Mind, Culture, and Activity

Routledge
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ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/hmca20

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To cite this article: Monique Verhoeven, Joseph L. Polman, Bonne J. H. Zijlstra & Monique Volman (2021) Creating space for agency: a conceptual framework to understand and study adolescents' school engagement from a Funds of Identity perspective, Mind, Culture, and Activity, 28:2, 125-137, DOI: 10.1080/10749039.2021.1908363

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/10749039.2021.1908363

Published online: 09 Apr 2021.

MIND, CULTURE, AND ACTIVITY
2021, VOL. 28, NO. 2, 125–137
https://doi.org/10.1080/10749039.2021.1908363

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Creating space for agency: a conceptual framework to understand and study adolescents' school engagement from a Funds of Identity perspective

Monique Verhoeven[a], Joseph L. Polman[b], Bonne J. H. Zijlstra[a], and Monique Volman[a]

[a]University of Amsterdam; [b]University of Colorado Boulder

ABSTRACT

A conceptual framework is presented to understand and study the role of students' agency in their school (dis-)engagement from a Funds of Identity (FoI) perspective. The framework includes the notion of agency combined with Funds of Learner Identity (FoLI): learning preferences that can be considered part of people's Funds of Identity. The framework holds that students manifest agency to negotiate engaging learning experiences when the school's affordances and constraints are considerably relatable to their FoLI and allow them to define themselves in desired ways. However, adolescents who feel that possibilities to engage their FoLI are rather limited in school are expected to turn to other contexts to learn, such as home, peer groups and workplaces. An exemplary case study is presented to illustrate the framework and implications are discussed.

Introduction

This paper regards the role of adolescents' agency in their school (dis-)engagement. It has been well-documented by sociocultural and CHAT research that adolescents' school engagement is fostered when what is taught in school is evidently relevant to their current or future lives (Polman, 2010; Vianna & Stetsenko, 2011). Studies have also found that adolescents engage with learning in school when they can understand themselves as appreciated classroom participants and their abilities are valued in the classroom (Fields & Enyedy, 2013; Rubin, 2007). Moreover, research suggests that students from backgrounds that are underrepresented in higher education (e.g., students with a migrant background or a lower socioeconomic background) experience more challenges in perceiving relations between what is taught in school to their daily lives and in coming to understand themselves as valued classroom participants than other students (Bronkhorst & Akkerman, 2016). Recently, a Funds of Identity (FoI) scholarship has emerged that aims to enhance the inclusivity of education by studying what teachers can do to help disadvantaged students connect to school in personally meaningful ways and to understand themselves as competent learners (Hogg & Volman, 2020). A key premise of FoI research is that all students, irrespective of their trajectories of learning and development, are competent and have access to knowledge, skills and experiences that are valued in certain contexts, among which school may or may not be one of them (e.g., Esteban-Guitart, 2012). The knowledge, skills and experiences that individuals themselves define as important to their identity are considered to be their FoI (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014). These concern the knowledge, skills and experiences that can be used to create meaningful continuities between adolescents' school and out-of-school lives, which, in turn, is thought to foster their school engagement (Hogg & Volman, 2020).

CONTACT Monique Verhoeven m.verhoeven1@uu.nl Research Institute of Child Development and Education, University of Amsterdam, 15780, 1001 NG, Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

*Currently works as a postdoctoral researcher at the Department of Education of Utrecht University

