Navigating Cultural Identity in the Classroom

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Second-generation immigrants and bi/tri-cultural identity formation:

Literature review

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“My daughter doesn’t want to be Mexican anymore.” I had just finished explaining the theme of my Kindergarten classroom - intercultural cooperation, exploration, and identity, to my students’ parents. When my student’s mom approached me, I was shocked to see her eyes filled with tears. “My little girl is half-Mexican and half-American, but recently she has decided that she doesn’t want anything to do with Mexico,” she said. I shook my head. Six years old, and this child had already begun forging an identity in which half of her family was irrelevant. As a young teacher in an ethnically diverse school, it was important to me that all my students began to build and share a strong self-concept of their individual, family, and community cultures. In the months that followed, many parents shared similar reactions of gratitude that their children had started to express more interest in their ancestral cultures. This piqued my interest. What meaning do second-generation immigrants assign to their parents’ cultures and heritage? And, what experiences do they have navigating these identities in school? The literature review that follows highlights contemporary research on the subject and provides deeper context to the information I present in my Plan B Kindergarten-3rd grade teacher development workshops.

The definition of “second-generation immigrant” is contested amongst scholars. It has variously been described as “the children of immigrants,” immigrants who migrate before age 18, immigrants who migrate before age 12, and immigrants who migrate before age 6. Buckingham & Brodsky assert, "[unlike] their parents,... who had to adapt after migration,... second-generation individuals have largely grown up in a cultural mix of ethnic differences, social networks, bilingualism, and transnationalism that manifest in multiple ways" (in Rizzo et al., 2015). Rumbaut suggests that “second-generation immigrant” is an umbrella term that includes children of immigrants, “generation 1.75” (children who immigrated while between the ages of 0-6), “generation 1.5” (children who immigrated while between the ages of 6-12), and
“generation 1.25” (children who immigrated while between the ages of 12-18) (in Rizzo et al., 2020). It should be noted that those children who are classified as “generation 1.75” are most often identified as second generation immigrants by both their families and the public (Creese, 2018).

There is additional debate about whether a child has to have two foreign-born parents to be classified as second-generation. Portes and Rumbaut take the view that any child born to at least one foreign-born parent qualifies as second-generation because they face many of the same identity struggles as children with both-foreign parents (2014, p. 375). Regardless of whose definition qualifiers are prioritized, second-generation immigrants face a unique set of obstacles including pressure to conform to local norms, pressure to conform to the norms of their family heritage, identity confusion, and discrimination (Rizzo et al., 2020; Fernández-Reino & González-Ferrer, 2019; Creese, 2018; Portes & Rumbaut, 2014). Within the context of my own research, I define second-generation immigrants as individuals who have one or more parents who immigrated and/or immigrated themselves before age 12.

Because these youth are socialized primarily or entirely in the “new” country (Portes & Rumbaut, 2014), they are the population best suited to answer my questions about cultural identity formation and socialization. This review focuses on second-generation immigrants specifically because they occupy a unique space of being both part of a larger familial ethnic and cultural heritage while simultaneously navigating the struggle between the ethnic and cultural heritage of the spaces in which they are raised. These unique tensions and exclusions, as Brocket states, are “a result of the interaction of transnationalism, assimilation, diaspora and racialization in their lives” (2018). Such tensions have the potential to create profound stresses that remain unexpressed. As Satkunam expresses, “being a part of a diaspora is a constant negotiation of
home, identity and trauma” (2018). Hearing these diasporic voices would surely be important for their teachers, doctors, counselors, therapists, and community leaders (Berry, 1997). Furthermore, such opportunities to unpack their own experience could prove beneficial for the youth themselves - reducing assimilation stressors (Berry, 1997).

Although significant research about the lived experiences of second-generation immigrants exists in the field of Communication Studies, few scholars have researched the ways members of this population assign meaning to their experiences as receivers of two cultures in the context of Early Childhood Education (ECE). This information becomes increasingly important in a society that grows more diverse every year. In Racial and Ethnic Studies, Brocket cites a 2016 statistic by Nibbs and Brettell indicating that “children of migrants now make up almost a quarter of all youth in the United States (2018). By 2050, children of migrants will constitute approximately 93% of the population growth (Pew, 2013). Despite these numbers, the research that has been conducted to try to understand this population’s experiences and perspectives is lacking in breadth. Furthermore, teachers in the United States are still overwhelmingly white. Recent US Census data indicates an ~79% majority of white, female K-12 teachers. All other represented ethnicities contain less than ~9% each (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). Thus, in order to better serve an increasingly diverse student population, teachers need to be armed with the most current research available.

Early childhood, defined as the period of time between ages 0-8, is one of the most important developmental periods of growth and sets the foundation for all future identity development (University of Pennsylvania, 2023). Early childhood educators are uniquely positioned to address identity issues with their young students because they spend more time engaged with the children than the children’s parents do. Dotti Sani found that parents spend an
average of 59-104 minutes per day (approximately 4-7% per day) engaging in childcare-related activities (2012). Children are spending 19 percent of their day (approximately 5 hours per day) in the classrooms with their teachers (Hall & Nielsen, 2020). Thus, the impact that teachers can have on identity development is essential to investigate. Early childhood educators who teach in intentional ways can shape self-perception and self-esteem as well as reducing incidences of “racism, discrimination, hate, and oppression” within their educational communities (Wild, 2023). Teachers who are able to engage in thoughtful classroom discussions with students aid those students in the creation of identity have a profound impact on identity development (Kotler in Wild, 2023). Some may question the need for identity-based conversations in such a young group. However, babies as young as 3 months old are able to detect racial differences (Bar-Haim et al., 2006), and some toddlers can begin identifying behaviors as racial at two years old (Hirschfeld, 2008). By preschool ages 3-5, children are able to distinguish between, show preference for, and discriminate against racial groups in play (Aboud, 2008). If these children are already beginning to make such distinctions between themselves and others, what added tensions are experienced by second-generation children who may belong to more than one ethnic group, race, and community? How do they make sense and speak about their own identities?

Whereas a breadth of research exists regarding tensions between single countries of origin and host countries, research that attempts to examine the overarching themes that emerge from second-generation immigrant experiences with acculturation, biculturalism, or enculturation is scarce. This hole is significant because in a country that projects a steady growth of multicultural students, it is essential that teachers have a base understanding of the ways that culture functions within the lives of these youth. To address this, the work that follows will outline three theories that may inform our understanding of how identity is created and
communicated. First, I will investigate Michael Hecht’s Communication Theory of Identity. This theory discusses the nature of identity creation and subsequent communication as well as the ways in which we can use this theory to craft more nuanced conversations about identity expression. Next, I will use this theory to investigate the unique tensions experienced by second-generation immigrants, potential strategies for bi- and tri-cultural identity navigation used by these youth, and potential outcomes of each. Finally, I will discuss Mark Orbe’s Co-Cultural Theory as a framework for better understanding the communicative approaches these youth may take to express the identities they create.

