

Children’s Moments of “Becoming” in Classrooms: Spatial Production and Multiliteracy Practices

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Author’s Note

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Abstract

While immigrant children’s identity negotiation and their sense of belonging are increasingly highlighted, existing literature remains largely focused on language abilities and identity struggles, often emphasizing rigid definitions of “identity” grounded in biology, language, and culture. Drawing on findings from my dissertation, this comparative ethnographic case study examines the fluidity of identity through literacy practices that help children construct meaning and foster belonging. By analyzing how 10-year-old students’ literacy practices interact with physical and social environments at school, I discuss shared expressions of emotions, power dynamics, the role of language, and variations in the use of cultural materials. These moments of ongoing identity negotiation are captured through the concept of Deleuze and Guattaris’ “becoming,” underscoring the need for inclusive practices that value diverse literacies and cultivate a sense of belonging among all students.

Introduction

At 10:20 am students lined up to move to their next class in the STEM room. Ms. Miller, the homeroom teacher, stood at the front with a stack of papers, while I observed from the back as students chatted animatedly, clutching their Chromebooks. As the line moved, students greeted friends from other classes with laughter and high fives. One passing student called out to Sarah in Korean, “야, 사라야! (Hey, Sarah!)” but Sarah quickly dropped her head and avoided eye contact.

Six months ago in Korea, during an observation, I was lining up with students to move to the music room. Jisoo, standing in front of me, eagerly greeted friends from other

classes, waving and mouthing “문자해 (text me)” as she tapped her thumbs in the air. She proudly mentioned her many friends, highlighting her social connections.

The vignettes reflect Jisoo and Sarah’s contrasting experiences as 10-year-old Korean students in different learning environments, Jisoo in Korea and Sarah in the United States, highlighting the roles that language, literacy, and identity play in their sense of belonging and connection. In today’s globalized world, diverse linguistic, cultural, and transnational experiences shape how immigrant children navigate identity and belonging, which is crucial for fostering inclusive educational environments (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2009). As populations become increasingly heterogeneous, understanding how immigrant children, like Sarah, navigate identity and belonging is essential for fostering inclusive educational environments. In Korea, a gradual rise in “internationals” prompts an investigation into how immigrant children perceive themselves, and how they experience identity as members of minority groups in new cultural settings (Yoon, 2012). In the United States, South Koreans, numbering about 1.4 million, constitute the fifth-largest Asian immigrant group, embodying the diverse experiences of those identified as “Koreans” or “Korean-Americans” (Holopainen, 2020). With growing diversity, exploring the unique experiences of students whose languages and cultures differ from mainstream norms becomes increasingly necessary.

Despite a growing body of research, much of the literature on Asian immigrants has been criticized for portraying them as a monolithic group, often overlooking their traits, practices, and affiliations (Kwon, 2019). This study moves beyond fixed categories such as race, nationality, and culture—categories that, as Kim (2020) notes, are insufficient for capturing the fluid and emergent nature of children’s identities. Instead, it examines how identity and belonging are negotiated through literacy practices across spatial and temporal contexts. This research specifically focuses on Korean children’s lived experiences and peer interactions in both Korean and American classrooms, aiming to capture the fluid and emergent nature of identities, such as “Koreanness” or “X-ness” (Yoon, 2012). Referring to the dynamic and context-dependent nature of identity, “X-ness” in this study is employed to resist fixed categorizations and reflects the evolving interplay between personal, cultural, and societal influences. By examining how these identities shift across spaces, shaped by the people, norms, and classroom materials they encounter, this study provides insight into how the movement and exchange of ideas, values, and practices across different cultural and national boundaries, driven by globalization and transnational interactions influence children’s identity construction. The study is guided by the following questions:

1. What aspects of literacy practices are proposed, acknowledged, and taken up in two different elementary classrooms?
2. How are children’s meaning-making, learning, and belonging performed and recognized through literacy practices?
3. What is the relationship between meaning-making and identity co-construction across different spaces?

By conceptualizing identity as a dynamic, evolving process, this research contributes to inclusive educational practices that support diverse learners. By examining how immigrant children engage in meaning-making through language and literacy, this study illuminates how children’s identities are continuously shaped, masked, or revealed in response to their complex global contexts.

