured studies that highlight the complex web of factors that influence how children negotiate relationships with their peers. As I just explained, preadolescents are not just interested in "doing things together", they are concerned with establishing and maintaining relationships with specific peers. For preadolescents, belonging is about friendship (Paley, 1986; Ramsey, 1991). Therefore, preadolescents prioritize hanging out with friends and focus much of their attention on creating boundaries that define their social circles. In the sections to come, I discuss the important role friendship plays in children's lives. Then, I introduce the factors that influence the nature and quality of children's social relationships. Finally, I describe the strategies children use to establish and maintain relationships with peers, emphasizing how children who occupy different social and cultural locations have similar goals but use different strategies to negotiate belongings in their local contexts.

Hanging Out with Friends

Spending time with friends is an important part of preadolescent life. As Adler and Alder (1998) explain, "Friends provide children with a means of entertainment, a source of feedback, a feeling of belonging, and a foundation of identity" (p. 115). Preadolescents rank "proximity, or being with someone," as the most important element of a strong friendship (Davies, 1982, p. 68). Learning someone's name is often the first step (Scott, 2003). Children continue to prioritize spending time together over the course of their relationship. At school, they line up near their friends and sit with friends at lunch and on the bus. Friends save seats for one another and make room for one another even when it appears as if no one else could possibly squeeze into a space (Nukaga, 2008). Friends dress alike and pursue similar interests (Moore, 2002). They are aware,

if they do not nurture their existing relationships, they will weaken and possibly even dissolve. By spending time together, engaging in similar activities, and developing similar tastes, children build a collective identity that communicates that they are friends. This sense of "we-ness" not only fulfills children's desire to spend time with their peers, it also enables children to gain, at least some, control over their lives. Although all friendships, to an important extent, share these characteristics, they vary in length, purpose, and intimacy.

Broadly speaking, children's friendships can be organized into two categories: social friendships and activity partnerships (Ramsey, 1991). Social friendships are often tied to specific people, whereas activity partnerships are often tied to specific activities and contexts. Social friendships can be divided into two smaller categories: close friendships and casual friendships. According to Adler and Alder (1998), children develop close friendships with children they have meaningful contact with over extended periods of times (p. 116) and casual friendships or acquaintanceships with children whose company they enjoy, but with whom they interact with "less frequently and with less intimacy" (p. 127). Children form activity partnerships, or what Adler and Adler (1998) refer to as compartmentalized friendships, as they spend time together within "particular niches" (p. 136) like on the bus, on a sports team, or at a camp.

While children do have some say in if they befriend someone, they do not autonomously make friendship choices. Whether or not children are successful is largely dependent upon their popularity, likability, personality, and relative social status, as well as the nature of the group or activity they are trying to join. Children tend to establish stronger relationships with children who are like them and often play in gender-segregated (Schofield, 1989; Thorne, 1993) and racially homogenous groups (Moore, 2002; Schofield, 1989; Tatum, 2003; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001). This pattern is not coincidental. Typically, people living in the United States

reside in segregated neighborhoods (Tatum, 2003). Even in diverse communities, people have more frequent and sustained opportunities to interact with other members of their social and cultural groups. In most cases, children have little control over where they attend school, where they live, or even how they spend their afternoons and evenings. For instance, children growing up in middle-class homes typically participate in numerous organized activities, whereas children living in poor and working-class homes have more autonomy over how they spend their leisure time often choosing to play with friends and family members who live in the neighborhood (Lareau, 2011). So, while children have some say in if they spend time with someone, they are only able to pursue relationships with other children that also spend time in their school, neighborhood, and community spaces.

Luckily, children who occupy different social and cultural locations do not participate in "separate worlds"; rather, they move "fluidly in and out of familial-based and gender-based groups" (Goodwin, 2003, p. 234) in ways that resemble Goffman's (1977) "with-then-apart" model. According to Goffman, people spend a substantial amount of time in gender-segregated groups, but this does not mean children never interact across gender lines. Thorne (1993) echoed Goffman's findings describing moments when "girls and boys… interact as boundaried collectivities" and "work and play in relaxed and integrated ways" (p. 118). The with-then-apart model also applies to children's other social and cultural locations. As will become evident in the sections below these patterns have some traction. Every time children interact, they creatively appropriate social values, governing structures, and membership criteria from the adult world and apply them to their local contexts. But children do not simply internalize the messages they encounter and apply them to their lives. They creatively appropriate them for their own purposes to fit their contexts (Corsaro, 2015).

Social values. Children develop values and a sense of right and wrong as they spend time in their homes and community spaces. They develop attitudes and behaviors that are socially acceptable and refine their ability to judge what is good, right, and fair. Because children participate in more than one community, they often encounter mixed messages. Behaviors that are encouraged in one space, might be discouraged in another. For example, they might interpret the invitation to play differently. As Heath (1983) described young children being raised in the white, working-class community engaged with the blocks, books, and art supplies in ways teachers intended. But, children from the black, working-class community "interpreted play as improvisation and creation" (p. 273). When playing at home, they creatively mixed toys and materials from different rooms and fluidly move items between inside and outside spaces. When they responded similarly at school, they unknowingly broke numerous rules including "using items for the purposes for which they were intended, returning items to their usual place of storage after each use, and keeping all items clean of mud and any other sticky substance" (p. 274). What was viewed as creative and resourceful at home was interpreted as disobedient, irresponsible, and even destructive at school. Values that help children navigate one context, might impede their ability to navigate another.

In addition, children receive mixed messages about what it means to live in a democratic society. As Ramsey (2015) explained, "On the one hand, they are learning that all people are 'created equal (Declaration of Independence) and that we as a nation are united to provide for the common good (Constitution)" (p. 4). At the same time, Ramsey continues, "children are learning that some groups are valued more than others, that it is acceptable to exclude classmates, and that material wealth is a source of individual status and control" (Ramsey, 2015, p. 4). Despite what some adults believe, children are not color-blind or culture-blind (Milner, 2007). Children notice

and name the ways they are similar to and different from one another, and their observations inform with whom and how they interact (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001). Sometimes, when children display racist, sexist, classist, and homophobic attitudes and behaviors they are imitating what they have witnessed in society, but other times they are using racial and ethnic ideas and concepts as powerful tools "to exercise social control within their play, sometimes working toward including or excluding other children from an activity" (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001, p. 96). Further, the United States of America is a meritocratic society that values individualism, competition, and getting ahead. Like many adults living in the United States of America, children assume a person's happiness and success are tied to their social ranking and social mobility. And thus, children use hierarchical structures to organize their local peer cultures and friendship groups by including some and excluding others (Ramsey, 2015).

Governing structures. Most peer cultures are hierarchically organized. In their well-known longitudinal study of white, middle-class children's friendships Adler and Adler (1998) found the children stratified themselves into four tiers. Within each tier, children possessed different degrees of autonomy and social mobility causing them to have very different expectations and experiences. The popular clique and wannabe group had strong hierarchal structures with clear leaders, and thus members had little autonomy. Popular group leaders focused their attention on maintaining control, while followers concentrated on maintaining their place in the cool group. On occasion, wannabees achieved their goal of hanging out with the cool group, but they rarely achieved full membership status. Independent friendship circle groups generally had weak hierarchical structures and were inclusive. Participants in independent friendship circles were not interested in joining the elite group. Instead, they prioritized spending time with peers who had similar interests and experiences. The children at the bottom of the

social hierarchy struggled to fit-in and had little social mobility. Seldom, were they invited to play, and their attempts to join activities often proved futile.

Many researchers have found that children used a version of this hierarchical structure to organize their local peer cultures. Elite groups existed in both schools where Scott (2003) conducted her study. Club members at the majority-white, diverse school structured their club in the top-down, exclusive way Adler and Adler described. Here, club members spent most of their time playing with other club members, and the leader had nearly complete control over who was entitled to join the group and how club members spent their time together. But, in the predominately African-American school, the elite group was structured horizontally instead of vertically. The leader invited members to help make decisions and non-club members often joined in their play. But just because non-club members were allowed to play did not mean they were granted membership status.

In some contexts, children did not use a hierarchical structure to organize their local peer cultures but rather their smaller social groups. Corsaro (2015) found that in settings where "we-ness" and social cohesion were valued over individualism, children were more interested in continually "debating and negotiating where they stood with one another rather than in establishing and maintaining rankings" (p. 209). When rankings were more fluid, children carved out a space for themselves in their friendship groups by choosing best friends, assuming and assigning play roles with varying degrees of authority and claiming leadership roles that entitled them to direct other children (Goodwin & Kryatzis, 2011). Goodwin (2006) documented how children created pretend playscripts where best friends became twin sisters that married twin brothers. Kryatzis (2007) observed children negotiating tiered relationships by playing a news reporting game in which they assigned one another hierarchical roles that included lead

announcer, news reporters and subordinate announcers. While children in western societies consistently use hierarchical structures to organize their social worlds, they adapted the structures to reflect their concerns, interests, and values.

Membership criteria. Children dedicate much of their energy to seeking opportunities to participate in their local peer culture and granting (or not) other children the opportunity to play. Children develop membership criteria to control who participates in activities and playgroups. Sometimes children develop exclusionary membership criteria that mirror the white, middle-class, heterosexual norms perpetuated in society. As Van Audsale and Feagin (2001) explain, "Exclusion of others can involve preventing association with unwanted others… or removing oneself from the presence of unwanted others" (p 97). Children might stigmatize their peers as tomboys or sissies for participating in activities that are typically associated with a specific gender group, such as when girls play sports or when boys jump rope at recess (Thorne, 1993). Children might exclude their peers because of their race or ethnicity. Both Moore (2002) and Scott (2003) observed white girls intentionally excluding black girls from their playgroups and activities whereas Garcia-Sanchez (2011) found that the Spanish children in her study avoided and rejected their Moroccan immigrant peers. The children often developed criteria to defend and even disguise their exclusions. Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001) found that the children in their study created "rules" like being able to speak two languages and being white to disqualify some of their peers from playing. Children might not accept their peers into their friendship circles because they do not own the new popular toy or wear fashionable enough clothes (Adler & Adler, 1998; Goodwin, 2006). Further, children might lack the material resources necessary to participate in cultural routines like exchanging food items from their packed lunches (Nukaga,

2008; Scott, 2003) and small trinkets like marbles, pencil toppers, and trading cards (Thorne, 1993) as both givers and receivers.

Other times, children construct more inclusive membership criteria that destabilize the status quo. In the predominately African-American school, where Scott (2003) conducted her study, members of the girls only club played with boys as long as the boys followed the girls' rules, whereas in the majority-white, diverse school club members only interacted with boys in an attempt to protect their territory from invasions. In some spaces, children used more common and accessible "badges of affiliation" such as wearing their bathing suits under their clothes and stowing sticks (collected during recess) in their waistbands to mark group membership (Fernie, Kantor, & Whaley, 1995). Sometimes children even invented their own languages and rules to include their peers like when an English-speaking boy and a Chinese-speaking boy blended elements of their home languages to invent a new language to nurture their budding friendship (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001). There is also evidence that children will challenge their peers when they exclude other children without good reason. For instance, a small group of mixed-age girls who attended the cultural awareness camp Moore (2001) studied, stood up to their white club leader when she excluded a black camper from joining their fantasy game. Over and over again, the girls insisted that their leader let the black camper play. Eventually, they convinced their leader that she was wrong and needed to adopt more inclusive practices.

Establishing and Maintaining Relationships with Peers

Children construct and participate in various routines that help them connect with some of their peers and distance themselves from others. As I elaborate below, children spend much of their time wondering, "how can I start a game that will draw other children, or how can I fit into and elaborate a game that others have started?" (Kyratzis, 2004). Once children gain access to a

group or activity, they call on a different set of strategies to sustain their participation. These strategies can be organized into three main categories: exchanging valuable resources, playing and games, and talking and teasing. Although researchers have found that children engage in similar routines across contexts, they do not always use the same strategies or participate with the same intentions.

Access strategies. Children have a variety of access strategies at their disposal. When they want to join an activity or group, they have to figure out which strategy is most appropriate for their immediate context. Garvey (1984) found that children's attempts to enter a playgroup or activity are most successful when children abide by the following guidelines:

> Don't ask questions for information (if you can't tell what's going on, you shouldn't be bothering those who do); don't mention yourself or state your feelings about the group or its activity (they're not interested at the moment); don't disagree or criticize the proceedings (you have no right to do so, since you're an outsider). (p. 164).

Corsaro (2015) echoed Garvey's (1984) findings. The children in his studies experienced more success when they observed their peers playing together before they tried to insert themselves into a group or activity. After developing a sense of what was happening, the children used indirect strategies like going along with the established play narrative and mirroring their peers' words and actions to demonstrate that they were capable of participating without "messing things up" (Corsaro, 2015, p. 161). But sometimes, children expect their peers to make direct requests when they want to play. On many occasions, Scott (2003) observed African-American children approaching their peers and asking if they could play. The children consistently embraced the newcomers' requests and invited them to join their game or activity. In short, indirect strategies

are not necessarily more successful than direct strategies. Rather, different strategies are appropriate for different settings.

When children are interested in becoming members of an exclusive clique, they use a specific set of strategies to seek membership. The children in Adler and Alder's (1998) study were only able to become a member of the exclusive clique if they: were recruited by a current leader or second-tier member, applied for membership by spending time on the periphery and expressing interest in participating in group, or ingratiated themselves with current members by mirroring their tastes and interests, doling out compliments, and performing favors. The leader controlled who was admitted to the exclusive group. Because clique membership was not stable, current members also used ingratiation techniques to maintain good standing and counter the ever-present threat of expulsion. Clique leaders would instigate subjugation techniques such as gossiping and treating outsiders and lower-status members poorly. Leaders expected clique members to support their subjugation efforts. Non-compliance could cause members to be temporarily rejected or permanently excommunicated from the group.

Other times children are motivated to join an activity or group because they are interested in building relationships with specific peers or participating in a specific activity. Children are more likely to gain access to a playgroup or activity when one or both of the following criteria are met: children feel deeply motivated to participate in an activity or group, and the nature of the context invites inclusivity. Children might be skilled at a certain activity or sport (Thorne, 1993) or interested in a certain kind of play (Fernie, Kantor, & Whaley, 1995) and as a result try to join an existing group. Other times, individuals will come together to form new groups. For instance, in contexts where there is an obvious majority group outsiders bond over their status as non-members. In Nukaga's (2008) study, Korean students were in the majority and hung

together. The children who were not Korean formed heterogeneous, interracial and interethnic friendship groups. Similarly, the African-American and Latina/o boys and girls who attended the "cultural awareness" camp in Moore's (2001) study bonded over being of color. Their experiences participating in marginalized groups brought them together. To strengthen their bond, the children nurtured their shared interests in basketball and popular culture and muted their differences. Even though speaking Spanish played an influential role in the Latina/o children's lives, they never spoke Spanish in front of their African American peers, because it might threaten their collective identity.

In some circumstances, children attempt to join groups or participate in activities that are by definition, out of their reach. Thorne (1993) referred to these instances as "crossing". As she explained, "I have carefully chosen the word 'crossing' to allude to the process through which a girl or a boy may seek access to groups and activities of the other gender" (p. 121). Although Thorne spoke specifically about children crossing gender lines, her definition can be applied to other social and cultural locations like race, class, and ethnicity. No matter which boundaries they are crossing, crossers want to be accepted as, "someone who ha[s] the same rights, skills, capabilities, and interests as the group" (Fernie, Davies, Kantor, & McMurray, 1993, p. 105). Children join activities with three different intentions: disrupting the play, exploring unfamiliar activities and groupings, or earnestly participating. No matter their intentions, children are more successful "crossers" when they have a strong desire to participate, know how to participate, persist in their attempts to participate, and are skilled at the activity. Often, those who are accepted crossers are popular (Thorne, 1993). Children that are endowed with a high social status often operate above the norms that govern how others are expected to act. Therefore, when children successfully cross boundaries they are often tokenized as exceptional cases rather than

as realistic possibilities for all children. Sometimes, other children engage in crossing behavior. Successful "crossers" are aware that they might be teased for participating, but they proceed anyways. Because boundary crossing is not encouraged in many social circles, people rarely advertise their crossing attempts or celebrate other people's efforts. Yet many researchers agree with Thorne (1993) that, "incidents of crossing may chip away at traditional ideologies and hold out new possibilities" (p. 133). Whether children are attempting to join established activities and groups or create new ones securing entry is only the beginning. Children also have to figure out how to maintain their participation. Children typically use three strategies to maintain their participation: exchanging valuable cultural resources, participating in play routines and games, and engaging in verbal talk and teasing routines.

Exchanging valuable cultural resources. Exchanges, although taken for granted by many adults, play an important role in children's local peer cultures (Katriel, 1987). Children gift, share, and trade (Nukaga, 2008) food, collectible trinkets, toys, and coins as a way to negotiate belonging in their local contexts. The items exchanged are similar in three ways: they are small enough to be exchanged discreetly; they are relatively inexpensive; and, they are valuable in the local context. Exchanges serve at least four purposes. They help children: initiate, maintain, and strengthen relationships with their peers; express their feelings about one another; control with whom they interact, and, monitor the boundaries that include some and exclude others. Typically, children only willingly accept and initiate exchanges with peers they like. When children distrust or dislike a person, they are less likely to engage in exchanges with them.

Researchers have found that children engage in three kinds of economic exchanges: "gift-giving, sharing, and trading" (Nukaga, 2008, p. 343). When a child wanted to express appreciation to a close friend, they would gift a small object or piece of food (Nukaga, 2008) or

the change received from purchasing a snack (Scott, 2003). Gift-giving is usually initiated by the giver, executed in secret, and not contingent upon receiving anything in return. Sharing routines often involve many children, can be initiated by the sharers or receivers, and reciprocity is expected. The item is distributed publicly yet discreetly to avoid being interrupted by an adult. In settings where the norm is to share with everyone, a child's request to have a taste (Nukaga, 2008) or a child's offer to give someone a taste (Scott, 2003) sparks a chain reaction, resulting in the sharer distributing (sometimes begrudgingly) samples to all interested parties (Scott, 2003). In other settings, it is socially acceptable to exclude individuals from sharing routines. Scott (2003) found in the majority-white, diverse school, the giver, who was typically a white girl, would publicly share her food (typically a treat) with her best friend and other select friends, but never shared with children she did not know or like. Gift-giving and sharing often occur within social circle groups because the process is symbolic. Trading is different. Children engage in trades to acquire something desirable and thus trading often transpires between children with different social statuses. The objects children trade usually have little value in the adult world but are trendy and valuable in children's local peer cultures. In the early nineties, children traded, "pencil pals (rubbery creatures designed to stick on the end of pencils), rabbit feet, special erasers and silver paper" (Thorne, 1993, p. 21) and more recently children have traded silly bands, rainbow loom bracelets, and fidget spinners.

Children engage in exchanges like gift giving, sharing, and trading to "express and regulate social relationships within the peer group" (Katriel, 1987, p. 307). Children's intentions mattered. When they genuinely engaged in economic exchanges with altruistic motives, they were able to, "balance the unequal economic resources to maintain status of equality among the participants in the peer group" (Evaldsson & Corsaro, 1998, p. 391). But, sometimes they gifted,

shared, or traded items with manipulative or malicious intentions, hoping to gain the favor of their peers (Nukaga, 2008), inflate or maintain their social status (Scott, 2003), "mark class differences" (Nukaga, 2008, p. 369), or offload lower quality or less desirable objects onto their unsuspecting peers (Evaldsson & Corsaro, 1998). In addition, not all children had access to the resources necessary to engage in exchanges as both givers and receivers, consequently endowing some children with more autonomy and power than others.

Playing and games. Children also negotiate belongings through play. Children spend much of their time playing. Even when they are engaged in adult-directed and adult-imposed activities like doing chores and completing schoolwork, children find ways to play. In addition to being enjoyable, play serves another purpose; children "use play and games to address complexities and ambiguities in their relations with each other and adults" (Evaldsson & Corsaro, 1998, p. 381). Evaldsson and Corsaro (1998) described how children engage in three kinds of play: "(1) imaginative play; (2) sociodramatic play; and (3) games with rules" (p. 382). Although each type of play is unique, they share the following characteristics. One, games and activities have a routine and some recognizable characteristics. During play, children adjust the playscripts, norms, or rules to fit their needs and interests. Two, children learn how to play by participating in the activity, encouraging newcomers to assume lesser roles, until they figure out how the game works. And three, some play activities invite open participation whereas others are reserved for players with certain skills, talents, identity markers, and social statuses. Play routines and interactive games are ripe with opportunities for children to negotiate belongings with one another.

Children construct and participate in a variety of play routines including contests, pollution routines, invasions, and play fights (Thorne, 1993) to help them expand, preserve, and

strengthen their social circles groups. Because children often play in gender exclusive groups at school, these routines often reinforce gender lines. Sometimes children have contests between boys and girls to see who is the fastest, strongest, or smartest. Girls use pollution routines like spreading cooties to interrupt boys' play. In an effort to avoid cooties infections, boys run from the girls and give one another cooties shots. Boys use a different kind of strategy to disrupt girls' activities: they invade their space. For instance, two boys might offer to turn the jump rope and after the girls agree to let them play, the boys snatch the rope and run away, making it impossible for the girls to continue playing until they reclaim the rope. Girls respond by chasing the boys away, yelling at them, and populating lookout points to foresee future invasions. Some routines like play fighting and rough and tumble play appear less innocent. But just because adults view "poking, pushing, tripping, grabbing a hat or scarf, [and] pinning from behind" (Thorne, 1993, p. 15) as aggressive and dangerous behaviors, does not mean that children position them as such. Many children view hitting, slapping and other seemingly aggressive actions as playful. They expect and even encourage one another to engage in aggressive play. Children use "moderately aggressive means" (Scott, 2003, p. 406) to grab other children's attention (Scott, 2003), engage in cross-gender play (Evaldsson & Corsaro, 1998; Moore, 2001; Scott 2003), and construct norms that guide how games are played (Goodwin, 1985).

Preadolescents also engage in interactive games such as marbles, hopscotch, clapping games, and jump rope. Often, children play the same games, day-after-day. These "repeated enactments of games like marbles and jump rope allow the preadolescent children to explore and test out their friendships and developing relationships with the opposite sex" (Evaldsson & Corsaro, 1998, p. 400). It is less about what the children are playing and more about what becomes possible as the children play together. Interactive games are "complex *collective*

productions… involving competition in the actual playing of games (shooting marbles and jumping rope), evaluation by the ever-present audiences, and the innovative and important activities of background strategists (such as those children who negotiate trades in marbles)" (Evaldsson & Corsaro, p. 399). In order to jump rope and play marbles, children have to be aware of the locally produced norms and rules that define who can play and how to play. Marble play is often dominated by boys (Evaldsson & Corsaro, 1998) whereas jump rope play is controlled by girls (Goodwin, 1985; Scott, 2003). In order to play marbles, boys had to have marbles, know how to play, and be willing to risk losing marbles, a highly prized item in their local peer culture. When engaged in a game of jump rope, girls take turns as jumpers, turners and chanters (Goodwin, 1985; Scott, 2003). Players use argumentative talk to create rules and make decisions about how the game was going to be played. But that does not mean girls were never involved in marble play or that boys were never involved in jumping rope. Girls participated in marble play by providing commentary and enforcing agreed upon rules (Evaldsson & Corsaro, 1998) and boys joined in jump rope play (Scott, 2003). Although they were permitted to jump, they were prohibited from participating in the girls' argumentative banter about the game. Their suggestions were ignored and at times resulted in them being banished from jumping rope.

Preadolescents also play "chase and catch" games. Chase games usually involve cross-gender interactions: boys chasing girls or girls chasing boys (Thorne, 1993) and therefore provide children with opportunities to interact outside their friendship circle groups. For example, Scott (2003) observed the children in her study playing three different kinds of cross-gender chase games. In the predominately African-American school, the girls played chase and catch games to assert their dominance and provoke the boys to play by their rules. A girl would initiate a chase game by aggressively pursuing a boy by hitting, slapping, or punching him until

he willingly ran, signaling to other children the game had begun. But, when boys tried to pursue girls in the same way, their invitations were refused. In the diverse, white-majority school, girls also had control over if, when, and how chase games unfolded. To them, chase games were a form of entertainment and an opportunity to flaunt their high status. To initiate the first round of monster chase, a boy or a girl of lower-status (often African-American, Latina, or Asian) would approach a white girl, growling and reaching towards her like a monster. If the white girl ran from the child, a game of chase would ensue. And if the girl did not run, the game would not begin. The other chase game served a related but more utilitarian purpose: to keep boys out of girl territory. This version of the game emerged: (a) when club members taunted boys to come near their territory and then chased them away to reaffirm that boys were not welcome in their space; or (b) if club members noticed that boys were encroaching on their territory, they would chase them away to ward off an impending invasion. In conclusion, children use play as a vehicle to establish and maintain relationships with their peers, distancing themselves from some peers and associating themselves with others.

Talking and teasing. Children also use language to negotiate relationships with their peers. The primary way children communicate is through talk. As Kyratzis (2004) explains, "Peer talk is essential for the negotiation of children's status within and inclusion in the peer group, and therefore for building relationships and develop social competence" (p. 640). The reciprocal act of sharing their thoughts, beliefs, and feelings makes it possible for children to construct and maintain local peer cultures and friendship circles. Through talk children make membership decisions, set and enforce participation rules, hold one another accountable for their words and actions, and figure out what it means to be a friend. As I discuss below, children

engage in five types of talk: casual talk, argumentative talk, evaluative talk, playful talk, and exploratory talk.

Children engage in casual talk when they meet new people and hang out with established friends (Adler & Adler, 1998). When children first meet, they chitchat about superficial topics, commonly referred to as small talk. Children also use casual talk to maintain their existing relationships. Children tell their friends about movies they saw and events they attended. They discuss the most recent pop culture news and what happened on the latest episode of their favorite television show. As children engage in casual talk, they have opportunities to get to know one another, nurture their shared interests, and build a collective identity.

Children use argumentative talk, also known as conflict talk, to decide how they are going to share resources, time, and space. The most telling characteristic of this form of talk is that it involves a degree of dissonance. During conflicts, participants express their ideas and opinions and consequently encounter perspectives that differ from their own. Conflicts are fertile grounds for negotiations (Goodwin, 2003). But children view conflicts differently than adults. They are not necessarily interested in reaching resolutions; for them, conflicts are the means through which they construct and reconstruct their local peer culture and friendship groups. They do not view conflicts as fires that need to be extinguished, but rather as the fuel that keeps their relationships alive (Kyratzis, 2004). In Goodwin's (1985) study the girls used argumentative talk to make decisions about how they were going to play jump rope. The girls' disputes helped them decide what roles different players were going to fulfill, which chants they were going to sing, and what rules they were going to use to decide who goes first and how long a child's turn should last. Argumentative talk also plays a role in children's relationships. In Davies (1982) study, her participants framed their arguments as opportunities to reflect on what it means to be a

friend. Walking away, arguing, and fighting are not strategies that end friendships but rather

"maneuvers within friendships" (p. 89). When children get into arguments and fights, they are

communicating their feelings, expectations, and preferences with one another. In effect, arguing

is not a sign that a friendship is failing, but rather as a sign that the terms of the friendship are

being renegotiated (Davies, 1982, p. 100). Arguing helps children figure out how to be in the

world with each other.

Evaluative talk also plays a role in children's social worlds. Children engage in

evaluative talk to establish social norms and hold one another accountable to them (Goodwin &

Kyratzis, 2011). Sometimes, as is in the case of tattling, children make evaluative comments

about their peers in an attempt to get them in trouble for saying or doing something mean and/or

against the rules (Thorne, 1993). Other times, children keep their evaluative assessments to

themselves. Children engage in "he-said-she-said" gossip (Goodwin, 1980) and two against one

gossip (Evaldsson, 2002; Goodwin, 1990) to instigate conflicts and develop allegiances within

and across friendship groups. Children also make value statements to qualify their peer's relative

coolness, popularity (Adler & Adler, 1998) and wealth (Goodwin, 2006). Children use insults,

compliments, and other evaluative comments to judge their peers' behavior, develop and

strengthen alliances, and establish and fortify rifts.

Sometimes their talk is more lighthearted and playful. Children tease, taunt, and joke with

one another; they pose, show off, and play fight (Scott, 2003; Thorne, 1993). Children engage in

playful back and forth taunting routines, feeding off of one another. Referencing Evaldsson's

(2005) study, Goodwin and Kryatzis (2011) explain, after one child initiates a performative talk

routine, the other participants use, "upgrades, laughter, recycles, repetitions, newly linked

evaluations and so on" (p. 371) to extend the insults. For example, children exchange insults and

comebacks using phrases like, "Your ___ is so ___ that ____" with the expectation that each response will be funnier than the last (Evaldsson, 2005). Similarly, Davies (1982) found that her participants also exchanged insults when playing chopped. Each insulter aimed to "come out on top by delivering the wittiest insult" (p. 65). The game ended when observers decided the insult could not be topped yelling, "yah chopped". They also played "sucked in". Players would tell a twisted or exaggerated story to portray another child in a negative way. When the child who was being portrayed negatively, realized what was happening, they would call the other child's bluff. Although playful talk is meant to be endearing, sometimes it becomes hurtful (Davies, 1982; Moore, 2001; Thorne, 1993).

During preadolescence, children also engage in exploratory talk that helps them process the physical and emotional changes they experience as they near puberty. Exploratory talk takes two forms: "nasty talk" (as known as "dirty play") and romance. Both serve the same purpose: they provide children with the opportunity to "get together" and discuss mature topics (Moore, 2001). Part of what makes "nasty talk" (Moore, 2001) and "dirty play" (Fine & Mechling, 1991) popular, is that adults usually forbid children from using dirty words and performing suggestive acts because they view them as inappropriate, offensive, and rude. They also disapprove of children discussing taboo topics like "genital hair growth, menstruation, breast development, and raging hormones" (Moore, 2002, p. 849). Nonetheless children continue to engage in "dirty talk". They use it as a way to mark their status as big kids. Children also engage in romantic talk. They sing jump rope chants about getting married and having babies and tease one another about being girlfriend and boyfriend. In Scott's (2002) study, the boys and girls in her study rarely engaged in cross-gender romance talk, the boys often approached the girls to ask, "Will you be my girlfriend?" Typically, adults ignore children's romantic gestures, unless they pair their labels

with actions like kissing or if they use suggestive language, at which point they render their behavior inappropriate and intervene (Scott, 2002; Moore, 2001).

Moving Forward

As is evident in my comprehensive review, belonging is not a status children achieve, but a state of being they must negotiate. Much of the existing work, focuses on how children seek and grant belonging in homogenous groups. By detailing how children initiate and sustain relationships with their peers, researchers do a pretty good job outlining how children form and protect social circle groups that include some and exclude others. But, after reading across this body of work I noticed another pattern. The researchers did not just provide rich accounts of how the children formed exclusionary social circle groups, they also acknowledged moments when the children crossed boundaries. They mentioned instances when the children extended and accepted invitations to interact with children they did not typically choose as work and play partners, but instead of closely studying when and how children engaged in boundary crossing on their own terms, they jumped right into making suggestions about how adults might facilitate cross-group work and play.

For example, they argued that adults can encourage children to construct more inclusive groups and play scripts by recognizing that, "the decisions they make about classroom structure and process are not neutral in their impact but rather set a context that molds intergroup relations" (Schofield, 1989, p. 218). They can diversify how they group children (Thorne, 1986) and create opportunities for children to engage in activities that encourage inclusivity and intergroup cooperation (Moore, 2001; Schofield, 1989). Adult intervention makes cross-group interactions less risky. When adults expect children to interact with other children who do not share their social and cultural locations, it is as if they are giving the children permission to

interact across groups without having to worry about being stigmatized by their peers. Grouping methods, that deemphasize a child's social and cultural locations, like, "counting off to form teams for spelling or kickball, dividing lines by hot lunch or cold lunch, or organizing a work group on the basis of interests or reading ability" (Thorne, 1986, p. 162) provide children with low-risk opportunities to interact with children outside their social circles.

Adults can also invite children to intermingle and engage in cross-group work and play by designing inclusive activities. In most cases, inclusive activities require lots of players and are accessible to children with different skill levels (Thorne, 1993). There is some evidence that when children have opportunities to casually interact with a wide range of peers, they realize they have some things in common, which encourages them, "to come together on their own initiatives as kids who could share some interests or who had shared some experiences" (Moore, 2001, p. 854) and ultimately grow more comfortable interacting with a wide range of people (Ramsey, 1991). We know children interact across social circle groups. We need to expand our understanding of how children seek and grant belonging across groups and what conditions facilitate cross-group interactions. In the next chapter, I describe how I designed an open and flexible narrative inquiry study that explored how the children negotiated belongings across social circle groups. I define what it means to do research with and for children, frame my study as a narrative inquiry study, introduce my study context and participants, and detail the data collection and analysis methods I used.