Communication Theory of Identity:

Hecht sought to understand what identity is, how it functions in society, and how creating better understandings of identity helps humans to communicate more effectively (Hecht & Phillips, 2022, p. 221). Hecht first draws attention to the conundrums of identity. An identity approach asserts that individuals have multiple identities - that how someone displays their identity in various communicative situations will change (Hecht & Phillips, 2022, p. 221). This paints a unique problem, however. Any attempt to quantify identity needs to take into account the ways that identity is constantly changing both without over-simplifying and simultaneously without making the theory so complex it is rendered impractical (p. 222). Thus, he and his associates crafted an understanding of identity and communication as inherently linked - that, in fact, identity WAS communication and that communication IS the enactment of identity. Thus, the model for Communication Theory of Identity presents as the following:

\[ \text{Identity as Communication/Communication as Identity Enactment } \Rightarrow \text{ Communication Satisfaction} \]

In other words, Hecht’s theory suggests that we cannot separate identity from communication. They are one and the same in that communicative acts are identity enactment, and the ways that we construct our identity are rooted in communicative practices (Hecht & Phillips, 2022, p. 225).
Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) is also based on the premise that human identities are composed of four layers that cross-cut into one another. The four layers include the personal level, the relational level, the enacted level, and the communal level. While each layer has a distinct function, they cannot in practice be separated from one another. A contributor, Kaitlin Phillips, described the theory as much like a tube of “rainbow frosting” used to ice a cake. While the colors are distinguishable, they cannot be separated from one another in any meaningful way (2022). The Personal Identity is essentially the way we view ourselves. This includes labels and group-based identities, such as gender, ethnicity, religious beliefs, race, and political ideologies (Hecht & Phillips, 2022, p. 224). The Relational level intertwines with the Personal level by giving context to the labels. This layer assumes that for any identity to be communicated, there must be an opposing identity (Hecht & Phillips, 2022, p. 224). For example, a second-generation immigrant may understand that they are thus because their parents speak a different language than the local society, talk about growing up elsewhere, etc.. The third layer, Enacted Identity, examines the communicative process of displaying the identities we have adopted. For example, a second-generation immigrant may variously communicate their identity as being isolated from others, part of a larger heritage, or as individuals who emphasize other parts of themselves. Finally, the Communal Identity examines the way that others communicate to us who we are expected to be (Hecht & Phillips, p. 224). What it means to be a second-generation immigrant may be communicated differently by politicians, parents, neighbors, friends, teachers, etc. In the sections that follow, we will examine each layer of identity in terms of stressors experienced by second-generation immigrant youth.
Stressors Experienced: Ethnicity vs. Nationality

The children of migrants may have a particularly difficult time creating and communicating a stable identity because they live at the intersection of many conflicting identities. Despite being born or raised in the United States, many are treated as inauthentic - they aren’t “American enough” and they aren’t “‘Other’ enough.” Some define themselves as “other” because they can’t assimilate, others because they lack individual connection to their homeland (Brocket, 2018). Although their parents’ home country is not the U.S., many have no experience anywhere else. This makes it hard for a second-generation immigrant to define themselves as anything but American (Brocket, 2018). Applying CTI here suggests a struggle between the relational-level and communal-level identities. In this framework, second-generation identity is not so much an individual choice as a process of having one’s identity articulated by others.

Empowering these youth, then, may require greater attention to the personal-layer. Particularly, as Louie indicates, it may be helpful to view diaspora through the communicated label of *ethnicity* (2006). In *Identities*, Louie defines ethnicity as “a sense of group belonging grounded in the idea of common ancestry, history, and culture” (2006). The construction of such identities gives power back to the individual and can create “positioned belongings” that offer the promise of transnational or ethnic identities that are unique to their experience as transnational diaspora (Brocket, 2018). These “positioned belongings” allow second-generation youth to create transnational connections on their own terms while also forging ethnic identities that may or may not be authentic in the eyes of their parents and “home country” but are nonetheless valid (Brocket, 2018). Thus, the creation of positioned belongings might be understood as the attempts a second-generation immigrant youth makes to communicate an
identity that is simultaneously grounded in the personal-level and enacted for a relational and communal-level audience.

**Political, Public, and Peer Stressors:**

Second-generation immigrants are often left to the mercy of being defined and given identities out of their control (Berry & Sabatier, 2011). Brocket cites Carruter’s 2002 argument, that the national community “retains a monopoly over the right to define who or what is authentically ethnic, and the second-generation face their harsh judgments” (2018). This leaves many with “a feeling of exclusion” and a self-described sense of “in-betweenness” (Brocket, 2018). In the lens of CTI, then, these youth are in the jarring position of the relational and communal-levels of identity being given disproportionate emphasis compared to the personal-level. Because the youths feel that their identity is out of their control, their ability to communicate the identities that they choose for themselves becomes limited.

If, as Ari notes, societies construct identity, members of a diaspora often "reconstruct their identities in a strategic attempt to survive and fit in. Identities are thus dynamic, fluid, situational, and eternally incomplete" (2019, p. 68). This implies that a second-generation youth’s enacted-identity is shaped more by outside forces than by personal decision-making. However, there is hope for these youths! In recent years, the tendency for communal-level identity creation has faced significant pushback amongst scholars. Ballantyne and Podkalicka echo Levey’s assert that "it is not the business of government or politicians (or others) to complete the definition of what it means to be Australian (or, in this case American)" (2020). Immigrants themselves often weigh in on these issues, discussing one another’s heritage and identity in stark terms. Waters noted the vehement disavowal many Jamaican immigrants voiced of being called “black Americans” because of the highly politicized definition of what it means
to be “black.” Their children’s engagement with the same issue, however, was shaped by their peers and the political discussions they had at school (1994, p. 7). In Great Britain, racial politics make it difficult for many second-generation immigrant Kurds to feel truly British (Moftizadeh, Zagefka, & Barn, 2022 p. 1093). In each case, the CTI relational-levels shaped enacted identity.

Other second-generation youth strive to “Americanize” themselves in the hopes of fitting in with their peers. Son notes that while Asian American students are often considered the "model minority," they face a wealth of struggles in feeling different and unliked by their peers (2022). Oh found that even if friends and peers of other cultures express interest in Korean culture, second-generation youth often avoid sharing it. They may fear rejection and/or belief that they have a special right to the… [culture] that their non-native peers do not possess. Many also shared experiences of rejection in the past when they tried to share their cultural heritage. This leads to less likelihood in their adolescent years to share in and engage with peers about their parents' culture (2012). Such research suggests that this population may be particularly vulnerable to the relational-layer when creating personal and enacted identities. Because the relational layer offers the potential that a peer’s identity might end up being “judgemental” or “threatening”, these youth are not taking the risks of enacting their full identities.

Reflecting back on their K-12 experiences, second-generation Asian-American youth recalled feeling "isolated," "too different," or "very alone." Even students who may act like model children at school often struggle with language learning and identity negotiation and may feel resentful of their heritage (Son, 2022). During the school day, peer interactions often dictate the extent to which youth disclose or conceal various aspects of their identities. This feedback shapes their perspectives of who they are currently and who they want to become (Umaña-Taylor, 2020, p. 707). Lee further recognizes school as a "crucible" in which identities
are forged and names the following factors that contribute to this process: cultural and social norms, peer interactions, composition and diversity of student body, and promotion or rejection of both national and international values (2019, p. 451).

As with most things, the researchers found evidence for both nature and nurture in second-generation youths’ friendships and identity development. A second-generation youth’s self-identity predicted what kinds of friendships they would form, and their friends predicted what kinds of identities they constructed for themselves. Furthermore, the extent to which students felt confident in their bicultural identities mediated the extent to which others sought them out as friends. The more confident a student felt in their identity, the more likely they were to be sought out by youth of all identity types (Umaña-Taylor, 2020, p. 717).

Second-generation British Congolese students demonstrated a strong preference for the English language they experienced in public and at playgrounds to their parents’ native languages (Luanga, 2008). Such cases indicate a sense by these youth that to be accepted by their friends, they must abandon their parents’ cultural heritage. While pushback in this area might be taken on by committed parents, it is important to recognize that at this point in a youth’s life especially, it is important that the youths feel powerful and safe. Thus, CTI components might advocate for increasing the active discussions about the child’s mental schemas, which may then help a youth gain greater confidence in enacting their personal identity.

**Parental and Family Stressors:**

Despite the pressure from peers and society to change, parents maintain a powerful role in maintaining and developing a second-generation’s bicultural identity. Their influence tends to shift their children’s beliefs in one of two directions. Either the children draw strong, confident bonds to their parents’ homeland, or they abandon their parents’ culture in an attempt to fit in.
The degree to which a second-generation immigrant embraces or moves away from their parents’ culture(s) is influenced by a number of factors. First, immigrant parents' lives are frequently characterized by physical movement, but second-generation immigrants' lives are frequently characterized by emotional/intellectual movement (Ballantyne & Podkalicka, 2020). Second-generation immigrants may face much greater difficulty with the navigation of cultural identity and loyalty than their parents. Their "sense of home" is profoundly different from the previous generation (Louie, 2006). Applying CTI to the role of parents in second-generation immigrants’ formation of identity requires understanding of interpenetration. Interpenetration recognizes that because layers of identity cannot neatly be separated from one another, one facet of identity may be shaped by a number of interlocking factors (Hecht & Phillips, 2022, pp. 224-225). In this instance, a child’s communicated identity is shaped by their relationship to their parents. In other words, because they are their parents’ child, they view themselves in terms of labels that apply to them through their parents. For example, a child may view themselves as having a deep bond with their heritage (personal) and as their parents’ child (relational). Interpenetration would suggest that these youth may view themselves as having a deep bond with their heritage because they are their parents’ child.