The conceptualization of FoI above implicitly acknowledges the role of adolescents' agency in their identity development: it is the adolescents themselves who are thought to define what is important to their identities. However, while much FoI research has examined how adolescents' FoI can be identified and utilized in education (e.g., Charteris et al., 2018; Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014), it has remained undertheorized why and when students manifest agency to employ FoI (Hedges, 2020), and to engage with or disengage from school (Eteläpelto et al., 2013; Lawson & Lawson, 2013). Furthermore, part of the FoI literature speaks of FoI and identity as phenomena that can be uncovered as if they are stable and simply there to be found (Hogg & Volman, 2020). This results in a problematic friction with the sociocultural and CHAT perspective the research field is grounded in, as from this perspective, identity is regarded instead as continuously and dynamically (re-)produced through interactions of people with other people and through interactions of people with the material means that are available to them (e.g., Holland et al., 1998; Silseth & Arnseth, 2011). Also in line with recent developments in sociocultural and CHAT research (e.g., Kajamaa & Kumpulainen, 2019; Kinsella et al., 2019; Williams et al., 2007), we therefore aim to create space in FoI scholarship to more explicitly position adolescents as active subjects by stressing the presence and power of their agency. We contend that it is important to further integrate a conceptualization of student agency and how it may inform adolescents' school engagement into FoI research: creating theoretical space for agency could provide us with further insights into what motivates adolescents' school (dis-)engagement, and into how disengaged adolescents' school re-engagement can be fostered. In other words, it can help us to make the potential that is present in the notion of FoI more explicit. In this paper, we provide a set of concepts that we believe can help to understand and study the role of students' agency in their school engagement. In doing so, we answer the research question: "How does our conceptualization of learning preferences, a type of FoI, and agency help us to understand and study processes of student (dis-)engagement?", and illustrate our conceptual framework by means of an exemplary case study. We do not claim that we offer final answers to questions such as "what is agency?" or present a framework that is not susceptible to improvement. Rather, we want to provide a set of conceptualizations and operationalizations that we have found to be productive in our own work. We hope they may be of use to other researchers concerned with adolescents' FoI and educational trajectories too.

Situating the conceptual framework

Our conceptual framework is grounded in a sociocultural and CHAT perspective (Holland et al., 1998; Silseth & Arnseth, 2011). It draws on neo-Vygotskian sources including FoI studies (e.g., Esteban-Guitart, 2012; Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014), learner identity research (e.g., Coll & Falsafi, 2010; Rubin, 2007) and Azevedo's (e.g., 2011, 2013) work on interest development. From a sociocultural and CHAT perspective, learning and identity development are considered to be intrinsically intertwined: by engaging in learning experiences, individuals develop new knowledge and skills *and* come to understand themselves in relation to the knowledge and skills that they try to master (Polman, 2010; Fields & Enyedy, 2013; Holland et al., 1998; Silseth & Arnseth, 2011). Based on this, a person may come to identify with certain knowledge domains or practices: these may become of significance to who that person is. This identification, or the lack thereof, is then understood to be integrated into the person's more abstract sense of self as a learner that transfers across contexts (e.g., school, home, peer groups) and that thickens over time (Coll & Falsafi, 2010; Holland et al., 1998). The rather stable and coherent self-understandings as learners that people thus develop, and that inform their current learning engagements and future learning goals, are people's learner identities (Coll & Falsafi, 2010; Rubin, 2007).

What processes of learning and learner identity development one engages in is partly dependent on the affordances and constraints of the contexts one participates in (Coll & Falsafi, 2010; Holland et al., 1998). From a sociocultural and CHAT perspective, these context-specific affordances and constraints are understood to be socially and culturally constructed, and historically accumulated (e.g., Polman, 2010; Holland et al., 1998). Simultaneously, it is acknowledged that a particular context such as

a school is situated and itself afforded and constrained by larger contexts (Azevedo, 2011; Esteban-Guitart, 2012; Poole & Huang, 2018), such as the education system or, in the instance of our exemplary case study, Dutch society.

The affordances and constraints of a particular educational context (such as a school, school track, or classroom) inform what learner identity positions – social roles as learners such as the science learner and the inquiry-based learner – are made available to students: they communicate certain messages to students regarding the knowledge and skills that they are and are not supposed to identify with. An educational context's affordances and constraints also convey to students what it means, in that particular context, to be a competent learner (Coll & Falsafi, 2010; Holland et al., 1998).