CHAPTER 3

DOING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH WITH AND FOR CHILDREN

My primary research question was: *How do children define and enact their understandings of belonging as they negotiate relationships with their peers in a diverse summer camp setting?* The purpose of my study was interpretive (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). I wanted to better understand how children define and enact their understandings of belonging as they interact with their peers. More specifically, I wanted to explore the strategies children use to seek and grant belongings across social circle groups and the conditions that seem to encourage positive cross-group interactions. In addition, I was committed to creating a space where the children's understandings and experiences were valued and viewed as credible sources of information. I chose narrative inquiry as my research methodology because it acknowledged the constructed yet reflective nature of the stories people tell about their experiences. In this chapter, I will describe how I designed an open and flexible narrative inquiry study (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) that positioned the children as experts on their own lives (Graue & Walsh 1998) and allowed me to adjust my plans over time to reflect what was happening in the field and my participants experiences (Morgan, 2008). After introducing the focus of my study, I explain how framing my study as a narrative inquiry helped me grow my understanding of how the children defined and enacted their understandings of belonging as they spent time together at camp. Then, I describe the context for my study, the data generation and analysis methods I used, and some of the considerations and limitations related to my work.

Figure 1: A Design Map of the Study

GOALS:

Better understand how children define and enact their understandings of belonging in their local context

Explore the strategies children use to seek and grant belongings in a diverse social setting

Describe the conditions that seem to encourage inclusive playscripts and playgroups

Create a space where the children's understandings and experiences are valued as credible sources of information

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK:

Personal experiences as teacher

Children as citizens

Belonging as a theoertical construct

Children's overlapping social worlds

Literature on civic education and children's peer relationships

Doing research with and for children

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

How do children define and enact their understandings of belonging as they negotiate relationships with their peers in a diverse summer camp setting?

How do the children define what it means to belong?

What strategies do the children use to negotiate belongings with their peers within and across social circle groups?

How do the children use language and their moment-to-moment actions and reactions to negotiate inclusive playgroups and playscripts?

What factors seem to facilitate or hinder the children's participation in this negotiation process?

METHODS:

Narrative inquiry

Focus group meetings

Descriptive, focused, and systematic observations

Informal conversations

Artifacts

Narrative analysis

Representative constructions

Broadening, burrowing, and storying and restorying tools

VALIDITY:

Include common and unique definitions

Look for hidden narratives in data

Approach data with faith and suspicion

Acknowledge alternatives

Listen to the children's words and actions

Detail process

Avoid generalizations by drawing tentative conclusions

Research as a Responsibility

When researchers are committed to studying children, they make decisions about how to conduct their studies in light of how they view children, what questions they wish to answer, and how they define their role as researchers (Graue & Walsh, 1998). Therefore, before I detail the particulars of my study, I position myself within a community of researchers who are committed to doing research with and for children. Since the late 1980's, many international scholars have criticized the colonizing, Eurocentric, westernized research traditions often used to study children (see Bluebond-Langner & Korbin, 2007; Pacini-Ketchabaw, Nxumalo, Kocher, Elliot, & Sanchez, 2015). They have substantiated their critique by challenging developmental narratives (Bluebond-Langner & Korbin, 2007), maintaining conversations about children's rights (Lundy, 2007; Lundy & McEvoy, 2011), and illuminating how childhood is socially and culturally produced (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998; Jenks, 2009). Since I too recognize that children actively shape their lives, their communities, and the world writ large, I decided to use a participatory methodology that invited children to play an active role in my study (Graue & Walsh, 1998).

Rather than viewing children as either: dependent individuals in need of protection or autonomous individuals who are self-sufficient, scholars who do research with and for children acknowledge how they are both (Bluebond-Langner & Korbin, 2007). Situating my work at this intersection, has encouraged me to explore how, "The particular and the general, the micro and the macro, agency and structure always interact in unpredictable ways to shape the everyday life of children" (Kincheloe, 2005, p. xiii). I knew in order to grow my understanding of children's lived experiences I had to craft a study that invited children to actively participate in the research process. As Graue and Walsh (1998) put it, "Children are capable of sharing their experiences

with adults, and adults are capable of understanding those experiences, to an important extent, if they make wise choices about their work and relations with children" (p. 79). This has led researchers to pay attention to how, "children live in and negotiate worlds that they create for themselves (e.g., play, peer groups, games), worlds others create for them (e.g., schools, hospitals), and worlds in concert with others (e.g., families, marketplaces, neighborhoods)…" (Bluebond-Langner & Korbin, 2007, p. 245). And therefore, I inquired into how the children experienced their world by describing what the children thought, said, and did, and the conditions that seemed to influence their thoughts, words, and actions.

I designed and implemented my study with an awareness that in order to explore the heterogeneous ways children participate in and experience the world, researchers should: inquire into how children are historically and culturally situated in particular times and places (Graue & Hawkins, 2004); refrain from assuming the position of all-knowing experts and rather adopt the roles of listener (Clark & Moss, 2001) and learner (Graue & Walsh, 1998); examine and deconstruct the ways power shapes the research process (Graue & Hawkins, 2004); accept that their understandings will always be partial and limited (Paley, 1986); and, use a variety of data generation methods including conversations, interviews, play, mapping, writing, drawing, photo elicitation, tours, and photography to elicit children's perspectives (Clark & Moss, 2001). Some scholars even argue that children are entitled to play an active role in all aspects of the research process—from helping design the study to analyzing the data and sharing the results with other audiences (Lundy & McEvoy, 2011). While I did not invite the children to participate in all aspects of my study, I did provide the children with many opportunities to share their perspectives and experiences, and, as I explain in the next section, over the course of my project, I adapted my study design to reflect and build on their interests.

In short, doing research with and for children is both an opportunity and a responsibility. On the one hand, children are capable of contributing invaluable insights to research studies. On the other hand, children have a right to have a say in matters that affect their lives. And therefore, it is not enough for a study to help the researcher better understand a particular phenomenon; it should also be of interest to the young participants and have the potential to positively influence their lives and the lives of other children. For example, researchers have conducted studies with and for children designed to elicit children's perspectives about: their outside spaces at school (Clark, 2007; Merewether & Fleet, 2014), their understandings of childhood and adulthood (Harcourt, 2011); their experiences participating in learning experiences designed to expand their capabilities (Adair, 2014), as well as their perceptions of how adults judged their competencies as readers (Moller, 1999) and scientific thinkers (Varelas, Kane, & Wylie, 2011). These researchers believed children were entitled to share their unique perspectives and have their perspectives taken seriously. Thus, they did not just listen to the children's perspectives, but they publicized what the children shared to trigger action. In these studies, the children's insights inspired pedagogical reflections and policy changes.

Since I understand research to be a "responsibility rather than a recipe" (Dillard, 2000), I thoughtfully designed a qualitative research study that privileged my participants' experiences and perspectives. Constructing an open and flexible narrative inquiry study (Clandinin & Connelly, 1989; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) allowed me to generate, "results and theories that are understandable and experientially credible" to the children and others who will read my work (Maxwell, 2013, p. 31). I knew "studying a world that is in flux, necessarily requires a researcher to remain flexible in methods used for investigating their phenomena" (Staller, Block, & Horner, 2008, p. 42). From the outset, I planned for emergence (Morgan, 2008).

Planning for Emergence

Although I did not know how my design would change, I was confident adjustments would be necessary. All research methods are created by humans, and thus, "the practice of a given method is not fixed over time but is subject to innovation" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2008, p. v). Planning for emergence enables researchers to, "allow contextual factors discovered during research to inform our methods, strengthen our designs, and increase the explanatory power of our conclusions-- often dramatically" (Miller, Nelson, & Moore, 1998, p. 381). In interpretative studies, researchers serve as the primary research tool (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) and "operate in a world defined by what they think and know to be true" (Wagner, 1993, p. 16). Starting from a place of ignorance (Wagner, 1993), "involves watching and waiting with feelings of uncertainty, of not knowing what will happen next" (Clandinin, Caine, Lessard, & Huber, 2016, p. 191). When researchers immerse themselves in the field and trust something will happen, they are able to identify and ultimately inquire their "blind spots" and "blank spots". According to Wagner (1993) "What they don't know well enough to even ask about or care about are their blind spots. What they know enough to question but not answer are their blank spots." (p. 16). By definition, it is difficult if not impossible for researchers to recognize their own blind spots and blank spots, but it is important to know they exist. Because I knew my perspectives were partial and my interpretations were subjective, I did my best to notice when I was making assumptions and judgements, inquire into moments that did not immediately make sense, and let myself be surprised. Keeping a reflective journal (Watt, 2007) allowed me to monitor how I was influencing my study, trace my evolving thoughts and understandings, and notice the ways my research was changing me (Russell & Kelly, 2002). As will become evident in the sections to come, starting from a place of ignorance (Wagner, 1993), developing a habit of reflective

journaling (Watt, 2007), and adopting a reflexive stance (Russell & Kelly, 2002) enabled me to locate, adapt, and create data generation and analysis methods that were "flexible and sensitive" (Staller, Block, Horner, 2008) enough to fit the camp context, elicit the children's perspectives and experiences, and ultimately answer my research questions.

Research Puzzle

Children have a strong desire to belong. But belonging is not a status that children achieve, it is a process that children continually negotiate. Belonging is something that children seek and are granted as they interact with their peers. Within diverse communities, children have opportunities to interact with a wider range of people. Still, children are more likely to establish social circle groups with peers who share their social and cultural locations. Therefore, researchers know little about how children negotiate belongings across social group lines. This study was designed to explore how children use language and moment-to-moment actions and reactions to initiate and sustain interactions with their peers when they have opportunities to interact with children who participate in a wide range of social and cultural groups. I paid particular attention to the moments when the children constructed inclusive playgroups and playscripts. Therefore, my central research question was: *How do children define and enact their understandings of belonging as they negotiate relationships with their peers in a diverse summer camp setting?* My subsidiary questions included:

- *How do the children define what it means to belong?*

- *What strategies do the children use to negotiate belongings with their peers within and across social circle groups?*

- *How do the children use language and their moment-to-moment actions and reactions to negotiate inclusive playgroups and playscripts?*

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- *What factors seem to facilitate or hinder the children's participation in this negotiation process?*

Next, I explain how I used narrative inquiry to deepen my understanding of how the children defined and enacted their understandings of belonging as they negotiated relationships with their peers at camp.

Living their Lives as Stories

Stories and narrative, whether personal or fictional, provide meaning and belonging in our lives. They attach us to others and to our own histories by providing a tapestry rich with threads of time, place, character, and even advice on what we might do with our lives. The story fabric offers us images, myths and metaphors that are morally resonant and contribute both to our knowing and our being known. (Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p. 1)

This quote emphasizes the power of story. People are drawn to stories for a reason. As Connelly and Clandinin (1990) write, "humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, live storied lives" (p. 2). Scholars who recognize how people use story to make sense of the world and participate in it, often use narrative inquiry to frame their studies (Bruner, 1987). They strive to, "highlight the multiplicity of experiences lived among people situated in specific contexts and practices" (Dubnewick, Fox, & Clandinin, 2014, p. 418), by inviting their participants to share their stories with them. When well-constructed stories have a way of representing the particular while alluding to the universal (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Stories lived and told, relieved and retold. Inquiring into "lives as lived", requires researchers to be in for the "long haul" and spend time "in the midst" with their participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Only then are they able to grow their understanding of how their

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participants "live, tell, retell, and relive" their lives as stories (Clandinin, 2013). They use the terms "living" and "telling" to account for how people live their lives as stories and share about their lives in storied ways. Opportunities for people to "retell" and "relive" their stories arise when they examine the "taken for granted" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) by questioning the stability, accuracy, and generalizability of what they think, say, and do. In this case, the children "lived" and "told" stories about what it means to belong, what helps or hinders their chances of joining an activity or group, and who belongs and who does not. The children "relived" and "retold" their stories, as they talked and played together. As the children interacted, they explored, questioned, and revised their stories. As Clandinin (2006) explains, participants are not the only ones who engage in the storying process; and thus, "Narrative inquirers cannot bracket themselves out of the inquiry but rather need to find ways to inquire into participants' experiences, their own experiences as well as the co-constructed experiences developed through the relational inquiry process" (Clandinin, 2006, p. 47). The children and I storied and restoried our understandings and experiences together.

Factors that influence the (re)storying process. Narrative inquirers recognize that the (re)storying process does not happen in isolation; many factors influence the stories people live and tell, as well as if, when, and how their stories change. They categorize these factors into three groups: the temporal, the social, and the spatial (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). They refer to the synergistic relationship these structures share as the "three-dimensional narrative inquiry space" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50). Thus, in order to inquire into how the children negotiated belongings with their peers, I considered how each factor was at play. Although the social, spatial, and temporal are intertwined and simultaneously at work, for clarities sake, I discuss each in isolation. After defining each factor, I explain how it materialized in my work.

The temporal. Understanding human experience to be storied, suggests that the narratives people live, tell, retell, and relive are grounded in the past (what has been) and pointed towards the future (what is to come). Although people might use beginnings and endings to bookend their experiences, their stories extend beyond their living and telling in both directions. As Bruner (2002) explained, people "are forever balancing what was with what might have been" (p. 75). In this way, the stories people live and tell represent a version of how they experienced something. A person's stories are always partial, incomplete, and under construction. People story and restory their experiences over time and in response to their histories and what they believe to be possible. I explored the stories the children shared about where they feel like they belong and their past experiences negotiating belongings with their peers. In addition, I explored if and how the stories the children lived and told changed over time.

The social. People are relational beings. The individual and the social simultaneously constitute the other. As Witherell & Noddings (1991) explain, "The self is formed and given meaning in the context of its relations with others" (p. 4). People shape and are shaped by their experiences and interactions with others and the world. As Clandinin (2013) elaborates, "The focus of narrative inquiry is not only valorizing individuals' experience, but it is also an exploration of the social, cultural, familial, linguistic, and institutional narratives within which individuals' experiences were, and are, constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted" (p. 18). Researchers explore how the individual and the social interact. To account for the social, I paid attention to the messages the children creatively appropriated from the larger world dominated by adults and applied to their local peer culture. Doing so helped me infer how the children came to understand what it means to belong and how the children applied these messages as they negotiated belongings with their peers.

The spatial. Space plays a pivotal role in the (re)storying process (Bathmaker, 2010; Harnnett, 2010; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Clandinin, 2013). The tangible, physical aspects of a space as well as the intangible, felt aspects of space influence the stories people tell and how they tell them. More specifically, how a space is organized, where a space is located, and who has access to it matters; as do the structures, rules, and norms that define how people are expected to act. But spaces, like people, are multi-dimensional, dynamic, and in flux (Clandinin, Pushor & Orr, 2007, p. 23). People and spaces influence one another and consequently how people story and restory their experiences. I situated my study in place by teasing out the factors that seemed to encourage the children to construct inclusive playscripts and playgroups. I also paid attention to how the children's words and actions shifted as they read and responded to the cultural information they encountered in different spaces. Before I detail my data generation methods, I will formally introduce my study site, participants, and recruitment practices.

The Context

I made many considerations when defining my study site and population. In order to explore my research questions, I needed to locate a site that was diverse. The children needed to have relatively uninhibited opportunities to interact with their peers, so I could observe them negotiating belongings in their local context. In addition, I needed to have opportunities to facilitate focus group meetings with small groups of children. I decided to invite upper-elementary-aged students to participate in my study for four reasons. As a past-elementary school teacher, I knew adults often underestimated their capabilities and understandings. Eight-to twelve-year-olds prioritize their social lives (Paley, 1986) and dedicate much of their energy to hanging out with friends and establishing social circle groups (Corsaro, 2015), so it is likely they would be interested in participating. Children between the ages of eight and twelve have

developed their reading, writing, and speaking skills enough to clearly and confidently articulate their ideas, understandings, and intentions to other people (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2001), and it is easier for older children to understand that research, unlike other adult-led activities, is voluntary (Moore, McArthur, Noble-Carr, 2008). I located a summer camp site that fit the above criteria and was supportive of my research project. The director of the summer camp was interested in my study. I submitted a research proposal to the school district and university. The school district approved my study, and the IRB office classified my study as exempt. The director connected me with the third-fifth grade summer camp team. They too were interested in my project and invited me to join their team.

The Summer Camp

I had the privilege of collecting my data at a month-long summer camp program sponsored by the local school district, the state's flagship university, and members of the local community. In 2011, a local non-profit organization found that the community lacked summer learning opportunities especially for children whose families had limited resources. In June of 2016, after two years of planning, the camp opened. The camp was available at no charge. Breakfast, lunch, and transportation to and from camp were provided. All rising kindergartners through rising eighth graders enrolled in the local school system were eligible to apply. Priority was given to children who had attended camp during past summers, siblings of current and past campers, and campers who were committed to attending camp daily. Although interest was high, enrollment was capped. Interested campers who exceeded the enrollment maximum were placed on a waitlist.

The advertised purpose of the camp was "to provide an engaging and enriching summer experience for students in kindergarten through eighth grade, while also giving university

students the opportunity to get hands-on experience working with children and youth from the local community." Community members were also invited to offer programming and make monetary contributions. The camp spanned the month of June and was in its third year of existence. The camp ran Monday through Thursday and was held at one of the local schools, and each day was divided into a morning and an afternoon session. On Fridays, all campers were invited to attend a day-long field trip. Week one, the campers visited a local farm to pick strawberries and watched The Lion King at a local movie theater. Week two, the campers visited the zoo. Week three, the campers spent the day at a local water park. Instead of going on a field trip on the last day of camp, the campers hosted a showcase event for their families and the local community. After the showcase, the campers, their family members, and community members attended a celebratory lunch.

The children started their day in the cafeteria. They could arrive for breakfast as early as 8:00 AM. The campers were required to sit at the tables reserved for campers in their grade span but were allowed to choose seats. At 8:30, all of the campers filed out of the cafeteria and headed down the hallway to the gymnasium, where the campers had some free time to hang out, play basketball, toss footballs, hula hoop, and play tag. At 8:40, two adults would get on the microphone and introduce the daily morning energizer activity. On the first day of camp, the campers were organized into multi-aged teams. Each team had representatives from the K-2, 3-5, and 6-8 cohorts. Each team was assigned a superhero mascot. Team members would work together to participate in collaborative games or team-building activities. At 9:00 AM, the students would be dismissed by grade level to their respective classrooms.

The third through fifth grade campers spent the morning learning about their local community. The children had opportunities to listen to guest speakers, conduct community

research, and learn about the people and animals that lived in their city. At around 11:00 AM, the campers would go to recess. On the playground the children could play in the grassy field, on the playground equipment, on the basketball court, and on the blacktop. On the first day of camp, the children were walking around the playground and noticed an overgrown patch of bamboo. Over the four weeks of camp, the children spent hours playing in the bamboo, carving out paths and rooms, harvesting bamboo to make clothes and forts, and using the bamboo forest as home base. The bamboo forest was transformed into a jail, a castle, a house, and a party room. After recess, the children would visit the restroom, wash their hands, and eat lunch. The children would eat lunch in the cafeteria unless they were attending a lunch bunch meeting.

After lunch the children would return to the classroom and participate in the afternoon activities. I did not attend the afternoon sessions on Mondays and Wednesdays, so I am unable to detail the nature of the events. On Tuesdays, the students attended "The Festival of the Arts". The students were divided into four small groups and rotated through a music, theater, dance, and visual arts station. Each station was headed by a community member who had an expertise in a particular art form. On Thursdays, the children took a half-day field trip to a local trapeze studio. At the studio, the campers rotated through three stations. At one station, the children would learn tricks on the trapeze. At the second station the children would navigate an obstacle course, and at the third station, the children would participate in some collaborative, critical thinking games. Camp ended at 2:30, at which point the children would either be picked up by a caregiver or ride the bus home.

The Participants

There were thirty-one children in the third through fifth grade cohort, and twenty-two volunteered to participate in my study. Although all the children were enrolled in the same

school district, they attended at least eight different elementary schools. About half of the campers were boys and the other half were girls. The cohort was composed of nearly the same number of children entering the third, fourth and fifth grades. Nearly half of the campers were Black, and a third of the campers were White. A fifth of the campers identified as Korean, one as Peruvian, one as Venezuelan, and one as Mexican. Although I do not have socioeconomic demographics for the campers, the district has a poverty rate of 27%. Eight children were bilingual. Three spoke Spanish and English and five spoke Korean and English.

Inviting participation. I invited all of the children in the third through fifth grade cohort to participate in my study. On the second day of camp, I briefly introduced my project to the campers, and provided each camper with a permission form. Of the twenty-five forms the campers returned, twenty-three families gave their camper permission to participate in my study. I did not send additional copies of the form home with the campers, unless they requested a new form. At the beginning of the second week of camp, I met with all of the campers who were granted permission to participate. I was surprised by the campers' enthusiasm. When I explained, "I am asking for your help because I'm not a kid, so I can't answer my questions unless I get help from kids" the kids looked around the room at each other, giggling with ear-to-ear smiles. I continued, "So that's why I'm inviting you to be part of my project. I thought you might be interested in helping me out. Your parents already said that you can be part of this project, but now you get to decide if you want to be part of it or not." Yeses echoed around the room. I encouraged the campers to wait until I told them more about the project, so they could make an informed decision. I detailed my project and what their involvement would entail. I explained that if they decided to participate, I would watch how they played with each other at recess, talked with each other at lunch, and worked with each other in the classroom. I would also invite

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them to join a lunch bunch group and work on a special project. I told them I would keep track of the things you say and do by writing notes, taking pictures of your work, and audio recording your lunch bunch meetings.

Then, I read the assent form aloud and fielded their questions, which included… "Does this involve… the parents getting in with us?" and "What if I say it in Korean?" Before the campers signed their assent form, I reiterated that their participation was voluntary, meaning they got to decide if they wanted to participate or not. One child decided he did not want to participate. A few others said they were not sure if they wanted to participate or not. I reiterated that they could come to one or two meetings and reevaluate their decision. Knowing they could change their minds later, helped the campers feel at ease marking yes.

I was interested in recruiting six to ten campers to participate in my study. To my surprise, only one child decided not to participate. The other twenty-two children whose parents granted them permission to participate elected to be part of my study. I could not ethically conduct a study about belonging and exclude some campers from participating, and I did not have time to wait for interest wane. So, I adjusted my research plan to accommodate more participants by using flexible grouping strategies. Over the second and third weeks of camp, each child participated in two lunch bunch meetings. At the end of the third week of camp, I introduced a special project to the campers. I invited all campers who were participating in my study to participate in the special project, but after discovering what their involvement would require, only sixteen campers volunteered.

My Role as Researcher

As I will detail in the considerations section at the end of this chapter, I was hyperaware of the ways power function in the research space, especially since I was working with young

children. Researchers must constantly monitor how their involvement in the research process affects what is happening in the field and the sense they are making of their data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). I did not sit on the sidelines and document what I saw and heard, because observing from a far would be voyeuristic. Unlike some researchers who try to adopt the role of "least-adult" (Mandell, 1991), I respected the children and their interactional space. Although I accepted invitations to talk and play with the children, I did not try to gain membership to their local peer culture. I did not assume instructional responsibilities like leading whole group activities and assigning traditional school tasks, because I did not want the children to see me as a teacher. I invited the children to use the restroom and visit the drinking fountain at their leisure. I encouraged but did not require participation. During breakfast, lunch, and recess, I did not chat with the other adults. Instead, I hung out with the campers and immersed myself in whatever was happening in the field. I ate meals with them and accepted their invitations to play. I took a jiu jitsu lesson with them. When we visited a local farm, I picked berries with them and bounced on the giant trampolines with them. The children did not see me as a teacher, but they tried to convince me to become one, because, "We need a good teacher. We need a fun teacher. We need a nice teacher." After they learned I was a "real" teacher, they tried to convince me to come teach at their schools.

As I was writing this section, I caught a clip from a Fresh Air interview with John C. Reilly who recently starred in the film *The Sisters Brothers*. He used the metaphor catching lightening in a bottle to describe what happens when actors are fully present on set. Actors spend months preparing for the film—rehearsing, memorizing lines, and building relationships with their fellow actors—but actors must also live in the moment and be skilled at improvising. Spontaneity makes films. Often the best scenes unfold when actors and actresses trust their

intuition and go off-script. The same can be said for researchers. Sometimes the most important insights develop when researchers let themselves be surprised. I immersed myself in the camp setting trying to "stay wakeful" (Craig & Huber, 2007) to what was happening in the field and in myself. I adopted what Corsaro (2005) dubbed a "reactive" approach. I spent time with the campers, expressed interest in their lives, and waited for the campers to extend invitations to me to join their conversations and play. From the outset, I clearly communicated my intentions. Over the course of my study, the children asked many questions. I honestly answered their inquiries about what I was doing and why. When I was observing, I reminded the students what I was documenting. Before turning on the tape recorder, I reminded the children I was going to be recording their conversations. When I extended invitations to participate, I respected their decision to participate or not.

The campers seemed to trust that my goals and intentions were sincere. They could tell I genuinely wanted to spend time with them at camp. They commented on my positive manner asking questions like, "Why are you always so happy?" They recognized that I was interested in their perspectives and invested in giving them opportunities to have a say in matters that affected their lives. For instance, if they wanted to play in an area of playground that was typically off limits, they would ask me for permission. On the second day of camp, one of the teachers tried to instate a rule that forbid the children from playing in the bamboo, because they were playing out of the teachers' sight. I volunteered to station myself near the bamboo, so the children could continue playing in the bamboo. From that day on, the children asked me to come with them to the bamboo. They did not always invite me to play, but they seemed to appreciate my willingness to let them play in their forest. About a week later, a teacher threatened to ban bamboo play, because the children were having trouble settling an argument. I intervened by

downplaying the severity of the conflict and reassuring the adult, that I was watching the children. I did not just advocate for the children, I stood by my words.

Although my primary goal was to deepen my understanding of how they defined and enacted their understandings of belonging, I was also committed to supporting the camp's goals. I attended camp training sessions, volunteered to chaperone field trips, and arrived early and stayed late to help setup and cleanup. I attended breakfast each morning to greet the campers, help cleanup spills, and guide the campers to the gym. When one of the team members had to take a leave of absence due to a family emergency, I volunteered to assume more responsibilities. As the camp director wrote,

> You became an integral member of the 3-5 team, and I am sure that without your capable guidance and caring insight into children, the experiences for that group of children would not have been nearly so wonderful. …And thanks, too, for your help cleaning up on the last day. Every additional pair of hands made the work go more quickly and you really did go above and beyond what was 'required.' … I just wanted to have the chance to tell you how much I appreciated everything you did. (personal correspondence)

As many narrative inquirers do, I felt obliged to give back to the camp community by helping in any way I could (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Simultaneously participating in camp activities and collecting data was challenging, but invaluable. It enabled me to develop a reciprocal, give-and-take relationship with the children and adults at camp. Further, I believe the relationships I built helped the children feel more at ease participating in my study.

Data Collection

I knew conducting a narrative inquiry study about the children's experiences of belonging would be just as "complex, rewarding, and messy as living and working with them" (Graue &

Walsh, 1998, p. 13). Narrative inquirers typically generate data in one of two ways. They formally invite their participants to talk about their experiences in interview or focus group settings, and they informally harness opportunities for their participants to share about their experiences as they organically arise in their "natural" setting (Connelly & Clandinin 2006). In a sense, "Everything has the potential to be data, but nothing becomes data without the intervention of the researcher who takes note – and often makes note – of some things to the exclusion of others" (Wolcott, 1994, p. 4). Over the course of my research project, I did both. My review of literature helped me decide what kind of data I needed to collect to answer my research questions. I knew observations would play an important role in my study. Most researchers who study children's peer relationships rely heavily on their observational notes to distill what the children were saying and doing to initiate and sustain relations with their peers. But I also wanted to elicit the children's perspectives. I knew their insights would differ from mine and ultimately enrich my data set. Therefore, I crafted multiple opportunities for the children to share their perspectives, experiences, and understandings through a variety of mediums. In addition, I documented how the children negotiated belongings with their peers as they went about their everyday. Specifically, I kept a field journal, conducted observations, hosted lunch bunch meetings, and facilitated opportunities for the children to enact and reenact play scenes.

Field Journal

Every day when I left camp, I had pages and pages filled with jottings. When I got home, I was exhausted. All I wanted to do was sit on the couch and mindlessly stream the next episode of "Grey's Anatomy." Graduate School had caused me to fall behind. I told myself that as soon as I finished typing up my field notes, I could watch. Usually, by the time I finished typing up

my notes, walked my dog, and made dinner, I could barely keep my eyes open. Catching up on "Grey's Anatomy" was going to have to wait. I used the space in my field journal to contextualize the day, document anomalies that arose, and reflect on how things went. I noted anything I found puzzling, interesting, or exciting. These field notes helped me recall how different temporal, spatial, and social factors were at play at particular moments throughout my study. The hours I spent diligently typing up the details I did not have time to record in the field paid off. In essence, I was forcing myself to sit down every day and reflect on what was happening in the field and the effectiveness of my methods. Most of the changes I made to my study design were inspired by my field notes. I ended up abandoning, revisiting, and reframing many aspects of my plan including how I invited the children to share their perspectives and experiences. For instance, I realized the children were negotiating belongings with their peers they were informally interacting during mealtimes, in the hallway, and while waiting in line and when they were playing on the playground. Thus, I started focusing my observations on what was happening in these in-between spaces. This realization also pushed me to adapt the invitations I crafted to elicit the children's understandings and experiences. Instead of providing the children with opportunities to talk, write, and draw, I gave them opportunities to casually chat and play. In my journal, I also documented my ongoing analyses. It was impossible to predict which questions, insights, and information would prove useful later, so I did my best to document everything that popped into my head.

Observations

As I explained earlier, I simultaneously assumed many roles at camp. No matter what role I was playing, I was always watching for instances when the children were negotiating belongings with their peers. I carried a notebook and pen with me at all times to jot down my

observations, insights, and questions. I spent my evenings transforming my jottings into elaborated field notes. I used what I had learned by reviewing literature about children's peer relationships to build my observation protocol (Appendix A). To grow my understanding of how the children defined what it means to belong, how the children accepted and extended invitations to interact with their peers, and how the children negotiated inclusive interactional spaces, I needed to inquire into the breadth of the children's understandings, experiences, and strategies. From reviewing the literature, I knew: the children would have different and sometimes contradictory perspectives; the children would be more likely to seek relational partners who were like them, but that there would be moments when the children interacted with a wider range of peers; some spaces would be more conducive to supporting cross-group interactions than others; and, the strategies children used to negotiate relations in one context, may not work in another. The questions I used to guide my observations included:

- How do the children seem to understand what it means to belong? Does it mean spending time with other children, engaging in certain activities, being acknowledged by other children, having certain things, and/or something else? How do the children spend their time together?

- When and how do the children organize themselves into groups? Which groups seem to be more fluid and which ones seem to be more fixed? Are there times and places when children form groups that are more inclusive? If so, what seems to make these times and places different?

- Which children frequently interact? What seems to bring them together? Which children rarely interact? What seems to draw the children apart? Which, if any, children spend most of their time alone? What factors seem to account for their solitary state?

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- How do the children use their words and actions to include and exclude their peers? How do the children use their words and actions to join a group, activity, or conversation?

I used this protocol to guide my observations over the course of my study, but the focus and purpose of my observations narrowed over time (Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2000). At first, I engaged in open-ended "descriptive observations" (Werner & Schoepfle, 1987). I noted what the children were saying and doing, where they were playing and socializing, as well as who played together. During this phase, I noticed the children were negotiating belongings with their peers during mealtimes, at recess, when they were engaged in partner and small-group activities, and during transitions. The less formal the space, the more I saw.

Then, I shifted my attention to conducting "focused observations" (Werner & Schoepfle, 1987) of how the children interacted at mealtimes and recess, during partner and group work activities, and during transitions. I also led two activities designed to grow my understanding of how the children defined belonging. I facilitated informal conversations with pairs of campers about the places where they feel like they belong and what made these places different than other places. And, I invited the children to create webs that showed who they felt connected to in their lives. During the second stage of my observations, I realized the children consistently interacted across social circle groups when they: were playing in the bamboo, were playing collaborative games at a local trapeze studio, participating in open-ended art activities, and when they had dead moments in between activities.

Finally, I engaged in "systematic observations" (Werner & Schoepfle, 1987). During this phase of my study, I focused my attention more narrowly on how these four spaces differed from the rest. I documented, in as much detail as possible, the space, who occupied it, the nature of the activity engaged, as well as how the children interacted within it. I paid special attention to the

norms and rules the children established in these spaces, as well as the strategies the children used to negotiate belongings with their peers. My observations made two things possible. I was able to: a) describe the strategies the children used to initiate and sustain interactions with their peers and the factors that seemed to influence the nature of their interactions; b) modify my planned activities to reflect and build on the children's experiences.