Although a parent’s view of the home culture may be tied to personal experiences and growth, a second-generation does not have to view that culture the same way. In other words, “intergenerational reasons for ethnic identification are not the same” (Oh, 2012). A study of Mexican-American children further highlighted the importance of parents in positive identity construction. It found that parents who had a strong sense of ethnic heritage worked to teach their children “ethnic values, traditions, norms, and Mexican culture” (Louie, 2006). As a result, the second-generation children formed a bond with their ethnic heritage. “Thus, it could be said
that the parent's way of relating to the host vis-à-vis the natal culture influences the children's attitudes towards the host cultures” (Louie, 2006). Second-gen immigrants' connection to their parents' homeland is often a product of older generation's connections to the homeland. If their parents, grandparents, aunts & uncles, etc. focus on maintaining that connection, they likely also will to some extent (ICA, 2012, p. 9). Overall, the second-generation immigrant youths tend to foster strongest connection to their parents' homeland when the parents themselves play an active role in facilitating international media use, native languages, and familial emphasis on heritage (ICA, 2012, p. 21).

Conversely, parents, society, and peers’ definitions of ethnicity, identity, and belonging are often a source of intense stress. By example Waters states,"the children of black immigrants in the United States face a choice about whether they will identify as “black Americans” or whether they will maintain an ethnic identity reflecting their parents' national origins" (1994, p. 3). This is stressful because the extent to which a child chooses to communicate a cultural identity that is fundamentally different from their parents’ identities may cause interpenetration dissonance. If a child sees themselves as respectful of culture because they are their parents’ child but also as socially aware because of their friends, two interpenetrating layers of their identity may come into conflict. Their decisions to accept and communicate one or the other identity often mark turning points in their intersectional ability for socioeconomic growth and stability. Unfortunately, those who choose to identify as "black Americans" often experience a downward trend in socioeconomic mobility relative to their parents (p. 8), whereas those who chose to identify with their specific family heritage were more likely to establish or maintain a middle-class lifestyle (p.10). Such findings highlight the larger pull between familial and societal values in shaping the life outcomes of these youth.
Some immigrant children do not want to be seen only as the sum of their ancestral heritage. Just under half (41%) of 16-25-year-old second-generation Latino immigrants studied preferred to think of themselves as belonging to their parents' country, 1/3 called themselves American, and the rest viewed themselves as Latino or Hispanic" (Pew Research, 2009). This latter trend of viewing themselves as part of a much larger ethnic culture is increasing for both pan-Latino and pan-Asian-identifying youth in the United States (UCA, 2012, p. 15). Even those second-generation immigrants who want to identify with their parents’ cultures may not be allowed to because of historical biases. Cruz-Manjarrez found that some Yalalag and Zapotec parents say that their children do not qualify to be described as Yalalag or Zapotec because they weren't born into hardship, poverty, and suffering (2013, pp. 67-69). In terms of CTI, these youth are facing conflicting versions of communal identity. Whether the children choose to enact an intercultural identity based on their parents’ country(ies), a larger pan-ethnic identity, “American” identity, or otherwise, is based in large measure on the intersectional tension between their relational and communal identity levels. Conversely, when they are defined by their parents or society as non-conforming “others,” part of their ability to choose an identity for themselves is limited by a communal force that seeks to decide for them.

Discrimination and stigma always have negative effects. Whether based on outside discrimination or within their own families, students discriminated against on the basis of race or ethnicity feel disconnected not only with the country they live in, but also with their parents' country and culture. This places these youth in a dangerous space where they feel that they belong nowhere (Lee, 2019, p. 459). Sometimes, immigrant youth feel a tension between the burden and honor of representing their parents' communities based on the clothing they wear. This is both a source of discrimination against them and an opportunity for them to share their
values with others (Rizzo et al., 2020, p. 7). Overall, many second-generation immigrants to the US prefer US-based media, English, and identification both because it is so prevalent in their daily lives and because it helps them escape the stigma and discrimination they might otherwise face (ICA, 2012, p. 4).

Language is an important facet of cultural transmission, and the role of language in a second-generation immigrant’s life is shaped by both parental and societal means. Whether parents encourage cultivation of multiple languages is the biggest indicator of whether or not a child will learn both English and their parent language. The children who maintained the strongest grasp of their parents' language and culture were those who felt the strongest familial bonds (Park & Sarkar, 2007, p. 223). Conversely, loss of language creates distance from parent culture and greater assimilation to local culture (Shi & Lu, 2007, p. 317). The loss of parent languages often occurs shortly after children begin grade school. Because they are likely to be fully immersed in English, they learn to regard the other language as inessential unless treated as such by their parents (Park & Sarkar, 2007, pp. 223-224). During adolescence, loyalty often shifts from the parent's language to the societal language. While this may have immediate social benefits, second-generation children who abandon their parents' languages have a harder time establishing emotional connections with family and friends in parent's home country. Furthermore, not only do students who abandon their parents' languages have a harder time connecting to parental cultures, they actively form prejudice against parental cultures (Luanga, 2008).

Co-Cultural Theory:

To gain a nuanced understanding of the ways in which these identities come together in practice, I also draw on Mark Orbe’s Co-Cultural Theory. Orbe’s work suggests that culture and
identity communication cannot be separated from one another. Just as Hecht and Phillips assert that identity is communication and vice versa (p. 222, 2022), Orbe argues that any meaningful presentation of culture is enacted identity and that these identities are created as coexisting cultures (ie. co-cultures) that live both together and as distinct identities (pp. 1-2, 1998). These co-cultures may include race, ethnicity, class, religion, age, etc. and are conceptualized as co-cultures in an endeavor to avoid the stigma attached to labels such as “minorities” or “subcultures” (Orbe, p. 1, 1998). An important distinction of this theory is its emphasis on power as a force in creating and shaping enactment of cultural identities which are no less relevant in shaping group communication than those considered dominant (ie. heterosexual, middle-to-upper-class, European-American men) (p. 2).

Orbe contends that any member of any non-dominant population is inherently a member of a “co-culture” (1998, p. 8). Within these co-cultures, members must determine how to interact with the dominant society. These communication acts are described as “performances” (p. 14). Orbe places these communicative decisions along a three-by-three grid with assimilation, accommodation, and separation as the three primary frameworks. Within these frameworks, a co-cultural member can choose an aggressive, assertive, or non assertive approach. Why and how a member chooses to approach a given interaction with a member of the dominant society is informed by their ongoing analysis of the associated costs and rewards (Orbe, 1998, p. 102). The framework, along with some of its accompanying discursive actions, is provided below (in Bell et al., 2014).
Assimilation occurs when a member of the diaspora abandons their previous/ancestral identity in favor of expressing the norms of the dominant culture (Orbe, 1998, p. 90). This may happen intentionally or unconsciously. In the case of my Kindergarten student, this looked like the rejection of all things “Mexican” in favor of a ‘white’ ‘American’ identity. A second strategy, Separation, swings to the opposite side of the pendulum. Those who separate seek to cling to family or other non-dominant culture(s) and avoid co-cultural discourse with other groups (Orbe, 1998, p. 93). Finally, Accommodation occurs as the marriage of the cultures. The individual chooses which parts of each co-cultural identity to express and blends them together (Orbe, 1998, p. 92; Brocket, 2018) to create their cohesive “new identity” (Hall, 1996).