Theoretical Framework

Immigrant Children's Embodied Literacy Practices in School Space

"... [that] the world of school is a social world. The human beings who live together in the school, though deeply severed in one sense, nevertheless spin a tangled web of interrelationships; that web and the people in it make up the social world of the school." (Waller, 1932, Preface)

In this dynamic setting, literacy has evolved with societal and technological advances, prompting a redefinition that considers the roles of bodies, objects, and places. Schools now recognize diverse modalities in immigrant children's communication, reflecting their identities within a culturally interconnected world. As Kress (2009) and Kuby and Crawford (2018) suggest, literacy practices are increasingly viewed as emergent, entangled, and embodied within a globalized communication environment (Enriquez et al., 2015; Leander & Boldt, 2013; Hackett & Somerville, 2017).

Within this broader understanding, literacy becomes a means for immigrant children to express identity, navigating culturally and linguistically diverse landscapes (Kress, 2009). Acknowledging the integration of linguistic, communicative, and technological diversity, these literacy practices, whether through signs, gestures, or digital interactions, transcend traditional boundaries and foster meaningful interactions within children's local and global contexts (Kwon, 2019; Walsh, 2017). Here, literacy practices are defined as the ability to engage with culturally and linguistically diverse landscapes, extending beyond traditional written and spoken languages to encompass global communication contexts. The broader understanding of literacy is recognized as multiliteracy, an embodied and socially situated practice, allowing immigrant children to express agency and navigate meaning within their specific environments (Kress, 2009). This interplay of objects, sensory experiences, and movement creates multimodal communicative practices illustrating that school as "space" is not a fixed concept but rather a dynamic construct shaped by social practices and power relations (Hackett & Somerville, 2017). The spaces in which children engage in literacy practices—be it a classroom, playground, or community—are integral to understanding their lived experiences and the complexities of their identities. In exploring the intersections of space and literacy, the study highlights that literacy is not merely a static skill but an assemblage that emerges through the dynamic interplay of bodies, objects, discourses, and spaces. This dynamic understanding of space as both physical and social enables a deeper exploration of how immigrant children's literacy practices are influenced by their surroundings, reinforcing their identities while navigating cultural landscapes.

Diasporic Identity Formation in the Elementary Classroom

This study examines the formation and negotiation of identity within both homeland and diasporic contexts, focusing on the multifaceted and fluid nature of diasporic identity among immigrant children. It explores how identity co-construction and meaning-making unfold across diverse spaces, highlighting the interplay between evolving cultural identities, literacy practices, and learning experiences. Recognizing that identity is perceived through lenses shaped by experiences and social positions (McCarthy & Moje, 2002), this research traces the construction of identity within historical and social contexts (Bhabha, 1987). This approach clarifies the multiplicity and flexibility of identities, especially for those navigating "in-between" spaces of culture and language.

Identity, shaped by “momentary contingencies of interaction” (Moerman, 1988, p. 85), requires a departure from fixed racial or ethnic categories. In poststructuralist terms, identity is constantly evolving, and shaped by changing discourses and emotional interactions (Zembylas, 2003). By focusing on the questions of “who they were” versus “who they are expected to be” (Bae, 2003, p. 15), this study situates identity formation within the volatile space where personal narratives intersect with cultural influences (Zembylas, 2003). This process not only contributes to individual identity formation but also fosters a sense of belonging as children navigate their relationships within these intersecting narratives. Norton's (2013) work on identity in second language acquisition emphasizes how language learners are socialized within broader linguistic and social frameworks across home, school, and community, negotiating identities across multiple spaces and developing a sense of “in-betweenness” influenced by cultural and linguistic patterns (Koven, 1998). Understanding that *belonging* encompasses “the maintenance, reproduction, and contestation of community boundaries” (Holopainen, 2020, p. 34), this study focuses on how Korean and Korean-American children, or immigrant children’s continuous movement across ethnic and linguistic boundaries can profoundly shape self-perception (Bae, 2003) and contribute to their evolving sense of belonging.

Diasporic identity, influenced by social, cultural, and linguistic factors, embodies a complex negotiation of self. It requires a vantage point outside oneself to fully grasp the cultural and temporal contexts at play in order to understand it; as it produces flexible textual representations while transcending rigid territorial affiliations (Kostogriz, 2004). Understanding diasporic identity involves recognizing that one’s sense of self and actions are shaped through the lens of the Other, emphasizing identity as dialogic and fluid. Classroom settings provide opportunities for students to explore these identities through engagement in literacy practices, which serve as both self-expression and a reflection of social practices (Bayley & Schecter, 2003). Through literacy, students engage with cultural-semiotic artifacts and new communication forms, especially in digital spaces (Kostogriz, 2004). Recognizing the third space of literacy education (McLean, 2010), this study promotes a critical literacy pedagogy that values the negotiation of diasporic identities among Korean students, their diverse sociocultural backgrounds and fosters a strong sense of belonging in educational environments.