Lunch Bunch Meetings

Over the course of my study, I invited each participant to participate in two focus group meetings. I had planned to divide the campers into three stable groups, but I ended up using more flexible grouping strategies. It was more important for the campers to participate in two sessions, than for them to interact with the same peers across sessions. I was interested in seeing how the children interacted with a variety of peers, so when grouping the campers, I prioritized making the groups diverse over making the groups consistent. In addition, flexible grouping strategies allowed me to adjust my groupings to account for absences and scheduling conflicts. The groups ranged in size from six to ten campers and were constructed to reflect the racial, ethic, gender, and language diversity present in the third through fifth grade cohort. Because the campers cherished lunchtime as an opportunity to relax and spend time with their friends, I tried to make sure the children had at least one friend in their group. I audio-recorded each meeting on two devices: a digital voice recorder and an iPad to account for equipment malfunctions. Using an audio recorder to record our meetings, enabled me to be fully present. I was able to move around the room, answer questions, listen and respond to the campers, and document who the children sat near and how the children interacted. During our meetings, I invited the campers to write and draw in the journals, participate in facilitated discussions and sharing sessions, and casually converse with their peers. During our first meeting, I invited the children to discuss what they

think it means to belong, including what makes them feel like they belong, and what makes them feel like they do not belong. During our second meeting, I invited the campers to discuss moments when things were going well with their friends and moments when things were not going well with their friends.

Before entering the field, I had assumed the children would produce rich accounts about how they defined and enacted their understandings of belonging in response to the writing, drawing, and mapping invitations I extended. Only days into my study, I realized I was wrong. Very wrong. Although I had constructed child-centered invitations, they were only marginally effective. The tasks were accessible and open-ended, but the children did not find them engaging (Waller & Bitou, 2011). When the invitations even loosely represented tasks the children were asked to complete at school, engagement was low. Most children rushed through opportunities to participate in discussions, write reflections, draw pictures, and create maps, so they could socialize with their peers. The children were busy negotiating belongings with their peers all day long, but my methods were not helping me grow my understanding of the sophisticated ways the children sought and granted belongings with their peers or the conditions that influenced their process. Further, like Paley (2004), I was "ignoring the delicate web being constructed by the children in their constant exchange of ideas the moment I stopped talking and they resumed playing" (p. 19). I changed course. I still invited the children to respond to prompts and participate in discussions, but I also built in opportunities for the children to socialize with their peers. I started focusing my attention on the taken for granted moments (Clandinin & Connelly 2000), when the children were interacting with one another on their own terms. After adapting the structure of my focus group meetings, I realized the children enacted understandings of belonging that surpassed what they articulated in words. Now, I understood what Paley (2004)

meant when she wrote, "The more complex the thought, the greater the child's need to view its meaning through play and find the characters and situations that bring ideas to life" (p. 57). My intuition was correct. The children were actively negotiating belongings with their peers, it was just difficult for them to articulate their process. The children were better able to communicate their understandings and experiences through play than talk.

Enacting and Reenacting Play Scenes

The children were negotiating belongings with their peers when they were hanging out. I had audio recordings of the children negotiating belongings as they casually chatted during our lunch bunch meetings and field notes of the children negotiating belongings as they played on the playground. When the children were playing on the playground and chit chatting with their peers, they were constantly moving in and out of the scene and talking over one another. The spaces were noisy and chaotic making it challenging to document the children's interactions and playscripts. I was also missing the children's interpretations. I wanted to find a way to witness the children enacting and reenacting their experiences negotiating belongings with their peers on a smaller scale, but I was not sure how to do so. I had considered using roleplaying activities or Forum theater skits (Boal, 1974/2008), but I knew many of the campers were not interested in acting, and I am not very comfortable acting myself. Then it came to me. If I wanted to deepen my understanding of the children's negotiation process in the ways I just discussed, I needed to give them opportunities to play.

With only one week of camp left, I shared my idea with the campers. I told them I was interested in recruiting some campers who were interested in telling stories about times when they were hanging out with other kids at camp. I explained, if they decided to participate, they would need to commit to coming to lunch bunch meetings every day for a week. During the

meetings they would create playscapes that represented the places where kids hung out at camp and figurines to represent the kids who spent time in each space. Then, they would use their playscapes and figurines to act out scenes of kids playing together at camp. A group of sixteen campers expressed interest in this activity.

The interested campers brainstormed a list of places where kids hang out at camp. They worked in self-selected small groups to create a playscape of one of the hangout places and paint figurines to use to act out scenes. After each group of campers finished, I invited them to play. I asked them to either: a) think of a time when they were playing in this space and act out what happened, or b) make up a scene that shows how children play in this space and act it out. I audio-recorded the campers play sessions. I also documented their play by taking photographs of the children's reenactments. The children used the photographs I took to create story boards that showed how their play unfolded. The children added speech bubbles to denote what the actors were saying and doing in different scenes. Although this activity was well-received and helped me grow my understanding of the children's perspectives, the activity was cut short. Initially, I had planned to observe and record how each group of children constructed and narrated their story board, but due to time constraints all the groups had to complete the activity simultaneously and in the same room making it impossible to decipher one group's process from another. Although I was unable to implement this data collection tool to its full potential, I did gain some insights from the children's understandings and developed a tool I could use in the future.

Moment of Panic

As I concluded my field work, I grew concerned that following the children's lead had caused me to lose sight of my goals and prevented me from conducting a narrative inquiry study. I had reviewed countless narrative studies, and I knew most narrative researchers explore the big

stories that people tell about their lives. They access their participants' stories by facilitating interviews and focus group meetings during which participants call on their experiences to answer the questions asked. These activities typically take place at a distance, providing participants with the time and space necessary to take ownership over the stories they tell. Then, researchers use their participants' reflections and recollections to construct narrative accounts that represent the sense they are making of their participants' experiences.

I embarked on my study ready to listen to, document, and process my participants' big stories, but as I explained above, the formal invitations I created to elicit the children's experiences and perspectives were not working. The children willingly participated, but their reflections and recollections were not representative of how they negotiated belongings with their peers. The sophistication of the children's actions far exceeded what they articulated during interviews and focus group meetings. As I followed the children's lead, my study started to look less and less like the narrative studies I had reviewed. Not only was I abandoning the methods most researchers use to produce narrative studies, but the children were not sharing extended bookended accounts in response to the questions I asked. Instead, they were sharing short snapshots as they playfully interacted with their peers. I started to worry that I was trying to force my study to fit within a narrative framework, until I happened upon literature about "living narratives" (Ochs & Capps, 2001), "narratives in interaction" (Georgkopoulou, 2006), and "small stories" (Bamberg, 2006). Reading these bodies of work helped me realize, narratives are not always polished, retrospective accounts that people share during interviews with researchers; they are also emergent, in-the-making, accounts that people construct during their moment-to-moment exchanges with fellow community members.

People do not just tell their stories when they are invited to share, they also narrate their lives in real-time. "Living narratives" (Ochs & Capps, 2001), also known as "narratives in interaction" (Georgkopoulou, 2006), are produced during everyday interactions. The conversations people have as they interact are the most common and accessible narrative form humans use; everyone is always dialogically co-constructing narratives about their lives during their ongoing interactions (Georgkopoulou, 2006). Unlike the retrospective narratives people produce when they are reflecting on their experiences from a distance, living narratives support people in their efforts to "air, probe, and otherwise attempt to reconstruct and make sense of actual and possible life experiences" (Och & Capps, 2001, p. 7) in the moment. As people co-author accounts of their experiences, they do not only build narratives but also connections with fellow community members (Ochs & Capps, 2001). Therefore, researchers who study how people narrate their lives in real-time, approach their studies differently than those who are only interested in the narratives themselves.

In order to inquire into "living narratives" researchers ask different questions, look for stories in different places, and use different criteria to determine when stories are being produced. Because they are "less interested in a narrator who is self-reflecting or searching for who s/he (really) is" (Bamberg, 2006, p. 144) and more interested in "narrators who are engaging in the activity of narrating, that is, the activity of giving an account" (Bamberg, 2006, p. 144), they seek opportunities to spend time with their participants in social settings. When their participants are interacting with one another they naturally enter storytelling mode, which provides researchers with opportunities to witness their narrating process. Researchers focus intently on, "the present of 'the telling moment'" (Bamberg, 2006, p. 140) as well as what happens just before and after a story is built. Since their participants' narratives are under

construction, they do not expect to hear fully-fledged accounts with clear beginnings, middles, and ends. They still listen for evidence of "coherence, structure and totality" but they also listen for "improvisation, contingency, contradictions and fragmentation" (Georgkopoulou, 2006p. 254). They end up collecting numerous "small stories" (Bamberg, 2006) that when read together, help them answer their research questions. And because they are present when their participants co-construct their stories, they are able to see, "how narrators position themselves in relation to discourses by which they are positioned" (Bamberg, 2006, p. 145). Narrative researchers who inquire into their participants small stories do not only have access to their participants' stories but also to their participants' process.

I had, in fact, conducted a narrative study. I was just approaching my study from a different perspective. I was exploring the stories the children constructed as they lived their lives instead of the stories the children told about their lives. The tidbits the children constructed when they were playing were stories even though they were fleeting and incomplete. The children were actively engaged in the narrating process when they were reading and responding to one another in the camp context and working together to construct narratives that reflected their needs, interests and desires. Like Ochs and Capps (2001) explain, "People apprehend their lives through the filter of narrative and build communities through the co-authoring of narrative; inversely, collaborative probing and redrafting of events propels, shapes, and keeps narratives alive" (p. 57-58). The stories the children co-constructed helped them forge relationships with one another, and when their stories stopped serving their needs, interests, and desires, they adapted them. Narrating, for them, was a life-giving process that helped them navigate their experiences and keep their stories and their communities alive. Their narrating process not only

helped them navigate their lives; listening to their collaborative narration helped me understand their experiences, practices, and perspectives.

Narrative Analysis

In narrative inquiry studies, "story is the basic unit of analysis" (Kramp, 2004, p. 105). The researcher thinks narratively with their data, "connect[ing] events, characters, circumstances, decisions, and so on, in a way that provides meaning to that experience (Freeman, 2017). Polkinghorne (1995) differentiated between two paths narrative researchers pursue. Researchers either engage in the deconstructive process of analyzing narratives or the reconstructive process of thinking narratively with their data to produce narratives. When researchers analyze narratives, they use inductive and deductive coding schemes to compare and categorize their data (Maxwell & Miller, 2008) with the goal of identifying "common themes or salient constructs" (Kim, 2016, p. 196). Alternatively, when researchers engage in narrative analysis, they use connecting strategies (Maxwell & Miller, 2008) to explore the relationships that exist within and between disparate pieces of data (Kramp, 2004) by emplotting their data. In other words, they produce stories by identifying "key relationships that tie the data together into a narrative or sequence and eliminating information that is not germane to these relationships" (Maxwell & Miller, 2008). They weave their data together into "into a temporally organized whole with a thematic thread, called the plot" (Kim, 2016, p. 197). Here, their goal is to produce stories that represent the sense they are making of their data and that resonate with their participants. As I explain below, I emplotted the data the children and I generated to construct stories that illuminated my understandings of their experiences negotiating belongings with their peers. My analysis process began the moment I entered the field and intensified as I transformed my field texts into interim texts, and my interim texts into research texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Field Texts

In June of 2018, during the data generation phase of my study, I spent most of my waking hours in the field generating field texts with my participants, writing field notes, and documenting my ongoing questions and insights in my field journal. In the five months after my data collection period ended, I prepared my data for analysis. I transformed my field jottings into field notes and eventually into elaborated accounts that described the children interactions. I transcribed all of the focus group meeting sessions. At first, I thought I might be able to listen to the audio-recordings and isolate instances when the children were communicating their understandings of belonging or sharing their experiences negotiating belongings with their peers, but quickly I realized the children were constantly involved in this important work. If I only transcribed the moments when they were directly answering my questions or responding to my prompts, I would overlook countless moments when the children were actually involved in this negotiation process. Therefore, I painstakingly listened and re-listened to each thirty to forty-five-minute meeting doing my best to transcribe everything the children said. Sometimes I had to listen to the same few seconds of tape fifteen times before I could make out the children's words. Sometimes the children referenced songs, dances, video games, TV shows, and movies that were unfamiliar. I spent hours on Google searching lyrics, popular slang terms, and characters from popular video games, TV shows and movies to understand both the children's words and cultural references. I also transcribed the informal partner conversations and play scene sessions I described above. The process of transforming the children's spoken words into written words deepened my understanding of the children's explanations and experiences. Although, at this point, I was not formally analyzing the data, I was informally making sense of what the children shared. I noted my initial interpretations and questions so I could to reference them later.

Interim Research Texts

After I finished creating all of my field texts and preparing them for analysis, I was ready to start formally analyzing my data and creating interim texts. I used ATLAS.ti as a platform to organize my data and keep track of my ongoing analyses. I imported my transcripts, field journal, and analysis journal into the software program. After I had everything housed in the software program, I used the tools in ATLAS.ti to make sense of my data. I read through every piece of data once. As I read, I started to discern what stories I could tell with my data. Like I had hoped, I had documented many instances when the children defined and enacted their understandings of belonging. I had also documented moments when the children interacted across social circle groups. After my first read through, I created an open-coding scheme to make sense of what the children were saying and doing. I isolated all the points in my data where the children discussed their understandings of belonging and all the points in my data where the children described the strategies they used to negotiate relations with their peers. When I was deeply entrenched in my analysis process, the search function in ATLAS.ti proved especially useful. I could use key words to quickly locate points in my data where the children discussed certain topics. Breaking down my data into isolated bits helped me identify connections and disconnections in what the children shared, and ultimately allowed me to construct stories that illuminated the sense I was making of the children's understandings and experiences.

Then, I read across the definitions I isolated to decipher the characteristics the children used to define belonging. Instead of digging deeply into one or two dimensions of belonging or attempting to distill a broad definition from what the children shared, I explored the multiple, overlapping, and sometimes contradictory definitions the children encountered and performed in their diverse camp space. In an attempt to tease out the various ways the children defined

belonging, I "burrowed" into the children accounts, and I isolated quotes and back and forth exchanges where the children discussed or alluded to their understandings of belonging. I illuminated the prominent definitions the children articulated in words and the subtler definitions they expressed through their actions. I described widely held understandings that many children expressed and unique understandings that individual children tied to their personal experiences. Then, I reread the documents to create codes that paraphrased the content of each quote or exchange. After working through each piece of data twice, I used "broadening" techniques to look across the data to identify connections between the coded passages.

In the end, I organized the quotes and exchanges into 21 categories that illuminated the children's understandings of belonging (Appendix B). Instead of including every quotation and exchange, I selected ones that represented the breadth of the children's understandings and eliminated repetitions. Occasionally, I added or removed words and reordered phrases and sentences to help the children's ideas flow more smoothly while preserving the essence of what the children shared. I proceeded in a similar way with the strategies the children mentioned and employed to negotiate relations with their peers. I named each strategy and defined how it functioned. I created a header to introduce each vantage point. Most of the headers were direct quotes from the children. When I was unable to isolate a quote that adequately introduced a category, I crafted one myself. Within each category, I differentiated speakers, by changing font styles. Finally, I sorted the 21 categories into four umbrella groups: connections to things and animals, connections to places, connections to people, and connections to activities. This process allowed me to acknowledge the breadth of the children's understandings of belonging without suggesting any understanding was more common or important than another. It also helped me distill the threads that transcended the children's accounts.

In addition, I located all of the points in my data where the children were interacting with peers they did not typically choose as work or play partners. I noted places where I observed the children discussing and enacting their understandings of belonging. I identified numerous interactions and exchanges within the children's "living narratives" (Ochs & Capps, 2001) that functioned as "small stories" (Bamberg, 2006) about what it means to belong and how the children made room for one another. Isolating the children's small stories helped me construct plots about the children's negotiation process. I transformed the children's conversational and interactional exchanges into a series of poems, vignettes, and reflections by adding contextual details and describing not only what was said, but also what was not said. I also described the children's non-verbal participation. Although I did not transform many of the stories, poems, vignettes, and reflections I wrote into final research texts, they played an important role in my analysis process.

Final Research Texts

Eventually, researchers transform their interim texts into final research texts they intend to publish and share with a wider audience. Because researchers are largely responsible for composing final research texts, they have to figure out what they are going to do with all of the data they generated and how they are going to reach those ends (Wolcott, 1994). Like Bold (2012), I knew my data was, "fragmented and incomplete, yet potentially rich if organised into something that made sense" (p. 147). After reading text after text about narrative analysis, Ely's (2007) dance metaphor finally made sense; "creating forms that come closest to the essence of our understandings and presenting them in trustworthy ways is a crucial, ongoing, interactive dance" (p. 568). Although the methodological texts and narrative studies I read informed my analysis process and final write-ups, no text told me how to proceed. I had to select and create

tools and forms that were well suited for my data. Trusting Richardson (2000), I wrote even

when I did not think I had anything to say. The small stories started piling up. As I sat at the

computer, clicking away at the keyboard, I noticed a pattern in the plots of the stories. As I will

elaborate in my data chapters, what often began as an inclination to spend time with specific

person or participate in a specific activity became an opportunity to build shared meanings and

connect. Building shared meanings was the key to negotiating belongings.

I spent the better part of nine months with my data. The children's experiences

negotiating belongings with their peers were complex and nuanced. They were context-bound

and co-constructed. No story had a single teller and there was never just one story to tell

(Kryaztis & Green, 1997). Instead of isolating individual accounts, I read across and between the

children's experiences to "intentionally craft" (Ely, 2007) "representative constructions" (Bold,

2012) that showcased the dynamic ways they negotiated belongings in their local context. By

weaving multiple moments and voices together I "strengthen[ed] the readability of the whole text

so that readers [could] envision cohesive, complex, meaningful stories about people's lived and

relived experiences." (Ely, 2007). I used my field notes and transcripts to construct narratives

that represented the countless ways the children defined and enacted their understandings of

belonging. Not everyone shared the same understandings; many different understandings were

floating in the air that had the potential to influence how the children interacted. I used narrative

smoothing to edit and revise the narratives I constructed to be more "coherent, engaging and

interesting to the reader" (Kim, 2016, p. 192) while "honoring the told story and preserving the

value and dignity of the teller" (Kim, 2016, p. 111). I approached my data with a healthy dose of

"faith" (p. 193) and "suspicion" (p. 194) taking what my participants shared "at face value"

(Kim, 2016, p. 193) and searching for "hidden narrative meanings that might be lurking in the

data" (Kim, 2016, p. 194). For instance, as I read and reread my transcripts and field notes, I realized the campers were only verbalizing a sliver of their understandings. They were communicating much more through their actions and interactions. I did not only analyze what the children said and how they said it, but also what they did and how they did it. During this process, I consulted my journal often. Although the entries I wrote in the field and immediately following my data generation period were invaluable, the entries I wrote as I transcribed my data were equally important.

But, as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) emphasized, it is not enough for researchers to showcase their participants' experiences. Researchers have to strike a balance between illuminating their participants' stories and conveying to their audiences why these stories matter. I used all three of the analytical tools Connelly and Clandinin (1990) introduced: broadening, burrowing, and storying and restorying to clearly articulate the "so what" of my data. "Broadening" techniques allowed me to draw connections between something that happened in one of my participant's stories and the research context more broadly. I used "burrowing" techniques, to hone in on a specific aspect of my participants' experiences in order to deepen my understanding of specific facets of their lives. Finally, I used the "storying and restorying" tool to explore the significance my participants attributed to their lived experiences. Using these tools, I deepened my understandings of the meanings my participants gave "to themselves, to their surroundings, to their lives, and to their lived experiences" (Kim, 2016, p. 189-190) as they playfully lived and told stories of belonging in community with one another. I realized there were countless stories I could tell, but I decided to tell two that were particularly significant. Engaging in the storying and restorying process helped me realize what mattered most to the children. They were at camp to hang out with their peers; to them, little else mattered. Therefore,

the stories I tell in my finding's sections are about the children interacting, often informally, with their peers. The stories I tell are not only personally significant to the campers and resonant in the camp setting, but they also have the potential to ring true with wider audiences, especially educators and scholars who are committed to making schools more welcoming and inclusive spaces for all children.

In chapter four, I present findings about how the children used their cultural knowledge to build shared meanings with one another. These stories are rooted in my analysis of the ways the children defined and enacted their understandings of belonging at camp. Consistently, the children described how their connections to things and animals, connections to places, connections to people, and connections to activities made them feel like they belong, but what made one child feel included made another feel left out. It was not until I put the children's ideas and experiences in conversation with one another that I realized the important role culture played in the children's negotiations. Children used their cultural knowledge to invite one another to talk and play, but because they had not necessarily built shared meanings about how they were going to share their space, they called on the cultural knowledge they had built in other spaces to inform their interactions. The stories I tell illuminate how the children's cultural knowledge functioned as a either a bridge or a barrier, depending on the context. In the end, I theorize how cultural knowledge factored into the construction of share meanings and consequently influenced the nature and quality of the children's interactions.

In chapter five, I tell stories about how the children reached across social group lines to make room for one another. These stories are a result of me rereading my data and highlighting moments when the children harnessed opportunities to interact with peers they did not typically select as work or play partners. Specifically, I isolated moments when the children crossed paths

with someone outside their social circle group and responded by playfully interacting. I further narrowed my focus by "burrowing" into moments when the children responded by helping each other or playing with each other. I wrote detailed accounts of how the children interacted. After writing through numerous positive accounts, I used "broadening" techniques to consider what conditions seemed to compel the children to make room for one another. I theorize how the production of shared meanings helped the children construct communities with one another, which allowed me to link these moments with broader camp context and speculate about if and how these moments might emerge in other spaces where children spend time.

Considerations

When doing research, scholars always occupy more powerful positions than their participants (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998); the power differential is even greater when children are involved (Thomas & O'Kane, 1998). Adults do and always will occupy more powerful social and cultural locations than children. Adults are largely responsible for the health and well-being of children and for helping children develop the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to fully participate in society (Bluebond-Langer & Korbin, 2007). In research settings, it is neither possible nor desirable to extinguish the lines that differentiate children from adults. Researchers have an ethical responsibility to monitor if and how their research agendas violate their young participants' rights (Pascal & Bertram, 2009) or threaten their physical or emotional safety (Fine & Sandstrom, 1988). Instead of muting or perpetuating the status lines that distinguish children from adults, researchers strive to interact with their participants on more equal terms (Pascal & Bertram, 2009). For example, Tay-Lim and Lim (2013) found using, "in-depth draw-and-talk methods, in which an adult researcher takes on the role of co-constructor" (p. 12) empowered their young participants to take the lead. The children's familiarity with drawing as a means to

express themselves, enabled them to maintain more control over what they shared and how they shared it. I upheld my responsibilities as a researcher by helping the children understand their rights and responsibilities as participants may differ from their rights and responsibilities as children and students, checking and rechecking participant interest, and listening to the creative means through which the children shared their understandings and experiences.

I helped the children who participated in my study understand that the rules and norms that guide their interactions with adults at school and home might differ than the rules and norms that apply in the research space. In order for the children to make an informed decision about if they wanted to participate (Kellet, 2010), I helped the children understand how their rights and responsibilities as research participants differed from their rights and responsibilities as children and students (Moore, McArthur & Noble-Carr, 2008). In most settings children are accustomed to complying with adult requests and being rewarded for doing so (Kellet, 2010). I tried to help the children understand that in the research setting participant recruitment "is not a one-way selection process" (Clandinin, Caine, Lessard, & Huber, 2016, p. 192); they had, "a real and legitimate opportunity to say they [did] not want to participate in the research" (Fine and Sandstrom, 1988, p. 31). After I introduced my research project to the children and described what their participation would entail, I explained that they did not have to participate in my study. I told them their parents had already granted them permission to participate, but it was ultimately their decision. If they decided to participate, they would not get anything special; and, if they decided not to participate, they would not get in trouble and no one would be mad at them. No matter what they decided, they would still get to come to camp and participate in all of the camp activities. The children who participated, selected their own pseudonyms. I told the children that what they shared would remain anonymous. I would only disclose their name, if

they told me something that suggested someone was danger, at which point I would inform the camp directors. Further, I emphasized that when they were sharing their perspectives and experiences, there were no right or wrong answers, and they should feel free to share as much or as little as they would like.

I was aware, "While a verbal account is important, actions speak louder than words" (Fine & Sandstrom, 1988, p. 31) and therefore researchers must periodically check-in with participants to make sure they are still interested in participating (Merewether & Fleet, 2014). Following this advice, I monitored the verbal and non-verbal ways the campers communicated their preferences and intentions. Whenever I noticed their interest might be waning, I reminded the children that they could take a break from the project or stop participating altogether. For instance, before our second lunch bunch meeting, I noticed that some of the children were begrudgingly walking towards the door when I announced that it was their turn to eat lunch in the classroom. I knew this could be a sign they did not want to participate in my project any longer. I approached the children and asked, "Do you want to come to lunch bunch today? You do not have to come. Remember you get to choose if you want to come or not." In moments like this, I reminded the campers that they had a real choice. Sometimes the children would decide to come and other times the children would decide to go to the cafeteria instead. Other times the children teetered back and forth saying things like, "I don't know what to do. I want to come to lunch bunch, but I also want to eat lunch with my friends." I heard what the children were saying. I was asking them to give up their friend time to work on my project. I tried to secure a different meeting time, so they did not have to sacrifice their lunch hour, but I was unsuccessful.

Researchers cannot begin to understand the lives of children and the phenomena that affect their lives until they grant children numerous opportunities to *speak* and grant themselves

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ample time and space to *listen* intently to what the children share (Lundy, 2007; Pascal & Bartram, 2009). I invited the children to share their ideas and experiences using a variety of multimodal methods. But creating numerous opportunities for my participants to feel free and safe to express their ideas was not enough. I had to give status to what they shared (Lundy, 2007). Pascal and Bertram (2009) reflected, "For us, listening to young children is an active process of receiving, interpreting and responding to their communications" (p. 255). I did not just pay attention to what the campers said when I asked them questions, but also what they communicated through their play (Paley, 2004). When I got out of the way, and let the children play, their stories took on a life of their own. A life that belonged to the children.

Limitations

Conceptualizing my study as a research puzzle (Clandinin, 2013), or what Bentz and Shapiro (1998) referred to as an inquiry, enabled me to emphasize its open-ended and unpredictable nature. While the methods I used helped me understand how children defined and enacted their understandings of belonging, I knew I would never be able to fully understand their experiences or perspectives. Narrative inquirers work at the intersection where art and science meet. Their focus is on the meaning people make of their experiences. And thus, "Narrative inquiry is an artificial endeavor existing within layers of intention and reconstruction." (Blumenfeld-Jones, 1995, p. 28) As Clandinin and Murphy (2009) wrote, "We work under partial, complicit, context dependent conditions, and these are what we can represent in our research texts. Our view as narrative researchers is far from omniscient" (p. 601). A narrative inquirer's interpretations are always in danger of becoming speculations. They must work vigilantly to address concerns related to the fidelity and applicability of their research.

Blumenfeld-Jones (1995) explained, doing narrative inquiry research with fidelity requires researchers to fulfill their promise to credibly and ethically represent their participants' experiences. Researchers can achieve fidelity by developing a sense of "betweenness", "believability", and aesthetic appeal. "Betweenness" refers to the reciprocal relationships between the teller and the receiver and the teller and the context. The receiver must uphold their obligation to the teller by "honoring the self-report of the teller" (Blumenfeld-Jones, 1995, p. 28), and the teller must uphold their obligation to the receiver by being, "as honest as possible in the telling" (Blumenfeld-Jones, 1995, p. 28). The transparent, trustworthy relationships I developed with my participants helped them feel comfortable sharing their stories with me. The teller and receiver are both "cultural being[s] living in specific ways within cultural bonds" (Blumenfeld-Jones, 1995, p. 30). The narratives the tellers and receivers construct are influenced by their social and cultural locations. I listened carefully to my participants' stories and contextualized them within the social, temporal, and spatial factors that helped produce them, which in turn helped me produce narratives that highlighted the complexity and multiplicity of their lives as lived. Writing reflective journal entries, helped me recognize how my ideas and values were shaping my study design and interpretations. In addition, the researcher must strive to construct narratives that are reasonable, resonate, and convincing. After reading my work, audience members should believe that the, "event occurred and was felt in the way that the artist is asserting" (Blumenfeld-Jones, 1995, p. 31). The narrative should include enough rich detail to peak the audience's attention, sustain their interest, and invite them to reflect on their experiences. Embracing Blumenfeld-Jones's (1995) advice, I authored "representative constructions" (Bold, 2012) by carefully selecting salient data. As I was writing my final research texts, I strove to make the stories reflective of my participants' experiences and

relatable to outsiders. I constantly monitored how my ideas and values were influencing the stories I wrote and how readers might interpret the stories I shared.

Since I conducted my study with a small number of participants in an isolated setting over a relatively short time span, my findings are not generalizable. But my findings do have the potential to be applicable in other settings. As Maxwell (2013) explained, although researchers cannot generalize their findings to other communities outside the ones within which they worked, they can draw suggestive conclusions about what people who belong to similar communities might experience. As I will detail in my last chapter, it is likely the patterns and deviations I noted might emerge in other settings. For instance, my study suggests upper elementary-aged children might not be done playing. My participants used play to expand their playscripts and playgroups to include a wider range of children and, at times, all who were interested in participating, which raises questions about how opportunities to play might enrich children's school experiences. In addition, play served as an insightful data collection tool. The children comfortably and confidently communicated their experiences and understandings through play. When the children were playing games on the playground, engaging in playful banter at mealtimes, and using their playmats and figurines to act out scenes of kids playing together at camp, they were defining and enacting their understandings of belonging. At the very least, my study raises questions about how teachers and researchers might integrate play into their grade level curricula and research agendas.

CHAPTER 4

BELONGING AS NEGOTIATED

It was the second day of camp. Their excitement was palatable. The "what will camp be like?" "will it be fun?" "will the teachers be nice?" "will I make friends?" jitters had not quite worn off, but the children were less tentative than on day one. They greeted each other with warm hellos. They made room for each other at the breakfast table. They invited each other to hula hoop, shoot hoops, and hangout during morning energizers. When they entered the classroom, they hurriedly rushed to secure a spot at a table near their new and old friends. The children eagerly accepted the teachers' invitations to participate in activities. Every time a question was asked, hands shot up. And when directions were given, pencils scratched answers on paper. I was unsure whether the children's engagement was sincere or adrenaline-fed, but they were volunteering ideas, asking clarifying questions, and participating in every way requested. Camp felt like school-lite.

It was strange being in a classroom with children and not assuming instructional responsibilities. I knew how to teach, and I had experience spending time with kids in casual settings but hanging out with kids in a school-like setting in non-teacherly ways was unfamiliar territory. I fought the urge to interrupt what appeared to be off-task behavior, answer student questions, and offer prompts to facilitate understanding. I was experiencing my own jitters: "Will the kids be interested in my project?" "Will my methods work?" "Will the kids have enough time to share their understandings?" "Who am I going to be as an adult at camp?" On day one, I had successfully distanced myself from the role of teacher, but I felt unsettled. I had inadvertently

assumed the role of spectator. My passivity was met with suspicion. It seemed like the kids and adults were questioning my intentions, "If you aren't here to help us, then why are you here?" I had to figure out how to become involved in camp activities as a different kind of adult— and quickly.

When I got home, I sat. Exhausted. I could not get my mind to slow. I was excited yet anxious, hopeful yet worried. I re-scoured the literature about doing research with children. I found articles about adopting the least adult role (Mandell, 1991) and ones about inviting children to be co-researchers (Lundy & McEvoy, 2011) as well as critiques of each approach. But neither approach felt right. It was not until I reread some of Clandinin and Connelly's work that my shoulders started to lower away from my ears. Some researchers do not adopt a specific role, but rather assume multiple roles responding to whatever is happening in the field (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I returned to camp with a different intention: to be present. Instead of withdrawing from camp activities to avoid being labeled as a teacher, I immersed myself ready to participate. When someone needed help, I jumped in. When something needed to be done, I volunteered. I sat with the kids at camp, floated around the classroom, led the kids out to recess, passed out snacks, and answered questions. I tried to be my authentic self. Sometimes my actions were teacherly and other times they were not. My approach can best be described as "reactive" (Corsaro, 2005; Edmond, 2005). I made myself available and waited for invitations to participate. The teachers appreciated my willingness to help and the kids expressed interest in spending time with me. They invited me to sit with them during mealtimes, chat with them between activities, and play with them at recess. By authentically participating in camp activities I became an integral member of the camp community without sacrificing my research pursuit:

exploring how the children defined and enacted their understandings of belonging as they interacted with their peers.

Priorities Askew

During the first week of camp, I noticed the adults' and children's priorities were misaligned. The children were hyper-focused on building relationships with their peers. Whether listening to a story, completing an assigned task, choosing a partner, walking down the hallway, or eating a meal they were directing at least some of their attention towards their social lives. They worked to secure opportunities to spend time with some peers and avoid opportunities to spend time with others. The adults had different priorities. They were concerned with developing and implementing the curriculum: Our Local Community. The teachers designed what they hoped were interesting activities, facilitated collaborative learning experiences, redirected students, checked for understanding, monitored bathroom breaks, and coordinated transitions among other tasks that keep teachers busy. Strikingly, the children's concern about socializing with their peers did not seem to make the teachers' priority lists.