As contexts are characterized by possibly overlapping yet unique sets of affordances, constraints and learner identity positions, the ones adolescents experience in school may be rather different from those they experience in other contexts (Polman, 2010; Akkerman & Bakker, 2019; Silseth & Arnseth, 2011). Whereas some students experience high degrees of continuity in the affordances and constraints of school and out-of-school contexts, others do not (e.g., Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014). Discontinuities are more commonly found among disadvantaged students from minoritized or low-income backgrounds (e.g., Bronkhorst & Akkerman, 2016). However, students can only engage in school when they find constructive ways to negotiate possible discontinuities, so as to connect to their education in personally meaningful ways (Polman, 2010; Esteban-Guitart, 2012; Vianna & Stetsenko, 2011). This is where students' agency comes in as adolescents experiencing such discontinuities may or may not try to constructively relate to the affordances or constraints that could cause them to disengage from school.

Creating space for agency: a conceptual framework

Learning engagement

In adopting an adjusted conceptualization of Lawson and Lawson (2013), we understand learning engagement as adolescents' affective and behavioral attachments to learning. Adolescents' affective engagement concerns their emotional, social and psychological attachments to learning, as indicated by their levels of enjoyment and boredom (Lawson & Lawson, 2013, pp. 435–436). Their behavioral engagement regards adolescents' conduct in learning activities, as indicated by the amount of effort they (are willing to) put into learning and their willingness to conform to a particular context's norms and rules (pp. 436–437).

Funds of learner identity

From a sociocultural and CHAT perspective, no person is thought to move across exactly the same contexts with exactly the same affordances and constraints engaging in the same learning experiences as someone else (Eteläpelto et al., 2013; Holland et al., 1998). As processes of learning and identity development are considered to be interwoven, learner identities are understood to be idiosyncratic phenomena (Coll & Falsafi, 2010). Moreover, adolescents have already engaged in learning experiences in various contexts prior to attending high school. Although the development of learner identities is generally a process that takes place throughout the life course (Coll & Falsafi, 2010; Holland et al., 1998), adolescents are likely to have already identified with certain learning goals and practices (Verhoeven et al., 2021; Engel et al., 2019). These will be referred to as Funds of Learner Identity (FoLI): learning preferences that can be considered part of adolescents' FoI. Inspired by Azevedo (2011, 2013) work, we define FoLI as deep, long-term learning-related goals, values and beliefs that people develop in relation to the sociocultural affordances and constraints that they experience. These FoLI indicate how people prefer to position, define and understand themselves as learners, and through what practices (Coll & Falsafi, 2010; Holland et al., 1998). As we will elaborate

upon below, people's FoLI also explain why and to what extent learners engage in learning experiences in the way they do.

What one's FoLI are is indicated by the reasons one has for engaging in or disengaging from specific learning experiences. To illustrate, in his study on model rocketry clubs, Azevedo (2011) found that one person's engagement in such a club was strongly motivated by his preference for design. This individual preferred to build reduced-scale original rockets and mainly engaged in that. Another person's engagements in the same club were mainly driven by a preference for construction work. The latter individual was less concerned with the looks of the rockets he built, and mainly engaged in activities such as machining parts and adapting motors. Hence, people's learning preferences, as part of their FoI, provide insights into how participating in a particular context is personally relevant to them, and into why they engage learning experiences in the way they do.

The deep, long-term learning-related goals, values and beliefs that people have can be considered their primary preferences. We understand these to possibly transfer across contexts. In addition, again inspired by Azevedo's work (2011, 2013), we distinguish lower level FoLI that entail specifications of *how* persons are willing to satisfy their primary FoLI in a particular context. By "lower level," neither we nor Azevedo mean to imply lesser importance; rather, this refers to a structural hierarchy. For example, in the context of the home, limited resources to design model rockets may be available compared to the model rocketry club. Consequently, at home one may use recyclable objects that one finds in the house to design model rockets, whereas one would use the more professional materials when designing model rockets at the club. Even though one may engage in designing model rockets in both contexts, the lower level FoLI (e.g., using professional rather than home-recycled materials) that can be satisfied in a particular context may impact one's level of learning engagement in that context: while still engaging in designing model rockets at home, a person may be even more engaged in this practice at the model rocketry club.