Being, Belonging, Becoming, and X-ness

“To become is not to progress or regress along a series [...] Becoming is a verb with a consistency all its own; it does not reduce to, or lead back to, “appearing,” “being,” “equaling,” or “producing”” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, pp. 238–239).

This study centers the concept of “becoming” to reimagine identity as fluid, emergent, and contextually negotiated rather than fixed or essentialized. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari (1987), “becoming” is understood not as a linear progression toward a predefined identity (e.g., becoming “Korean,” “American,” or “class student”) but as a continuous and dynamic process shaped by interactions with others, spaces, and cultural practices. This challenges traditional notions of identity tied to rigid categories, emphasizing its unpredictability and multiplicity.

“Becoming,” as applied in this research, highlights two key dimensions central to how immigrant children construct their identities through literacy practices. First, it reconceptualizes identity not as a state to be achieved but as a series of relational and performative acts evolving through engagement with diverse social, cultural, and linguistic practices. This moves beyond binary constructions (e.g., Korean vs. American) to how children navigate overlapping cultural spaces, aligning with poststructuralist views of identity as contingent and discursively constructed (McCarthy & Moje, 2002; Zembylas, 2003). Second, responding to Bhabha’s (1987) “third space,” this research

examines how children navigate in-between spaces where identities are negotiated between the cultural norms of their homes and the dominant discourses in their schools (Souto-Manning, 2013).

Recent discussions in education build on these foundations, emphasizing "becoming" as a lens for understanding the fluid interplay between identity, belonging, and learning (Canagarajah, 2018; Souto-Manning, 2013). Through this lens, the study highlights how children's interactions with literacy shape their identities in response to the unique contexts of their everyday lives. Zembylas's (2003) work on belonging and otherness informs this perspective by addressing the emotional and affective dimensions of inclusion and exclusion in identity formation. Literacy practices, as moments of identity production, allow immigrant children to move beyond essentialized categories of race, language, and nationality, such as "Koreanness." Here, "Koreanness" is understood not as a static racial or ethnic category but as a fluid process of becoming, dynamically shaped by children's engagement with language, culture, and literacy (McCarthy & Moje, 2002).

The study further emphasizes that immigrant children's experiences of belonging and becoming are influenced by not only school spaces but also the broader sociopolitical forces that shape both their self-perception and how they are perceived by others (Norton, 2013; Orellana, 2016). This challenges static and reductive views of identity and embraces a postfoundational approach that foregrounds the fluid, performative, and socially situated nature of children's literacy practices. Moving beyond stereotypes, the study frames daily literacy practices as moments of identity formation that foster a sense of belonging. "Koreanness," redefined as an engagement in cultural practices rather than a fixed racial category, exemplifies the dynamic processes of identity formation that intersect with social and institutional forces (Kim, 2020; McCarthy & Moje, 2002). From "Koreanness" to broader "X-ness" constructs, the research opens a conceptual space for each child's fluid identity, illustrating how they emerge at the convergence of internal and external influences and are redefined through engagement with diverse cultural practices across transnational settings.

Comparative Ethnographic Case Studies in the United States and Korea

This study employs comparative ethnographic case studies (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017) to explore how multiliteracy practices differ between classroom environments in Korea and the United States, focusing on how these practices shape children's sense of belonging. Through this lens, I investigate how focal children from each site inhabit and make sense of their worlds, addressing both the unique and shared dimensions of their identity construction (Ingold, 2017; Schnegg & Lowe, 2020). In response to calls for ethnographic research that advances scholarly and pedagogical insight, this study serves as first, to examine how social practices and cultural understandings intertwine within multiliteracy experiences across varied social interactions and contexts; second, to highlight the specific structures and dynamics unique to each case, comparing, for example, the expression of a Korean child within a Korean context to that of a Korean child in the United States setting, and third, to acknowledge that multiliteracy practices are instrumental in shaping children's identities through diverse modes of meaning-making, with a particular focus on a sense of belonging.

Grounded in ethnographic methods, I explore how children's sense of belonging manifests through literacy practices, informed by cultural, linguistic, and historical influences that shape their behavior (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Despite geographic and cultural distinctions, both cases reveal core themes such as identity negotiation and literacy practices within diasporic contexts. The research was conducted in distinct classroom environments: Erum Elementary School in Seoul, Korea, with a largely homogeneous student population and Rosewood Elementary School in the Northeastern

United States, where roughly a third of the students are first-generation immigrants or English Language Learners. By examining classrooms across these two sites, this comparative approach underscores how contextual factors influence the social and cultural complexities surrounding identity formation.