Officially, the children spent four weeks studying their community— the resources available, the natural environment, the local animals. The children created maps, constructed dioramas, read and wrote stories, and participated in interactive guest speaker's sessions. But the children were also engaged in another community investigation. They were negotiating ways of being in community with one another. While the children's engagement in the teacher-led activities ebbed and flowed, their interest in cultivating their local peer culture remained constant. The children were at camp to hang out with their peers. Most of their attention was focused on cultivating social relationships, and therefore the children were continually seeking and granting belongings in their local context. At the end of week one, I was confident the

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campers had a lot to share about what it means to belong, when and where they fit in, and what helps and hinders their chances of gaining entry to desired groups, activities, and places.

The Children's Understandings of Belonging

By the second week of camp, everyone was sinking into a routine. The children knew, after they came inside from recess, they washed their hands, used the bathroom, and made their way back to the classroom to lineup for lunch. Today, was a little different. I was hosting my first focus group meeting. As the children walked back through the classroom door, they asked questions like, "Do I get to come to lunch bunch today?" and "What are we going to do? I bet it is going to be fun." I worried to myself, "What are the children expecting? I am not sure if they will consider making webs about belonging fun." The last children returned from the bathroom. Without prompting, the children quieted themselves so they could hear who was invited to attend our inaugural lunch bunch meeting. I made my way to the front of the line with the coveted list and explained, "Some of you are going to come to lunch today and other people are going to come tomorrow. If I call your name, please come to the front of the line. We are going to go to the cafeteria, pick up our food, and then walk back to the classroom. This way, you will still have enough time to eat and chat." The children stood in silence, listening intently for their name to be called. One-by-one, I announced the names of the campers who were going to participate in the first meeting. As I called the last name on my list, twelve campers were congregated at the door, jumping up and down, beaming with excitement. When the children who were still standing in line realized they were going to have to wait to attend their first meeting, their stares melted into frowns. I reassured them, "Don't worry. You will have your turn."

Eventually, we made our way back to the classroom. The desks were arranged in a circle, so we would be able to have a conversation as we ate. I invited the children to choose a seat and

start eating. I would tell them more about what we were going to do in a few minutes. I am glad I made sure the children had at least one friend in their lunch bunch group. No one had trouble finding somewhere to sit. After the children secured places to sit, they got quiet. I thanked them for quieting down but encouraged them to eat and socialize for a few minutes. I would let them know when we were going to start our project. After about ten minutes, I started passing out the children's researcher notebooks and a real ink pen, which the children found novel. "I have never used a pen before!" one of the children exclaimed. I looked around the room at the campers. They returned the favor by looking at me. When I had everyone's attention, I explained, "Today we are going to talk about what it means to belong. Who has an idea that they would like to share?" The children excitedly shouted out ideas. When the children started talking over each other, I invited them to raise their hands, so we could hear everyone's ideas.

The children's understandings of belonging were far from simplistic. The children understood belonging to have relational, affective, and political dimensions. The children named places where they belonged and described moments when they felt like they were part of something bigger than themselves. When I asked the children what they thought it means to belong, their initial responses were usually about ownership and places they found fulfilling. They talked about their relationships with their toys and pets, and the places they found comfortable, empowering, or interesting. For instance, the children felt like they belonged in kid-friendly places like fast food restaurants and ice cream shops, retail stores that catered to children, and entertainment spots like pools and movie theaters because they were treated as autonomous, respected members of these communities. The children also valued places that sustained their interest like past and future travel destinations, recreational spaces where they pursued their hobbies, and locations where tragic events, like robberies and terrorist attacks, took

place. Going deeper, the children attributed their sense of belonging to their ability to establish and maintain relationships with friends and family members as well as their ability to become and remain involved in activities of interest. The children tied their sense of belonging to important people in their lives—people who cared for them, treated them kindly, and helped them when they were in need. They felt connected to their favorite shows, movies, video games, activities, and songs; and they felt connected when they engaged in debates, joked around, and discussed off-limits topics with their peers.

My first meeting with the second group of children proceeded in much the same way. The children's understandings of belonging mirrored and extended the multifaceted definitions circulating in scholarly communities. Belonging was about participation. Belonging was about being an individual and being a group member. Belonging was about the relationships the children had already established with people, places, activities, and things in their lives, and the relationships they wished to build. The children tied their understandings of belonging to their experiences participating in the broader social world dominated by adults and their local peer culture. They referenced the past, commented on the present, and hypothesized about the future. They tied belonging to feelings, people, places and things. They tethered belonging to their experiences, memories, hopes, and dreams. They recollected about places they frequented as well as ones they visited on occasion or even just once. They identified people to whom they felt connected, activities they enjoyed, and topics they found interesting.

Methods of Negotiation

It was fairly easy for the children to articulate when and where they felt like they belong, but it was harder for them to describe what made them feel connected to some people, spaces, activities, and objects and disconnected to others. Their sense of belonging was embodied, so the

best they could do was describe moments when their sense of belonging was strong and moments when their sense of belonging was weak. The stories the children told were familiar, but not because the children had already shared them with me, but because most of the activities the children referenced have been identified by childhood studies scholars as avenues through which children build relations with their peers. It is well documented that gifting, sharing, and trading valuable cultural resources (Nukaga, 2008), playing imaginative, sociodramatic, and rule-driven games (Evaldsson & Corsaro, 1998), and engaging in talk and teasing routines (Kyratzis, 2004) help children establish and maintain relations with their peers.

Although the campers referenced these same kinds of activities, there were two factors that set their participation apart from the children in many past studies. The first factor was that the campers did not sort themselves into static groups with children who shared their social and cultural locations. Their groups were much more fluid. The campers still gravitated towards peers who were like them and established relatively homogenous social circle groups. More often than not, the children elected to play with peers that they considered friends and peers who shared their social and cultural locations. Boys played with other boys, and girls played with other girls. The younger campers played with younger campers, and the older campers played with older campers. Most of the children's social circle groups were racially and ethnically homogenous. The campers who were bilingual formed social circle groups with peers who spoke their home languages. The children were also drawn to peers who had similar interests and experiences and made cultural references to the same songs, TV shows, movies, and video games. The campers rekindled friendships from past summers and nurtured relationships they had established in other spaces like school, church, and athletic fields. The campers were drawn to peers who were familiar. It was relatively easy for the children to bond with children who

were like them and had similar interests and experiences. But the campers also ventured outside their established groups to informally interact with a wide range of peers. Just because it was more challenging for them to connect did not mean it was impossible. Like Diprose (2008) explains, belonging is possible when someone feels inclined to spend time with another person, and belonging is realized when they are able to build shared meanings. The children proved the feasibility of Diprose's theory on a daily basis.

I was not surprised to see the children initiating interactions with new relational partners. Since the 1990's researchers have documented instances when children played with children who did not share their social and cultural locations (see, for example, Moore, 2001; Ramsey, 1991; Thorne, 1993), but because their interactions were short-lived and infrequent the researchers were unable to record detailed accounts of the children's interactions. Instead, they had to speculate about what might have encouraged the children to expand the range of peers with whom they felt comfortable interacting. Luckily, my situation was different. The diversity of the camp and the frequency of the children's informal interactions allowed me to witness the children interacting with a wider range of peers on a more regular basis. I was able to explore what brought the children together and what propelled or stalled their interactions.

The second factor that set the campers' participation apart from the children in many past studies was what the campers called on to forge relationships with their peers. The campers did not depend on their similarities to negotiate belongings with their peers. They did not have to have shared interests, experiences, backgrounds, or social and cultural locations to connect. Rather, their capacity to negotiate belongings with their peers was dependent on their ability and willingness to build shared meanings (Diprose, 2008). And the primary mode through which the children built shared meanings was by referencing and exchanging cultural information. The

cultural information the children brought with them from other spaces made its way into the children's negotiations. In addition to referencing cultural information that was tied to their individual social and cultural locations, the campers referenced information that was tethered to the social and cultural location they all shared. From their collective position as children, they built shared meanings about what it means to belong through their casual talk and play. Specifically, the children drew on cultural information from three sources: their local peer culture, popular culture, and the adult world. Although these categories were not mutually exclusive, I discuss each in turn for clarities sake.

Local Peer Culture

The children discussed and made references to their understandings of what it means to be a member of their local community and how community member should treat one another. As the children participated in their local peer culture, they were immersed in a live feedback loop. They would say or do something; their peers would respond; and they would use what they learned to inform their next move. This process helped the children cultivate ways of being in community with one another. In the following vignettes, I illuminate how the children produced and reproduced shared meanings about how they should treat one another. Specifically, I illuminate how name-calling and copying served as strategies that could bring children together or draw them apart.

Name-calling. Name-calling served as a playful way for the campers to relate. Although it was an accepted mode of interaction, the campers did not always draw the same conclusions about if an exchange was playful or callous. For instance, one day, during a focus group meeting, the children became deeply entrenched in a conversation about what it means to be a good friend. They had disparate ideas.

"A good friend," as one child explained, "won't call you bad words and stuff, and a bad friend will call you names and stuff like that." Nodding in agreement another child added, "Kind of sounds like a bully!" "It sure does," another child confirmed. But not everyone was in agreement; "Huh!? No, it don't." The children seemed to have different ideas about if name calling was a kind or hostile act.

I asked, "So you think friends call each other names sometimes?" Almost before I could finish asking the question, the child continued, "Yes. Like my friends; they do it all the time." A handful of other voices chimed in, "So do mine," and "Mine do too, sometimes at least." The group seemed to be split. About half of the campers interpreted name calling as a friendly gesture while the other half interpreted it as a demeaning insult. Before I could ask why friends call each other names, the child who initiated the debate added, "They do it to be funny." "Oh," I responded, "They do it just to be funny? How do you know if somebody is just being funny, or if somebody is being mean? Is there a way to tell?" This time nearly all of the children were nodding. They seemed to agree that name calling was not always ill-intentioned.

The debate continued. "If someone is joking when they're name calling, they'll laugh and you'll laugh too, but if they're not joking, you'll probably get a little sad or mad." Another child clarified, "No, no, no. If they're foolin' they ain't supposed to laugh first. You're supposed to laugh first." To make sure I understood the distinction the children were making, I paraphrased, "Oh, so you laugh first, and they laugh second?" They resumed their explanation, "Yeah, yeah. Cause if they laugh first, y'all gonna think, y'all gonna think they're laughing at y'all." Still curious, I asked a follow-up question, "Are there any other ways you can tell if someone is joking?" Within seconds, another

child chimed in, "Ooo. I know! If somebody is joking, they would probably just say it one time, and not do it again. But if they're not joking, they would probably just keep doing it over and over and over and over again." One of the campers added, "Just like teasing."

Instantly, I was reminded of something that happened at camp, earlier in the month. A group of boys were working together on a project. The children had self-selected their groups. Although all the members had expressed interest in working together, one of the campers was struggling to be included. His attempts to participate were ignored or mocked. At one point, he was trying to get his group members to pass him the stack of papers that he needed to complete a task that he had been delegated. He was not particularly interested in completing the task, but no one else wanted to do it, so he agreed.

"Can I have those papers?" No response. At least 30 seconds pass. "I need those papers," he repeats. His request is met with silence. He tried a third time, "Pass me those papers." Again, his group members ignored his request. In a voice, not quite as loud as a yell, he demanded, "I need them! I need them! I need them!" Finally, he got their attention, but they did not fulfill his request. When he repeated, "I need them" They echoed back, "I need them." The mockery continued. "I'm serious," he responded. "I'm serious," they parroted back. His "stop" was met with their "stop," and his "Stop following me" was met with their "Stop following me." After a series of at least 10 back and forth exchanges, he yelled, "I need it now," finally interrupting his peers' charade. This time, instead of repeating him, one of his group members asked, "What?" to which he responded, "That thing!" pointing at the stack of papers. And with that they passed him the stack.

In this situation, it was obvious that the child who was being teased was not amused. His peers were mimicking him to be condescending. Their intentions were mean-spirited not friendly.

But the campers were quick to remind me that repeating someone should not always be interpreted as a form of mockery. Copying could also be playful. "Sometimes," as one of the campers explained, "people want to say something over and over and over again, because it is really funny." This time, I was reminded of a different moment at camp.

The children were chatting as they worked on an art project. One camper (Camper A) turned to the camper sitting next to him (Camper B) and said, "That's cause you trash." Camper B responded, "No, you trash boy," and the banter continued. Camper A countered, "No, you trash. You trash at Fortnite. You trash at basketball. You trash at football. You trash at baseball" which was met with Camper B's, "You trash at everything boy." As a result, Camper A questioned, "So you saying, I'm trash at everything?" A bystander chimed in, "That's what he was kind of saying." "Yes, that was what I was saying" Camper B confirmed. Camper A challenged, "Well, I'm not trash at football. I'm not trash at baseball. Cause I play baseball and football and basketball." Camper B met his challenge with a dare, "Beat me in every sport then." Confidently, Camper A retorted, "Okay, I would!"

In this example, the children were equal participants in the name-calling routine. They both took jabs and stated comebacks. They laughed with, not at one another. Their exchanges were playful and entertaining and seemed to strengthen not weaken their relationship.

When the children were evaluating whether their peers' intentions were kind or malicious, they did not only pay attention to who laughs first, if the name-calling/teasing routine was repeated, and whether or not the routine was reciprocal or one-sided, but also their peer's

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tone of voice and facial expressions. As one camper explained, "You see it in their face, or maybe in their voice; their voice changes if they are talking to you in a mean way." Expounding on their peer's explanation, another camper added,

> I know when they are being mean because their whole voice would change tone. Sometimes they change their voice to be funny, but it depends on the way their face will look. Because sometimes when people get, when people are mean they change their face a little bit.

How a person delivered a message drastically influenced how it was received. Generally speaking, boys, older campers, and African American campers were more likely to view name-calling as an acceptable means to negotiate belongings with peers. They did not just accept it as something friends did, they expected their peers to playfully participate in the name-calling routine, both delivering and accepting jabs and comebacks. But even the campers who viewed name-calling as a bonding strategy recognized it was not always good-natured. It all depended on how someone's words and actions were delivered and received in the feedback loop.

Name-calling and teasing only accounted for a sliver of the children's negotiation strategies. Another strategy the children used was copying. As in the case of name-calling and teasing, copying embodied different meanings in different settings. Sometimes it was viewed as an acceptable even complimentary practice. In these contexts, copying functioned as a strategy to build camaraderie, demonstrate allegiance, or deliver accolades. Other times, copying was used as a strategy to aggravate someone, in which case copying was interpreted as an annoyance. Copying could also be equated with stealing, and consequently spark conflicts and damage relationships. The children agreed copying could serve different purposes, but they did not always agree on how it functioned in particular contexts.

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Copying. Every day, there were countless moments when copying brought the children together. The children might sing together, like when one child softly sang, "It's raining, it's pouring…" which obliged a second child to join in, "The old man is snoring." The initiator's jaw dropped, "How do you know that song?" The echoer explained, "Because I sing it when…" the initiator finished the line with a question, "It's raining?" to which the echoer answered, "Yeah, when it's pouring, and the old man is snoring." They finished the song together, "He went to bed and bumped his head and couldn't get in the morning." When the campers realized they knew the same song, they sang it together, providing them with an authentic opportunity to connect.

The children also altered their stories to sound like the one's their peers told. Like when two campers told very similar stories about finding cats under their father's parked trucks.

Ohh! I almost forgot. Yesterday, we saw these cats at my house. They were hiding under my daddy's truck. They were still kittens. We moved them so my daddy wouldn't accidently run them over. But when I went outside to check on them, they were gone.

As soon as she finished telling her story, a different camper told a story that strongly resembled the first. Guess what? Once, I was outside, and there was this cat under my dad's truck. But he ran out and scratched my finger, and now he's gone.

Although the plot of their stories differed, they were similar enough to suggest the second child adjusted her story to match the one her peer had told.

In addition, the campers adapted their preferences to match those of their peers. During snack, one day, the campers were offered pretzels. Three girls sat together to enjoy their snack.

One of the campers turned to the child sitting next to her and asked, "Where are your pretzels?" to which the camper responded, "I don't eat pretzels." The camper followed up, "Oh, why? You don't like them?" The camper clarified, "I just don't like them." The

third camper added, "They're too nasty. Too crunchy." Listening to her peer's

reasonings, she nodded, "Yeah." The pretzel nay-sayers continued, "They're just too

salty." But the camper continued to eat her pretzels, "Yeah, but I'm really hungry, so I'm

eating mine anyways."

Often, when their preferences did not align with the preferences of their peers, like in the case of

the pretzels, the children would construct excuses to justify why they made different choices.

Sometimes the children took it a step further and encouraged their peers to copy, so they

could teach them how to do something new. Like when a child expressed interest in learning to

whistle.

"I want to whistle, but I can't." After coaching her peer through the process of sucking in

air, forming her lips into a tight "o", and blowing out, she whistled for the first time.

Other children expressed interest in joining in, "Let me try." They campers divvied out

tips like, "Make your tongue look like this," compliments like, "You sound like a bird,

and encouragements like, "There you go."

Copying, was a strategy the children used to connect and mark their relationships. It was a way

for them to demonstrate the ways they were like each other and the strength of their bond. Even

during formal camp activities, the children located opportunities to use copying as a strategy to

connect with their peers, like when the children were engaged in an open-ended art activity.

Two eight-seater lab tables were pushed together encircled by a dozen or so

chairs. The markers piled in the center of the table stood in stark contrast to the black

tabletop. There had to be at least two dozen colored markers and a dozen, or so, black

ones sprinkled throughout. The campers chatted with one another as they filed into the

room and found a seat at the table. The art center leader greeted each camper with a

sheet of white printer paper and a warm hello. She instructed the children to choose a

black marker and wait for the next direction.

The children scrambled to get hold of one, even though there were more than

enough on the table. As the children fished for a black marker, some of them could not

resist grabbing a colored marker or two. One of the campers grabbed a handful of

markers and nestled the end of one marker into the cap of another, building a long chain.

The child sitting next to him mirrored his actions, choosing the same colors and

attaching them in the same order. "Look at our giant markers!" they announced. "Wow;

they match!" admired another camper. "Hiya!" On contact, the swords broke into pieces

and the markers scattered across the table and rolled onto the floor. The campers

gathered up the markers and started reconstructing their swords. During sword

construction, a debate broke out. "I had the blue first" was met with a "No, you didn't. It

is in my hand?" The child countered, "But I need the blue one so I can make mine look

just like my best friend's." Before the children had a chance to settle their debate, the art

leader announced, "If you have any colored markers, you can put them back. We aren't

going to need them right now. All you need is one black marker and a piece of white

paper. When we need the colored markers, I am sure we will figure out a way to share

them, and I have more markers if we run out." As quickly as the pile of colored markers

vanished, it reappeared.

The art leader guided the children through the first few steps of the activity. They

drew a black line all the way across their papers. They were encouraged to make their

line as jagged, swirly, and squiggly as they wanted. The leader only set one parameter:

extend your line from one edge of your paper to the other. Without hesitation, some of the

campers skated the tip of their marker across the page, but other children were more cautious. They glanced around the room watching their peers complete their lines before even uncapping their markers. One child intently watched his neighbor. As she finished, he picked up his marker and created a similar path. When he reached the far end of his paper, he turned to his neighbor and said, "I did just like you with the black!"

It did not take long for all the children to finish their lines. Then, the children traded their black marker for a colored one. They outlined their black line with one color; when they finished, they returned their colored marker to the middle and selected another colored marker. Eventually all the children selected a third color to finish their outlines. During this part of the activity, the children's concentration kept their chatter to a minimum. As they completed their outlines, one of the campers beckoned, "Look Miss Jess. We all picked similar colors. See, we girls picked good colors together." Within ten minutes everyone had finished their lines and were ready for the next step. The campers followed the leader's instructions to grab a black marker and divide the remainder of their paper into smaller segments. They started each new line at the center line and extended it to either the top or bottom edge of their paper, eventually partitioning their paper into 10-12 smaller segments. Finally, in each section, they drew a different design, again with their black marker. The chatter picked up as the children transitioned into design-drawing mode. They commented on each other's designs, and when they were at a loss for ideas, they asked one another for suggestions.

But copying was not always desirable. Sometimes the children did not want to be lumped into a group but recognized as an individual; "Sometimes, you just want to be you". As one camper explained, "Sometimes belonging means that you are part of them and you do the same

things as them, but sometimes you don't want to belong with them because you want to stand out." Copying had to be reciprocal in order to facilitate belonging. When a person became upset because someone used their idea, the copier's intentions did not necessarily matter because the copied interpreted their act as an intrusion or even a personal attack. Sometimes the campers were so proud of their project or the originality of their work that they want to keep it for themselves. The campers were not only concerned with preserving their self-interest but also with protecting the integrity of their community. One camper wisely explained,

> *Would you want everybody to be the same as you? I mean you wouldn't, cause then*
> *everything would just be the same. Everybody would have the same things, and*
> *everybody would want the same things, and everybody would do the same things. But if*
> *everybody is the same and only you stood out that would mean that you would be like*
> *special or something like that.*

The campers were continually negotiating shared meanings about what role copying should play in their community. They recognized that copying could encourage bonding but at a cost. When assimilation and sameness are valued over multiplicity and difference communities are at risk of becoming monotonous, even stagnant. Instantly, I thought of the cloud debate.

> *The campers were working in pairs to create dioramas of local animal habitats.*
> *The campers were encouraged to think about what their animal needed to live and*
> *include those elements in their model. I was bopping around the room helping the*
> *campers locate supplies and brainstorm ideas about how they could use the materials*
> *available to build a model that reflected their animal's needs. Suddenly, I heard someone*
> *yell, "Stop copying us!" and someone counter, "We aren't copying you!" Before I had*
> *time to figure out who was yelling, someone was tapping me on my shoulder, "She said*

we copied their idea, but we didn't." I reassured her, "Let's go over there together and figure out what happened".

I followed the camper back to her work space. When I arrived, the accuser proclaimed, "They keep copying us!" The accused explained, "We aren't copying you". The back and forth continued: "Yes, you are. We made our clouds first!" was refuted with, "But ours wouldn't stick." The accused turned to me and asked, "Is copying the same as being inspired?" They must be referring to the conversation we had last week when we talked about how artists often get their inspiration from other artists and writers borrow ideas from other writers. I had to figure out how to respond and quickly. I explained, "copying and being inspired are similar. But when you are inspired you see or hear someone do something that you think is great and you borrow their idea to make your work better." Before I could finish, the accused used my explanation to justify their actions, "That's what we did. We tried to glue our clouds to the back, but they wouldn't stick. Your idea worked, and ours didn't." The accuser listened, but was not satisfied, "But we want our diorama to stand out. To be unique." The accused tried to reassure her peers, "It will. We are just doing our clouds like you. Everything else is different." The accuser was not convinced, "No it won't. Everyone will think it was someone else's idea." I tried to offer a remedy, "What if they write a note next to their diorama that says they borrowed your idea, because they could not figure out how to get their clouds to stick to the back?" I was hopeful the campers would embrace, or at least consider, my suggestion. But they didn't, "Still, ours won't look unique." Although the conflict had not been resolved, the campers started working on their dioramas again.

I walked away, hoping the situation would diffuse. But in less than a minute, the accused were back; "Miss Jess. Now she is crying." I walked back over and asked the teary-eyed camper, "Are you okay?" Between sniffles, she explained, "I just really don't want them to use the same kind of clouds in their habitat." The accused conceded, "Fine! We will take them down." The accused pair, scooted their diorama about a foot down the table and pondered, "But now what will we do? We need clouds." I brainstormed some ideas with the campers. They explained that they tried to glue their cotton balls to the back of their diorama, but they were too heavy and kept falling off. After a few minutes the campers settled on an idea. They were going to stretch out the cotton balls to distribute the weight. I sighed in relief. It seemed like everyone was satisfied. As I walked away, I overheard the accusers talking to another pair, "You will never guess what they did. They stole our idea. They hung their clouds from the top of their box, just like us."

Copying, in this context, was not well-received. The campers who had developed an inventive way to incorporate clouds into their diorama wanted their ingenuity to shine. They tried to prevent others from duplicating their creative cloud-hanging technique. They did not just want credit for their idea, they wanted to copyright their idea and prevent anyone else from using it. Even after the campers who were accused of stealing gave in and figured out a different way to incorporate clouds into their diorama, the accusers were still upset. I could not help but wonder if the sequence of events would have unfolded differently if the accused had backed down earlier. Were the accusers upset because someone tried to copy them; or were they upset because their peers snubbed their pleas to take their clouds down? Maybe, it would not have made a difference, but maybe the situation would have diffused more quickly. Something caused this interaction to be destructive instead of generative.

I was puzzled. I wondered, "What caused copying to facilitate the children's negotiations of belonging in some settings and hinder their negotiations in others?" I knew just who to ask: the campers. They were in the best position to help me understand the difference; "I noticed that sometimes you are cool with people borrowing your ideas and other times you feel like they are taking your ideas? What's the difference?" Initially the children responded with silence. A few seconds later they followed up with an, "I don't know." I waited to see if something might come to them after they had some time to think. I am glad I waited. In fewer than thirty seconds, one camper offered, "One time, you keep doing it over and over and over, so you're just making people mad. When you say stop, they don't stop." Another camper chimed in, "Once, I was inspired by someone, but they said I wasn't inspired. I just copied them." A third camper added, "But when you congrats them and stuff, then they say, 'oh thanks!'" The first camper clarified, "Sometimes it helps if you ask. Like you might say, 'Can I do what you did? If that's okay?'" Nodding, the second camper agreed, "Yeah, that's when I like it." Unlike in the case of name-calling, the children's understandings of copying did not differ based on their race, age, gender, ethnicity, or language. All the children viewed copying as a tool they used to participate in their social world. They used it to achieve a variety of goals including bolstering their relationships, participating in activities, annoying their peers, and distinguishing themselves from the group.

The campers were aware that strategies like name-calling, teasing, and copying could help them forge community with one another, but they could also accomplish the opposite. They could produce rifts and contribute to community decay. In short, context always mattered. In order for their strategy use to help them achieve their desired goals, the campers had to be skilled at reading and responding to their immediate context which, like all communities, was cultural.

The children did not only construct their own norms and references, they also pulled in ones from the outside world.

Popular Culture.

The children made references to songs, dances, movies, TV shows, and video games as they chatted with their peers. When someone made a pop culture reference, it was as if they were inviting their peers to converse. They would pitch an idea, offer their opinion, or quote a line from a show, movie, or song and wait for a response. These interactions weren't planned or coordinated. They organically emerged as the campers interacted. Sometimes a reference would fall flat, but other times it would be taken up and ricochet back and forth between campers, until it lost steam. The vignettes below showcase the primary modes through which the children engaged with popular culture content; they engaged in banter and constructed jokes.

Engaging in banter. There is something to be said about what happens when people engage in a back and forth exchange, especially when they have no particular goal in mind— when they debate in real-time their ideas, evaluations, and preferences. The children continually bantered about their favorites-- movies they had seen, TV shows they had watched, video games they had played, and gaming systems they preferred. The campers' references seemed to serve at least three purposes: to share their interests and skills, gauge their peers' interests and skills, and, evaluate the veracity of their peers' claims. This process helped the children build shared meanings about their preferences—what they liked and how they preferred to spend their time. For instance, the campers talked about playing video games including *Fortnite, Stone Age, Robo* and *Minecraft*. Instead of talking about the details of the game or what playing required, they were searching for peers who played the same games and appreciated its intricacies. They also looked for potential challengers with similar skill levels.

"You play Prodigy, too? What number are you?"

"Fifty-two."

"Ooo, I'm fifty-seven, boy."

Overhearing their conversation, another camper asked, "Prodigy Math?"

The campers nodded, "Yeah."

With her hands on her hips, she announced, "Well, I am on level one-hundred."

"No, you're not."

"That's impossible."

Originally, the campers entertained the possibility of welcoming their peer to join their conversation. But when she claimed she had reached level one-hundred, the highest level in the game, they excluded her from their conversation. The children participated in similar conversations about recently released movies and ones that were yet to come out.

"Jurassic World forever!"

"Blast the whole forest with my one and only torpedo. Hey, you remember the grandpa?

"What Grandpa?"

"The grandpa that died."

(No response.)

"Did you watch the new Jurassic World?"

Yeah, I watched it. Oh, you mean that dude?

"You guys are spoiling it for everyone at this table who didn't see it. I haven't seen the movie yet."

After realizing that some of their peers had not seen the movie, they turned their attention to a new movie. Before they started discussing it, they checked to make sure their peers had seen the movie before sharing spoilers.

For late elementary schoolers, game systems and their corresponding controllers were another popular topic of conversation. The campers had very strong opinions about which systems were the best, but the primary focus of this debate was on the quality of the controllers. The front runners were the controllers that came with the Xbox X and the PlayStation 4.

"The PS4 is way better than the Xbox. It has better quality."

"The Play Station 3 is good too. That's what I have."

"*I don't know how y'all do with a PlayStation controller. It feels…"*

"Weird?"

"It feels weird in your hands. Just, the shooting controls…"

 "I like my controller. I decorated it, so I can't feel anything"

"If you play with a PlayStation, you need to try to change that thing to an Xbox remote control, because that thing…"

"You should look it up right now. Xbox X. It's hand test. It might cost a lot of money, but that thing. OooOoo."

The campers called on their experiences to justify which controller was best, but they also encouraged their peers to research it themselves. Everyone had a chance to air their opinion. It was acceptable to hold your ground or change your mind. Assimilation was not expected.

While these exchanges were brief, the children also engaged in longer back and forth exchanges during which they integrated cultural references into their talk and play. I had no idea the campers were into cars, until the day they engaged in a heated debate about which car was

fastest. Although all the campers knew that cars, especially racecars, were fast, their knowledge of car models varied. The Lamborghini, Corvette, Ducati, and Bugatti were in the running, but other models like the Ferrari and Cobra were thrown in the mix.

"There are so many fast cars. The Lamborghini. No, a corvette or maybe the Ducati." Missing the beginning of the conversation, an on-listener asked, "Who in the world is corvette?" "Did you say who in the world is corvette?" another camper questioned. The on-listener nodded. In shock, the camper explained, "Corvette, is not a person." "It is a car!" another camper added. To clarify further, the on-listener asked, "OH! Like what is the fastest car?" The other campers continued their conversation without answering or even acknowledging her question.

The campers commented on the characteristics of different models—which ones had the best turning radius; which ones were most stylish—but they continually refocused their conversation on the speed of the car. Eventually, the Bugatti became the front runner. At two points during the conversation, the camper who asked, "Who in the world is corvette?" tried to add her evaluation, "Hey guys. Hey! The answer is Ferrari." When they ignored her suggestion, she offered another, "Guys, the answer is a cobra." This time, the campers questioned her contribution, "A cobra. What is that?" Another camper inquired, "What type of car are you thinking of?" She responded, "It's a cobra, guys. Like they go one-hundred million miles per hour." Again, the campers wrote off her opinion and continued their conversation without her.

"The Bugatti. Bugatti. If you try to race a Bugatti, you'd already be passed up."

"Nah. The Flash is way faster."

"Well, yeah. Duh."

"He can go around the world in two or three seconds."

"No, not two or three seconds."

"Well in Justice 2 he can."

"But a Bugatti. Have you seen a Bugatti? Look it up on YouTube. Then you'll see what a

Bugatti can do. Bugatti versus Sonic. Bugatti versus Sonic. Oh man!"

As is evident in the stories I just told, the ability to participate in a conversation was valued over assimilation and consensus. The campers' goals were not to agree or convince other campers to adopt their viewpoints. Rather, they focused their attention on reading the context, listening to their peers' contributions, and making relevant contributions themselves. Differences of opinion enriched the meaning-making process, whereas a lack of cultural knowledge inhibited it. When the campers made a comment that suggested their background knowledge was lacking, their peers discounted their contributions. And by ignoring their contributions, in a sense, they were excluding their peers from their conversations. More often than not, the main actors in the bantering episodes were boys. When girls participated, they only interjected a comment or two. It is unclear why this gender discrepancy existed. Maybe the boys preferred to engage in banter more than girls, or maybe the boys were more knowledgeable about the topics debated than the girls. Alternatively, the girls might have engaged in a different kind of back and forth exchange that I overlooked or labeled as something else.

Constructing jokes. Making cultural references also served another purpose. It helped the campers make jokes and consequently served as a form of entertainment. The children manipulated the popular culture references they encountered in the world by adapting the content to be relevant and humorous in their context. The jokes were not premeditated. Rather, someone would make a comment and other campers would build on the original remark. As more campers

participated in the joke telling scheme the laughter spread. Take for instance, when the children were singing the *Black Panther* movie's praises.