Agency

We understand people to manifest agency when they *use* tools, norms, values and skills that they think are or can be made available *in order to* pursue their preferences. This includes engaging their FoI and to be positioned by themselves and others in ways that they desire and deem important to their identity. Here, the possibility to manifest agency is considered to not simply *belong* to particular persons, but to be in part dependent on both human and nonhuman actors (e.g., Silseth & Arnseth, 2011). Engaging one's FoI can only be done in relation to the contexts one participates in. Dependent on the patterns of action and interaction that are prevalent there, a context may be more affording or constraining of the ways in which one can manifest agency: the context(s) one participates in may, to a larger or lesser extent, provide resistance in one's attempt to be positioned by oneself and others in personally meaningful ways (e.g., Vianna & Stetsenko, 2011). One of the important ways in which agency is manifested is through the continuous negotiation and renegotiation of identities (Polman, 2010; Verhoeven et al., 2021).

Finally, in line with Azevedo (2011), we assume people to have multiple FoLI on both primary and lower levels that all interact with various contexts' affordances and constraints in their own way. Consider for instance, the view of an adolescent. When a context provides affordances and constraints that make it easier to engage more of their FoLI than another context, and in perhaps more preferred ways as well (i.e., considering their lower level FoLI), we contend that this makes it reasonable for adolescents to pursue higher levels of learning engagement in that context. After all, it is in this context that they can connect to learning in personally meaningful ways and can understand themselves as competent learners (e.g., Rubin, 2007; Vianna & Stetsenko, 2011). Hence, we understand contexts to compete with each other in the extent to which they provide adolescents space to manifest agency; to connect to the affordances and constraints in ways that are personally relevant to them. Furthermore, as FoLI interact with contextual affordances and constraints (Akkerman & Bakker, 2019; Azevedo, 2011), shifts in learning engagement may occur when affordances and constraints in a particular

context change, when a new and more apt context is accessed, or when a previously present and rather apt context becomes inaccessible.

The new framework's premises

We now present the premises of our conceptual framework that can be distilled from the above. The first premise is that it is reasonable and to be expected that adolescents engage in school when school's affordances and constraints are perceived as already considerably helpful (compared to other contexts) to manifest agency *or* when school's affordances and constraints are perceived as changeable and negotiable so that ultimately more space in school will be available compared to other contexts to manifest agency. Our second premise is that it is reasonable and to be expected that adolescents disengage from school when they deem school's affordances and constraints to be considerably unwelcoming places (compared to other contexts) to manifest agency, both now and in the future. In such cases, adolescents will look at other contexts to satisfy their preferences, leading to school disengagement. What the framework presented above ultimately intends to do is to introduce agency to the FoI framework in a way that helps to further understand adolescents' school (dis-)engagement. Next, we will illustrate the framework by means of an exemplary case.

Method

Research context

In Dutch education students are allocated to separate programs in the first year of high school (grade seven, by the age of twelve). This allocation is based on teacher recommendations, and students' standardized test scores at the end of primary school. Three alternative tracks of a four year long prevocational program (ranging from more hands-on to more theoretically oriented education) prepare students for subsequent vocational programs. The five year long intermediate program provides students with access to higher professional education. Additionally, there are two six year long pre-university programs, of which one (the Gymnasium) includes Latin and ancient Greek. Completing one of the six-year programs is the most common way to enroll in university. Exit qualifications for all high school programs are formally established on a national level. In Dutch society, the prevocational programs are – in contrast to the intermediate and especially the pre-university programs – generally associated with limited career prospects in terms of finding a well-paying job. As Van den Bulk (2011) demonstrated, collective ideas about the prospects of people in the different programs are often integrated in adolescents' status positioning of both themselves and others. Consequently, the program students are in may impact their preferences regarding their futures and may shape and interfere with how they (want to) understand and position themselves.