Assimilation and Separation:

Brocket argues that assimilation is problematic in that it creates a “zero sum game” for second-generation immigrants. The abandonment of familial culture may result partially in a loss of self (2018). However, there is also great potential in marrying the processes of assimilation.
with a transnational identity (Kivisto; Levitt; Levitt & Glick-Schiller in Brocket, 2018). Berry suggests other potential lenses for acculturation: reactive, creative, and delayed. These lenses promise the potential for multi-group change, the development of new, unique cultures, and the gradual development of identity over time (1997). Separation, on the other hand, may occur when a co-cultural group perceives that an attempt to assimilate or integrate cultural values and norms is futile. These groups strive to “create their own rules” in an attempt to deal with the perceived realities of life that exclude them (Orbe, 1998, p. 93). Whereas the intention of the separation may or may not be rooted in a desire for conflict, Berry argues that that is often the result (1997, p. 10). Thus, the tendency toward separation is unlikely to be the method of cultural identity communication that second-generation youth will find most empowering.

**Accommodation:**

Because their experience is wholly unique, second-generation youth construct identities that blend both their family experience and new national upbringing. Second-generation immigrants are often given and claim hybrid pan-ethnic labels such as "Latina" and "Asian" rather than being viewed as specifically from one or another place. They may use this to communicate a more general conception of their identity as part of a larger intercultural group. For second-generation immigrants in NYC and London, there is a focus on decentralizing identity. They live in their physical world, but a part of them also exists within the imagined world and society of their parents' homeland (ICA, p. 6). Ultimately, a youth's determination of how much to identify with their parents' culture v. national culture was a personal decision and was largely unrelated to the decisions made by their peers or parents. This suggests that ultimately, bicultural identity is a personal choice (Umaña-Taylor, 2020, p. 719).
Identity is expressed differently depending on the situation. "Someone can be religious and traditional at home..., adventurous and unconventional with friends, recreation-minded with others, and achievement-oriented with colleagues" (p. 10). Oh cited Espiritu, 2002, in suggesting that second-generation immigrants often use ethnic culture and U. S. as symbolic frames of reference when constructing identities (2012). Thus, a second-generation immigrant forms what Hall dubs “new ethnicities” - a blend of ethnic culture and transnational identity (1996). Such identities require thoughtful consideration on the part of the diasporic youth. Which cultural norms should be maintained? How do they make sense of a bicultural identity that by definition cannot belong properly to one land or the other? Lee’s study had a particularly interesting finding: "contrary to expectations of generational assimilation, the second-generation is actually significantly less likely than the first generation to express assimilated identity, they are also not significantly more likely to express separated ethnic identity" (p. 458). In other words, these students were less likely to think of their identity in black and white terms. They do not consider themselves fully part of either group, and are okay with that.

Moftizadeh et al. similarly found that Kurds who were able to form new “place-based” identities were better able to incorporate cultural customs and values from both their parents’ homeland and from the places in which they were raised (2022). One theoretical frame for understanding these contextualized identities are through Bhabha’s “third spaces.” In this model, "first space" is the heritage culture, "second space" is the host culture, and "third space" is the creation of the negotiation of multiple identities. Use of a third space does not suggest that the first or second spaces are superior or inferior to one another. Rather, they allow for differences and make space for individual choices (in Son, 2022).
The 2012 International Communication Association encouraged viewing identity in terms of layers of meaning. People have not only an individual identity, but a family, local, ethnic, religious, sociodemographic, state, national, professional, etc. identity. Looking at oneself in terms of these multiple identities can create greater opportunities for identity exploration and discussion with others. For second-generation immigrants, it is a reminder that they do not have to necessarily be one identity or another. Both are a part of who they are and thus, the exploration of these multiple identities provides chances for greater connection with those around them of all identities (ICA, 2012). Having a strong connection to the host country in combination with embracing ethnic identity created the strongest sense of life-satisfaction, self-esteem, and mental health out of all the tested scenarios. Only embracing one's home country, however, had negative effects. Thus, it is important for these youth to form a strong, stable connection to their heritage and their current homeland to reach full potential (Berry & Hou, 2019, p. 166). Similar to Brocket’s definition of integration, and Orbe’s accommodation, Berry advocates for interculturation - “the set of processes by which individuals and groups interact when they identify themselves as culturally distinct” (1997). Integration and interculturation both point to a newer, more holistic method that may be helpful for second-generation immigrants trying to create identity.

**Assimilation, Rejection, or Integration/Accommodation?**

Of course, the processes of reaching any or all of these acculturation frames is as varied as the approaches themselves. According to Berry, they vary in difficulty and, by default, outcome. He suggests three factors that may influence this are diasporic voluntariness to change, mobility between cultural locales, and permanence in the resulting sense of identity (1997). Orbe’s work similarly emphasizes differences between fields of experience, ability, situational
context, and perceived costs and rewards within communicative contexts in shaping communicated identity (1998, pp. 93-104). Berry and Sabatier approach these tensions by discussing shifting a societal frame of interculturalism for multiculturalism. Interculturalism allows for expression of diverse identities provided that those expressing them also conform to local cultural behaviors. Multiculturalism, on the other hand, problematizes the idea of local culture as being a single, salient thing. By disrupting the narrative of the dominant culture as comprising all of the cultural values of a geographic area, space is created for new cultural identities, exploration, and inter-group growth (2011). Thus, if advocated for within a community, multiculturalism might become an avenue by which second-generation immigrants can explore their identities in new ways. Comănaru adds to the theory of multiculturalism two additional profiles of bicultural identity development: alternation (contextual cultural code-switching) and fusion (the blending of multiple cultures) (2018). While Orbe argues that there is no such thing as a “correct” approach to co-cultural navigation (p. 106), the above research seems to indicate that an assertive-accommodating approach may result in the highest life-satisfaction outcomes for those navigating co-cultures. Because assertive approaches “take into account both an others’ needs… (in) a clear attempt to promote their own rights, needs, and desires without violating the rights of (dominant or non-dominant) others” (1998, p. 105) and accommodation further allows for collaboration between multicultural identities (p. 92).

**Finding New Ways to Construct Identity**

Whereas earlier second-generation immigrants may have had a harder time connecting with their parents' culture(s) on a regular basis, the shift towards globalization, travel, and access to international media has made "the homeland" much more accessible to these youth. This indicates that these youth may have a better ability to simultaneously form strong national
identity and ethnic/transnational identity (Gowricharn, 2020, pp. 110-111). Second-generation immigrants in the 21st Century have a unique ability to explore their multicultural life because, unlike 20th Century immigrants, there is a much higher tolerance for and encouragement of, social differences. Because of this, these youth may be more likely to have access to accommodation as a communicative stratagem. Thus, these children are uniquely poised to embrace aspects of both their parents and their country's cultures (Cruz, Manjarrez, 2013, p. 54). Hecht and Phillips might view this as a communal-identity-level construct that provides greater space for positive personal-identity-level communication.

None of the aforementioned frames are relevant unless they are placed within the context of active identity construction. In this respect, there are a multiplicity of scholarly articles delineating methods used by second-generation immigrants. In particular, Pinnamshetty highlights the connections made possible by growing technologies that provide second-generation immigrants with “‘neutral building blocks’ to construct and shape their ethnicity in new ways.” Such technologies bring the “global to the local,” allowing for the construction of blended identities. Most importantly, such identities may be constructed on an individual level through “revision and reinvention of these traditional identities” (Pinnamshetty, 2021). Satkunam’s research, however, indicated that there is concern amongst first generation immigrants that the fusion of cultural traits diffuses the “purity” of their home culture. In response, she cites Hall, 1994, in advocacy for the defense of hybridity - the process of multicultural navigation - as a way for second-generation youth to embrace the multiplicity of identities that they belong to (2018). Thus, “purity” of culture becomes a myth to be challenged in order to survive their changed circumstances (Satkunam, 2018) or, in terms of CTI, an attempt
to face communal-identity-level norms can be challenged by youth who opt instead to change the narrative about their personal and relational-level identities.