> *Renditions of "Black Panther was awesome" and "Wakanda forever!" echoed across the room. The hype continued to build until someone inserted a different opinion, "No, Black Panther sucks." The room quieted, and everyone's eyes trailed towards the offender who dared question the quality of the movie. "What'd you say about Black Panther? one camper asked as if he was defending his best friend. Another camper contested, "Why would you say something bad about Black Panther? Black Panther is awesome." A third camper tried to make light of the subject, "I said Black Pamper." Laughter contagiously spread across the room.*
>
> *"Black Pamper!"*
>
> *"Like a black diaper?"*
>
> *"Yeah, a black pamper"*
>
> *To follow-up, a camper asked, "Wait, why did you say black diaper?"*
>
> *"Cause he's black, and he got a pamper on."*
>
> *Between laughs, another camper clarified, "Yeah. He does have a black pamper. No. He got a panther suit on, but his diapers are black."*
>
> *Another camper advanced the joke further, "What if he was a black panther, and he had a black diaper on over his suit?"*
>
> *The giggles were turning into belly laughs.*
>
> *"Just like superman," another child added.*

The children drew on what they knew about superheroes, the movie *Black Panther*, and bathroom humor to construct a back and forth exchange that they found hilarious. Or at least

most of the campers considered humorous. The majority of the campers, regardless of their race, gender, ethnicity, language, or age markers, had seen *Black Panther* as well as a few other superhero movies. They knew Pampers is a diaper brand and understood the analogy being made between diapers and superhero suits. Even the campers who initially questioned the substance of their peers' joke by asking, "Like a black diaper?" and "Wait, why did you say black diaper?" eventually got the joke and laughed along.

Occasionally a camper would miss the joke. Instead of laughing with their peers, they would end up saying something that caused them to be laughed at. Let me give you an example. One Field Trip Friday, the campers traveled to the local independent movie theater in town to watch the original "The Lion King". After seeing the film, the campers continually referenced the film in their talk and play. On this particular day, the children were reciting lines from the song Timon and Pumbaa sang to inform Simba about their lifestyle.

"Hakuna matata," to which another camper parroted back, "Hakuna matata." The line continued to bounce around the group, until a different line was introduced,

"Do you know thee way?"

"What?"

"I said, Do you know thee way?"

"Who in the world is that?"

"That's not the question. But, do you know thee way?"

"I don't even know."

He's saying, "Thee way"

"Do you know thee way?"

"Thee way," another camper clarified.

(no response) (laughter)

"Do you know thee way?"

(no response) (laughter)

"Do you know thee way?"

"NO!"

In this conversation, the camper thought her peer was asking her a legitimate question, when in actuality he was trying to make her laugh. She didn't get the joke. It is impossible to know if the camper was referencing the scene from "The Lion King" when Rafiki offers to show Simba the way, or if he had transitioned to referencing the "Do you know da wae?" meme that went viral in January 2018. The meme features Knuckles, one of the characters from *Sonic the Hedgehog*, posing the question, "Do you know da wae?" in a deep Ugandan accent. In the meme, Knuckles asks, "Do you know da wae?" and no matter how his conversational partner responds, Kunckles repeats the question, "Do you know da wae?" The pattern continues until his conversational partner's yell interrupts the cycle. The camper lacked the cultural knowledge necessary to understand that the question was a joke. Consequently, instead of laughing with her peers, her peers laughed at her. Although there were exceptions, as in the case of the "Do you know thee way?" joke, joke construction was more inclusive than banter. The jokes the campers co-constructed at camp were built around widely known references, whereas the banter was focused on niche topics. The jokes needed an audience, so even children who had a limited understanding of the joke's content could still participate by laughing along. On the other hand, in order to participate in banter, the children had to have enough background knowledge to make relevant contributions. So, while participation was always possible, it was not always realized.

The Adult World

The children also pulled cultural information from the adult world into their peer-to-peer interactions. The children made references to topics, events, and spaces that are typically reserved for adults like death, terrorism, robberies, jail, and money when they were playing and chatting with their peers. Although adults have directed much of their energy towards protecting children from these complex, difficult-to-understand, and sometimes scary topics, children still encounter them. And when they do, children yearn for opportunities to process them. Here, what brought the children together was their status as not-yet-adults, their rudimentary understandings of off-limits content, and their lack of opportunities to process mature content with people who are more knowledgeable about the topics. As will become evident in the vignettes below, the children explored off-limits topics in two ways. They would either talk about what they had observed or experienced, or they would introduce play narratives that were inspired by their observations and experiences.

Exploring off-limits topics. The campers' interest in processing off-limits content pulled them together. When an off-limits topic caught the children's attention, they made room for it in their talk and play. In one instance, the campers even forfeited some of their coveted recess time to process a squirrel's death.

> *I leisurely walked out the doors and onto the long sidewalk that led to the playground, with two campers in tow. We had stopped at the restroom on the way to recess and were a few minutes behind the rest of the group. As the gate to the play area came into view, I noticed a large group of children still on the nearside of the gate. Either our restroom break was way shorter than I thought or something more interesting than free play had caught the children's attention. As we neared the gate, I noticed that*

the children were huddled together on the edge of the sidewalk, pointing towards the

parking lot. A few of them shuffled their feet off the curb and onto the driveway,

cautiously taking a few steps forward to get a closer look. "What were they looking at?"

I wondered. The campers walking with me sped up to a trot. They too were anxious to see

what had caught their peers' attention. Finally, I was within earshot.

> *I feel really bad for the squirrel.*
>
> *What happened to him?*
>
> *I think my bus driver hit it. I felt a big bump in the parking lot when we were*
> *pulling up to camp.*
>
> *I wish we could help it.*
>
> *Without thinking, I proclaimed, in my teacher voice, "You can look at it, but don't*
> *touch it."*
>
> *To which the children responded, "We know. The teacher already told us."*

What made me think the kids were going to touch the squirrel? The children were

keeping their distance. They were expressing concern for the squirrel. They wished they

could help the squirrel and even contemplated the possibility of turning back time to

prevent its death. But the children were not saying or doing anything to cause me to

believe they were getting too close. I stopped myself from making any more comments.

> *With a little encouragement from their teachers, the children left the squirrel,*

made their way through the gate, and dispersed across the fenced in play zone. After

recess, the squirrel attracted a similar amount of attention. The children stopped on the

sidewalk, looked at the squirrel, and made comments similar to the ones they made on

their way to play. One of the campers stopped, stared at the squirrel and inquired, "Why

is the sun not healing the squirrel?" to which another camper matter-of-factly responded,

"Because the squirrel is dead." The camper who was puzzled why the squirrel was not

healed, stood on the curb and looked at the squirrel for another thirty seconds. Then, he

turned, and walked towards the building with his head hung low.

The children knew that death was part of life. They matter-of-factly approached the topic.

Although they did not have any particular attachment to the squirrel, they felt bad for the animal.

On a typical day, when the children saw a squirrel scampering around the playground, they paid

it little attention. But the death of the squirrel caused them to pause. The campers speculated

about how the squirrel died, wished the squirrel was still alive, and expressed interest in turning

back time so they could help it. I am not sure how much experience the children had processing

death, but the children seemed motivated to explore it. When the children saw the squirrel lying

dead in the driveway, the children came together. They made observations, offered speculations

and talked about what it means to die. And the adults stood back. They permitted the children to

discuss the squirrel's death, but they did not insert themselves into the children's conversation.

The children also played with narratives about money and getting rich. They

contemplated how people get money, what people do with money, and what they would do if

they were rich.

> *One camper, who was especially interested in money talk, proudly announced, "I*
>
> *found a dime." I congratulated the camper, "It must be your lucky day." But the camper*
>
> *disagreed, "It's not my lucky day. I only found a dime. I wanted to find twenty bucks."*
>
> *"What would you have done if you had found twenty bucks?"*
>
> *"If I found twenty bucks, I would have waved it around in the air. Because I want*
>
> *to be rich."*

"How do you get rich?"

"Work. Find it on the streets. I don't know. I don't care how I get rich. I just want to be rich, so I can buy a big house and get lots of stuff. I collect money. I already have lots of money."

By this point, a few other campers were listening in. "How much money do you have?" they asked. Standing a little taller, the camper announced, "I have one-thousand dollars." The other campers were not convinced.

"That's a story."

"Nut uh," she retorted.

"Then how did you get that money?" her challenger sarcastically snapped back, "Do a lot of chores?"

"I do chores, and my mom gives me money. I save up my money."

Perplexed, I asked, "What are you saving your money for?" Her eyes light up as if she was waiting for someone to ask, "To buy a huge house one day. My family is already rich. My mom is a doctor, not a doctor, doctor but…" I probe further, "Did she go to school for a long time and get a higher degree?" Before I finished explaining what it means to get a doctorate, she nodded, "Yeah. That kind of doctor." At this point, her peers offered another critique, "If your family is already rich, you wouldn't have to collect more money." The camper waited until her peer finished but did not acknowledge her peers' analysis. Instead, she continued describing her family's situation, "My house has three floors. My house costs lots of money. My mom is the boss, and she works really hard. I wish to be rich when I grow up."

Although this interaction was brief, the children touched on the intricacies of getting rich. The campers agreed that money was a valuable commodity and becoming rich was enticing. It meant that they would have lots of money and consequently be able to purchase big homes and get whatever they wanted. They agreed that becoming rich was a worthy goal, but they knew it would be difficult to achieve. The child who found the dime drew correlations between hard work, upward mobility, and wealth. The child suggested that if the system did not work for her, she would figure out a different way to become rich. The other children drew more tentative correlations. Hard work could help a person become rich, but other factors like family status and luck played a role. The children were motivated to talk about money. The children were building shared meanings about the role money plays in the adult world in the United States of America. The children understood that money was not just a valuable commodity. Yes, money would factor into their ability to survive, but it would also have social consequences. Having enough money would help them fit in and having a surplus would allow them to be autonomous.

The campers did not just talk about off-limits topics. They also pulled them into their play. For instance, the children explored the relationships between imprisonment and freedom by playing versions of jail at recess.

> *"In the bamboo," the campers explained, "we play jailbreak". "How do you play," I inquired. If you want to play, you go in the bamboo forest and there's like a jail person standing outside, and there's like a little guard in there watching you." Another camper added, "You're trying not to let them see you escape." The first camper continued, "So we all run and find places to hide." I continued my line of questioning, "What happens if they find you?" "Well, if you escape and they see you, they tickle you, and then you become the jail person."*

To make sure I understood, I recited back what I heard back, "To play, you need a jail person. The jail person tries to catch the other players who are trying to escape. If you get caught, then you switch roles. The jail person becomes a prisoner and the prisoner becomes the jail person. Is that right?" They approved my interpretation. I couldn't help but inquire further, "Is there a base?" The campers clarified that there was no base. The jail person can tag you inside the bamboo or outside the bamboo. Anywhere really. Everyone runs in and out of the bamboo. Although there was no surefire way to prevent yourself from being tagged, pretending to be obedient, locating good hiding places, and running fast were effective methods to escape.

During my inquiry, I learned that the children also played a different version of jail called, "Good Dungeon". When they play "Good Dungeon", the campers explained, "If you stay in your cell, you will be able to go to the good jail, where you can eat all the cake you want. But you have to behave, or you won't get to go to the good jail, and you won't get any cake." The power dynamics remained the same, but instead of using threats to encourage compliance, the campers used bribery and rewards. One of the campers offered her evaluation of Good Dungeon, "Some people like to play that game. But I didn't want cake. I wanted to be free. So, I just stayed in the bamboo and chilled."

Although their play was couched in the notion of imprisonment, their focus was securing and maintaining control. The campers obviously drew on what they knew about prison, but their play also functioned on a metaphoric level. Playing "Jailbreak" and "Good Dungeon" provided the children with opportunities to process what it meant to be a child in an adult-dominated world. When the children played the role of prisoners, they fought for their freedom by navigating the boundaries they encountered. Their goal was to escape. And when they played the role of guards,

they patrolled the boundaries they set. Their goal was to cajole compliance by punishing and bribing their prisoners. By assuming both roles, the campers experimented with how to assert themselves from different subject positions.

All the campers, at some point, explored off-limits topics with their peers. It was as if the topics that many adults position as off-limits were the ones that were most inclusive. Living in the United States of America, all the children had been exposed to information about death, jail, and money. But, since the children were not usually invited to discuss these topics, they all had relatively rudimentary understandings, which in this case was advantageous. Everyone was familiar with the topics, but no one was an expert. In addition, the concepts were abstract enough for the children to use their imaginations to fill in the gaps. Although the children's talk and play were relatively unsophisticated, the children used what they knew about death, jail, and money to make sense of these off-limits topics together. The children were deeply motivated to discuss these topics and because their understandings were underdeveloped, the children were able to participate on more equal terms.

Discussion

As I have demonstrated above, the factor that most strongly influenced the degree to which the children were able to make room for one another in their local context was their ability to build shared meanings. In order to take part in the meaning-making process, the children had to have access to the cultural information necessary to participate alongside their peers. Moments when the campers secured opportunities to reference and exchange cultural information functioned as points of convergence. When the children came together, they drew on cultural information from their local peer culture, popular culture, and the adult world to build shared

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meanings about what it means to belong which ultimately allowed them to forge communities with one another. Their attempts to participate were not always successful.

As I alluded throughout chapter four, the children drew on the knowledge and experiences they developed in other settings to negotiate belongings at camp. What the children brought with them to camp became culturally meaningful when they used it to read and respond to their peers. Sometimes the information the campers drew on helped them connect, and other times the information they drew on prevented them from connecting. Because I concentrated my attention on stories of inclusion instead of exclusion, I focus most of my discussion on the conditions that brought the children together and enabled them to build shared meanings. Importantly, I acknowledge that I have not fully addressed an important dimension of the campers' negotiation process. Due to time and space constraints, I was only able to nod to the ways the campers' social and cultural locations influenced their capacity to build shared meanings and connect. Although my discussion has its shortcomings, I was able to tell an important part of the story. I was able to distill the conditions that encouraged the campers to come together and connect, in spite of their differences.

Accessibility

When the cultural references the children made were common and widely accessible, more children were able to participate. For example, when the campers were exploring off-limits topics, such as jail, and popular topics in kid culture, like the box office hit *Black Panther*, most of the children were able to participate. In most cases, being familiar with a reference was sufficient. The children did not have to have a deep understanding of the movies, video games, and popular songs and dances their peers referenced in order to participate in their local peer culture. They just had to know enough to read the situation and make relevant contributions.

That being said, the more informed the children were about a topic, the better positioned they were to participate. The children who played video games were able to discuss the ins and outs of different games and gaming systems. In addition, they were capable of offering evaluative commentary like which controller was best. The children who had knowledge of racecars engaged in a debate about which car was fastest, and the children who watched popular movies were able to rank films they had seen and anticipate how they would rank films yet to be released. When the children heard their peers belt out a radio hit or saw their peers break out a popular dance, they were only able to join in if they knew the song lyrics or dance moves.

Although a superficial understanding of a reference might enable the children to evaluate a cultural product's entertainment quality, it did not prepare them to participate in banter or jokes. They could draw on their limited knowledge to demonstrate that they were familiar with TV program or knew that the line their peer quoted was from a song they had heard on the radio, even though they could not recall the name of the artist. They could even fake having seen a movie or having played a video game by making sweeping statements like "I loved that movie," or "I play that video game at my house". But, engaging in debates or witty antics required a deeper understanding of the topic. For instance, when the children were making references to *The Lion King* and *Blank Panther* some of the children did not realize their peers were making jokes. They did not recognize that "Do you know thee way?" was a line from *The Lion King*, and they were confused why their peers were talking about an animal wearing a diaper. Not only did their lack of cultural knowledge prevent them from seeing the humor in their peer's commentary and partaking in the jokes, it also disrupted the activity they were trying to join. Jokes were only funny when the audience laughed, and banter was only fun, when people countered each other's contributions. It did not seem like missing a cultural reference here or there negatively

influenced the camper's social life. But I wonder what would happen if their dearth of knowledge was more widespread. Would the child struggle to participate in the meaning-making process their peers used to negotiate belongings with one another which, over time, could inhibit their ability to establish and maintain connections with their peers?

Ownership

Generally speaking, the cultural references the children drew on to connect with their peers were produced and reproduced in their local peer culture and consequently belonged to them. Adults were rarely involved in the process for two reasons. The first reason was that adults were often unfamiliar with the cultural references the children made. Typically, they were uninterested in the TV shows, movies, songs, video games, and dances the children consumed. For the most part, they did not watch *Disney* movies, play *Minecraft*, or make underwear jokes. Adults might familiarize themselves with the content children consumed in order grant or deny the children under their care permission to consume it, but they rarely explored it further. Because adults were unfamiliar with the references that the children made, their capacity to participate in the children's talk and play was inhibited.

The second reason why adults were rarely involved in the children's meaning making process was because the adults often classified the children's cultural references as either trivial or inappropriate. When adults overheard the campers weighing whether someone was justified in copying someone else's work, debating which superhero was the best, explaining why they needed a blue marker instead of a red, or discussing off-limits topics, they rarely engaged. From an adult's perspective, it did not matter whether a child wrote their name in blue or red, and they knew that choosing a favorite superhero was a matter of opinion not a matter of debate. These references were immature, and not worthy of their attention. So, instead of engaging with the

children, they gave the children space to continue their conversations on their own. When the campers accused someone of copying or name-calling the adults rarely explored the root of the conflict and instead tried to diffuse the situation as quickly as possible, Other times, the adults decided that the references the children made were too mature for them to process, in which case, they ignored or shut down the children's inquiries. Even when the adults tried to stop the children from discussing off-limits topics, their interventions rarely prevented the children from exploring mature content. The children would simply relocate their inquiries away from adults.

Some might draw correlations between adult absence, exclusion, and demeaning social behaviors. But at camp the children responded to opportunities to distance themselves from adults in a different way. Although the children had few, if any, opportunities to truly escape the gaze of adults, the campers did secure opportunities to more freely interact with their peers. In these spaces, the campers broached topics that were interesting to many of their peers and adopted practices that encouraged broad participation. Consequently, the children felt ownership over the topics they discussed and had control over how they discussed them. In these spaces, participation was always possible. All the children needed to participate was access to the cultural information being referenced.

Participation

The children's capacity to participate in their local peer culture was tied to their capacity to exchange cultural information. The cultural references the children used to connect with their peers did not have to look or sound a certain way. They just needed to relevant and convincing. Although making cultural references helped the children demonstrate how they were like one another and where their interests and experiences overlapped, they played an even more important role. They made participation possible. Through the sharing of cultural information,

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the children negotiated belongings with their peers. The children's conversations were not consensus-driven. This was especially true when numerous participants were engaged in a back and forth exchange. It was perfectly acceptable for a discussion to conclude without a resolution being reached. Often, the purpose of the conversation or interaction was to build social capital. The campers were finding and inventing ways to be in community with one another. They were exploring concepts, testing theories, evaluating the credibility of arguments, and canvasing the field. As the children listened to each other and contributed their own ideas, they came to realize that different community members had different values, preferences, and expectations. As the children were living alongside one another, they were building shared meanings about how to work and play together at camp.

Just because the shared meanings the children produced and reproduced at camp were not generalizable, did not mean they were irrelevant. The campers were developing understandings about what it means to be in community with other people that could be transferred to other settings. As the campers figured out ways to participate in their immediate context, they recognized that every social setting was unique and demanded different kinds of participation. In order to successfully navigate different contexts, they needed to hone their skills to read and respond to their current context and expand their repertoire of cultural references, such that they were able to engage in a wide array of contexts.

Conclusion

The children constructed belonging as a dynamic, relational, context-bound process they were constantly negotiating. Belonging was always possible but not always realized. Although important, desire and effort alone would not suffice. The children needed access. As already established, being familiar with a place, a person, an activity, and the local norms helped

children negotiate belongings. Without this important contextual information, the children struggled to initiate or sustain relationships with the people, places, activities, and things they cared about. But the most important information that the children carried with them into social spaces was cultural in nature. Participation always required the use of cultural information. The children produced and reproduced their own understandings of how teasing, name-calling, and copying functioned in their social spaces. They also drew pop culture references to movies, TV shows, songs and dances into their social spaces as well as references to off-limits topics like death, money, and jail that were generally regulated to the adult world. The children who were familiar with the cultural information circulating at camp were better prepared to read and respond to their peers' words and actions, and thus better positioned to connect. On the contrary, the children who were unfamiliar with the cultural information referenced at camp were ill-positioned to participate and consequently struggled to connect with their peers.

Luckily, cultural knowledge and understandings can be cultivated. They are developed as people spend time in their cultural communities. Although cultural information is not explicitly tied to a person's social and cultural locations or their skills and talents, it is not universal. What is valued in one context is not necessarily valued in another. And thus, exposure is key. People grow their understanding of the cultural information valued in their communities as they spend time with other community members. Community members do not only produce and reproduce cultural information within the community they currently occupy, they also bring cultural information with them from other places. As participants realize other community members are interested in particular topics or activities, they may need to spend some time expanding their knowledge bases. Again, desire and effort alone were not enough. The campers had to have access to the cultural information circulating in their local peer culture in order to participate.

In a sense, every child's access to cultural information was constrained by their life outside of camp. The children called on their current understandings and past experiences to navigate their social world. When the cultural information a child brought with them aligned with the cultural information their peers brought with them, the child was better positioned to participate. And thus, when the campers' knowledge and experiences were misaligned, they struggled to participate. Although I did not explicitly trace if children who participated in particular social and cultural groups struggled to participate more than others, I did notice a few patterns. As I mentioned throughout chapter four, some topics, strategies, and settings seemed to align more closely with some children's backgrounds than others. Generally speaking, younger campers had more difficulty inserting themselves into their local peer culture than older campers. Most notably, the children who struggled to make friends and were not comfortably situated within a small social circle group, also struggled to participate in the larger community.

Sometimes barriers like a lack of resources or parental restrictions prevented the children from accessing the cultural information necessary to fully participate in their local peer culture. Maybe, they were not permitted to view certain movies or TV shows, or maybe they were prohibited from playing video games. Maybe the children listened to music their peers did not consume or spent their afterschool hours involved in activities that were unlike the ones their peers engaged. The children only had so much control over how they spent their time and what kinds of cultural information they could access. In addition, it could be difficult to predict what kinds of cultural information would become relevant in their local context and when. Typically, they emerged organically. When a new kid's movie came out, a new toy hit the market, or a song became a Billboard hit, it would probably make its way into the children's talk and play. Aside from these exceedingly popular consumables, it was hard to predict which cultural references

would make their way into the children's social world. Sometimes the children made passing references, in which case a reference would make a brief appearance in the children's world and never emerge again. But some references had more staying power and would secure a more permanent place in the children's local peer culture.

In short, the children's capacity to negotiate belongings with their peers and participate in their local peer culture was tied to their ability to build shared meanings. And in order to build shared meanings, the children referenced and exchanged cultural information. Although participation was always possible, it was not always realized. In order to better understand what interrupted the children's meaning making process, I would need to revisit my data and explore the roots of the commonly referenced cultural information. I would need to look for patterns in who struggled to participate and in which situations. Paying closer attention to how individuals participated would allow me to trace the children's cultural understandings back to their social and cultural locations and say more about the important role the children's backgrounds played in their meaning-making process. Following this line of inquiry would allow me to substantiate how the children's social and cultural locations mattered and identify what else facilitated or hindered their capacity to negotiate belongings with their peers.

Now that I have explored the children's understandings of what it means to belong and how they used cultural information to connect with their peers, I am going to turn my attention to how they seek and grant belongings in their local context. There are many stories I could tell about the children negotiating belongings at camp, but I have decided to tell a series of stories about play. I was not surprised that the children were securing opportunities to play. Nor was I surprised by the adults' responses; the teachers interrupted the children's play, because they were supposed to be working. I could relate. When I was teaching elementary school, I extended

redirections like "Stop playing around" or "Focus on your work" on a daily basis. I had assumed the children played during cleanup, because they did not want to help; and they rushed through assigned tasks, so they could goof off with their friends. But, as I listened to the campers, I realized the play that was happening in these in-between spaces was much more than an avoidance technique. As is evident in the vignettes to come, the children harnessed opportunities to play to seek and grant belongings in their local context. Opportunities to play, did not just provide children with opportunities to strengthen their existing friendships, but also to interact with peers outside their social circle groups.

CHAPTER 5

THE POWER OF THE IN-BETWEEN

As I established in chapters three and four, camp was a diverse space. The campers lived

in a variety of neighborhoods, attended a variety of schools, and belonged to a variety of social

and cultural groups. As has been well-documented by many researchers, the children used

gender, race, ethnicity, language, age, as well as their interests and experiences to organize

themselves into predictable social circle groups. The children formed groups that were relatively

homogenous with regards to race, ethnicity, language, age, and gender. But the campers

regularly crossed paths with children who participated in other groups. The children's cross-

group interactions were fleeting, yet frequent. Sometimes the children bumped into one another

and then continued on their separate paths, but other times their paths became intertwined

leading them to expand their playgroups and playscripts enough to invite other children in. At

first, it seemed impossible to predict when or where the children would initiate interactions

across social circle groups. But, after reading and rereading my field notes and focus group

transcripts, I noticed a pattern. Cross-group interactions were more likely to emerge when the

campers had the freedom to play. When the children had opportunities to playfully interact, they

experimented with different roles, expanded their pool of relational partners, and found ways to

make room for one another.

In-Between Spaces

The children had opportunities to play during in-between activities like transitions,

restroom breaks, mealtimes, and recess. From the adults' perspectives, these in-between spaces

served utilitarian purposes like moving from one activity to the next and giving the children time to recharge so they could engage in the instructional activities to come. These spaces functioned as a means to an end— like a bridge to get over a river. The children viewed in-between spaces differently—as an opportunity to spend time with their peers. Provided the campers did not obviously disrupt the task-at-hand, the campers experienced a degree of freedom. The children moved slowly, sometimes slower than I thought possible, cherishing the time they had with each other but not at the expense of doing what was requested. Whenever an in-between activity ended, the adults excitedly introduced the next instructional task. Sometimes the adults introduced activities that captivated the camper's attention, but other times the campers went through the motions, excitedly anticipating the next in-between activity.

I was not surprised to witness the children negotiating belongings during in-between activities. Existing research suggests children use these spaces to strengthen their established social circle groups. But the campers also used these moments for a different purpose: to expand the range of children with whom they comfortably interacted. For example, when it was time to transition from one activity to the next, the teachers paid little attention to what the campers were doing as long as they were cleaning up, or convincingly pretending to help. Despite the adults' attempts to speed up the activity, the campers would maintain a pace just quick enough to keep the adults happy without squandering their opportunity to hang out with their peers. In addition, transitions like cleaning up were low-stakes tasks. The campers did not need any requisite knowledge or skills to help clean up; everyone could participate. And, when the children were busy tidying up, they experienced little pressure to spend time with their friends. The relative freedom the children experienced during transitions, presented them with opportunities to interact with many different peers.

Take for instance, the day when the children were lining up for recess, and they started to dance the floss. As soon as a few campers started swaying their hips and swinging their arms to an imaginary beat, others joined in. The dance was contagious. In less than a minute, more than half of the campers were doing the floss as they stood in line at the door. I inquired, "Is that a new dance move?" Jessie stared at me, shocked. "You don't know how to floss?" I knew how to floss my teeth, but no; I did not know how to dance the floss. "Everyone knows how to floss," she continued. Apparently, everybody who was anybody knew how to floss. Luckily, Jessie was forgiving and showed me how to floss. Glancing around the room, I noticed only about half of the campers were bopping along with their peers. Some seem disinterested. They were busy chatting about the latest episode of *Jessie* or choosing teams to play basketball at recess. But there were a few campers who stared, in awe, at their peers. They wanted to dance, but like me, they did not know how to floss.

"Can you show me how?" Ruby Cleopatra asked. "Sure" Jessie agreed. They stood, face-to-face. "You put your hands like this," Jessie clenched her hands into fists and outstretched her arms towards the right, "Then like this." She swung her arms backwards, threading her torso between her outstretched arms. Her right arm ended up behind her torso and her left arm ended up in front. She swung her arms back towards the right and then swept them in front of her torso. Jessie repeated the same movements on her left. Ruby Cleopatra mirrored Jessie's every move. After modeling the arm movements a few times, Jessie added the hips. "Then your hips go like this." Jessie moved her arms backward toward the right, as she cocked her hips up and toward the right. Ruby Cleopatra followed suit. The girls' arms and hips always moved in opposite directions. When their arms were forward, their hips were back and when their hips were forward their arms were back. To transition from side to side, they swung their arms in front of

their torsos. "Like this?" Ruby Cleopatra asked. "Yep." Jessie repeated the moves over and over again until Ruby Cleopatra was doing the floss. Jessie retreated, flossing her way to the end of the line. Ruby Cleopatra stood in line swinging her arms and hips along with her peers.

Although their interaction was brief, the girls connected at a deep level. Jessie directed her attention on teaching Ruby Cleopatra to floss, and Ruby Cleopatra focused her attention on copying Jessie's every move. They moved in synchrony. Interestingly, Ruby Cleopatra and Jessie rarely interacted. But, in this moment, their paths crossed. Ruby Cleopatra wanted to learn how to floss and Jessie knew how. When Ruby Cleopatra asked Jessie to show her how to floss, she was complimenting Jessie on her dance skills. And when Jessie agreed to help Ruby Cleopatra, she was reassuring Ruby Cleopatra that she could learn the dance. Their confidence in each other brought them together.

The campers also came together when they noticed that one of their peer's was in need, no matter who needed help. Although there were countless moments when the children helped one another, one moment stands out. It was lunch bunch day. The children who were attending the meeting were standing at the cafeteria door waiting for everyone to make their way through the line. As the last child approached the door, I led the children out of the cafeteria and down the hall. The children were walking in pairs and trios, continuing the conversations they started at recess about what they were planning to do after camp and how they were going to convince their parents to schedule a playdate. Walking and talking does not take much coordination but walking and talking down a school hallway with an unbalanced Styrofoam lunch tray piled high with food while dodging hall traffic was a feat.

We were nearing the homestretch, when I heard "oh no!" One of the campers had tripped. She managed to catch herself before she hit the floor, but she lost the contents of her lunch tray.

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"Ha, ha, ha!" one camper laughed pointing at the child who tripped. "That's not funny" I reprimanded. As quickly as his laughter started it ceased. The rest of the campers responded in a very different way. One of her peers, skipped ahead to catch her apple that was rolling down the hall, while another peeled her piece of pizza that landed cheese-side-down off the floor. Somehow, she managed to stabilize her tray before losing her vegetables and milk. She was standing statue still, jaw dropped. Her cheeks were blushed, and tears were starting to leak from the corners of her eyes. "Don't worry," I said, "We will get you another lunch."

Before I had the chance to act, the other campers jumped in offering away parts of their lunch. "You can have my pizza," one child offered, "I don't like school pizza anyway." Other campers offered their vegetables and milk. Another child stated, "I'm going to go back to the cafeteria and get her another apple." Before I was able to grant her permission, she was off. As I watched her bop down the hall, I realized why she had not waited to hear my response. She wasn't asking me if she could go get another apple, she was just letting me know what she was doing. The campers did not only make sure their peer had something to eat, they made sure she had a full tray of fresh food. And they did not stop there. Someone disposed of her dropped lunch, while another camper wrapped her arm around her shoulder and told her it would be okay. In less than three minutes, the campers had comforted their peer, built her a fresh tray of food, and even cleaned up the floor.

The children also crossed paths with children who participated in other social circle groups on the playground. Like when Ladybug set out to master the log spinner. Per usual, the kids migrated to different areas of the fenced-in play space. Some ran to the field, and others darted towards the basketball court. Some headed to the bamboo, while others congregated on the mulched area dotted with playground equipment. Ladybug wandered around the mulched

area, pausing next to what the campers referred to as the "sausage spinner". The sausage spinner, officially called a log spinner, was a ridged cylinder suspended between two poles. The poles were fitted with handlebars. To play, the kids grabbed onto the handlebars and pulled themselves up to a stand on the spinner. They started moving their feet slowly, but they quickly increased their pace to a run. Ladybug watched a few kids mount and dismount the roller, but when it was her turn, she could not get her balance. Turkish Angora offered, "Do you want some help?" Ladybug nodded her head vigorously. "Watch me." Ladybug watched Turkish Angora grab the handles and hoist herself up onto the roller. Turkish Angora narrated her process, "You hold onto the handlebars really tight. Then you need to stare at a spot that is not moving. That will help you keep your balance." Turkish Angora stabilized herself with her arms. After Turkish Angora was standing on the roller, she started walking and quickly transitioned to a run. Ladybug asked, "So you start off slow and then you go faster." Turkish Angora responded, "Yes. You start off walking and then you run." Turkish Angora jumped off.

Ladybug approached the roller. Turkish Angora stood next to the roller ready to play the role of coach. Ladybug grabbed hold of the handles and tried to step up. Her foot slipped off. She tried again. This time when she stepped up onto the roller, it started to spin, and she glided off the other side. "Try from the other side," Turkish Angora suggested. Ladybug walked around the roller and tried to pull herself up. She grabbed the handles, stepped up, and again slid off the roller. Turkish Angora offered another idea, "If you have trouble getting on, stare at a spot that is not moving." "Here," Turkish Angora picked up a wood chip and held it between her thumb and pointer finger, "Stare at this. I'll put it on the ground." Turkish Angora placed the wood chip on the ground about five feet in front of the roller "Look at that." Ladybug grabbed the handlebars, stared at the wood chip, and tried to step up. Again, she slid off. Turkish Angora offered a

different idea, "I can hold the sausage if you want." Turkish Angora wrapped her arms around the roller, holding it still. Ladybug held the handles, flexed her arms and hoisted herself up, one foot at a time. Teeth clenched; Ladybug pulled herself to a stand. Her jaw relaxed, and her lips turned up to form a smile. Wide-eyed, she stood balanced on the roller. Turkish Angora pulled her chest away from the roller and slowly released her bear hug grip. Ladybug was still standing. "Start to run!" Turkish Angora encouraged. Ladybug lifted one foot and set it down. Then, she did the same with the other. The roller started to move under her feet. Ladybug quickened her pace to keep up with the roller, but the roller kept gaining speed. Soon, the roller outpaced Ladybug, and she tumbled off. Ladybug stumbled backwards somehow managing to stay on her feet. Turkish Angora and a few other kids cycled through the line, mounting and dismounting the spinner. "Are you in line?" someone asked. Ladybug shook her head no. I was not sure if Ladybug was going to try again. After the other kids cycled through three rotations, Ladybug reentered the rotation. Every time it was her turn, she tried to mount the spinner. And, every time she slipped off.