As a researcher with a transnational identity, I recognize my own "in-betweenness" as former elementary school teacher in Korea and the current international Korean scholar in the United States, while navigating educational systems in two sites which has profoundly shaped my perspective on diasporic identity, and literacy practices. This positionality has sensitized me to the identity negotiation that children experience in classrooms across different cultural contexts. I approach this study with an understanding that identities are fluid, and shaped by interactions within social and cultural environments, and I aim to honor these complexities in my analysis and interpretations. Although my primary participants were the two focal children from each site from my connections, the literacy practices of their peers were also considered, allowing for contextualizing how children's interactions and identities are influenced within the classroom setting. As this is a case study research project, my concern was not with being representative of any specific group of children; rather, the goal was to ensure variability in participant selection (Dyson, 2018).

Data Collection and Analysis

To capture the multi-layered identities of the focal children as reflected in classroom multiliteracy practices, I conducted fieldwork over four months (one academic semester) at each site. The study has received Institutional Review Board approval, ensuring ethical compliance, and informed consent was obtained from all participants and their guardians prior to their involvement. Data collection methods included classroom observations, mapping, field notes, site documents, and informal interviews, which provided insights into children's social and cultural values.

Data collection spanned several months in Korea from May to August and in the United States from September to December. Classroom observations included 2-3 hour sessions, 3-5 times per week in Korea and 3.5 hours, 2-3 times per week in the U.S. Throughout this period, informal and unstructured interviews were conducted with students, teachers, and peer groups as relevant, typically lasting 30 minutes and mapping activities (Henward & Grace, 2016; Powell, 2010). Field documents, such as photographs, were also collected during this time. These methods facilitated a rich exploration of the dynamics within the classrooms, yielding numerous observations and interviews across both cultural contexts.

Qualitative data were analyzed through ethnographic content analysis, involving several iterative rounds to identify, code, and develop patterns or themes across the collected narratives (Choi et al., 2014). In the initial round of analysis, key moments and phrases that resonated with the concepts of identity, belonging, and multiliteracy were identified and coded. These codes were then grouped into broader themes, aligning with the overarching focus of the study (e.g., Identity Construction through Language, Relational Dynamics in the Classroom, Becoming a "Curriculum Co-Designer," Spatial Productions of Literacy, and Multimodality in Curriculum and Instruction). This process underscores the intricate and fluid nature of diasporic identity among immigrant children, demonstrating how literacy practices and relational dynamics contribute to their ongoing processes of becoming and belonging. The iterative nature of this analysis ensured that emerging themes were consistently refined and validated against the data, leading to a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences within their respective educational contexts.

Findings

This study's findings prompted a reevaluation of how children express themselves through literacy within localized and transnational contexts, urging the identification of classroom activities discussing, examining, and rethinking. The research underscores the value of embracing diverse, multiliteracy approaches that connect diasporic children to their social and cultural surroundings, facilitating richer identity formation. I present the findings on two key themes: *Intersections of Identity, Language, and Literacy Practice in Diverse Classroom Contexts* and *Unpacking Meaning-Making and Belonging Across Space*.

Intersections of Identity, Language, and Literacy Practice in Diverse Classroom Contexts

In this study, the experiences of two children in a classroom in Korea, Jisoo and Ho, are presented to explore how identity, language, and literacy practices intertwine within classroom contexts. These examples illustrate the fluidity of identity construction and the ways in which immigrant children navigate their cultural belonging in distinct national and educational settings.

Jisoo in Korea

In a Korean art class, children were tasked with designing reusable cup prints for a hypothetical global design competition. Mr. Sohn, the teacher, encouraged creative freedom, allowing students to explore reference images on smart pads. While most students chose playful designs, Jisoo and her friend Min, expressed their identity as Korean by decorating her cup with the Korean flag and text in English, Chinese, and Japanese, symbolizing her stance on the Dokdo island dispute—a territorial issue significant in Korean public discourse (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Jisoo And Min's Reusable Cup Designs



Researcher: Why did you add other languages here?

Jisoo: I used Papago (a translator app) and copied the sentence. [laugh] Because Koreans know that *Dokdo* (island) belongs to Korea, right?

Researcher: So, you wanted to let the people who are not Korean know it as well.