Hybridity can also be viewed through transnational media. Oh explored the ways in which second-generation Korean American adolescents constructed identity through the use of popular Korean dramas, finding that if the youth felt secure in watching the shows, they felt a stronger kinship with Korea (2012). Pinamshetty similarly stressed the importance of media in identity creation. In this research, Indian Americans were interviewed about their connection with Bollywood as a branch of Indian culture. The findings indicated that watching the movies fostered a “community of sentiment” in which diaspora fused self-concept with an imaginary view of Indian culture. This fusion allowed for both individual adaptation and a stronger group identity (2021). Growing international media empires (ex. Korean wave; Bollywood, etc.) are also shaping the ways in which second-generation youth interact with their home cultures as well as shaping their use of ethnic "language, identity, fashion, gender role patterns, and social intercourse." 72% of the second gen Hindustani youth studied indicated that exposure to Bollywood increased their sense of ethnic connection and pride (Gowricharn, 2020, p. 122).

Such approaches take an assertive-accommodating approach as they seek to reconstruct what it means to be part of multiple cultures in a way that empowers both in and out-group members to do the same.

Reinvention of culture can also happen through more traditional lenses. Satkunam cites the use of cultural art as a tool through which second-generation Sri Lankan Tamil women find inspiration in the navigation of multiple identities (2016). Brocket highlights the tendency of Palestinian parents to take their children back to visit in the hopes of instilling their homeland’s “culture, language, and religion” (2018). Weller & Turkon also highlight food as a source of
Food meets both physical and symbolic needs. Because it engages all five senses, it is also closely linked to memory. In the case of immigrant identity formation, the use of ethnic or national foods can shape a person's perspective of themselves, their family, and their place within society. This connection is so salient that a lack of access to ethnic food is correlated with the loss of heritage and identity (Weller & Turkon, 2015, p. 58). Mukherjee and Pattnaik (2021) and Pinnamshetty (2021) further cite the use of ethnic clothing and music as a way in which college aged second-generation immigrants express their dual identities. “Such hybrid identities may be more or less asymmetrical” (Comănaru, 2018), but are nonetheless an embrace of biculturalism. As Comănaru expresses, these identities might be thought of as symbolically similar to a Russian Matryoshka doll - wherein there are many layers of cross-cutting identities, or a marble cake (2018) or, as Phillips’s rainbow frosting (2022) - wherein identities are so interwoven that they cannot be readily separated.

**A Point of Debate: Is Identity Construction Available to Everyone?**

The ability of second-generation immigrants to express themselves in multiethnic ways may, however, be limited by outside forces. Berry argues that our advocacy for individual growth and expression is “based on the assumption that non-dominant groups and their individual members have the freedom to choose how they want to acculturate” (1997). Unfortunately, this is not always the case. Orbe analyzes these tensions in terms of the power dynamics at play both within and amongst co-cultural groups (1998, p. 2). One or both of the cultures may regard the second-generation children as not being authentically belonging. In an interview with a second-generation immigrant student, Brocket found that many identify as American, but are not accepted as such by the American public. Such cases often occur within frames of microaggressions (2018) and may be conceptualized as a tension between outward communal
identity groups and the personal and enacted levels of identity (Hecht & Phillips, 2022) as constructed by engagement with cultural groups that are more relationally or institutionally dominant (Orbe, 1998). Brocket’s research participants identified themselves as “‘too American for the Palestinians and too Palestinian for the Americans’, or similarly ‘not Arab enough for the Arabs and not American enough to the Americans’” (2018). Potter and Philips research suggests that immigrant children feel “caught between two worlds, with feelings of not being wanted by either those in the homeland or the hostland” (2006). Sziarto writes of Chinese Americans feeling “trapped between the cultures of their immigrant parents and mainstream, white Anglo-America” (2003).

The burden of conformity to one or the other culture may result in negative self-efficacy and, as Berry suggests, the transition of an American “melting pot” to an American “pressure cooker” (1997). Brocket’s research found that children whose first generation parents forced them to conform to their ethnic heritage developed a sense of resentment and chose to abandon that culture as an act of rebellion (2018). Similarly, ChenFeng found that second-generation adult children felt misunderstood by parents and were perceived as being “too American” (2015). The pressure to conform by parents in particular is stressed by Satkunam, who argues that the burden of maintaining real or imagined culture is presented by parents who expect children to pass along their home culture (2018). However, Louie argued that pressure from immigrant parents who want their children to embrace their heritage doesn’t necessarily create a stronger sense of cultural identity in their child (2006).

**Outcomes of Self-Efficacy in Identity Construction**

Despite the dire, perhaps fatalistic realities of pressures on second-generation immigrants, there is hope. In fact, as Mukherjee states, “American values of individualism, freedom of
religious beliefs and cultural practices, allow immigrants the liberty to practice any culture” (2021). Although individuals may engage in microaggressions, the overall culture of Americanism may be welcoming to the development of multiple ethnic and cultural identities. Berry found that as second-generation youth were able to engage in sociocultural adaptation - the active process of working through daily problems, exploring new context, and navigating school, work, and social situations - found higher self-efficacy. Comănaru found that in cases where immigrants were able to form a strong sense of self-efficacy, biculturals perceive their identities as harmonious and adaptable to context (2018). This sets the stage for a co-cultural identity communication grounded in assertive behaviors.

Berry also cites the benefits of psychological adaptation to multiple identities - a strong sense of self, good mental health, and overall greater life satisfaction in the new home (1997). As second-generation immigrants were able to embrace their dual identities, they found that upon a visit to their parents’ homeland, they were labeled “Americans.” However, they formed a fusion of their bicultural status that they were proud of and thus, others’ labeling of them was no longer salient in the same way (2018). Mukherjee and Pattnaik call this creation of dual identities “lived hybridity” because the formation of identity is “fluid, emerging and entails an element of volition and choice” (2021). Sen Das’s work further illustrates the benefits of multicultural identity. second-generation immigrants were found to have better mental health, better behavior, “better school adjustment and have similar levels of life satisfaction and self-esteem compared with their native peers” (2018). In many respects, well-being in work, school, relationships, and family connections were correlated with the formation of a strong bicultural identity in second-generation youth (Sen Das, 2018).
Concluding Thoughts:

The consensus amongst scholars seems to be an advocacy for the creation of unique cultural identities determined by individual second-generation immigrants, but shaped by their loved ones and local communities. While Orbe advocates for the validity of each approach to co-cultural communication, I support the assertion by other scholars that an assertive-accommodation approach will lead to the highest outcomes for second-generation immigrant youth. If we are to become more culturally-informed and potentially even adopt Berry’s multicultural frame, there must be an increase in advocacy for and discussions surrounding bi and tri-cultural identities. The formation of such identities is predicated on understanding the interpenetrating levels of CTI. The extent to which these layers intermingle based upon considerations of power deserves further study. This literature review also revealed a gaping hole in the field. Most of the work regarding second-generation immigrant youth also seems to focus on teenagers and young adults rather than on children. While there may be a variety of reasons for this, this is an area of research that is critically unexamined. My project, then, attempts to take the information we have about these youth and make it accessible to an audience of K-3 teachers. It is my hope that continuing work in this field will recognize the essential role that early childhood plays in the development of identity and biases. Empowered children create confident, nuanced identities that allow for creative and fulfilling self-expression through life. As researchers and advocates, we have the opportunity to begin these conversations. What an encouraging thought.
References


Plan B Workshop Outline:

Expected timing: ~ 2 hours - will take a ten-minute break after Slide 30.

Objectives: At the conclusion of this workshop, teachers will be able to:

- Identify the unique set of challenges that second-generation immigrants face.
- Explain the key points of Hecht’s “Communication Theory of Identity” and Orbe’s “Co-Cultural Theory” to parents, other teachers, and district officials.
- Advocate for their second-generation students by addressing elements of Communication Theory of Identity and Co-Cultural Theory in creating inclusive lesson plans.