Turkish Angora continued to offer advice. She explained, "You can just imagine you are like on a cartoon. That's what I did last year." Ladybug braced herself, placed one foot on the roller, and tried to pull herself up. Once again, she could not get her balance. "You want me to try again?" Turkish Angora offered. Turkish Angora pulled herself up, she took a few steps increasing her speed to a run. Turkish Angora jumped off. "*Tom and Jerry* is a pretty popular show. In the show, the bulldog was running on sausages. But he was running on actual sausages. Then he fell off. That is where I got the idea of how to run on this sausage roller." Turkish Angora explained it took her a long time to feel balanced enough to run, but now that she has figured it out, she can do it. Although Turkish Angora and the other kids came and went,

Ladybug remained at the log spinner for the entire recess period. She watched the other kids run on the log spinner and tried to master it herself.

These stories are not unlike when Violet was afraid to slide down the pole, and Katherine volunteered to go first. When Katherine reached the bottom, she offered tips and encouraged Violet to give it a try. Eventually, Violet made her way down the pole. At the bottom, she announced, "I don't think I ever want to do it again." Or, when Piccolo was unable to open their pack of Craisins at breakfast. Black Light Dude offered, "Do you need help?" But, before he had a chance to help, ForJay interrupted, "No. I can get it. I'm the strongest kid in my class. I always open everyone's packages for them." Or when the campers checked on each other when they were sad or stood up for each other when someone would not let them play. In all of these situations, the children were genuinely interested in helping their peers, no matter who they were. Play acted as a facilitator. When the children had the time and space to playfully interact, they were more likely to extend and accept invitations to spend time with a wider range of their peers. When their paths crossed, they did not keep walking. They came together, if even for just a moment, to help each other. Although the children interacted across social circle groups in many spaces, there was one space where cross-group interactions were almost guaranteed: in the bamboo forest. In the bamboo, the campers' focus shifted. They did not come together to help each other, but to play together.

The Bamboo

"The bamboo palace!" Turkish Angora announced with her arms outstretched as if she had just stumbled upon a magnificent castle. The girls paused and gazed up at the towering stalks of bamboo tucked away at the far end of the playground. The girls paced the perimeter, inching closer and closer to the dense patch of bamboo that was about the size of a one car garage. The

bamboo patch was bordered by a fence, an underused patch of blacktop, and a small grassy area

that was dotted with small flowering trees. At first glance, the bamboo appeared

untouched. There was no clear entrance, and there were vines winding their way between the

stalks, tying them together. Unicorn Girl stepped forward and squeezed her way between two

stalks of bamboo. "I never went in this way before." I guess Unicorn Girl had played in the

bamboo before.

The bamboo swallowed Unicorn Girl. Although Unicorn Girl was hidden from view, the

crunch, crunch, crunch of the bamboo under her feet reminded us she was only inches away.

Turkish Angora and a few other girls huddled near Unicorn Girl's point of entry, awaiting her

exit. Not even thirty seconds after she disappeared into the bamboo, Unicorn Girl stumbled her

way out; "That was not fun. I got a leaf in my mouth." Curious, the other girls clutched stalks of bamboo and bent them towards the ground, until they snapped. After clearing a dozen or so stalks, they uncovered a way in. "I am not sure if you want to go in there," Unicorn Girl advised, but the girls did not heed Unicorn Girl's warning. Filing in, one after another, they made their way into the bamboo. "It's not so bad," someone called from inside, "Look over here!" The children created more pathways in and out. They carved out niches just big enough to house two crouching kids at a time. Unicorn Girl turned towards me, shrugged her shoulders and hesitantly reentered the overgrown bamboo.

As the kids busied themselves in the bamboo, I questioned whether I should encourage their bamboo play: "Are they allowed to play in the bamboo?" What if they destroy it? What if it is dangerous? What if… Wait— where are these questions coming from? I guess I have been an adult for too long. Or maybe the risk-averse narratives circulating in schools were rubbing off on me. Don't… stop… be careful… How could the bamboo be dangerous? And if it was off limits, why would it be on the playground? Bamboo is resilient. Even when people want to rid their yard of bamboo, it is impossible to eradicate. The kids were not going to kill the bamboo, and the bamboo was not going to hurt the kids. My momentary blip in judgement passed.

In the days and weeks to come, the third through fifth grade campers spent hours playing in the bamboo. It took days for the adults to realize the campers were playing in the bamboo. Even after learning of the campers' favorite play place, they turned down invitations to tour with statements like, "You go on and play" and "I'll pass. I'm too tall." On more than one occasion, the adults threatened to shut down bamboo play for reasons similar to the ones I curbed in myself. Their biggest concern was safety. The bamboo was too tall and too dense for them to monitor what the children were doing when they were inside. Every time the adults were alerted

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of an argument related to the bamboo; they dangled the possibility of outlawing bamboo play. My offer to supervise bamboo play, kept it open, but the adults' threats to ban bamboo play did not cease. After the children realized the adults could easily shutdown one of their favorite play places, they stopped reporting squabbles to their teachers and started resolving them amongst themselves. A new pattern developed. Instead of running to a teacher when a conflict emerged, the children would dissipate, and the game would fizzle out.
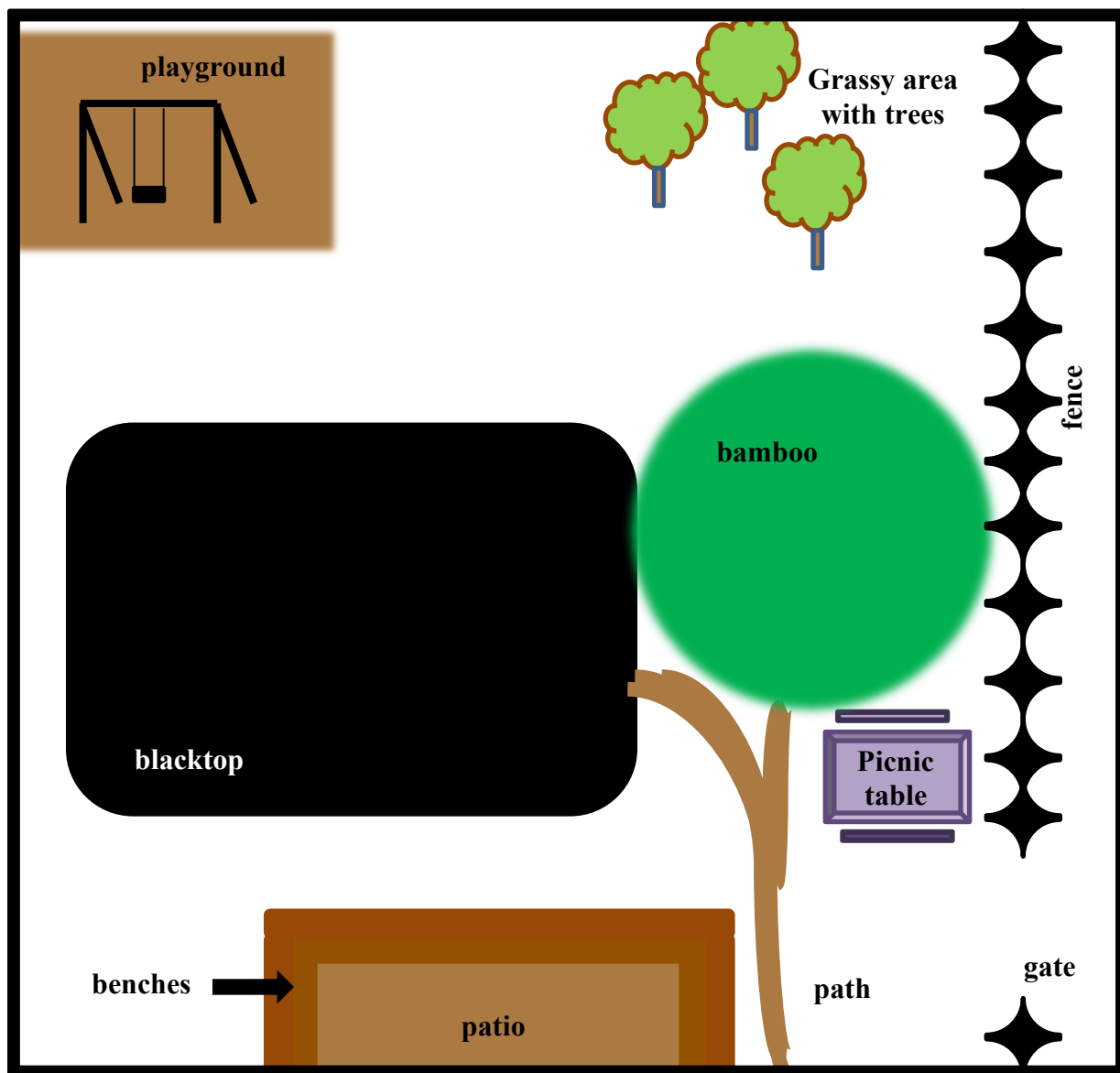

Figure 2: Map of Bamboo Area

The kids played in the bamboo on a daily basis, largely out of the gaze of the adults. The kids owned the bamboo. They decided what games they were going to play and who was going to assume which roles. They defined and enforced the rules and norms that governed the space. The bamboo was a place to hang out, a fort of sorts. It also became a house, a jail, and a party venue. The campers harvested bamboo to build teepees and fashion costumes and props. The bamboo fed the children's imaginations.

> *I approached the bamboo to find five campers huddled around the picnic table—Erica, Katherine, Unicorn Girl, Ani, and Jessie. They were dragging stalks of bamboo out of the bamboo forest and piling them next to the table. They had a few stalks strewn across the table. One by one, the campers stripped the bamboo leaves from the stalks. Their hands were busy braiding, twisting, and knotting the leaves into crowns, headbands, necklaces, bracelets, and other accessories. As I neared the table Jessie asked, "Can I make you something?" Nodding, I accepted her offer, "Sure." I took a seat at the table. Jessie stood on the bench and gently wrapped a leaf around my head. She pulled the leaf just taut enough to achieve the perfect fit. She gently lifted the leaf from my head and knotted it before slipping it back into place. "There!" she announced standing proudly with her arms crossed. Just seconds after crowning me, the knot loosened, and the crown fell to the ground. Jessie shrugged her shoulders, picked up the unraveled crown, and split the leaf down the middle, creating two long, thin bamboo ribbons. She wrapped one ribbon around my wrist and knotted it, careful to not pull too hard to prevent it from tearing. This time, the knot held. Jessie added a second knot, just in case. The other girls were equally engrossed. I peeled a few leaves off a stalk of bamboo and started experimenting. Inspired by Jessie, I split a bamboo leaf into three ribbons, knotted the strands together, and wove them into a braid. Erica seemed to be working on an elaborate project. She*

laid out a long flat bamboo leaf near the middle of the picnic table, leaving the space in

front of her open, so she could work. She grabbed a fresh stalk of bamboo from the forest

and stripped a handful of leaves from the stalk. She piled them on the table. She picked

up each leaf, set it on the table, and meticulously sliced it into pieces that were about five

inches long. After she had created more than a dozen identical strips, she used her

fingernail to create slits in the long leaf. She made each slit just wide enough to slip the

bamboo strips into place.

I never figured out if Erica was making a crown, a belt, or a mini-skirt. I was momentarily pulled

away from the bamboo, and when I returned the girls had moved on. For more than twenty

minutes, the campers fashioned accessories for themselves and for each other. They watched

each other work and worked on their own projects. Occasionally they commented on each

other's work— "Wow! That's cool!" "How did you do that?"—but, for the most part they sat in

silence, simultaneously crafting the bamboo they harvested into creative masterpieces. The

bamboo did not only support the children's creativity, but also their interest in spending time

with each other. Everyone was welcome to play in the bamboo.

Bamboo Jail

"Someone, save me, from the bamboo jail!"

"It's not a jail. The only way it could be a jail is if we were playing cops and robbers."

"Let's play jailbreak!"

And with that, the bamboo forest became a jail. The niches became cells, the stalks became bars,

and the paths in and out became escape routes.

"I'm the queen!" one girl proclaimed. After a short debate about if a queen had a place

in a jail narrative, the other three players conceded.

"If you are going to be a queen, then I am going to be a cat prisoner."

"I want to be a fox; a fox prisoner!"

"I'll be a police officer. Every jail needs a police officer."

Roles were claimed, and play began. I sat within ears reach, listening from a nearby picnic table. The queen and police officer left the bamboo, locking the door behind them. The cat and fox prisoner tiptoed towards the just-locked door. The queen and police officer were at least twenty paces away, with their backs to the bamboo jail.

"How do you play jailbreak?" I asked.

"So, it's like, whenever the bamboo queen and the bamboo police come, we stay in. Then when the queen and the police leave, we try to escape."

Before I could ask any follow-up questions, the cat and fox were off, sprinting across the blacktop. Just as I finished scribbling down notes about their first few minutes of play, the cat and fox scurried back into their cells in the bamboo.

"We made it!" the fox proclaimed between huffs and puffs.

"Here. I will unlock the door." The police officer offered. "Hmm. That's strange; it is unlocked. Queen, did you forget to lock the door?"

"No, I locked it! I'm sure."

The police officer and the queen walked in and found the cat and fox in their cells, exactly where they left them. The queen and the police officer traipsed their way up and down the hall, pausing at each cell to check the locks.

"All good."

"You check the back door, and I'll check the front."

As they prepared to leave, the cat and fox devised an escape plan.

"I am going to stay in here until the queen and police officer leave. Then, I am going to

escape. Do you want to come?"

The fox nodded in agreement.

"We have to wait until they leave, so act normal."

"Here they come."

"Stay in your cells," the queen warned.

"Or, you'll be sorry!" the police officer added.

After the queen and the police officer cleared the exit, the cat and fox tiptoe-ran to the door.

They peeked out.

"It's clear! Let's go!" said the cat.

The cat took off, and the fox trailed close behind. They sprinted across the blacktop towards the

mulched area dotted with playground equipment. Without warning, the cat froze.

"What was that for?" the fox questioned, nearly colliding with the cat.

"Shhh. Look. We have to go a different way."

The queen and police officer were standing on the edge of mulched playground area, right where

they were heading.

The cat proclaimed, "This way!"

"Where are we going?"

Without hesitation, the fox followed. They retraced their steps before taking a sharp turn towards

the grassy area near the bamboo.

"Come on! Let's get over the fence. They won't find us there." The cat scaled the chain-

link fence and crouched down out of view. The fox had just cleared the fence when they

heard, "Let's check on our prisoners."

The cat and fox turned their heads towards one another, wide-eyed. The only thing

separating them from their pursuers was the chain-link fence.

"They're gone!" the police officer exclaimed.

"We have to find them!" The queen declared.

They sped around the play equipment, blacktop, and greenspace, trying to track down the

escapees. The cat and fox crouch-walked towards the opening in the fence near the bamboo.

"We have to get back without them seeing us. Can you see them?" asked the cat.

"I don't see them anywhere" the fox responded.

"Follow me." The cat cleared the gate and turned towards the bamboo.

"There they are!" the queen yelled.

The cat and fox darted back into the bamboo and collapsed into their cells. Within seconds the

queen and police officer were back, standing guard in the lobby.

"We told you to stay in your cells."

"But you didn't listen."

"If you stay in your cells this time you will be able to go to the good jail, where you can

eat all the cake you want!"

"But you have to behave, or you won't get any cake."

The cat and fox sat in their cells as the queen and police officer explained the new conditions.

At first, it appeared as if they were willing to stay put for cake. But, as soon as the police officer

and queen were out of sight, they escaped. The allure of cake did not compel the prisoners to stay

put and as the game continued, the promise of cake did not convince them to return to their cells.

"My freedom is worth more than all the cake in the world!" The cat explained.

"Well, the fox is going to the good jail, where she can eat all the cake she wants."

"Yeah, because she is staying in her cell."

In protest, the cat announced, "I'm not going to play anymore. I'm just going to stay in here and chill."

She didn't want to play if it meant she would be imprisoned indefinitely, even if she had access to all the cake in the world. The fox, the queen, and the police officer continued the jail narrative.

"Come on, we're just playing."

"Yeah."

"It's just part of the game."

Without a word, the cat ran out of the bamboo.

It was unclear if she was going to return. Her exit interrupted the storyline. It was hard to play jail with only one prisoner.

The fox reached up and tore off a bamboo leaf and announced, "It's breakfast. Who wants to split this leaf?" She started passing out pieces of the leaf. When it ran out, she harvested another. The three girls tore the leaves apart, sniffed them, and pretended to nibble on them as if they were rabbits eating dandelion leaves.

"Is this actually edible?" one camper asked.

I had no idea. Luckily, my lack of bamboo knowledge dissuaded the children from taking a bite. Suddenly, the cat ran back into the bamboo and resumed her place in one of the nooks.

"You're back!" the fox yelled.

The police officer hovered over the cat. With a dried stalk of bamboo in hand, the police officer threatened, "If you dare escape."

The cat ran.

"Ha. I got you. And, you are not going to the good dungeon."

The cat responded, "But I'm not even in the dungeon. I escaped. I'm not even in jail. I escaped."

"You ran out of the jail, and we caught you."

"You were caught. Now you have to go to prison."

"But I'm not playing."

The argument continued, until the fox suggested, "Let's just play family bamboo. Who wants a room?"

The girls agreed to play a different game. The game had a familiar house feel. The kids negotiated roles and decided how to use the space. They discussed who was going to be the mom and who were going to be the kids. The queen decided she was not finished playing the role of queen. The children did not challenge her character choice, but nor did they acknowledge it.

One of the kids announced, "My name is kitty shadow. This is our secret hideout from now on."

Two more girls entered the bamboo and asked, "Can we play?"

"Should we let them play or keep them out?"

At first, no one responded.

"Y'all wanna play?"

"What are you playing?"

"Kitty Dungeon."

"Kitty Dungeon?"

"I mean kitty room."

"Sure" shrugging their shoulders.

"I'm gonna close the door," suggesting that the game is not going to work if too many kids try to play. Six players were enough.

"I'm the mom, she's the queen, and they're the kids. Why don't you be the dad?"

"I don't want to play a boy. I want to be a kid, too."

"Yeah. Me too. I'll be another kid."

It was hard to tell what the game was becoming, but the mom and queen seemed to be humans and the kids seemed to be animals. Since the mom and queen were played by the same children as the queen and police officer, a similar plot unfolded. The animal kids were told to stay in their rooms, and if they didn't comply, they would get in trouble. The animal kids came and went. They pretended to be content in their rooms, until the adults were out of sight, at which point they would sneak off. It was as if the campers were still playing jail, just under a different name.

"We locked every single door. How did they escape?" the queen questioned.

"I know we did" the mom confirmed, "Did you forget to lock this door?"

Without answering the mom's question, the queen announced, "I'm going to get something to catch them."

The queen exited the bamboo in search of the kitty, the fox, and their animal friends

"I found them," the queen announced, "Come on!" The mom ran towards the queen to help her summon the kitty and fox.

The queen called, "Kitty! Come here, Kitty."

The kitty followed the queen home, "You go back in your room now. You go back in the kitty dungeon."

The queen looked at the mom and said, "You lock the door, okay? I'm gonna stay in here with her, so she doesn't escape."

"Okay" the mom responded. The mom left in search of the fox. Within minutes the mom

returned with the fox. She asked, "Where are the other ones?"

The queen responded, "We don't need them. I'm gonna lock the doors."

The narrative had shifted but not completely. The players were no longer "prisoners", but they were still under the control of adults. They were required to abide the rules and adult commands. Just like when they were prisoners, the animal kids snuck around, pushed the boundaries, and tried to escape. But the game had a different feel. The cat and fox went out to play without telling their caregivers where they were going. When the mom and queen tried to call them in, they were nowhere to be found. They were not being coerced back like when they were prisoners, but they were being called home out of concern. As the game progressed, the campers slipped back into the jail play narrative, referring to their house as dungeon and their rooms as cells. Instead of reprimanding the animal kids for going too far from home or trying to run away, they lectured them for trying to escape.

The campers continued playing versions of bamboo jail in the days and weeks to come. They transformed their imaginative role-playing game into a game of tag. Bamboo tag was a relatively simple, inclusive game. The rules were straightforward. One camper would play the guard, while the other campers would play prisoners. The prisoners would pretend to be obedient and remain in the bamboo jail, but when the guard turned away the prisoners would try to escape. If the guard spotted them sneaking off, a game of chase would ensue. The prisoners would scatter. If they were able to out-run, out-hide, or otherwise out-smart the guard they would make their way back towards the jail and resume their obedient facade. When someone was tagged, the players would switch roles. The prisoner would become the guard, and the guard would become a prisoner. Although there was no base, the children found ways to rest. When

they needed a break, the prisoners would hang around the bamboo pretending to be obedient, but as soon as they caught their breath, they would sneak off again.

Everyone was welcome to play, but no one was forced to play. The number of players varied from a few campers to a dozen or more. The children were free to come and go as they pleased. There were no repercussions for turning down invitations to play or leaving the bamboo before the game was over. The only time campers were barred from playing was when they violated the norms that governed bamboo play, namely: everyone was permitted to play; and everyone had access to all of the rooms and tunnels in the bamboo, no matter who made them. If a player tried to turn away another player or block access to any part of the bamboo, they were ridiculed and even banished from play. And, if the violators refused to leave, the children would relocate their game to a different area of the playground. For the first half of camp, bamboo tag was the most popular bamboo game, but during the third week the campers flocked to the bamboo with a renewed sense of urgency. Something new was happening in the bamboo. And, I was curious.

Party Time!

As I neared the bamboo, I saw the campers running in and out of the main thoroughfare, but they were not chasing each other. They were carrying armfuls of rotting and freshly harvested bamboo. They were moving with purpose. Were they building something? I wondered. I resumed my usual position at the picnic table next to the bamboo and listened.

"We finished the entrance to paradise!"

"But we aren't done clearing out the dead stuff."

"I have a squishy one."

"I'll take it." Unicorn Girl handed the squishy stalk of bamboo to Black Light Dude.

"I want a room right here" Unicorn Girl explained. She grabbed a stalk of bamboo and bent it until it broke. She carried the stalk of bamboo out of the patch and tossed it on the ground in front of the picnic bench. She headed back in and harvested a few more stalks.

"Put the bamboo here, so I can use it to make the parking lot."

"We need to clear out more bamboo, so we can all fit."

"Do you think that's enough."

"Nah, we need to take out more bamboo."

Suddenly, their party planning was interrupted, "The party's been moved! The party's been moved! It's too wet in the bamboo. We are going to have the party on the patio instead. Tell everybody."

"So, they are planning a party?" I thought to myself. Pretending I had not heard the announcement, I asked, "What are you playing?"

"We're having a bamboo party!"

"What's a bamboo party?"

"It's a party in the bamboo!"

I could feel my cheeks reddening, but before I had time to reconsider my next question, I blurted out, "What's the party for?"

"To have fun."

Of course, I thought to myself. Why else would you have a party?

"We are celebrating the end of camp."

Although many kids have spent at least some time in the bamboo, few campers consistently played there. During week three, many of them came back. Party planning ignited a different kind of energy. They were not playing a game; they were planning an event. The

campers were invested. Once party planning commenced, they returned to the bamboo day after day to transform their vision into reality. At first, I thought they had an elaborate plan to host an invite-only party. Soon I learned that their goal was the opposite; they wanted to host a party for everyone. All were invited to help plan the event, and all were invited to attend the party. The campers worked as a unit. Their efforts seemed coordinated, but not pre-planned. "How do you decide who does what?" I asked. I probably should have been able to predict their response, "Whoever wants to do whatever, can do whatever." Campers had the freedom to help in any way they wished as long as their individual efforts were in line with their collective vision: hosting the party of all parties for all the third through fifth graders at camp.

> *"We are going to have the party in three places. In the forest, on the blacktop, and on the patio."*
>
> *"We need all the help we can get."*
>
> *"The bamboo is still so messy."*
>
> *"We are never going to get it cleaned out."*
>
> *"At least it is better than it was, and we created a new pathway in and out."*
>
> *"And a new room! Remember?"*
>
> *"Why are you just standing there? You should be helping."*
>
> *"I am."*
>
> *"How is standing there helping?"*
>
> *"I am the guard. I am watching for intruders."*
>
> *"Me too. You need someone to watch out."*
>
> *"Do you need this bamboo?"*

"Which bamboo?"

"The bamboo all piled up?"

"No. You can have it. That is just the bamboo we cleared out of the bamboo patch."

"Good. I need more to finish the parking lot. I only have three spots. I need a lot more."

"Take it. As much as you want."

"Can I have some too? I am making an arch for the patio."

"And we need some for our weapons."

"Oh, and I need some to make a door."

"Sure. We don't need it!"

"Is everyone over here on your guest list?"

"Let me check…. Everyone except the guards. Let me add them. Now I got everybody."

"Let's keep going. We have to finish the guest list today."

"Where did these bricks come from? These bricks have to be out of here, because I don't want anyone to bust their head on them."

"We need some more bamboo over here!"

The campers were simultaneously engaged in different parts of the planning process. They were clearing out the bamboo forest, standing guard, making weapons, and crafting party decorations. Other campers were creating a guest list and spreading the word about the party. But, none of this would have been possible without their ringleader. He took responsibility for coordinating everyone's efforts and ensuring all interested parties were included. The campers referred to him as the owner. He was in charge, and he always had the final say. According to the campers, he could hire and fire people, and he made sure everyone was doing their job. The owner relied on his second in command for help. The campers viewed him as their manager. He

was responsible for making sure everything was operating smoothly and informing the boss of any concerns that arose. Although he had the autonomy to monitor the planning process and approve side projects, he could not make big decisions without his boss's okay. Although it was clear these two children occupied powerful positions in the party planning narrative, they used their positions to encourage everyone to help plan the party and attend the event.

When the energy around party planning started to diminish, the ringleader strategically pulled people together, like when he sprinted towards the bamboo forest and proclaimed, "Guys, stop, stop, stop what you are doing? Come help. An outsider is trying to get into the cabin." Camper after camper dropped what they were doing and followed him. Two campers did not heed his warning. They stayed behind and continued clearing the bamboo. When I asked, "Where's the cabin?" they shrugged their shoulders and kept working. I hung back and watched the campers huddle near the edge of the patio. The stalks of bamboo they had used to create the door had not been disturbed, and there were no intruders in sight, but they were convinced someone had tried to break in. Whether the threat was potential or actual, the kids were ready and willing to defend their bamboo party space. A few kids armed themselves with stalks of bamboo and stood guard at the doorways. Others scurried back to their posts to continue clearing bamboo, creating decorations, and passing out invitations. As the ringleader retreated, he reminded the guards, "Don't let anyone in unless they are helping."

He pulled a similar stunt the following day, when he faked the start of the party. The kids were scattered around fulfilling odd jobs. Suddenly, the ringleader jogged up the path between the patio and blacktop and yelled, "Come on! It's time for the party." He continued jogging across the blacktop and towards the bamboo patch. One by one, the kids abandoned what they were doing and followed him. After notifying all of the campers in the vicinity that the party was

starting, he led the pack to the patio. He lifted the bamboo stalk that was serving as a makeshift door, and the campers filed onto the brick patio. They gathered near the center of the patio, waiting for directions. To my surprise, the campers started making more party plans. They discussed reinforcing the doors, preparing snacks, and creating a special party room for their VIP guests. I thought it was finally time for the party, but I was wrong. I could not understand why it was taking the campers so long to plan their party. They had been clearing bamboo, creating guest lists, and decorating for days. They did not seem to be getting any closer to actually hosting the event. But maybe that was the point. Planning the party was the fun part. The party did not mark the beginning of the fun, but the beginning of the end. After they opened the doors and announced, "The party is starting!" their time would be numbered. The campers had enough foresight to stretch their planning over days. Whenever they were at a loss for ideas, they reconvened and brainstormed ways they could make the party even better.

There was one narrative that was less egalitarian. The campers constructed a narrative about earning VIP status. Instead of having one guest list, now they had two. They willingly added anyone's name to the party list, but only some campers made the VIP list. The campers knew they had to do something special in order to earn a coveted VIP spot, but what they had to do was unclear. VIP's had special privileges including reserved parking spaces and access to a special party room. Curious, I asked, "Who gets to be a VIP?" The second in command explained, "Everyone who helped plan the party is a VIP" but the ringleader quickly refuted, "No, not everyone." Neither elaborated. I am not sure if they had not created a criteria list or if they wanted to keep it secret, but how someone earned VIP status remained elusive. The VIP debate was not settled until the last day of camp, when the campers finally hosted their party.

"It's time! It's time! We're having the party!"

"Go get everyone."

"You, stand guard at the door; and, you, no snoozing on the job," MJ barked.

When I approached the gate, I was greeted by MJ, the second in command.

"Hello. Are you on the guest list?" MJ asked.

"I don't know?" I responded.

"Wait one minute. I have to check the guest list." He turned and yelled, "Black Light Dude, I need the guest list!"

Black Light Dude trotted over, looked at me, and asked, "What's your name?"

I responded, "Miss Jess."

Black Light Dude opened his notebook and flipped through the pages. He paused when he reached the guest list. "I am not sure if you are on the list." He scanned the page.

I remained hopeful. I had not been turned away, at least not yet. The line was starting to build up behind me.

The ringleader noticed the backup at the door. He ran over and said, "Let her in. Teachers can come to the party."

The second in command lifted the bamboo stalk gate, and I walked in. I took a seat on one of the benches.

"Are you here for the party?"

I nodded.

"The party is going to be so much fun."

A few of the campers ran up to me and exclaimed, "You came! You came!"

Interestingly, I was not the only one who was held at the door. There were quite a few campers who were not on the guest list. But, like me, they were invited in. I am not sure if the

hosts added their names to the list or made exceptions to rule that guests had to be on the list, but they did not turn anyone away. Eventually, they changed the entrance criteria. The greeter would ask, "Do you wanna have some fun and party?" If the camper answered, "yes" they were extended an invitation to enter, "Then you can come in." The hosts held true to their promise that everyone was invited. They genuinely welcomed one another with greetings like, "Look who is here!" and "I'm so glad you came!" As the guests arrived, the hosts finalized the party plans.

"Go grab some more bamboo. The gate is breaking."

"I need to get the makeup ready."

"Ooo, I'll have some makeup."

Holding up white flower, she offered, "How about some powder?" Once she finished powdering her face, she held up a red flower and asked, "Lipstick?"

"Are you watching the VIP door?"

"Yes. I am not letting anyone in yet."

The party room was filling up. The benches were dotted with guests and the greeters were relieved of their welcoming duties. Now, the party-goers were focused on earning VIP status. A line was building up at the back exit. Apparently, the back door was more than an exit. It was also the entrance to the VIP room. The ringleader was stationed at the door. Only after he scanned the camper's imaginary badges, were they permitted in. If, at any time, the ringleader was pulled away, the second in command took his place.

"Pick a color" Black Light Dude requested, holding his paper fortune teller to my face.

"Blue"

"B-L-U-E" Pick a number.

Three.

"One, two, three." Pick another number.

"Six."

"You didn't get it" he explained and ran off.

"I didn't get what?"

"A VIP pass," someone else clarified.

"Oh, you can get a VIP pass through the fortune teller?"

"Yeah. Or you can help out and earn one."

"Or sometimes they just give it to you."

"Who wants a VIP pass?" Erica offered extending a handful of leaves towards a group of party-goers waiting to have their fortunes told.

"That's poison ivy!" Zane exclaimed.

"Ahhh!" she screamed, throwing the leaves up in shock.

"That's not poison ivy," one of the teachers explained.

"Oh, really? It looks like poison ivy." Zane questioned.

"The leaves look similar, but they aren't clustered in groups of three, so it can't be poison ivy," the teacher clarified.

"Phew!" Erica exhaled and gathered up the VIP passes scattered across the ground."

I redirected my attention to the VIP door. The line of campers trying to access the VIP room was growing, but was everyone being let in? I moved closer to figure out how they were negotiating entry. The campers no longer needed a special pass to access the party room, but now something different was controlling access: space. The room was overcrowded. The narrative shifted from, "you don't have a VIP pass" to "the party room is full". Campers stood in line waiting to take another camper's place. Before the leaders had a chance to figure out how to expand the VIP

room to accommodate more campers, the whistle blew, and it was time to head inside. As we walked away from the bamboo for the last time, I realized I still had one question.

"How did you decide to have a bamboo party in the first place?"