Jisoo: Indeed. There are many people who speak English and Chinese the world, ranked number 1 and 2 in the world... (the most spoken language) That way, people around the world will know that the island is ours, our territory. They might not know/understand if you just draw or just write in Korean. (J, personal communication)

During the interview, Jisoo's voice was confident enough, pointing with her finger to the sentence in other languages as she explained. When the classmates tilted their heads in front of the design as if they couldn't understand the sentence in other languages, Jisoo stood up from her seat and made her way to the back of the classroom to explain the same. "... This is the World Design Competition, so if we're going to claim that the island is ours, we have to use different languages. Then there will be more people who can understand, right? It means '*Dokdo* is our territory.'"

In the classroom, children generally engage in activities in various ways. In the previous scene in her art class, Jisoo expressed her identity as Korean through her awareness of the *Dokdo* island dispute and her ability to express it through multiliteracy, within her holistic constitutions of memories, desires, and minds. In the go-along interview with Jisoo, she revealed her intention to embed multiple languages, either to communicate with people all around the world or to put more power into her argument. As an active agent, she expressed emotions such as care, love, and belonging to her home country by attempting a strategy with her understanding of the role of language (Kwon, 2019).

Ho in Korea

In the same school, during a science class, Jisoo worked alongside Ho, a recent immigrant to Korea. Ho's parents were from China and North Korea, but he was born in China and immigrated to Korea with his family in 2020. Despite his residence in Korea, Ho identified strongly with his Chinese heritage, making him the only student in the class from a linguistically, culturally, and historically different background. The task involved coloring planets on a plastic ball in order: Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, and so forth.

Figure 2

Jisoo and Ho's Science Class



Ho: Did you draw China on Earth?

Jisoo: I can't draw like that much in detail because this ball is too small. But Jisoo had already drawn Korea on Earth, even indicating small cities and islands in Korea.

Jisoo and the group except for Ho, chatting: This dot looks like *Chuncheon*. / Ah, a city famous for *Dakgalbi* [spicy grilled chicken]. / *Chuncheon* is also famous for a new Legoland. / Oh, have you been there?

Ho: "Guys, wh-, what about China?" (J and H, Personal Communication)

Jisoo and Ho's expressions of their love for, care for, and belonging to their respective countries through multimodal literacy practices were evident in their drawing and design choices. While Jisoo meticulously drew each city and island of Korea, Ho chose to depict his home country China on the ball-planet. These multimodal practices involved the use of images, words, sounds, and movements, all of which worked together to convey meaning. Such practices are shaped by culture and its role in transforming raw materials into resources for representation (Jewitt & Kress, 2003). In line with the concept of multimodality, Jisoo's and Ho's meaning-making involved a wider range of communication approaches that enabled effective individual interaction. These multimodal literacy practices, using images, dialogue, and symbols, highlighted each child's sense of belonging and their connection to their cultural heritage and emerging political ideas. Through these interactions, Jisoo and Ho each engaged in "combining an action and an awareness of the kind of identity that action signifies" (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004, p. 1010), illustrating how literacy and identity expression intertwine.

The concept of belonging is closely related to the processes of defining and enforcing boundaries that separate a community from others who are perceived as different or outside of it. These boundaries can be maintained, reproduced, and contested over time, depending on a range of factors such as cultural, social, and historical contexts (Holopainen, 2020). In the case of Jisoo and Ho, their sense of belonging to their country was expressed through their use of language, which reflected their attachment to and identification with their cultural and linguistic heritage. This sense of belonging could also be shaped by their emotions, memories, and experiences related to their country and its traditions, which could evolve and change over time as they engaged in literacy practices that allowed them to express their cultural identities and negotiate their places within different social contexts.

Unpacking Meaning-Making and Belonging Across Space

This study explores how children's sense of belonging and identity, or moments of "becoming-X," are expressed through their spatial awareness and relational experiences. Mapping activities were used as a research tool (Powell, 2010) to allow children to visually represent their relationships and connections to spaces within their classrooms, revealing aspects of their identities and feelings of inclusion (Yu, 2024). The prompts used for the mapping activity were consistent across participants to ensure comparability: *draw your most comfortable spaces in school* (Henward & Grace, 2016). Children were asked to depict spaces and relationships that felt meaningful to them, providing insights into their spatial and relational experiences of belonging. Although all the children in the classroom participated in the activity, the findings focus on the mapping work of two selected focal participants, Jisoo and Sarah.

