

Children's Cultural Production Through Literature: A Decolonial Analysis of Indigenous Childhood, Identity Formation, and Narrative Agency

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Abstract

Children are frequently conceptualized within formal education as passive recipients of cultural knowledge, particularly in relation to literary texts that transmit dominant histories and values. However, contemporary scholarship in anthropology of childhood and decolonial studies challenges this assumption by recognizing children as active cultural agents capable of producing meaning, identity, and social knowledge. This paper examines children's literature as a site of cultural production rather than mere transmission, focusing on Indigenous childhood contexts in Chile.

Grounded in decolonial theory and Indigenous research methodologies (Smith, 1999), the study argues that culturally responsive literature can function as a mediating artifact through which children negotiate belonging, reinterpret tradition, and generate hybrid cultural forms. Rather than preserving static cultural identities, such texts enable dynamic processes of cultural re-articulation shaped by colonial histories, linguistic diversity, and contemporary social realities.

The research draws on qualitative case studies from educational and community settings involving children from Indigenous peoples of Chile, where reading practices were observed alongside participatory discussions and creative responses to culturally relevant texts. In line with contemporary childhood studies, which emphasize children's agency and the co-production of knowledge (Corsaro, 2015), the findings suggest that literature designed from within culturally situated frameworks can transform reading into an act of narrative agency. Children do not simply internalize cultural content; they reinterpret and reshape it according to lived experience.

This paper situates these processes within a broader critique of colonial epistemologies that historically positioned Indigenous knowledge as static or endangered rather than dynamic and evolving. Decolonizing approaches call for recognizing children's voices as legitimate sources of knowledge production and for challenging adult-centric research paradigms (Smith, 1999; Tesar, 2023). By reframing literature as a participatory cultural practice, this study contributes to debates in applied

anthropology, intercultural education, and decolonial pedagogy, highlighting the potential of children's literature to support cultural continuity while fostering new forms of identity formation in globalized societies.

Keywords: Decolonial Education; Indigenous Childhood; Intercultural Pedagogy; Narrative Agency; Participatory Research; Qualitative Methodology; Sociocultural Identity; Transcultural Communication

Lorem Ipsum