Introduction:

- Why am I here?
- I am a former Kindergarten teacher!
  - Share story of Kindergarten mom:
    - Heading into my first year of teaching, I had big plans about my classroom theme: Around the World in 180 days. Many of my students were first or second-generation immigrants, and I wanted to honor the cultural heritage of each child. Each month, I planned to emphasize a different geographic area of the world. We would discuss various cultural groups from each area and investigate our ties to them as a class. These discussions in class would walk hand-in-hand with conversations that happened at home. Each of these objectives aligns with Utah Core’s social studies four curriculum goals: identifying similarities and differences between individuals and families, recognizing the roles and
responsibilities of being a good citizen, using geographic terms and tools, and identifying many different ways that humans meet their needs (UEN, 2023).

- On back-to-school night, I introduced this theme to my students’ parents. Afterward, a parent approached me, and I was shocked to see her eyes filled with tears. “I am so grateful that you are doing this theme. My little girl is half-Mexican and half-American, but recently she has decided that she doesn’t want anything to do with Mexico. She told me, “I don’t want to be Mexican anymore.” In the months that followed, many parents shared similar reactions of gratitude that their children had started to express more interest in their ancestral cultures. However, when I tried to talk about these experiences with other teachers, they would express how brave they thought I was and indicated that they often felt uncomfortable with or unable to spend much time on social studies. But there’s a problem here. What happens when teachers are unwilling or unable to have these conversations with their students, especially their students whose parents are not native to the United States and who may be conflicted about their cultural identity?

- This experience and others led me back to Utah State University, where I decided to pursue a Master’s degree in Communication Studies with a research focus on intercultural communication. I wanted my research to empower you and other teachers and, most especially, the students we work with!

- So why am I here? Because I’m not afraid of culture and I don’t want you to be, either! I am here because I believe that integrating social studies into classroom life and conversation is dangerously underutilized in K-3 classrooms. Today I argue that a child’s
ability to navigate their own identity is as critical as their ability to read, write, and do basic math.

- My research process:
  - The materials I present today are the result of my overall research question: What kinds of cultural experiences are second-generation immigrant children having at school and at home and how does this shape their creation of unique identities?

My research examines this question in three ways:

  - What do scholars have to say about second-generation immigrant children and identity navigation?
  - What do former K-3 second-generation immigrants have to say about their identity navigation at home and school?
  - What do current K-3 teachers say about social studies within their classrooms?

- This presentation is why I’m here. But, why are YOU (the teachers) here today?

First and foremost, I know that as teachers, you are the most powerful people I know. You can and do make a difference everyday!

Today’s Objectives: At the conclusion of this workshop, teachers will be able to:

  - Identify the unique set of challenges that second-generation immigrants face.
  - Explain the key points of Hecht’s “Communication Theory of Identity” and Orbe’s “Co-Cultural Theory” to parents, other teachers, and district officials.
  - Advocate for their second-generation students by addressing elements of Communication Theory of Identity and Co-Cultural Theory in creating inclusive lesson plans.
I will make an argument for my claims today and ask that you simply do the following three things:

- Listen carefully
- Record your thoughts
- Ask questions of me and of yourself

- At the conclusion of this presentation, I encourage you to decide for yourself about my proposal. Will you endeavor to apply what you’ve learned? Why or why not?

**Introduce the Issue: 2 minutes**

- Provide statistics

  - According to the most recent Census records, 10% of children in Cache County are part of immigrant families (United States Census Bureau, 2022).
  - Across the United States, the number jumps to 25% (United States Census Bureau, 2022).
  - By 2050, children of migrants are expected to comprise approximately 93% of population growth in the U.S. (Pew, 2013).

It is important for us to understand who we are talking about when referring to second-generation immigrants. Various scholars define second-generation immigrants in multiple ways:

- Children born after the immigration of parents
- Children who immigrated before age 6
- Children who immigrated from ages 6-12
- Children who immigrated from ages 12-18
- Children with at least one immigrant parent
- Children with both immigrant parents

- Today we’ll use Portes & Rumbaut’s definition, which includes any child with at least one immigrant parent who was born after their parent(s)’ immigration, or before age 6 (2014). I chose this definition because much of the extant research suggests that after age 6, children’s processes of socialization more closely resemble first-generation immigrants.

- The issue: Immigrant children face multiple tensions as they try to create a personal cultural identity

- What is identity construction?
  - In Communications Studies, there are many theories about what identity construction means and how we go about creating it. Today I will discuss two of these theories with you. First, we will look at Michael Hecht’s “Communication Theory of Identity” and identify the ways that identity construction is multifaceted for all students. Next, we will examine Mark Orbe’s “Co-Cultural Theory” and identify how its principles apply specifically to our second-generation immigrant students.

**Michael Hecht’s Communication Theory of Identity:**

- Hecht’s work strives to answer three fundamental questions: First, what is identity? Second, why do we need theories about identity? Finally, how can we use what we know about identity to communicate more effectively?

- CTI is based on the premise that communication IS identity and vice versa. In other words, we can’t communicate without expressing our identity in some
manner, and our identity is the way we communicate our understanding of ourselves in relation to the rest of the world!

- CTI says that there are four intersecting layers of identity: Personal, Relational, Enacted, and Communal. Let’s define each.

  - Personal - the labels we give ourselves - race, gender, ethnicity, religion, political beliefs, favorite things, etc.

  - Relational - how we understand ourselves in terms of those around us. For example, you only know whether you are tall or short based on your height in relation to other people. Other categories in this layer might include father, sister, aunt, friend, husband, child, teacher, officer, leader, shy, extroverted, etc.

  - Enacted - how we show our identities to other people as a result of the first two layers. For example, if you view yourself as shy around strangers, but loud around your friends, you will communicate in these ways.

  - Communal - how your identity is defined by groups and societies outside yourself. This might include societal constructs about what it means to be “a good teacher”, “a good mom”, and “lazy”. This includes the ways that media, politicians, groups, and literature define various identities and the roles they play in our society.

- Clear as mud? Think of these layers as rainbow frosting on a cupcake. The layers of color are distinct from one another, but you cannot separate them even if you want to! They all play into and build upon one another.

Mark Orbe’s Co-Cultural Theory:
- Next, we’re going to unpack Orbe’s Co-Cultural Theory, then we’ll look at some examples.

- Co-Cultural Theory extends our understanding of identity to say that each of our layers of identity might be thought of as “co-cultures.” Specifically, a co-culture is any culture that does not constitute the “dominant” identity. For example, race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sex, and political beliefs would each be considered co-cultures.

- Orbe says that there are three basic ways that we can approach these identities:
  - Assimilation: This means that the person decides to abandon the co-culture in favor of performing the identity of the dominant culture.
  - Rejection: This approach takes the opposite view. Those who engage in rejection claim their co-culture as the only culture that they express. They reject everything having to do with the dominant culture in favor of creating their own rules.
  - Accommodation: This approach takes a more measured view than the first two. Rather than privilege one or the other co-cultures exclusively, accommodation allows the person to express whatever parts of each culture feels best to them.

- The three stages can also be considered in three ways as pictured here: Non-assertive, Assertive, and Aggressive. Show chart, briefly touch on assertive, non-assertive, and aggressive difference.

Setting the Stage: Two Theories in Action:

- Let’s look at these two theories in action with three short example stories to illustrate 3 points.
  - The issue of identity construction is global: At the 2022 Beijing, China Winter Olympics, three second generation Chinese-American athletes...
faced intense international scrutiny. Olympic figure skaters Nathan Chen and Zhu Yi and Olympic freestyle skier Eileen Gu were all born in the United States, but while Chen opted to compete for the U.S. in the games, Gu and Yi decided to represent China. After each winning gold medals, Chen was denounced by Chinese mass and social media as a “traitor” who “insulted ‘his’ country,” while Gu was hailed as “the pride of China.” Yi, who changed her first name from Beverly to be more “patriotic,” underperformed, falling during her final event. She was accused of “bringing shame to her adopted country and #Zhuhasfallen gained over 200 million views on Chinese social media Weibo in the hours before it was removed.” Across the world, mass and social media users weighed in. Purely because these athletes were second-generation immigrants, their ability to self-identify became the subject of international discourse (CNN Staff, 2022).

- Think-pair-share. What layers of identity are you seeing here? Which co-cultures are at work?