Jisoo in Korea

Jisoo, a 10-year-old Korean student (Classroom 2 in a Korean elementary school), provided insights into how mapping can capture children's relationships and feelings of inclusion in ways that traditional surveys or interviews might overlook highlighting who they feel close to and where they feel they belong (Powell, 2010; Strayhorn, 2012).

Through mapping, children like Jisoo convey how certain spaces, people, and activities influence their sense of belonging, giving unique insight into the spatial and relational aspects of their experiences.

Figure 3

Jisoo's Mapping



In her mapping, Jisoo illustrated her awareness of peer relationships, using colors and lines to distinguish her close friends from those with whom she had conflicts. For instance, she used green to denote a peer's calm personality and black to signify conflict, reflecting her understanding of classroom social dynamics. The map's visual representation of her social environment allowed Jisoo to organize and articulate her relational ties, reinforcing that her sense of identity and belonging was deeply connected to the classroom's social structure through acknowledgment from both peers and teachers in shaping her classroom experience. She expressed a desire for recognition and validation, as seen in her aspiration to be featured in the class's Hall of Fame (on a chalkboard in Korean), which she perceived as a symbol of acceptance and acknowledgment within her classroom community. Jisoo's mapping and descriptions of her most comfortable spaces reveal that her sense of belonging was tied to moments of peer acceptance and inclusion, suggesting that these social dynamics were instrumental in her identity negotiation. According to Massumi (2021), such interactions are materialized in assemblages, where identity encounters are often represented from a limited, predetermined perspective, which may overlook the fluidity of identity. The visual data generated by Jisoo's map, alongside those of her peers in Classroom 2, sheds

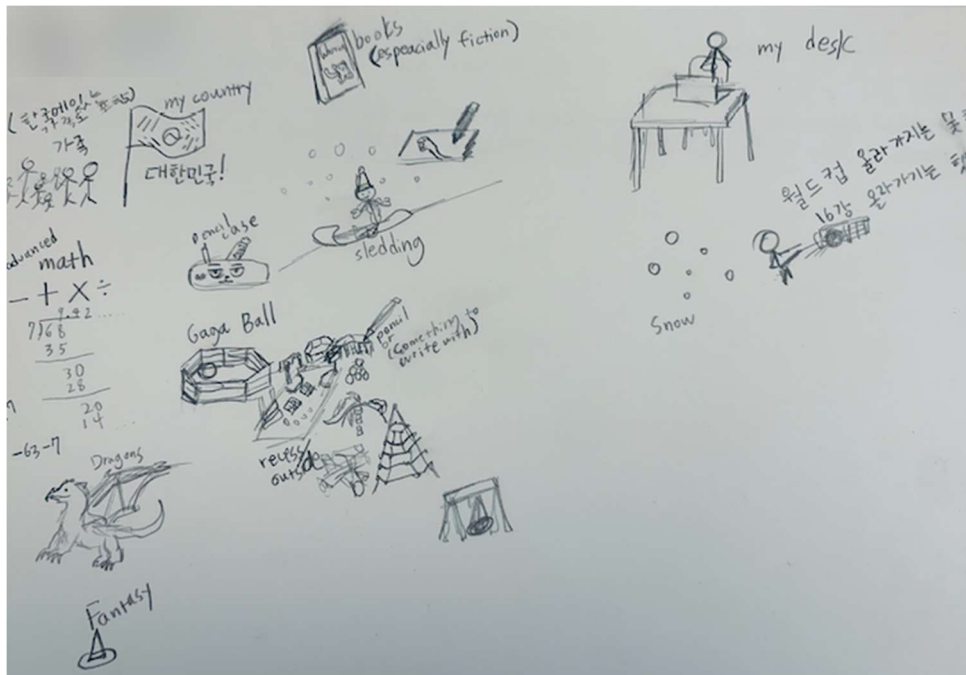
light on the spatial dimensions of social interactions and offers insight into how children's sense of belonging is dynamically shaped within the physical classroom space.

Sarah in the United States

In parallel, Sarah, a 10-year-old Korean student in Ms. Miller's fourth-grade classroom in the United States, provided a mapping example that reflected her dual cultural affiliations (Figure 4). Sarah included symbols from both Korean and American contexts, such as the South Korean flag, family imagery, and her favorite books, alongside dragons and math concepts. These elements illustrated her bicultural identity and the comfort she found in blending her Korean heritage with her American classroom environment.