"I don't know."

"Last year, on the last day of camp we wanted to have a party."

"So, we had a bamboo party."

"And then, this year we decided we wanted to have one too."

"We started planning earlier so we could throw a better party."

"But we still ran out of time."

"Next year, we will have to start planning even earlier."

"Maybe a week earlier."

"Then, we will be able to plan a great party!"

At first, what drew all the campers to spend at least some time in this overgrown patch of bamboo was unclear. From my perspective, the bamboo was special. It was the only place on the playground where everyone played. But according to the children the bamboo was ordinary. I know, it surprised me too. Did they not realize that the bamboo was different from so many other spaces where they spent time? But that was just it. From their perspective, there was nothing special about the bamboo. Sure, the children enjoyed spending time in the bamboo and appreciated having opportunities to play in it, but they viewed it as just another space to hang out. The bamboo was inviting, because it was a stable, ordinary space.

Bamboo Fights

Even though the bamboo was the most inclusive space at camp, I would be remiss to ignore the moments when bamboo play broke down. Early on in the summer, the children

debated if breaking the bamboo was an acceptable practice. They were not sure if the bamboo would grow back or if the stalks were more like the branches on a tree—once they break, it takes years for new branches to grow. They debated whether the bamboo was edible and if the vines growing through the bamboo were poison ivy. Most of their scuffles were about the bamboo itself and how they could play in it without destroying it. But they also had disagreements about the norms that they had established to govern bamboo play. In this vignette, the children were debating: If everyone should always be permitted to play in the bamboo, and, if the bamboo could support two play narratives at once.

> *Turkish Angora tapped me on the shoulder, I turned around, and she yelled, "Miss Jess, You're it!" "What are we playing?" I asked. "Bamboo jail," she answered. "How do you play again?" I asked. "When we escape, you have to chase us. When you catch us, you have to tickle us for 10 seconds." I continued, "And, what happens when I tickle you?" Turkish Angora explained, "I become it, and you become a prisoner. We switch spots." With that, she ran off. When she was only a few paces away, she looked back and taunted, "Try to get me!" As her voice trailed off, I joined their game of chase.*

For ten minutes, the play unfolded as expected. The children moved in and out of the bamboo, chasing each other, and seamlessly transitioning between the roles of prisoner and guard. But as we were playing an argument broke out. It did not take long before their rumblings turned into a heated debate. I took a break from playing chase and listened.

> *"Let us in. You can't have this space."*
>
> *"They're trying to get in! Help!"*

I inched my way closer to the bamboo patch. Four campers had barricaded themselves inside one of the tunnels the campers used to get in and out of the bamboo. The children playing Jail Break were not happy.

"Let us in!" they yelled, trying to break down the barricades.

"You aren't playing the game right" another camper added.

The campers outside the barricade seem to assume that the campers inside the barricade were playing Jail Break, but they were not playing by the rules. They had created a base—a place where they could hide away and avoid being tagged. And, they had cut off one of their main thoroughfares. Now there were only two ways in and out of the bamboo.

The barricaded campers explained, "We don't want anyone else to come in." To which another player added, "We aren't playing anyways." A third camper clarified, "Don't worry about us. Just play your game."

"But you aren't playing right."

"There is no base."

"And you can't just stay in the bamboo. You have to run."

"No, we don't. We can do what we want."

The campers bickered back and forth. I could not tell if the campers who had barricaded themselves into one of the bamboo tunnels were trying to play Jail Break, were just hanging out in the bamboo, or if they were playing something else. Eventually, the campers who were playing Jail Break gave up. Upset, they ran out of the bamboo declaring, "They aren't playing right. Let's go play somewhere else." The campers seemed to be arguing about the rules of bamboo play. Four campers had sectioned off part of the bamboo for their use. They were not letting anyone else in. They had broken one of the norms the children developed to govern

bamboo play. They were controlling part of the bamboo and not letting anyone travel in and out of the tunnel they claimed. As we walked back inside from recess the campers were still talking about their fight.

> *"I hate the bamboo. It messed up my hair and now no one is going to compliment me on it. And people are not getting along in the bamboo. They are fighting."*

The next day, the children returned to the bamboo. Jail Break, again, was the game of choice. But not everyone in the bamboo was playing chase. Some campers traveled in and out to harvest bamboo to build forts. Others came in to enjoy the shade for a few minutes. It was obvious the bamboo could simultaneously support more than one activity, and the campers were willing to share their space, as long as everyone played by the rules.

Bamboo play had a history and a future. The children referenced playing in the bamboo during past summers and suggested they would continue playing in it for years to come. The children were confident it would always be there, and if they wanted to play in it, they would not be turned away. The bamboo was not a conflict-free zone, but the norms the children had established were strong enough to withstand their quarrels and feuds. But, what an overgrown patch of bamboo had in common with other in-between spaces like restroom breaks and mealtimes was still obscure. Writing through these stories helped me realize these spaces had more in common than I originally thought.

Discussion

In in-between spaces, like mealtimes, transitions, and the bamboo forest, the children extended and accepted invitations to interact with a wider range of peers. These spaces shared an important set of characteristics that encouraged the children to make room for one another.

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│              │───│   supported emergence    │
│              │   └──────────────────────────┘
│              │   ┌──────────────────────────┐
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│   inclusive  │   └──────────────────────────┘
│    spaces    │   ┌──────────────────────────┐
│              │───│     process-focused      │
│              │   └──────────────────────────┘
│              │   ┌──────────────────────────┐
│              │───│  acknowledged individuals │
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│              │───│   required collaboration  │
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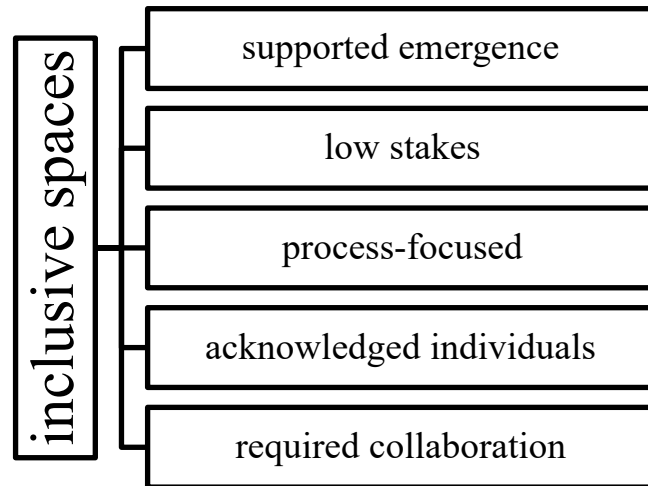
Figure 3: Characteristics of Inclusive Spaces

First, the open-ended nature of these spaces supported emergence. They created opportunities for the campers to cross paths with many different peers. Thus, when the campers needed support, someone was there to jump in. For instance, when they needed help opening a food package or wanted to learn the new popular dance, they just so happened to cross paths with someone who was willing to assist them. These moments were not planned, but when an opportunity presented itself, the campers harnessed it. Second, these spaces were low-stakes. If they had some specialized knowledge that was relevant to a situation, they were encouraged to share it, but their participation was not contingent on their ability to contribute novel ideas. For instance, the children did not have to be athletic or artistic to play in the bamboo. They did not need any specialized knowledge like how to set a pick in basketball or how to pump their legs on the swings. They did not have to be quick-footed or quick-witted. They just had to be interested in playing and willing to let everyone else play. And, because the children were free to come and go as they pleased, they did not have to give up anything to participate. Their friends could come with them and if they decided they wanted to do something else, they were not pressured to stay. Third, these spaces were process-focused. Although the children often came together for

product-focused reasons, like to plan the ultimate party, the time they spent together was often just as rewarding as the outcome of their interactions. Finally, these spaces allowed the campers to showcase their individuality and unite around their shared goals. Individuals were valued as contributing members. Their presence was acknowledged, and their efforts were appreciated, but collaboration was key. Whether they were determined to master a new skill or play a game of tag, the campers needed each other to achieve their goal.

These moments did not just provide the children with opportunities to expand the range of people with whom they felt comfortable interacting, but they also provided them with opportunities to process what it means to live in society that values individuality and getting ahead. All day long the children were encouraged to be responsible. They were expected to stand out, prove themselves, and contribute something unique to the group. Speed, accuracy, and precision were valued. Products were rewarded, and processes were ignored. The campers were encouraged to be compliant, follow directions, and do their own work. They were not just expected to do their best but to be the best. To an important extent, the campers bought into the competitive, individualistic narratives used to measure a person's worth in school and society. But the campers did not let them control all their interactions.

During transitions, mealtimes, scheduled breaks, and recess, there were moments when the campers resisted these principles in favor of values like unity and equality. They created havens where their sole purpose was to be together, to help each other, and to enjoy one another's company. Whether their interactions lasted seconds, minutes, or hours, the campers experienced brief reprieves from the oppressive meritocratic narratives that privileged the individual over the group, hard work over creativity, and personal effort over collaboration. For instance, the campers practiced constructing and resisting narratives of control when they played

jail. Whether they threatened runaways with punishments or taunted them with rewards, their attempts to inspire compliance were unsuccessful. The campers faked obedience, snuck around, and escaped despite the repercussions they might face. The campers also found ways to care for one another in a world where they were expected to take care of themselves. They noticed when someone was in need and stepped in to help. For example, when their peers expressed interest in learning how to floss, they taught them. When a peer desired to master the log spinner they offered tips and words of encouragement. And, when their peers struggled to open their food packages, they offered to help. Additionally, the campers constructed inclusive play narratives as alternatives to activities that attracted campers with certain skills, interests, and abilities like shooting hoops, racing, or swinging on the monkey bars. When the children were playing bamboo tag and planning their bamboo party, they enforced one rule: everyone was permitted to play. And when someone or something threatened the integrity of their inclusive space, they responded. When the play narrative became exclusionary, they adapted it. When players tried to exclude another player, they banished them. And when nothing else worked, the players dispersed, and play ended for the day.

It may seem like these moments just happened. To some extent, they did. But the campers' interactions were not pure coincidence. The children had to have the time and space to informally interact with one another in order cross paths with peers they would not typically choose as work or play partners. Most of the campers' interactions budded when they were chatting in line, eating meals, cleaning up, and playing together at recess. But I did witness adults facilitating activities that encouraged the campers to expand the range of people with whom they interacted. At camp, there were two adult-led activities that urged the campers to make room for one another. Every week, the campers visited a local trapeze studio where they cycled through

three stations. At one of the stations, the campers were invited to participate in collaborative

games. The other activity also occurred weekly. A community member would visit the classroom

and facilitate an open-ended and accessible art project. As will become evident in the vignette

below, these activities shared the characteristics I just described; they were emergent, low-stakes,

process-focused activities that invited individual participation, but required collaboration. They

gave the campers an opportunity to work together towards a common end.

> *"Next, we are going to play a game with a ball and a parachute," The leader*
>
> *instructed. She went on to explain that the campers were going to work together to*
>
> *launch the ball into the air and try to get it stuck in the rafters. She continued," We are*
>
> *going to go around the circle and each person is going to have a turn to come up with*
>
> *their own plan. We will listen to their plan, and then follow their directions to see if their*
>
> *idea will help us get the ball stuck." The campers built on each other's ideas. One*
>
> *camper offered, "We should move our arms really fast," and the next suggested, "We*
>
> *should move our arms fast and then jump at the end." Some of the campers directed their*
>
> *peers to try to move together, while others tried to position the ball in a certain place in*
>
> *the parachute before they initiated their move, making comments like "The ball has to be*
>
> *in the middle, before we do it." Over time, he camper's directions became more*
>
> *elaborate.*

> *"We should get down really low and then swing our arms up to make the*
>
> *parachute shoot the ball really high."*
>
> *MJ suggested, "I think we should do Omega's plan but move our arms even*
>
> *faster."*
>
> *"Omega, can you remind us of your plan?" the leader asked.*

Omega repeated his plan "We should start low and swing our arms fast and high"

The leader summarized, "Okay so we are going to do Omega's plan but move our arms even faster and higher to try to get the ball stuck in the rafters.

"MJ, when you are ready, count for us."

MJ looked down at the ball and up at the ceiling a few times. Then he said, "We need to move this way." He pointed to the building. Everyone shuffled towards the building. When MJ stopped, they stopped. He looked up at the ceiling and down at the ball.

The leader asked, "Is that good?"

MJ nodded.

The campers squatted down with their fists clenched around the edge of the parachute. The ball rolled towards the edge of the parachute. MJ let go of the parachute, and the ball drifted back towards the middle. But, as soon as he grabbed the edge of the parachute again, the ball rolled out of the center. He released his grip once more, he pushed the ball to the center, and then held the edge of the parachute tight. It started to roll again. The campers on the other side of the circle lifted their edge of the parachute just slightly to help the ball to stay in the center.

MJ watched the ball rock back towards the center.

Finally, MJ counted, "one-two-three"

In unison, the kids lifted their arms into the air, the parachute snapped taut, and the ball shot up into the rafters. The campers stared up at the ceiling, watching the ball shimmy between the beams. Their jaws dropped. A quiet cheer of ahs and yays percolated as the

ball reached the ceiling. But their cheers faded into disappointing aws and ohs as the ball

dropped back between the rafters into its parachute cradle.

"Oh man."

"That was so close."

"I don't think the ball can get stuck."

During this fifteen-minute period, the campers had their sights set on a common goal: they wanted to thrust the beach ball up into the rafters with just enough force to get it stuck. If they launched it with too little force, the beach ball would fall short of the rafters, and if they launched it with too much force, it would hit the ceiling and come whizzing back down to the ground. The campers could not achieve their goal alone. And the leader had structured the challenge in such a way that every camper's plan was given due weight. They each had a chance to voice their idea and watch it in action. As the children experimented with different strategies, they realized which ones were most effective, abandoning some ideas and building on others. Every part of this activity encouraged authentic collaboration.

The Civic and Political Dimension of the Children's Participation

In short, whether the children's interactions emerged organically, like when the campers were playing in the bamboo, or in response to adult-constructed invitations, like when the campers were thrusting the ball into the rafters, they embraced the opportunity to come together and construct ways of being in community with one another. The scholars who have argued that the children's civic and political participation looks different than that of adults were correct (Kallio, 2009). As I outlined earlier, the children's participation was political when it was "purposive, oriented, and intentional" (Kallio & Häkli, 2011, p. 106). In other words, when the children's actions affected their experiences and the experiences of others, they were political. It

was through their ongoing micro-acts that the children were able to carve out a space for themselves in their social world and make room for one another, which, at its root, is civic and political work.

Some might argue that the children were engaged in the most difficult kind of civic work that exists. Not only were they were working within and around a set of institutional structures that did not recognize their claims to citizenship by finding ways to have at least some say in how they spent their time at camp, they were also employing inclusive norms and practices that allowed them to comfortably interact with a wider range of peers. They were shaping each other's experiences of belonging, by extending invitations to connect. Since the early 1900s, scholars, who have theorized how the United States of America's democracy is failing, have argued that top-down efforts, alone, will not transform the everyday lives of people who occupy marginalized social and cultural locations. Although it is necessary to pass laws that protect people's civil liberties and elect government leaders who are committed to making the United States of America a more accepting and equitable place for all people, these efforts alone are insufficient. People who belong to marginalized groups will continue to be treated as second-class citizens until the everyday acts of ordinary citizens change. And this is exactly what the children were doing. They were finding ways to make room for one another. Not always, but consistently. Whether they were noticing when a community member needed something and offering to help, or they were expanding their play narratives and play groups enough to let others in, the campers were making camp a more inclusive, welcoming space for all children. In spite of this, the children's participation would not necessarily be recognized as political because it does not fit into any of the existing citizenship typologies civic educators use to define what it means to be civically and politically engaged.

It is easy to see how the children's participation would not be classified as "minimal" (Banks, 2008) or "personally responsible" (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004) citizenship. The campers were not passively waiting to be officially recognized as a citizen or blindly abiding by the rules and norms adults set. Although the campers' participation was active, it was not necessarily "participatory," at least not according to the definitions civic education scholars use to classify it as such (Banks, 2008; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). There were times when the campers followed their teachers' lead and embraced the status quo, but there were also many moments when they also actively resisted. When they resisted, they did not collaborate with those in power to have their concerns addressed, instead they stealthily located opportunities to realize their desires without adult approval or even knowledge. Although their participation somewhat resembled the "justice-oriented" (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004) and "transformative" (Banks, 2008) typologies for which many scholars advocate, the nature and scope of their actions differed. The children did not take a public stand against the rules and structures that restricted their ability to participate in their community in hopes of changing the system, like is assumed in the formal definitions promoted by scholars. Their efforts were more covert. The campers worked around the systems designed to protect and provide for them to harness opportunities to shape their communities, their lives, and the lives of other community members.

A new citizenship typology. If we were to rely on our existing frameworks, the children's participation would generally be considered apolitical, even though it was active and transformative in its own way. The children demonstrated how through their ordinary moment-to-moment actions and reactions they were able to make room for one another, which as I just established, is a political feat in and of itself. But in order to regard the children's participation as political, we need a to develop a new typology that accounts for the corporeal, emergent nature

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of the children's political participation. And since children are largely excluded from the formal political realm, we need a typology that recognizes cultural citizenship as a legitimate form of civic participation.

In order to recognize the children's participation in their cultural communities as political, we need to redefine the characteristics used to categorize someone as a citizen. As Moosa-Mitha (2005) explains, instead of using qualifiers like individuality, autonomy, and the capacity to perform specific tasks to classify someone as a citizen, we need to use presence, agency, and ability to act as markers of a person's civic capacity. From this perspective, children are positioned as civic actors who play an active role in their community and whose participation is always potentially political (Kallio, 2009). Citizenship is not just about what people give to their community, but also entails the process of "being-made" and "self-making" (Ong, 1996). Thus, citizenship is about citizen development and community development. People are continuously engaged in the process of making their community and their community is continuously engaged in the process of making them. Diprose's (2008) theorization of belonging helps us understand how civic participation is not confined to official political realm but pervades people's everyday lives. Through the continual performance of micro-acts people forge communities with one another.

For Diprose, community formation is tied to the production of shared meanings. But community formation does not begin there. At first, a person experiences an inclination to associate. Something draws a person towards another. Like when the campers witnessed a peer spill a lunch tray, struggle to open a food package, or express interest in learning a new dance move. Or when the campers set their sights on accomplishing a shared goal, like throwing a bamboo party or trying to get the ball stuck in the rafters. When the campers trusted their

inclination and initiated contact, their paths converged. It was at this point when meaning-making became possible. The children engaged in back and forth exchanges that allowed them to express their uniqueness (Diprose, 2008) and ultimately build shared meanings that express, "neither a unified, shared identity nor the endless dispersal of meaning, but an open and flexible sense of belonging with others and to places that allows one to move along habitually within the familiar without thinking" (Diprose, 2008, p. 41). As I described in chapter four, the production and reproduction of shared meanings required the exchange of cultural information. A camper had to be able to read their immediate context in order to read their peers' cries for help and invitations to connect and respond in kind. Thus, the children's micro-acts functioned as political acts and contributed to the formation and preservation of their local peer culture.

Conclusion

I had reviewed many studies about children negotiating relations with their peers. Researchers like Goodwin (2003) and Thorne (1993) built convincing cases that children who participate in different social and cultural groups do interact, but their interactions tend to be brief and infrequent. Generally speaking, I drew similar conclusions. On occasion, the children embraced opportunities to interact with peers they did not usually seek as a work or play partners, especially if the other child needed help, if they had the knowledge or resources necessary to be of assistance, and if the act of helping did not require them to choose an acquaintance over a friend. The children also responded positively when adults facilitated activities that encouraged inclusive work and play in diverse settings (Moore, 2001; Schofield, 1989). When the children had opportunities to take part in activities that required individual participation and collaboration, it was as if the adults were giving the children permission to interact in new and different ways. But what happened in the bamboo was different. The

children's play was sustained over long stretches of time—days and sometimes even weeks. And, surprisingly, when the players changed, the narratives remained the same. The norms the children established were inclusive and when exclusive narratives emerged, the children shut them down. In order for adults to start recognizing all the ways children participate in their communities as citizens, they need to expand their citizenship typologies to reflect and build on the ways children actively participate in their communities already.

CHAPTER 6

MAKING ROOM FOR ONE ANOTHER

I am going to end where I began—with Fiona's story and Robert's story. They were struggling to fit in, and, as their teacher, I was struggling to support them in their relationship building efforts. I embarked on my PhD with the goal of inquiring into this phenomenon. I spent years reading and writing about children's social lives—how they carve out a space for themselves in their social world and make room for one another. I used what I learned from the literature to design my study. I spent a month closely studying how a group of upper elementary aged children negotiated belongings in a diverse summer camp setting. For the better part of nine months, I mulled over the data the children and I generated. As I will explain below, my study expanded my understanding of the ways the children defined and enacted their understandings of belonging and the conditions that seemed to facilitate their cross-group talk and play, but there is still much to learn. Not only does my study confirm and extend what we know about how children negotiate belongings with their peers, it also raises important practical questions about the short-term and long-term effects of encouraging inclusive playgroups and playscripts, theoretical questions about inclusivity's place in a highly competitive and individualistic society, and methodological questions about doing research with and for children.

Although camp was not long enough for me to isolate the experiences of individual children, it was long enough for me to grow my understanding of how the children defined and enacted their understandings of belonging. The children could name moments when they felt like they belonged, but it was more difficult for them to articulate what made them feel this way.

Their sense of belonging was embodied. It was a sensation they experienced when they felt connected to an object, place, person, or activity. Sometimes, they were not interested in fitting in but in standing out. The children wanted to be acknowledged as a unique individual and accepted as a part of the group. Although belonging meant different things to different campers, their definitions shared some characteristics. Like has been theorized by many scholars, the children: tied their sense of belonging to something outside the self (Anthias, 2016), spoke of the connections they had established and the ones they wished to develop (Jones and Krzyzanowski, 2011), and recognized belonging was not a status they could achieve, but a position they had to constantly negotiate (Antonsich, 2010). The children had a sophisticated understanding of what it means to belong and focused much of their attention on negotiating belongings with their peers. The children used cultural information as a resource to connect with a wide range of peers and facilitate the construction of their local peer culture.

Camp was also long enough for me to witness moments when the children interacted across social circle group lines. These moments were not unlike the moments when Fiona and Robert were invited in. They were brief, sporadic, and unpredictable. But they were also patterned. Whether these moments emerged organically between children or were intentionally facilitated by adults, the campers harnessed opportunities to interact with a wide range of peers when the conditions were right. Generally speaking, the campers did not seek opportunities to play with new peers, but they did welcome passing interactions. They treated moments when they crossed paths with a campmate outside their social circle group as an invitation to mingle. The children might have been more likely to casually interact because they were not at school but at camp. Another factor that might have contributed to their willingness to interact was because in a month the children did not have enough time to establish firm lines that separated

one social circle group from the next. In addition, patterns of exclusion were just starting to develop when camp was coming to an end. But the ways the children interacted in emergent, low-stakes, process-focused spaces that invited individual participation but required collaboration were promising.

For generations, scholars have acknowledged the important role the everyday acts of ordinary people play in the realization of democratic ideals for all community members, especially those who are marginalized. The children were doing this work. On a continual basis, they were securing ways to make room for one another by extending invitations to connect, sharing their resources with one another, and coming to each other's aid. They were offering each other tips and advice, coaching each other as they developed new skills, and helping each other overcome challenges and embarrassments. Sometimes they were simply spending time together. As the children were informally interacting, they were growing more comfortable mingling with a wide range of peers.

Most adults would support and even celebrate these kinds of behavior. Many educators facilitate activities with the hope that they will encourage children to develop prosocial behaviors and interact beyond their social circle groups. But these same educators fail to recognize that some of their policies and practices are discouraging the kinds of behavior they are trying to foster. Silent lunch and hallway walking (Minkel, 2019), hands behind the back "ducktail" walking (Rodriguez, 2015), and hurried cleanup routines are commonplace in many schools. As is taking away recess to extend the school day, makeup missed assignments, and punish misbehavior (Ramstetter & Fink, 2018). Not to mention the lack of opportunities for free play (Paley, 2004). The very places where the campers were carving out spaces for themselves in their social world and making room for one another are disappearing from schools.

Thinking back on my practice as a teacher, I rushed the children to lineup and shushed them in the hallway without considering why they were hanging back at their table for a minute before getting into line or what they were whispering to their neighbor in the hall. At camp, it was in these moments when the children were reaching across social group lines to make room for one another. My attempts keep the children moving and maximize instructional time, might have granted me a few more minutes to introduce an extra practice problem or complete one more writing conference. But I am not sure if my instructional goals were necessarily more important than the children's social goals.

Before conducting this study, I might have defended my decision to hurry the children along by explaining that I provided the children with lots of opportunities to socialize. They worked in partners and groups on a daily basis. They sat in pods, and they had opportunities to chat during transitions and snack time. But the decisions I had made to encourage cross-group work and play, like alternating between letting the children choose partners and using flexible grouping strategies, were unlikely to encourage authentic engagement. When the children selected partners they usually decided to work with friends. Choosing a partner can be overwhelming. For children who have strong social networks, they had to figure out which friend to ask and how they were going to avoid hurting other friends' feelings. Children who struggled to build social relationships with their peers faced a different challenge. They had a hard time finding someone who was willing to work with them and often had to endure the humiliation of being picked last. When I arranged the children into groups, I encountered a different set of challenges. I had to consider who worked well together, the purpose of the work, the children's differing skill and ability levels, as well as how to provide the children with enough structure to make sure the work was collaboratively produced.

At camp, organized and self-selected partner and group work presented similar challenges. The campers resisted being organized into prearranged groups. They did not refuse to work with non-friends, but their interactions felt forced instead of genuine. Sure, they completed assigned tasks, but then they parted ways. And, when they were invited to organize themselves into pairs and small groups, they chose to work with friends. This is what happened when I invited the children to create playscapes and figurines to reenact moments when they played together at camp. Sometimes campers from different social circle groups ended up in the same group. When this happened, they did not actively exclude anyone from their play by, for example, constructing a script with too few players. But they chose to reenact moments when they were playing their favorite games with friends, inadvertently excluding some peers from their play. Thus, it is unlikely that institutionally endorsed collaborations, whether self-selected or thoughtfully arranged, can replace the kinds of interactions that result when children just so happen to cross paths with their peers. Authenticity cannot be fabricated.

In short, when the children just so happened to cross paths with someone outside their social circle groups, they embraced the opportunity to interact. Whether their interactions emerged organically, like when they were navigating in-between spaces, or were facilitated, like when they were participating in adult-led activities that required individual participation and encouraged collaboration, the children responded by genuinely making room for one another. Thus, the integrity of in-between spaces and collaborative activities must be preserved. When campers have fewer opportunities to informally interact, it is less likely they will notice when someone needs something. And even if they notice, they will be less likely to react especially if acting might cause them to get in trouble or require them to take action in front of an audience of peers. These spaces are not just a means to an end but have important ends in themselves. It is in

these spaces where the children expanded their playgroups and playscripts enough to invite others in and ultimately cultivated a community that belonged to them.

But, as other researchers have documented, cross-group interactions are not always positive (see Thorne, 1993; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001). In-between spaces may be marked with promise, but they can also feed prejudices, rouse misconceptions, and harbor hatred. In these spaces, children might draw on racist, sexist, classist, and homophobic narratives to demean their peers or exclude them from playing. Which is yet another reason why adults need to pay attention to what is happening in these spaces. Some might use these same claims to advocate that these spaces need to be controlled or even eliminated. But, reducing, regulating, or eradicating opportunities for children to informally interact with a wide range of peers is not the answer. The children will continue to cross paths with people from a variety of social and cultural groups no matter how diligently adults work to prevent it. When children have supported opportunities to playfully interact with many different peers, it is more likely their interactions will be positive and instructive. And when racist, sexist, classist, homophobic, or other hurtful narratives emerge, adults will know so they can address them. As a result, the children may not only grow more comfortable and confident interacting with a wide range of peers, but they also may learn to appreciate the diversity of human experience. Which, in turn, will help them navigate the multicultural, interdependent, twenty-first century world within which they live as more ethical, understanding, and curious citizens.

Personal Implications

As an elementary school teacher, I struggled to know how to respond when the children were excluding one another. I felt the urge to intervene, and often I did. But, as is evident in the stories I told about Fiona and Robert, my attempts to encourage inclusivity were largely

unsuccessful. After this study, I have a greater appreciation for what negotiating belongings entails. The process is complicated, context-bound, and political. Children are not just focused on their social lives, because they want to play instead of work; the health of their relationships is dependent on it. I better grasp the challenges children may face when accepting and extending invitations to work and play with their peers and recognize there is no surefire way to navigate the social boundaries they encounter. Before I conducted this study, I did not realize the important role cultural information plays in children's interactions. Cultural information is what enabled the children to build shared meanings and connect with their peers. In addition, I have a deeper understanding of the value of play and the conditions that encourage cross-group interactions. Until now, I was a jump on the bandwagon play advocate. I believed play was important. Play, I thought, provided children with an avenue to decompress and enjoy one another's company. When they were playing, children had opportunities to exercise, cultivate their skills, and explore new interests. But now, after watching the children play, I realized play is not just fun, it is work (Paley, 2004). Over the course of camp, the children used play as a way to make sense of the world and figure out how to participate in it. As the children played, they experimented. They played with new children, made new rules, and invented new versions of familiar games. The children tested beliefs and values they had encountered in the adult world to see how they would stand up in their local peer culture. To my surprise, when the children were playing with one another, on their own terms, and largely out of the gaze of adults they were constructing elaborate play routines, games, and stories about belonging. In addition, I recognize that in-between spaces and collaborative games have the potential to bring children together in ways that other spaces do not.

But inclusion is not guaranteed. The relative freedom children experience in these spaces may lead to exclusionary behavior. If I could go back to Fiona's and Robert's classrooms, I would follow the children's lead, just like I did at camp. I would foreground the children's interests, namely socializing and relationship building, on my priority list. I would preserve the integrity of in-between spaces and observe how the children interact, so I could design learning experiences that encourage the children to expand the range of children with whom they feel comfortable interacting. I would craft opportunities for the children to experiment with different relational partners and integrate more collaborative games into our daily schedule. And, when I meet more children like Fiona and Robert, I will use what I have learned to passionately defend my decisions to prioritize the children's social lives, integrate play into the school day, and listen to the children's words and actions to figure out how I can help them carve out a space for themselves in their social world and make room for one another.

Broader Implications

My study is just the beginning, or should I say a continuation of the inquiries that started to emerge in the 1980s. Although the context has changed, children's desire to nurture their social lives has remained constant. Like in many studies, the children focused most of their attention on building relationships with their peers (Paley, 1986; Ramsey, 1991). No matter what the children were officially doing their social lives were always on their minds. The children developed a sense of "we-ness" by spending time together (Davies, 1982), discussing their common interests (Moore, 2002), sharing food (Evaldsson & Corsaro, 1998), and engaging in games, play routines, and language play (Kyratzis, 2004). They "creatively appropriated" information from the adult world and applied it to their local peer culture (Corsaro, 1992) when they played jail, talked money, and engaged in other topics usually reserved for adults. The

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children's capacity to carve out a space for themselves in their social world and make room for one another was intimately tied to their capacity to build shared meanings. And in order to participate in this meaning-making process, the children had to have access to the cultural information referenced in their local context. For instance, the children's ability to differentiate between playful and mean-spirited name-calling and understand when copying was an acceptable practice and when it was equated with stealing were valuable skills that helped them connect with their peers. Being familiar with popular cultural references also proved useful. When a child referenced a movie, TV show, video game, song, dance, or other cultural product, other children had to have knowledge of the reference to respond in socially acceptable ways. When a child did not understand a reference, they struggled to participate. Not only did the act of building shared meanings allow the children to connect, it also helped them develop a sense of community.

My study also serves as further evidence that children do not only play in homogenous groups, they also have passing interactions with peers they do not regard as friends (Goodwin, 2003; Thorne, 1993). Their interactions were not unlike the ones other researchers documented. The "with-then-apart" model (Goffman, 1977) still holds true. The children momentarily expanded their playgroups and playscripts enough to make room for one another, but because I focused intently on these moments, I was able to detail the children's "language and moment-to-moment actions and reactions" (Madrid & Kantor, 2009) in ways that other researchers had not. The largest contributions my study makes to the literature about children's social worlds are the detailed accounts I offer of moments when the children interacted across social circle groups and my synthesis of the conditions that encouraged cross-group play. The conditions that encouraged the children to interact with a wider range of peers in social settings, may have similar affects in

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other contexts. These findings also have the potential to contribute to the civic education community's understanding of how children participate in the world as citizens especially as children continue to have more frequent encounters with people who are different from them. I demonstrate how the current typologies used to discuss what civic and political participation looks like and sounds like exclude children's everyday political acts. We need to develop a new typology that recognizes cultural citizenship as a form of participation (Ong, 1996), uses markers like presence, agency, and the ability to act to categorize someone as a potential actor (Moosa-Mitha, 2005), and accounts for the ways children use cultural information to produce and reproduce shared meanings that enable them to connect with one another and participate in their communities.