- Discuss

  - Possible examples:
    - Personal - athlete
    - Relational - athlete FOR China/US
    - Enacted - speaking Chinese v. English; choosing one country over another; changing name to Chinese name
- Communal - public reaction to each athlete; traitor v. hero v. embarrassment, etc.
- Co-cultures: second-generation immigrants; gold medalists; ex-patriots of the U.S., etc.
- The issue of identity construction is national: In 2012, researcher Oh found that Korean-American adolescents are embarrassed to share Korean culture with non-Korean peers. Even amongst themselves, Korean-American youth labeled one another as being “too Korean” and not up-to-date with American standards as well as “not Korean enough.” The right to define oneself as Korean or American was hotly contested and became a source of both frustration and shame for many of these youth (Oh, 2012).
  - Think - pair - share: What layers of identities do you see here? What co-cultures?
- The issue of identity construction is local and personal: I asked my student research participants how they felt about their bicultural identity. One participant said:
  - “[Now that I’m in college], it’s never too late to be Mexican...Unfortunately, I feel like [in grade school] there was more of a separation than a connection… It has been hard to feel that sense of connection because, like, more often than not, it (talking about my heritage) was a little divisive.”
Think-pair-share: Let’s take this one step farther now. Which approaches to co-cultural theory have we seen? Where has there been assimilation? Accommodation? Rejection?

I also asked these students what they wished other students who are not immigrants understood about their experience. Here are some of their answers:

- “I feel like this is really essentializing, but I think people need to stop being so judgmental. During Covid, people who even looked Chinese got the back end of a lot of stuff. I would just say that people need to have a greater understanding before making those kinds of judgments.”

- “A lot of people didn’t really even know. They thought I was just a ‘tan white kid’. I knew how to act at home, but I had to learn to treat people a little bit different when they aren’t too familiar with how I act.”

- “Growing up, people didn’t think I was Samoan. People assumed that I spoke Spanish. They didn’t ask; they just assumed. I just wish people understood more. Just because I might look like a more dominant race doesn’t mean I’m Hispanic or Latina.”

- “[I wish they understood] that I don’t belong to one side or the other, but that I belong to both. I feel like when I was in Mexico, I was “American,” but here, I’m a “Mexican.” And so it’s hard because I want other people to realize that we (second-generation immigrants) can be seen as “wholes...” If I wanted people to understand something, it was that I can be both and I want people to be able to ask me about both. It’s not that I’m one or the other - I want to be able to weave them together.”
- Migrant children are often not given autonomy in choosing their cultural identity. This is important in part because their ability to do so has strong correlations to their performance in school (Sen Das, 2018) and self-esteem (Berry, 1997).

So, what can we do? **Early childhood educators and district officials should adjust social studies curriculum to better emphasize multicultural identities.**

Why should teachers care?

- Refer back to statistics about second-generation immigrants in U.S.; Utah; Cache. These students are real, they are here, and they need the help of passionate, informed teachers.
  - These issues are global, national, and personal. They impact all students. Even though not all of our students are first or second-generation immigrants, all students need to develop a strong sense of self rooted in exploration and discussion!

- We are mandated to do so! For example, let’s examine the Utah Core Social Studies curriculum for Kindergarten.
  - Standard 1: Students will recognize & describe how individuals and families are both similar & different.
  - Standard 2: Students will recognize their roles and responsibilities of being a good citizen.
  - Standard 3: Students will use geographic terms and tools.
  - Standard 4: Students can explain how humans meet their needs in many ways (UEN, 2023).

- Social skills
  - Introduce: Young children and egocentrism
- Everything in a young child’s life is measured in terms of themselves - who they are in relation to others (Surtees & Apperly, 2012).

- We would therefore expect children this age to spend an exceptional amount of school time learning about the exploration of identity and building channels to the development of empathy. However, this is not happening in our classrooms. Why? Because it has been deemed non-essential relative to other subjects.

- Identity development is a foundational component of early childhood education. Some of our most well-known childhood psychologists, Jean Piaget and Erik Erikson, emphasized the extent to which young children strive to form senses of self and the ways that the self functions within school and society.

Despite this, many teachers I have worked with express frustration with the lack of emphasis on social studies and social development in ECE.

Discussion: What time are you given for social studies? When and how do you talk about identity with your young students?

- A teacher I spoke with said this: “More and more is being demanded of these little children - to work on the keyboard, critical thinking, writing. Society demands this of them. But society also demands that they have morals and principles. And it becomes a decision - do we go out to recess or do we have social studies?”

Today I claim that specifically designated social studies time is essential in K-3 classrooms.

- How we discuss these issues with children matters. As teachers, we spend as much time with our students as any other adult in their life. They look to us for support as they create identities.
Common-sense knowledge:

- They spend half of their day at school and many of their attempts to negotiate identity with peers begin here.
- Children encounter many different objects and subjects associated with culture at school - foods, clothing, music, art, book reports, geography, history, etc.
- As we facilitate inclusive conversations that discuss multiple perspectives, we open doors for our students.

What tensions might these children face?

- Let’s revisit Co-Cultural Theory. It is based on the premise that as people begin interacting with a culture that they perceive as new or different from their own, they will respond in one of four ways: rejection, integration, or assimilation. I am going to add another level suggested by Berry - marginalization. These four options happen along a two-dimensional continuum. The first dimension is the level to which a person adapts to the new culture. The second is the level to which the original culture is maintained.
  - Marginalization is the least healthy response. Within this approach, the person experiences low levels of connection to their ‘original’ culture and low levels of adaptation to the new culture. Essentially, those who are marginalized may feel that they live on an island of in-betweenness.
  - Rejection sits at the intersection of low adaptation to the new culture and high levels of ‘original’ cultural maintenance. For these individuals, the new culture is ignored in favor of maintaining cultural heritage.
  - Assimilation takes the reverse approach in that it gives total commitment to the new culture and leaves the old behind.
Finally, integration/accommodation, the approach with the highest life satisfaction outcomes, weaves two cultures together. In this approach, cultures are not seen as perceived as diametrically opposed but rather as pieces of a more complex whole (Berry, 1997). When we help youth find ways to weave together their many identities, they are free to determine for themselves what makes them the happiest and most-fulfilled.

What are some of the more specific difficulties that these youth may face in creating an environment for discussion?

- Parental pressure
  - Pressure to conform to traditional cultural expectations (Louie, 2006; Espiritu, 2002; Oh, 2012; Brocket, 2018).
  - Pressure to become “American” and leave behind old cultural expectations (Phillips, 2023).

- Peer pressure
  - Pressure to “fit in” with dominant culture (Son, 2022; Waters, 1994; Ari, 2019; Phillips, 2023)
  - You are too ___, or not ____ enough (Oh, 2012; Waters, 1994; Ari, 2019)

- Political/public pressure
  - Government leaders attempt to define migrant children; social discourse (Brocket, 2018; Carruters, 2002)

Such tensions can create confusion/intense stress (Berry, 1997) and leave migrant children feeling “in between,” that they don’t really belong anywhere (Brocket, 2018).

Growth in identity construction begins with conversations, often in the classroom
- Are teachers being given time to have these conversations?
  - Here’s one teacher’s thoughts: “We have been mandated to spend the lion’s share of our time on ELA, writing, and math. Very little time is left over for… other, important issues. Anything deep, anything deep, anything of real significance, is pushed to the side… These subjects (identity, skills, values) that are vital to happiness and health, are pushed aside because of priorities determined by higher groups.”

- Despite this, some teachers choose to “rebel” against the system by abandoning core curriculum for small periods of time. Quote, “we [don’t] learn and teach identity intentionally in Kindergarten. We are focused on reading and math… there is a lot of pressure on teachers to meet testing deadlines… but there need to be days when we throw the curriculum out the window. This (identity and social studies) is more important.”

- This issue is not exclusive to CCSD. All across the state, teachers are sharing similar stories.
  - Share personal experience: My administrator told me to “step away from the social studies” because it’s “not as important as raising Kindergarten test scores.”