Case selection and description

The exemplary case is drawn from a larger research project where fifteen students were interviewed in two sessions: one in fall and one in spring of the schoolyear 2016–2017 (Verhoeven, 2021). The semi-structured interviews regarded the students' experiences of going to school, their self-understandings as learners in school, their educational trajectory thus far, the contextual affordances and constraints they experienced in the various contexts they moved across, and their reflections thereupon. More information on the research procedure can be found elsewhere (Verhoeven, 2021). Although we analyzed four cases of differing backgrounds and abilities using the framework, we zoom in on one of these cases due to space restrictions. Amanda's case was selected because her school engagement shifted twice over the course of a schoolyear. Also, she was one of the few interviewed adolescents who had already started a job contemporaneous to school. These two factors make her case particularly

illuminating. We would like to stress, though, that Amanda's case is not supposed to operationalize our conceptual framework as a whole.

During the time of the interviews, Amanda was fifteen years old and lived with her parents and younger brother. Both Amanda's parents finished the intermediate program. Afterward, her mother was trained and worked as a secretary. Amanda's father finished a technical program and became a self-employed plumber. During the schoolyear of 2016–2017 (after the first but before the second round of interviews), Amanda started working as a runner in a restaurant. To make sure that other researchers can apply our framework to other students' cases with different learning and identity trajectories too, the operationalizations of our framework's concepts are discussed below.

Analysis

To examine the role of Amanda's agency in her school re-engagement and later disengagement, the first author started to code the data for Amanda's learning engagement in the various contexts she participated in. Fragments were coded that were characterized by Amanda's use of words such as "like", "fun", "enjoy", "appealing", "a pity" "hate" or "boring". For example, the following statement was identified as an indication of Amanda's enjoyment of a learning experience, because she mentioned liking this experience, "Working is a lot of fun" (interview #2). Additionally, fragments were coded for Amanda's behavioral learning engagement when she made remarks about her invested effort and behavior that conformed with norms or disrupted norms. For instance, regarding certain class sessions in school, Amanda said, "When I am not interested, I would describe myself as someone who just sits there, but does not bother others" (interview #1), which indicates that when she is bored, she does still comply with the school's rules, yet without paying attention and intending to learn something. In this process, we found that fragments in which Amanda reported relatively high levels of learning engagement in school appeared almost exclusively in the interview that took place in fall, rather than in the interview that took place in spring.

Amanda's FoLI were identified based on statements she made regarding why she engaged with or disengaged from various learning experiences. In coding the data for Amanda's FoLI, the first author initially stayed very close to the data. To provide an illustration, we present an interview transcript below.

> Interviewer: What are your favorite classes?
>
> Amanda: I think my favorite classes are mathematics and religion. And perhaps religion seems a bit odd as I am not religious, but [. . .] for example, we now work on a chapter called Relations. It is about friendships, romantic relations, how to best maintain relations. [. . .] That really gets to me [. . .] It teaches you that there is a lot you should be appreciative of.
>
> [. . .]
>
> It is also about racism, discrimination, about how to treat each other [. . .] and that you cannot just say things and tell yourself it was a joke, because it might really hurt someone else's feelings. (interview #1)

This part of the transcript was coded for the FoLI, "learning about how social relations can be built and sustained", "learning about racism and discrimination" and "treating each other respectfully". Other examples of coded FoLI identified in other parts of the interview transcripts are "not struggling with the subject matter", "seeing friends again", and "not using unnecessarily difficult words". Additionally, the coded fragments were coded too for the contexts that Amanda referred to, as especially lower level preferences may be context-specific. Hence, context codes such as "high school", "prevocational program" and "home" were allocated to the fragments.