Figure 4

Sarah's Mapping



Sarah's map portrays her "two-fold associations" as she navigates her sense of belonging across Korean and American contexts. While immigrant children, like Sarah, participate in complex processes of identity construction, situating themselves within various imagined communities, her mapping reveals a comfortable, imagined space where her home culture (e.g., represented by the Korean flag and family imagery) coexists with her American classroom, creating a symbolic intersection between the two cultural worlds. Despite concealing her Korean identity in front of her peers, Sarah found comfort in symbols of home, such as her favorite books and familiar imagery, as part of her experience in Ms. Miller's classroom.

The concept of *becoming* is particularly relevant here, as Sarah's experience illustrates a constant negotiation of self, where identity is neither fixed nor singular but fluid and responsive to her surroundings. Her interactions in different school spaces—Ms. Miller's classroom, the hallway, and the math classroom—demonstrate her flexible identity negotiation. Although she avoided engaging with me in Ms. Miller's classroom, she conversed comfortably in Korean in the hallway and during math, where her peers were older and her identity as a Korean student felt safe to express. During the go-along

interview, Sarah explained, "If I use English in the hallway, everyone [friends] will look at me. But in the math class, it's okay [to use Korean]." Her statement reveals the nuanced and context-dependent nature of her identity negotiation. In the hallway, the visibility of speaking English seemed to signal conformity to her peers' expectations, a strategy she used to blend in and avoid drawing attention to her Korean heritage. Conversely, in the gifted math classroom—a space where her academic competence and individuality were already acknowledged—Sarah felt a sense of safety and acceptance that allowed her to comfortably use Korean.

Sarah's language choice—whether Korean or English—and spatial preferences underscore how her identity is actively shaped by the context and individuals around her, revealing the complexity of her "becoming-Korean" and "becoming-a-student" in this cross-cultural environment. as processes shaped by external perceptions and internal comfort. For instance, in Ms. Miller's classroom, Sarah's hesitation to express her Korean identity reflects the pressures of assimilation, while her behavior in the math classroom highlights her ability to assert her heritage in spaces where she perceives lower risk of judgment. This moment aligns with Deleuze's assertion that how "everything is a becoming; according to the other, being is the being of becoming" (Deleuze, 2006, p. 141). Sarah's identity was not a static trait but an evolving state of negotiation, reflective of her interactions with others and her environment. For Sarah, as a minority in the United States, this ongoing negotiation marked her experience of becoming as inherently incomplete—a distinctive feature of her dual "becoming-Koreanness" and "becoming-a-student" in Ms. Miller's class. These moments of negotiation reveal not only her adaptability but also the vulnerability and resilience involved in navigating the intersections of cultural identity and social belonging.

These school spaces serve as knowledge-construction sites, allowing children to express themselves through sound, movement, and literacy (Hackett & Somerville, 2017). The classroom, in particular, is where children's experiences unfold, where literacy practices emerge and evolve (Pahl, 2014), and where they encounter and adapt to changing worlds. Sarah's and Jisoo's mapping activities illustrate how distinct literacy practices within these spaces shape their senses of self and belonging (Yu, 2024). Through mapping, children articulate "who they are and who they are (expected to be) now," offering a glimpse into how they perceive their place in fluid, interconnected spaces where narratives of identity continuously intersect (Bae, 2003; Powell, 2010). This spatial approach to understanding children's identity formation reveals that their "becoming" is shaped not only by personal interactions but also by the broader physical and cultural spaces they navigate. These insights emphasize the importance of recognizing embodied literacies as essential to understanding immigrant children's lived experiences in diverse classrooms, where they make meaning, learn, and find belonging through complex spatial and relational practices.

Discussion: (Re)imagining Identity in Inclusive Classrooms through Fluidity of X-ness

Children develop layered identities through active participation in multiple communities, both real and imagined. For immigrant children, this process is especially dynamic as they constantly negotiate between the cultures of their new environment and their country of origin. This negotiation fosters an adaptable sense of belonging that transcends a simple binary choice between identities (Sánchez & Kasun, 2012). This study illustrates that immigrant children's identities are in a continuous state of becoming, shaped by their unique interactions, spatial awareness, and literacy practices in the classroom setting (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Olsson, 2009). For example, Jisoo's expression of herself in mapping with gold shining colors strengthened her sense of belonging within the classroom community, while Sarah's experience as the only fourth-grader in a fifth-grade

class allowed her to express her Korean identity with comfort, marking her presence within a new yet affirming space.