- If they aren’t learning it at school, they will at home, right?
  - In an ideal world, children would discuss these things at school and then reinforce them with rich conversations at home. But, is this actually happening? Well, sort of. Here’s what my interviewees said:

  “Please share an experience about how your parents taught you about their home culture? How do you feel about this?”

- Common elements:
- All of my participants identified food as the primary way that they connected with their heritage. Several noted that food was the only consistent emphasis on learning their parents’ culture(s).
- The second most popular mode of cultural transmission at home was listening to their parents’ music. One noted, “I can’t speak Samoan, but I can sing it. At least, I can pronounce it correctly.”
- A few of the participants noted family stories as an important component of learning about their parents’ culture(s).
- Others mentioned learning the language as young children, but only one maintained a strong connection to the language beyond elementary school.
- There were passing references to media such as Dora and Diego, and the celebration of a few cultural holidays. However, the participant who mentioned cultural holidays couldn’t think of one that held any particular significance to her.
- Although each participant could name at least one way that they learned about their parents’ culture(s) at home, all noted with enthusiasm and some regret that they would have felt more “seen” and accepted at school if they had been able to explore these identities with any more depth in the classroom.
- It should be noted that these participants were lucky enough to have parents who could afford to spend time with them during the day. Many of our students are in full time daycare.
- Daycare statistics
  - 74% of pre-K children were enrolled in full-day non-parental child care systems (USDE, 2021).
- These systems are overburdened. 80% of childcare systems are experiencing labor shortages AND the teachers who are still around are extremely burnt out (Rogers, 2021).

- Where does this leave the children? If they don’t have enough of these conversations at home or school, where will they learn? We need to make space for cultural conversations.

- People may question the need for social studies in children this young. Can’t they just learn when they’re older and have more time in the classroom?

- Children as young as two can identify differences in skin colors and cultural backgrounds and show preference for playing with children of the same skin color and gender (Belli, 2020).

- ECE students can and do engage in conversations about identity. In fact, students who receive more time engaging in these conversations at school demonstrate better relationships with their teachers and higher academic outcomes (Kaiser & Rasminsky, 2019)

- Students who do not get to fully express and navigate their identities expressed frustration, lower life satisfaction, and a sense of isolation or “in-betweenness” (Brocket, 2018; ChenFeng, 2015; Potter & Phillips, 2006).

Here is what some of my research participants said about their experiences with identity in school. I asked them what they wish their teachers had understood about their experience:

- What do you wish your teachers understood?

- “I sometimes wish it [connections to culture] was here more because I kind of feel like an outsider… [I wish my teachers had] More background about where
I’ve come from. It’s just good to know a little bit more information so they can teach you better or understand some of the things you suffer with.”

- “Sometimes people would think that everyone who comes from South of the Border is “Mexican”. I think maybe just the lack of learning about other cultures makes it difficult because then no one even knows where other people come from.”

- “Black, White, Hispanic. Those were the dominant three. I wish we’d learned more about Asian culture. And Polynesian culture. The worst thing was to hear some other student say, “I’ve never heard of Samoa. Where is that?” I think some teachers are scared to approach it because they don’t want to stereotype. They think it’s messy. I think they’re scared to make a mistake or say something wrong… People would always be asked to share who they were, but it was all about interests, not about culture. If we got to introduce ourselves with culture or if teachers even wrote those conversations into the classrooms more often, that would be so helpful. Let’s stop saying “culture is messy” and start saying, “culture is complex.” It’s extra work for teachers to understand students, but I definitely think it’s worth it.”

- “I wish that they had encouraged me to embrace those things more. I feel like they were easy to leave behind because when you’re going to school, you focus on math and other things. But, you have kids from lots of different cultures that come to school. And so, you know, I wish my teachers… would at least invite me to study these things with my family. That they would make a space where it’s like,
“you know, even if we don’t have time… to talk about these things at school, I want to know what it’s like for you.””

- “Teachers, if they want to be more inclusive, should learn a little Spanish…Many [students] are fully Spanish, you know, so try to understand them. Try to be patient with them. English is hard for them.”

Good news: There is hope! Although we may not be given specific time to generate meaningful discussions about this topic, we must make room for it in our classrooms. We, as teachers, are uniquely positioned to make this happen!

- Think-pair-share: What is our purpose as teachers? Why would we have particular potential to create these discussions?

So what then, is the solution? Learning to navigate the in-betweenness to craft a unique communicative expression of cultural identity (Brocket, 2018)! Second-generation youth who were able to explore their bi- or tri-cultural identities and form their own unique identity had higher levels of self-efficacy (Berry, 1997), which led to a feeling of harmony in their identities (Comanuru et al., 2018). These youth also felt more independent (Mukherjee & Pattnaik, 2021), had better mental health, better behavior, better academic performance, and higher levels of life satisfaction than their peers (Sen Das, 2018).

Discuss: What is your role as a teacher? Why/should you add this into an already busy schedule? How can we advocate for our students? Fundamental change is needed, but fundamental change rarely happens overnight. Let’s break down the things that we can do now.

- Unite as educators (teachers and district officials).
  - Bring these issues to the attention of the district and work upward.

What kinds of discussions should we encourage?
- We are opening space for “new ethnicities” (Hall, 1996) and “blended identities” (Berry, 1997).
- We are encouraging assertive accommodation. Let’s help these students confidently claim and communicate as many parts of their identities as they would like to express!
- In other words, just as children should be free to play and explore the world around them, we want to give them opportunities to play with and place emphasis on all parts of their cultural identity!

How can we facilitate these discussions?

- Do what we do best - introduce children to new perspectives!
  - Food, clothing, families, arts (visual; performing; musical), languages, holidays, books, folk tales, field trips, etc.
- Where/when: throughout the day, increase emphasis on sharing stories and familial heritage instead of generic examples for math, reading, and writing. Introduce cultural concepts - food, music, etc. into play-based learning. Help children identify the identity layers that they already experience (CTI) and help give them context for expressing the many co-cultural identities that they have!
  - What is it? Play-based learning (PBL) involves giving children learning materials that encourage exploration and collaboration through play (Zosh et al., 2022).
  - Why does it matter?
    - It encourages developmentally-appropriate learning! Zosh et al.’s research indicates a strong link between cognitive, literary, physical, social, and emotional outcomes (2022). Highly effective early childhood education, then, must include play as an essential component of learning (Zosh et al.,
2022). Play-based learning leads to seamless integration and opportunities for discussion of both core subjects and the arts, sciences, social and emotional development, and physical growth.

- Children learn best through integration, and integration allows this to be tied into subjects already being taught! These projects are gradable if desired, so they may be a viable option for a district that places high levels of emphasis on testing.

- Identity texts:

  - Identity texts are rich nonfiction or realistic fiction books that discuss issues of identity - race, religion, ethnicity, gender, etc. (Cummins, 2015). Teachers use these texts to facilitate discussions and activities that center around the engagement of children in compare and contrasting identities as well as expressing their beliefs about their own identities - through play, through art, through writing, etc.

  - We can use these to help children explore the layers of their identity (CTI) as well as the co-cultures that they are a part of.

- Caution: Our job is NOT to tell the children who to be. Rather, we give them lots of options and allow THEM to choose who they want to be. Assertive accommodation!

- These are shorter-term solutions to an overall evolution that needs to occur in ECE. How can we advocate for change within the district? Discuss.

**Review Summary:**

Let’s look back on our three objectives for today:

- Identify the unique set of challenges that second-generation immigrants face.
- Explain the key points of Hecht’s “Communication Theory of Identity” and Orbe’s “Co-Cultural Theory” to parents, other teachers, and district officials.

- Advocate for their second-generation students by addressing elements of Communication Theory of Identity and Co-Cultural Theory in creating inclusive lesson plans.

Conclusion: Passionate, mindful teachers will always lead students to success. But greater success is the result of better preparation and research-based methods. As we increase social studies exploration in normal and natural ways, your students’ outcomes will increase. You are your students' best advocate for increasing essential social discussion and exploration in the classroom. These discussions do not benefit only first or second generation immigrant children. ALL children have an ethnic heritage. ALL children are constructing their identities every day. What a privilege that we can help them do that. If not you, who?

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