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**Recognizing Divergence in Children's
Agency**

Do children have greater or unrecognized access to certain types of agency than do adults?

Dear Gurbir,

As a Children, Childhood, and Youth minor, I have learned quite a bit regarding the nature of childhood and the importance of amplifying the voices of children. I find it unfortunate that children are often understood to be helpless and non-agentic when in reality, they not only have unrecognized forms of agency, they also have diverging forms of agency. In this essay, I hope to contrast how Indigenous children versus white children practice agency, and how the “normative child,” by which I mean a child who conforms to Western expectations for children and childhood, versus their “non-normative” counterparts practice agency.

A child's status in their environment greatly informs the kind of power they maintain. In *Key Concepts in Childhood Studies*, Allison James and Adrian James write “society [...] determin[es] what people do, through the various constraints that collective moral ideas and social institutions place upon their actions” (4). In many ways, an individual's agency is defined by their social roles. The role most often attributed to children is that of storytellers and heirs to legacies. The importance of relaying tales is especially prevalent amongst Indigenous communities. Storytelling allows people to maintain connections to their roots. Daniel Heath Justice writes in his book *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* that “[stories] remind us of who we are” (7). This sentiment is maintained by, 16 year old, Hanna Sault-Hartwick in “Whole.”

Hanna's mixed-race status complicates her childhood as she struggles for acceptance from her Indigenous cousins. It is in her mother's recounting of creation stories that Hanna can attain a relationship to her Indigenous heritage. In turn, Hanna uses storytelling to reclaim her identity concluding her piece with the statement "I am not half-white, or half-Native. I am whole" (Sault-Hartwick). This reconciliation of her "otherness" within the Indigenous community is an important way that Hanna practices agency. David and Kilderry explore storytelling as a form of agency in their paper "Storying un/belonging in early childhood." These authors position the child as "the keeper of a complex narrative" (David and Kilderry 92). Children's agency is thus represented when passing down ancestral knowledge and customs.