Pedagogical strategies, along with the physical and social environment, played key roles in both classrooms. In Jisoo's Korean classroom, community-building activities, such as collaborative projects and classroom rituals, provided structured opportunities for her to situate herself socially. The multimodal curriculum, incorporating visual and spatial literacy activities like mapping, enabled Jisoo to explore and express her identity relationally and spatially. In contrast, Sarah's U.S. classroom, particularly her placement in a gifted 5th grade math class where she was surrounded by older students, allowed her to selectively express her Korean identity in ways that felt safe from peer judgment, such as speaking Korean with me or incorporating cultural symbols into her work. These contexts highlight the significance of educational strategies that create environments of trust, vulnerability, and belonging. The use of multimodal literacy practices enabled both Jisoo and Sarah to articulate and negotiate their identities through recognition and inclusion, fostering a sense of belonging deeply intertwined with the social environment (e.g., Jisoo), or by blending cultural elements to reflect their hybrid identity and find a symbolic intersection (e.g., Sarah).

Deleuze and Guattari's concept of *becoming* offers a lens to understand this evolving identity formation, emphasizing identity as a dynamic, ongoing process rather than a fixed state. For Jisoo and Sarah, the concept of "X-ness" allows for a fluid expression of identity, shifting according to context and interaction. This adaptability is seen in how they navigate literacy practices as a means of situating themselves within their environments, whether by expressing Koreanness within Ms. Miller's classroom or blending cultural symbols in a classroom map to bridge the familiarity of home with the newness of school. Through these literacy practices, children's "X-ness" emerges as both an assertion and negotiation of belonging, giving them agency to shape their identities within the dynamics of power and cultural context (Bae, 2003; Koven, 1998). Rather than being passive recipients of cultural identity, they actively position themselves within or apart from dominant groups by making sense of their experiences and expressing complex, multilayered selves.

This study underscores the importance of educational strategies that honor students' cultural and linguistic experiences, advocating for curricular and classroom activities that position children as agents of meaning-making (Choi et al., 2014). By integrating multimodal literacy practices, educators can provide opportunities for children to express their hybrid identities, navigate their cultural affiliations, and assert their belonging in inclusive ways. Pedagogical approaches that prioritize trust-building, freedom of expression, and recognition of diverse cultural literacies are vital to creating such environments. As classrooms grow more diverse, recognizing the interplay between language, identity, and space is essential to fostering a participatory classroom culture where students feel valued, engaged, and supported in their evolving sense of self (Kuby & Crawford, 2018). Ultimately, the conditions of vulnerability, trust, freedom, and structure within educational settings profoundly influence how immigrant children perceive their identities and sense of belonging. Their experiences are filtered through the dynamics of where they are situated, whom they interact with, and the ways they conceptualize their identities through space and time. By understanding these dynamics, educators can better equip themselves to foster inclusive, affirming spaces that recognize the complex social landscapes immigrant children navigate. Through these classroom practices, educators can nurture fluid identities, allowing children to become active participants in their own narratives of belonging, identity, and cultural expression in X-ness.

Conclusion

This study foregrounds the dynamic interplay between literacy practices and identity formation, offering an understanding of how immigrant children navigate belonging and selfhood within the transnational flows of their lived experiences. By situating literacy as both a medium and a site of identity negotiation, the findings illuminate the deeply relational and context-sensitive nature of identity construction. These insights challenge reductive notions of fixed identities, highlighting instead the emergent, contingent, and fluid processes through which identities are co-constructed in interaction with people, materials, and environments. From a postfoundational perspective, the research highlights the importance of educational spaces as sites of becoming—spaces where identities are continuously formed, contested, and reimaged. It calls for a pedagogical commitment to embracing the multiplicity and hybridity inherent in students' linguistic and cultural repertoires. Literacy, far from being a neutral or technical skill, emerges here as a deeply transformative practice that enables students to articulate, perform, and reconfigure their identities within diverse cultural and temporal contexts.

This work also interrogates the role of educators in shaping environments that not only acknowledge but actively nurture these fluid and emergent identities. It suggests that educators must cultivate rich, dialogic spaces that honor students' linguistic heritage and cultural narratives while fostering trust, creativity, and identity. By centering language and literacy as vehicles of belonging and meaning-making, classrooms can become sites where diversity is not merely accommodated but celebrated as a source of generative possibility. Ultimately, this research invites a reconceptualization of literacy as an open, evolving field of identity work—one that requires educational practices capable of responding to the complexities and contingencies of children's globalized realities. In advocating for these practices, this study contributes to a broader vision of education that affirms diversity, promotes inclusion, and recognizes the transformative power of literacy in shaping who children are and who they might become.

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