After having coded the first interview for Amanda's FoLI, we used the network function in our data analysis software program Atlas.ti to group these FoLI when they appeared to be related. For instance, the FoLI "not having fights with friends", "not being yelled at", "not being bullied", "being able to wear whatever you want", "seeing friends", "learning about how social relations can be built and sustained",

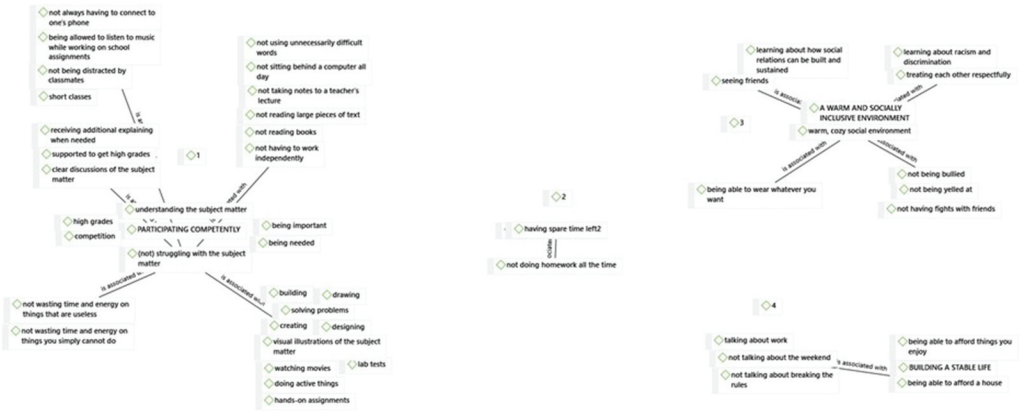

Figure 1. Amanda's FoLI at the beginning of the schoolyear.

"learning about racism and discrimination" and "treating each other respectfully" were assigned to the same cluster of FoLI. The result of this grouping process can be found in Figure 1. As can be derived from this figure, four FoLI clusters were distinguished.

We used these clusters to interpret what really was at stake for Amanda in these interviews. In doing so, we labeled Amanda's four primary FoLI that were related to her reported levels of learning engagement in school: "participating competently" (cluster 1), "having spare time left" (cluster 2), "a warm and socially inclusive environment" (cluster 3), and "building a stable life" (cluster 4). These primary FoLI are represented in capital letters in Figure 1. Subsequently, we repeated the process of coding for Amanda's FoLI for the transcript of the second interview. In doing so, we did not find new primary FoLI. Additional lower level FoLI, such as "getting work experience" were also added to the already distinguished preference clusters, as is presented in Figure 2.

To examine Amanda's agency, the first author started coding the fragments for the affordances and constraints that Amanda experienced in each of the contexts she participated in. The quote below was, for instance, coded as "constraints: intermediate program: only getting just sufficient grades".

> So I was in the intermediate program in Grade 7. I really struggled there, was promoted with a GPA of a 5.9 [out of 10]. Then, in Grade 8 of the intermediate program I was really struggling again, and so I was promoted, but to Grade 9 of the prevocational program, this time with a GPA of a 5.8. (interview #1)

The identification of Amanda's perceived affordances and constraints per context enabled us to assess which contexts were considerably apt for Amanda to engage her various FoLI. We contend that

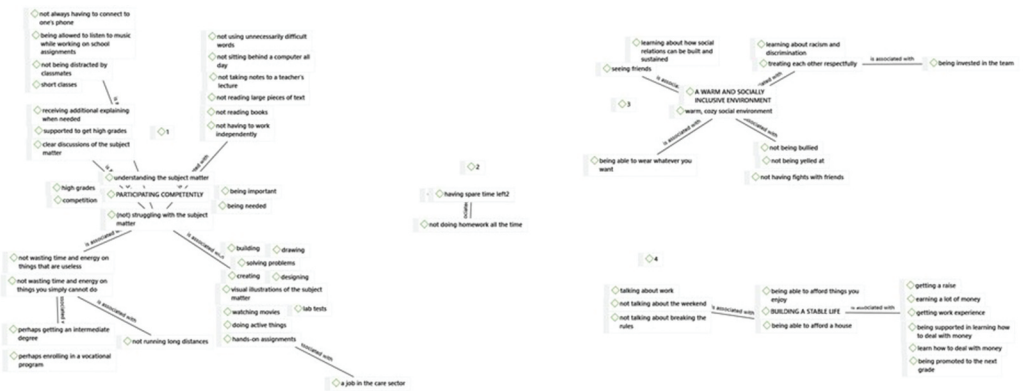

Figure 2. Amanda's FoLI later on in the schoolyear.

this provided us insights into when, why and how Amanda manifested agency, thereby explaining Amanda's levels of learning engagement in each context and the shifts therein. Throughout the coding process, the other authors took the role of critical friends. In cases of doubt, we held research team meetings.