Future Work

My study left many practical and theoretical questions unanswered. What effect, if any, does having opportunities to interact across social circle groups have on children's interactional patterns and social relationships? How will expanding the range of people with whom children feel comfortable interacting influence children's schooling experiences? How do children who occupy different social and cultural locations (race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, language, body size, appearance, class, etc.) negotiate belongings across social circle groups? Does participating in this negotiation process have different consequences for different children? How might having more opportunities to play influence children's social relationships and the nature of their interactions? What kinds of play encourage children to accept and extend invitations to interact with a wider range of peers? Although including one another in their work and play might positively influence the children's social lives, will it interfere with their capacity to navigate a world that values competition, winning, and individuality? Where do cooperative,

inclusive social activities fit within a society that discourages collaboration in favor of individual performances? Are these goals antithetical, or should expanding the range of people with whom children feel comfortable interacting qualify as an end in itself?

My study also makes some methodological contributions. It illuminates the power in "planning for emergence" (Morgan, 2008). I am glad I let myself be surprised. If I had stuck with my original plan, I would have gravely limited what I learned from the children. In the first days of my study, I realized the children were better able to communicate their understandings and experiences through play than words. Thus, the invitations I crafted to write, draw, and talk were only moderately effective. I adapted my plan to include opportunities to observe the children informally interacting and encourage the children to chat and play during our focus group meetings. These changes allowed me to witness the children negotiating belongings in action. When the children were playfully interacting, I was able to grow my understanding of the conditions that encouraged cross-group interactions. But my study also fell short. I provided the children with limited opportunities to help me understand their processes and practices. I attempted to remedy this shortcoming during the last week of camp when I invited the children to create figurines and playscapes to reenact moments when they were playing with their peers. I was hoping the campers would provide me with insights into how they interact across social circle groups, but instead the children elected to reenact scenes when they were engaged in their favorite activities with their closest friends. So, while these moments helped me understand how the children negotiated belongings more broadly, they failed to help me understand what the children attributed to their cross-group play. And, as I explained in my methodology chapter, time constraints prevented me from meeting with each small group of children separately as they put together their story boards. I missed an opportunity to hear them talk through how their

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scenes unfolded and what their actors said and did to play together. Again, I had to over rely on my interpretative skills with the risk of misinterpreting the children's intentions.

My study also raises some methodological questions. Should parental permission always be required, or should children have the autonomy to make participation decisions? Where and how should these lines be drawn? Observations played an important role in my study, because the children often communicated their understandings and experiences through play. How might researchers elicit children's understandings of what is happening when they play without their interactions becoming inauthentic? How can researchers encourage participants to organically interact during focus group meetings without sacrificing the quality of the audio?

Did I achieve what I set out to accomplish? Partially. I grew my understanding of how the children defined and enacted their understandings of belonging. My study was relatively short, lasting just one month; only twenty-two children participated in the study; and, the camp setting was unique. So, while my findings suggest children have the capacity to make room for one another, we need to know more about when, how, and why. Negotiating belongings is a complex process. Someone might feel like they belong in one moment and not in the next. They might confidently navigate one context and struggle to navigate another. They might feel deeply connected to one of their peers, until they are pulled apart. I am left with more questions than answers, but maybe that means I am asking the right questions. My work does not end here. I still have a lot to learn about how children carve out a space for themselves in their social world and make room for one another. But, with what I know now I can move forward.

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APPENDIX A

OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

The researcher will use the following questions to focus her participant observations.

- How do the children seem to understand what it means to belong? (does it mean spending time with other children, engaging in certain activities, being acknowledged by other children, having certain things, and/or something else) How do the children spend time together? How do they play together on the playground? How do they interact in their classroom? What games do they play? How do they greet another? How do they "say goodbye"?

- When and how do the children organize themselves into groups? Which groups seem to be more fluid and which ones seem to be more fixed? Are there times and places when children form groups that are more or less diverse? If so, what seems to make these times and places different?

- Which children frequently interact? What seems to bring them together? (an activity, a common interest, an assignment, a shared experience, similar backgrounds, or something else) What reasons do the children provide for why they frequently interact? What similarities do the children seem to share? What seems to make them different?

- Which children rarely interact? What seems to draw the children apart? (an assignment, different interests or preferences, different backgrounds or experiences, or something else) What reasons do the children provide for why they rarely interact? What similarities do the children seem to share? What seems to make them different?

- Which, if any, children spend most of their time alone? Why do these children seem to spend most of their time alone? What reasons do the children provide for why they spend most of their time alone? If and when do they interact with their peers?

- How do the children use their words and actions to include and exclude their peers? Which strategies seem to be more or less effective?

    GRANTING BELONGINGS
    o How do the children invite their peers to work or play with them? How do their peers respond? What do the children do if their invitations are rejected?
    o How do the children express disinterest in working and playing with their peers? How do their peers respond?
    o What factors seem to influence whether certain children are included or excluded by their peers (interests, language, patterns of behavior, play preferences, where the

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interaction takes place, and/or something else)? What reasons do the children provide for including or excluding their peers?

o What emotions arise for the children when they are included or excluded by their peers?

SEEKING BELONGINGS:

o How do the children use their words and actions to join a group, activity, or conversation? Which strategies seem to be more or less effective?

o What do the children do if their attempts to join a group, activity, or conversation are unsuccessful?

o What factors seem to influence whether or not certain children try to join a group, activity, or conversation? What reasons do the children provide for whether or not they try to join a group, activity, or conversation or not?

o What emotions arise for the children when they try to join a group, activity, or conversation?

APPENDIX B

BELONGING AS A WEB OF CONNECTIONS

As you will see in the lists to follow, the children tied their sense of belonging to their relationships with things and animals, places, people, and activities. Their sense of belonging was not stable but continually negotiated.

Connections to Things and Animals

"Something that's yours"

>Belonging means something that's yours and nobody else's.
>It's something you're having. It could be anything
>like your toys
>Let's say that your parent says that the toy belongs to you; that means you own the toy.
>It's something's that yours.
>like when you adopt your own pet

Connections to Places

"I belong here. I belong here."

>Belong, means like where you fit in.
>like you feel belonged.
>somewhere like school
>In the lunch room...The library. And outside, cause I can do gymnastics. AND I can do this (does a backbend).
>At camp. In the normal room slash art room... the dance room... the music room... the gym room and the cafeteria/lunch room and the playground, which is the park. We feel like we fit in these places because we feel like we are good at them. And we just really love the teachers that be in our places.
>I BELONG EVERYWHERE.
>in places where you're together with other people
>like my grandma's house, cause they got a lot of chickens, cock-a-doodle-doos. And because sometimes I stay with my grandma because my mama and my daddy have to go to work on the weekends, so we gonna have to spend the night with my grandma.
>Here. in the classroom. Cause it's a nice quiet place… It's warm and has a lot of chairs... And it doesn't have that much leam in it... people aren't hurting other people's feelings or being mean to each other. There's not much

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leaming in here. Cause it's just a place to talk, express your feelings about other people, and then if they do that they are mean.

we feel like we fit in our houses and in our cars. At school and at camp.

Camp makes me feel safe. And my house also makes me feel safe.

"Where you stay"

My house

Mine too. It's cool there… I can go outside… play hide-and-go-seek… and play my video games.

I just relax all day

I have all of my things there… And I can do anything I want, I guess.

Because I always live there

and I get to sleep anywhere in my house. In the living room, my brother's room, my room, on top of my bunk bed, in my mama's room. Cause they really don't care. And, I got a big yard.

and I almost always swim there

My apartment… But when I go back to Korea, I'm moving. I lived in Korea. Now I live here. I live in the Korean area.

Athens

Yeah, Athens, cause that's where I live now

and my old house.

"Where you are from"

My grandma's house in the town where my dad grew up, cause my dad pretty much knows everybody out there.

I'm Irish.

Florida and Peru and Colombia.

We feel like we fit in um, Peru. And I fit in Venezuela. She fits in Colombia, and I fit in Italy. My grandpa is from Italy.

I'm from Italy too…. but, I've never been there

And, we fit in food.

Pizza. Peruvian food. Arepas.

I fit in pasta. Because I'm Italian. Every day, um, when I go eat lunch I come back, well I always have lunch again at home and um, I always eat pasta. It's like a tradition. We can't stop eating pasta. Because it's like I have a long-time eating pasta…. Since I was born.

In Peru, they have floors different than in America. They have these floors (points to the tiles the children are using for art project). And actually, my grandpa. His house was robbed…. And the robbers, they broke down the floorings. And my mom and my stepdad and my baby brother got to go there, and my mom sent a picture to my grandpa about it. This right here was cracked everything was-- especially the clay that was in it, was broken down.

Smithville cause that, that's where I was born. And then we moved to Africa. Well my ancestors were from Africa. But I was born in the hot, hot sun. The hot, hot sun.
You were born in Africa?
No. I was born in Smithville. It's very, very hot in Smithville. I don't put any clothes on. I just wear a bathing suit, I just wear a tank, I just wear like some skinny shorts and a shirt. No jackets.
Where I lived in Korea. I was born in there.

"I always like to go to…"

the movie theater… because I love movies
School… the theme park!

Six Flags

the baseball diamond

RUSH is fun. … you be jumping on trampolines, jumping in the blocks thing

And Trail Life. It's technically like a camping group. I like it because it's with the neighbor kids and they're like my best friends ever.
Athens Skate-In… I just like to go there…. I go with my brother…. I always just skate and bunch of that stuff. But, only he can do tricks…. I can kinda do them. I can try.
the pool I like because you get to swim. I have been swimming for like two weeks now, and I really like it.

there's a pool that we always go to… And I almost always swim there

There's a three-car garage on my house. I put stuff in it, and my friends and my brothers like talk there…. And play games… because you can plug the WIFI out there.
I like Camp.
Athens Little Playhouse… because I have so many friends at Athens Little Playhouse.
Grandma GiGi's house at Perry Beach in North Carolina… I always like to go to the arcade. I like to go swimming at the beach. I like to go walk on the pier.

The mall
Justice

chick-fil-a. Menchies.
Chick-fil-A and Roll-it-Up.
and d'lishis. And menchies.
Oo. I like Menchies too.
Menchies and D'lishis. I like do-menchies... I'm gonna put do-menchies even though it's not a real place. I'm gonna make it one

Second and Charles... they sell everything. Everything that I like, I guess. I like buying the books there. There are a lot of mangas. And cool toys and stuff... other stores they have normal toys that every store would have, but at Second and Charles they have different things. Like they have a Harry Potter book shelf. And there's "Stranger Things" things.

Sam's Club because... I can't explain it. It's like all these different stores and places, because all different people go there. So, it's just like, I'm kinda the same as some of the people that go there even though I don't know them, but it's just like everybody, I can't explain it. It's like if you're reading a book. Like the book we're reading, about Rufus and Kenny. They were strangers at first, but when they made friends, they were both the same. They both liked the war game and stuff. Like some of us are different in some ways and some of us are the same in some ways. That's why I like it there.

my aunt's house. She's like really kind. She gives us everything. Even though we don't even ask for it. She'll take us to the movies, she took us to Stone Mountain I think, yay. And there was a laser show. And it was really cool, and we had lots of fun.

I like La Parilla because my um cousin Ian, he's 18 now. He had his birthday there. And that's the day I had my birthday party.

Where we've been and where we're going

Washington D.C.
I've been to Washington D.C.
I don't like New York. It's like all these people. And they never even make eye contact with you and they're like, if they bump into you they just keep walking. Then don't even say sorry.
D.C. they say sorry and they're like
Yeah, they're really nice in D.C.
They're like "Hi" and I'm like... I got to stay with my um, one of my mom's cousins, and she had a big apartment... so I'm gonna put D.C.

I'm drawing the flag of Japan.
Oh, is that where you want to go?
Yeah, because it looks lit and fun. And Thailand, too.

When I go back to Korea, I'm going to the Korean apartments, but all the apartments in Korea will be crushed. Because they will make new ones, because it's very old. And, when I go back to Korea, my mom has to go to college, and I have to go alone to my school.

The story of 9/11. It's interesting. Osama Bin Laden, he's the one who ordered all those people to crash the airplanes. But, he's the one that didn't crash the airplanes, even though he knew he was gonna get searched for it. And he was gonna die already. It's like a mystery story. He knew he was going to get searched for it. He told all those other people to do it. Why didn't he go? He knew something bad was going to happen to him? Cause he knew they were going to look for him. My friend, she asked this question, when they found him they just killed him, but she wanted to know why couldn't they torture him first, then kill him?

"I like high up places"

I liked the mountain. because it was above the clouds.

My apartment. Because it's very tall. And there are no elevators. You have to just walk up the stairs
which floor do you live on?
Umm. (Holds up one finger)
Number one? The first floor.
But this doesn't have a yard. If you open, nothing happens. There's nothing fun. If we go to these floors, it will be very fun.
Oh. What happens on the other floors?
They're really fun, cause you can see the sky.

I like the Empire State Building because, I don't know… I like high up places, and it's like really high and I like getting scared sometimes. I don't know why. And it's really high. And so, it scared me, and that's why I liked it there.

Let's try to make a second level. You go first.
I don't know how I might climb up the bamboo without falling.
It's not strong enough. It's breaking in my hand."

Connections to People

"You belong with somebody"

It's like there's a group of people that you're not like and you find a group of people that you are like and then you belong in that group

like you stay in your family because the family makes you

friends, family, home and that's all I have to say.

Friends, family, and home. Siblings?

And siblings too.

I just belong with my family.

My mom and my dad and my family make me feel safe, because they take care of me.

Ms. Young... our favorite teacher at the moment

she's really nice, she's really pretty, she's an artist.

And she gives her whole like to us, she tries her best on everything.

My teacher too.

My neighbors. Jude and Amos, they're the oldest. And they let me play on their X-box and let me go in their room sometimes, so I can play this spinny game they have.

when you have friends... it feels like you are at home with them

I used to have friends, but they moved. I forgot their names. Cause it was a long time ago. I have a friend at camp. But, my mom doesn't know her mom and I don't really know where she lives. I'm going to ask my mom could I go over to her house.

And not with others

Usually, one group is a lot nicer to you and do more stuff that you like to do and stuff, like another group they might have different stuff that you might not like.

Well, some people, when they don't want you to be in a group, they treat you badly or things like that. The kids at my old school said, "You're not even popular."

How rude.

They said, "We don't want to hang out with you. You're a drama girl, you're not even popular."

Yeah, we are the drama girls. (laughs) Drama girls normally become popular, though.

Once a boy punched me in the face. He was one of my neighbors. He came up to me and said, "Do you want to fight?" I said, "No, I don't want to fight." The other boy started chanting, "Fight, fight, fight." And then he punched me. He just came up to me and punched me in the face. My brother and my other neighbors always fight. But they play fight. They always ask, 'Do you want to fight first?' and they only fight if they want to fight. But these boys were younger, and I didn't want to fight. I didn't punch him back, because I don't hit little kids. I didn't do anything, because he was a kindergartner.

Even friends fight.

There was one girl that I played with, and my other friend wanted to play, too. I said this is only for two players. And then she got very mad, and she told me, "me or my sister are not going to your friend anymore". Then we never played with each other again. But, I have gotten in a fight with my friend at camp, and we played with each other again.

"Help you… protect you… be nice"

A good friend is like really nice
they don't really single me out
They talk to you.

They help you out.
Like when she dropped her lunch tray and her food spilled everywhere.
We helped her clean up the mess and made sure she had something to eat.
I don't like school pizza. So I gave her mine.
And I went to get her more fruit.
Teamwork.
they always protect you…when you get hurt, they're always around to help you.
I don't go anywhere without my first aid kit.
Once I went on a camping trip. And I got my toe cut open on branches.
Ouch. Did you have to get stitches?
No. And there was, uh like someone who could heal people there.
Oh.
He said to just leave it by the heat and he gave me a cast on my foot. I had to wear it for like three days.
Oh wow. But it healed?
Yeah.
I told you the story of me and the girl. right? It starts like, once this girl, she was hitting my sister

And then you hit her back to try to defend your sister.

So, you remember that girl? What if she comes up the hill while my friend is there? I already told my friend the story. I think the girl will be mean again. Well, no cause, when my mom was there, she wouldn't mess with me, she would have like a sweet voice but when my mom left she would be very mean to me and pick on me. I could tell the girl to be nice to my friend. Or, I could come out by my friend's house. And, if I come by her house, the girl who always picks on me when my mom's gone, she would be at my house, cause she doesn't know where my friend's house is, but I don't either.

They share with you.

Like when I shared my Smarties, "Who wants one?"

And when my apple was disgusting.

When it was rotten?

Yeah.

I said, "You can have mine."

"Or mine!"

I got a new one!

And I took the other one, because I'll really take any apple. I love apples.

When I didn't know what design to do, I looked around to see other people's lines.

That's what I do when I get stuck!

That's a friend.

You gotta find the right one that's not gonna bully you, that's not gonna pick on you, that's not gonna make fun of you, that's gonna stick up for you, be nice to you, and like you for who you are.

"If they're foolin… you'll laugh too"

A good friend won't call you bad words and stuff and a bad friend will call you names and stuff like that.

Kinda sounds like a bully.

Huh! No, it don't.

Do you think friends sometimes do call each other names or do things like that?

YES!

Sometimes!

Like my friends

Just to be funny? So how do you know if somebody is just being funny or somebody's being mean? Like, is there a way to tell?

If someone is joking when they're calling, you'll laugh too.

No, no.

but…

No, if they're foolin

but if they're not you'll probably just get a little sad or mad.

247

No, they ain't supposed to laugh first. You're supposed to laugh first. (laughs loudly)

So, you laugh first, and they laugh second?

Yeah, yeaahh. If they laugh first, ya'll gonna think, ya'll gonna think they're laughin at ya'll.

How do you know if someone is joking or someone is really being mean?

Because if somebody is joking they would probably just say it one time and not done it again, but if they're not joking, they would probably just keep doing it over and over and over and over again.

Oh, like when I was trying to get the other boys to pass me the papers, so I could do my part and they wouldn't. I said, "I need them. I need them. I need them." They teased me.

I need them.

I need them.

I need them.

I'm serious.

I'm serious.

Stop.

Stop.

Stop following me.

Stop following me.

Stop, stop, stop, stop, stop.

Stop, stop, stop, stop, stop (laughing)

Stooooppppp!

Stooooooopppp.

I need it now!

What?

That thing!

But sometimes, they want to say it over and over and over. Cause it was really funny. Like when I said, "That's cause you trash."

And I said, "No you trash boy."

No, you trash. You trash at "Fortnite." You trash at basketball. You trash at football. You trash at baseball.

You trash at everything boy.

So you saying I'm trash at everything?

That's what he was kind of saying.

Yes.

Well, I'm not trash at football. I'm not trash at baseball. Cause I play baseball and football and basketball.

Beat me in every sport then.

248

Okay, I would! Alright, who gave me the yellow?
You.
You is the yellow.

You see their face or maybe their voice changed if they are talking to you in a mean way
I know they are being mean because their whole voice would change tone. Sometimes they change their voice to be funny, but it depends on the way their face will look because sometimes when people get, when people are mean they change their face a little bit

I need purple and green please.
I need yellow. YEEELLLLLOW!
Hold on.
YEEELLLLLOW!
YEEELLLLLOW!
(Laughter)
Come HHHEEEERRREEE!
(Laughter)
YEEELLLLLOW! Come here!
Can everybody look up and smile?
Saaaayyy YEEEELLLLOOOWWW!
Look here and smile.
(Laughter)
Give me the YYEEELLLOOOOW!
Okay. Hold on.
(Laughter)
Okay, that's it!
Thank you for the YYEEELLLOOOOW!

"We want to be together."

Friends are friendship. There's not really a way to explain it.
You just do everything together. Like, I'm going to his house today.

When she gets here, she is going to be mad because she always wants to sit between us.
We are just going to move over here so there is a space for her.

Dude you should come back to me school, because I miss you.
Really? Really?
For real, you should. Because we are going to get a lot of new stuff. We have a jungle gym at our school.
I know. Now you have a new swing set.
Yeah. That's for the little kids. But we have a jungle gym too.

249

We got, we got a lot of swing sets at our school. We have
more than y'all think. We have like fourteen.

We're friends.
but sometimes people just don't make me happy. For example, my friends make
me sad. I wanna talk to both of my friends but, it's just we want to play
somewhere, and my other friend wants to play somewhere else.
Mmhmm.
we want to be together.
like yesterday, we had a challenge…. It was a fun challenge though. It was…
That's the only sad part is I fell on a rock and on my hand.
Oh no.
Yeah. It was a hard rock, but
It was fun, the challenge was fun
We did a challenge on who could jump
we measured how far people got. And there were levels. At first there was little
level, then we come to the middle, bigger. And then to the top. First, I try to do it⋯I
can't do it, because I feel too scared.
Oh, you can be the judge, cause you can't do it.
Yeah. Yes, I'm gonna be the judge.
Haleigh: We're friends.
We are BFF's. Goals.

It's no fun to work alone.
"Is there someone you want to work with?"
I want someone to work with me. But, I'm the very youngest in the red lanyards
(3rd -5th grade group), because I'm a little brother.
So, no one wants to work with you?
Yeah.

Can you change seats with me?
no.
Can we switch the seat?
uuhhh. No.
They want to sit together, and I want to stay in my seat.
How about we all stay in our seats, so we can stay focused
and everybody can get their coasters made.
Well, we're not gonna talk.
Yeah. We're just like connecting, like that.
But it's peaceful.
Fine, you can switch with me.

We want to be like each other

We all picked similar colors. See. We girls picked good colors together.
I just did like you, with the black.
I am going to use all of the colors to make my rainbow.
Me too!
Look at our giant markers!
Wow, they match!
Hiya!

Ohh! Yesterday, we saw these cats at my house. They were hiding under my daddy's truck.
Wow! I'm glad you found them.
Guess what? When I was outside, there was this cat under my dad's truck. He came out running and he scratched me on my finger, but now he's gone so

I don't eat pretzels.
Oh, why? You don't like them?
I don't like pretzels.
They're too nasty. Too crunchy.
Yeah.
Too salty.
Yeah. But, I'm hungry, so I'm eating them anyways.

Remember when we were at the trapeze studio and you
introduced yourself to the teacher
Yeah. When you took her name.
You said, "Hi, my name is Jane."
And then the teacher took my name. She said, "Hi, my name is Miss Jessie. Nice to meet you." And next week, she remembered. When I said, "Hi, Ms. Miss Jessie, I'm Jane." She said, "I remember you Jane."

I want to whistle, but I can't.
Can you give her some tips? How do you whistle? Do you blow in or blow out?
First, I blow in, then I blow out.
I can whistle now!
Another kid starts whistling, and I comment, "Wow you're a good whistler too."
You sound like a bird!
So it's like, you put your tongue like this.
Let me try.
There you go.

I noticed that sometimes you are cool with people borrowing your ideas and sometimes you feel like they are copying. What's the difference?

251

I don't know.

One time, you keep doing it over and over and over, so you're just making people mad. When you say stop, they don't stop.

Oh.

Once, I was inspired by someone, but they said I wasn't inspired. I copied them.

But, when you congrats them and stuff, then they say oh thanks!

Like you might ask, Can I do what you did? If that's okay?

Yeah. That's when I like it.

"But, sometimes you just want to be you"

Sometimes belonging means that you are part of them and you do the same thing as them, but sometimes you don't want to belong with them because you want to stand out.

To me, fitting in means not getting judged about simple little things. Like what color your shirt is.

Sometimes you just want to be you.

Like when my brother always gets mad when people copy him. He says, why does everyone use the same design as me?

Same. My little sister always gets mad at me for copying her too. She tells me to stop copying, but I just like her ideas.

Sometimes you just don't want to be part of them. It's like, would you want everybody to be the same as you? I mean you wouldn't, cause then everything would just be the same. Everybody would have the same things, and everybody would want the same things, and everybody would do the same things. But, if everybody is the same and only you stood out that would mean that you would be like special or something like that.

Stop copying us!

We aren't copying you!

Yes, you are! We made our clouds first!

But ours wouldn't stick.

Is copying the same as being inspired?

I explain, copying and being inspired are similar. But when you are inspired you see or hear someone do something that you think is great and you borrow their idea to make your work better.

We tried to glue our clouds to the back, but they wouldn't stick.

Your idea worked and ours didn't.

But, we want our diorama to stand out. To be unique.

It will. We are just doing our clouds like you.

No, it won't. Everyone will think it was someone else's idea.

What if they write a note next to their diorama and say they borrowed your idea, because they could not figure out how to get their clouds to stick to the back?

Still, ours won't look unique.

Miss Jess, now she is crying.

Are you okay?

I just really don't want them to use the same kind of clouds in their habitat.

Fine! We will take them down.

But, now what will we do. We need clouds.

What if you stretch out the cotton balls to make them lighter and then glue them on the back? Will they stay then?

That might work!

Let's try it.

After the kids took their clouds down I overheard:

You will never guess what they did. They stole our idea. They hung their clouds from the top of the box just like us.

Connections to Activities

We break into song and dance.

It's raining, it's pouring
The old man is snoring.
How do you know that?
Because I sing it when...
It's raining?
It's pouring, the old man is snoring.
He went to bed and be bumped his head and he couldn't get up in the morning

Work hard. Play hard. Work hard. Play hard. Work. Work. Work
You don't own me. Don't tell me what to do; don't tell me what to say
Like a raindrop. Raindrop. Drop drop.

All I do is win, win, win. No matter what, what, what.

What's your name? I must've forgot. Too many cities, too many bottles, too many thoughts.

Can you show me how to do the floss?

Do the moon walk
Dab, dab, dab... dab, dab.

Even if you're little you can do a lot. You mustn't let a little thing like little stop you.
You're gonna make it get stuck in my head, so you better stop.
Even if you're little you can do a lot.

253

The way to get something out of your head is to sing it all out.

And when I grown up…
I will go to bed late every night
I will watch cartoons until my eyes go square.
And I won't care cause I'm all grown up.

We watch.

Yesterday I looked on YouTube. And there is this video called the luckiest people who had the greatest day of their lives. One of them was when someone got the last bag of Cheetos, and they thought that they were just going to be regular like this (holds up a Cheeto) but instead they got a whole string of them, all of them attached together.

"Jurassic World" forever.
Blast the whole forest with my one and only torpedo. Hey, you remember your grandpa?
What? Grandpa.
the grandpa that died?
What grandpa that died?
Did you watch the new Jurassic World?
Yeah, I watched it. Oh, you mean the dude?
You guys are spoiling it for everyone at this table who didn't see it. I haven't seen the movie yet. Who in this room has seen Incredibles 2?
Not me.
I want to see it.
You haven't seen it yet?
But we saw "Jurassic World".
Incredibles 2 is fun
I wanna watch Descendants three, but it didn't come out yet.
Yeah, descendants three is coming out in the summer.
I watched Descendants one and two.
Me too. Descendants two came out on my birthday.
I like Uma, she is so
I wanted to be Uma for Halloween, but all the Uma costumes were gone.
Black Panther was awesome!
Wakanda forever.
"Avengers Infinity Wars" is the best. But I know "Captain Marvel" is going to be the best movie ever.

And, we game.

We fight
We play soccer and football and basketball
Remember when we made the basketball court?
We had to make it fair. We had an equal three on three. The big kids versus the small kids. No, actually, we made it be an equal four on four.
We made everything. The court. The players. The ref.
We had to make a special person to be the ref. So, he stood out.

I couldn't make the ref, because I don't know about them, but I knew we needed a basketball. I thought we could take one of the heads off the people to use for the ball, but it wouldn't come off. So, we used some clay instead. For some reason we made two balls.

Yeah. One of them is the practice ball. The road ball is a practice ball for the other team.

Oh.

Cause you know they how they practice at first?

Yeah. And, we made the audience.

You mean the fans?

It's okay. You didn't know.

I made the basketball goals, while you worked on the bleachers.

The Jaguars played the Dogs.

We **hula hoop and just hang out.**

I belong in Fortnite, because I am a great player.

I play Stoneage.

Who plays ROBO?

Me!

I got Robo.

Ooo, Minecraft.

Who has played Minecraft Naruto?

What about Minecraft Vehicular Movement?

I like Prodigy.

What number are you?

52.

57, boy.

Prodigy Math?

Yeah.

Well I am on level one hundred.

No, you're not.

Talk about adult stuff.

I feel really bad for the squirrel.

What happened to him?

I think my bus driver hit it. I felt a big bump in the parking lot when we were pulling up to camp.

I wish we could help it.

You can look at it, but don't touch it...

We know. The teacher already told us that.

Why is the sun not healing the squirrel?

Because the squirrel is dead.

In the bamboo, we play jailbreak.

If you want to play, you go in the bamboo forest and there's like a jail person standing outside and there's like a little guard in there watching you.

you're trying not to let them see you escape.

we all go run and find places to hide.

And, if you escape and they see you, they tickle you and then you become the jail person. there's no base. When you try to run back in, he can come in, he can run in and try to tag you.

sometimes we play good dungeon

If stay in your cell, you will be able to go to the good jail, where you can eat all the cake you want! But you have to behave, or you won't get any cake.

Some people want to play. But I didn't want cake. I wanted to be free. So, I stayed in the bamboo and chilled.

I found a dime!

It must be your lucky day.

It's not my lucky day, I only found a dime. I wanted to find 20 bucks. If I found 20 bucks, I would wave it around in the air. Because I want to be rich."

How do you get rich?

Work; find it on the streets. I don't know. I don't care how I get rich. I just want to be rich, so I can buy a big house and get lots of stuff. I collect money. I already have lots of money.

How much do you have?

I have one thousand dollars.

That's a story.

Nuht ah

How did you get that money? Do you do a lot of chores?

I do chores and my mom gives me money. I save up my money.

What are you saving your money for?

To buy a huge house one day. My family is already rich. My mom is a doctor. Not a doctor, doctor.

Do you mean someone who went to school a long time and got a higher degree?

Yeah. That kind of doctor.

If your family was already rich, you wouldn't have to collect more money.

My house has three floors. My house costs lots of money. My mom is the boss and she works really hard. I wish to be rich when I grow up.

We joke and play.

Hakuna matata
Hakuna matata
Do you know thee way?
What?

I said, Do you know thee way.

Who in the world is that?

That's not the question. But, do you know thee way?

I don't even know...

He's saying "thee way"

Do you know thee way?

thee way

(Laughter)

Do you know thee way? Do you know thee way?

NO!

This is teddy. Teddy says hi. Teddy says, "clap your hands". Oops. Teddy dies.

"Black Panther" sucks.

"Black Panther" does not suck.

What'd you say about Black Panther?

Why would you say something bad about Black Panther? Black Panther is awesome.

I said Black Pamper.

Black pamper?

A black diaper?

Yeah, a black pamper.

Wait. Why did he say black diaper?

Cause he's black, and he got a pamper on.

Yeah. He does have a black pamper. No. He got a panther suit on, but his diapers are black.

what if he was a black panther and he had a black diaper over his suit.

Like superman.

I think about it in the night and day. I spread my wings and fly away. I believe I can soaaaaaaaarrrrrrrrr. I believe I can die.

Wait, I believe I can fly.

Yeah! Yeah!

I believe I can touch the sky.

I believe I can die.

I think about it every night and day… I believe I can fly.

And banter.

Lamburgini. No, corvette or Ducati

Who in the world is corvette?

Did you say who in the world is corvette? Corvette is not a person.

It's a car.

Oh! Like what is the fastest car?

Lamburgini.

No, the bugatti. It can't turn that good, but it can go faster.

I know, but they look ugly.

Hey, guys! Hey!! The answer is a Ferrari.

Bugatti is. Bugatti's the fastest

Guys, the answer is a cobra.

A cobra? What is that?

What type of car you thinking of?

It's a cobra guys. Like they go one-hundred million miles per hour.

Bugatti, Bugatti. If you try to race with a Bugatti, you'd already be passed up.

The Flash is way faster.

Yeah, duh.

He can go around the world in two or three seconds.

No, not in two or three seconds.

Well in Justice 2, in Justice he can.

But a Bugatti. Have you seen a Bugatti? Look it up on YouTube. To see what a Bugatti can do. Bugatti versus sonic. Bugatti vs. sonic. Oh man.

Let us in. You can't have this space.

They're trying to get in! Help!

Let us in!

That's not how you play the game.

We don't want anyone else to come in.

And, we aren't playing anyways

Don't worry about us. Just play your game.

But you aren't playing right.

There is no base.

And you can't just stay in the bamboo. You have to run.

No, we don't. We can do what we want.

They aren't playing right.

Let's go play somewhere else.

The PS4 is the best.

Xbox. No, Xbox X.

The PS4 is way better than the Xbox. It has better quality.

Playstation 3. That's what I have.

I got a Playstation PS

I don't get how y'all do with that Playstation controller. It feels...

weird?

It feels weird in your hands. Just, the shooting, the shooting

I have my controller decorated so I can't feel nothin.

I like my controller

If you play with a Playstation, you need to try to change that thing to an Xbox remote control because that thing. You can't play with that. You should look it up right now. Xbox my X. It's hand test. It might cost a lot of money, but that thing. OoooOoo.