Exemplary case study

Amanda's re-engagement in school

Amanda's first shift in school engagement had taken place at the beginning of the schoolyear. After summer break, Amanda had just moved from the intermediate program in the eighth grade to the most theoretical prevocational program in the ninth grade because of her just sufficient GPA. That her school engagement was higher than it was in the schoolyear before was, for example, indicated by the following quote: "Now I am in the prevocational program and I really feel this is the right place for me [. . .] I enjoy it more" (interview #1). Additionally, as an indication of her behavioral engagement, Amanda reported in the first interview that she now always finished her homework, whereas this was not the case in the previous schoolyear. The analysis based on our conceptual framework suggests that this can be explained by how the affordances and constraints in the prevocational program, in Amanda's view, catered more to some of her FoLI than the affordances and constraints in the intermediate program.

FoLI at the beginning of the schoolyear

As noted above, we identified four primary FoLI of Amanda (these are represented in Figure 1 by capital letters) at the beginning of the schoolyear: *building a stable life, participating competently, having spare time left* and *a warm and socially inclusive environment*. Regarding her primary preference for *building a stable life*, Amanda wanted to work toward a future in which she would have a job through which she could afford the rent and engage in things she would enjoy. That Amanda was concerned with building a stable life was also indicated by the fact that she was not as interested in talking with friends about, for example, their weekend plans, as she was in talking with her adult neighbors about their day-to-day working lives.

When it comes to *participating competently*, performing well made Amanda feel important and needed, especially when her peers asked her to help them with something because of her high performance. In line with this, Amanda wanted to obtain high grades rather than just sufficient ones. To engage this FoLI in school, Amanda felt she had to understand the subject matter. Amanda's lower level FoLI "being supported" was needed to satisfy this FoLI when she was struggling with the subject matter. For example, she received support in the form of receiving additional explanation of the class content, and by not being distracted: short classes and listening to music helped Amanda to focus. Additionally, Amanda noticed that it was easier for her to understand the subject matter when she could engage in hands-on assignments and with visual rather than textual study materials. Yet, despite her preference for *participating competently*, Amanda preferred to not waste time and energy on things she felt she would never be successful in (such as graduating from the intermediate program), or on things that seemed useless to her (e.g., learning the German language).

Having spare time left was another primary FoLI of Amanda's. This FoLI was most clearly characterized by her lower level FoLI "not getting too much homework" at school. In Amanda's case, this meant she preferred to have less than two hours of homework a day. This lower level FoLI was related to a lower level FoLI of her primary FoLI *participating competently* too, namely "not being distracted": the more Amanda could focus, the sooner she could finish her school- and homework, and the more spare time she would have left.

Finally, Amanda was socially-oriented and had a preference for *a warm and socially inclusive environment* in all contexts. This primary FoLI is not further elaborated as it did not play into

Amanda's shifts in school engagement (probably because Amanda experienced all the contexts she participated in to be warm and socially inclusive) and is therefore not germane to this paper.

Manifesting agency at the beginning of the schoolyear

Our analysis suggests Amanda deemed the prevocational program less apt to engage her FoLI *building a stable life* than the intermediate program. Amanda reported that being in the prevocational program made her worry about the future: she felt her education level was now considered too low for most available jobs. Also, she feared that the jobs she could still get might not pay enough to live a comfortable life. Hence, finishing her prevocational program would not adequately contribute to Amanda understanding herself as someone who was building a stable life. For that she felt she needed to finish the high school program on the intermediate level. This feeling appeared to be grounded in Dutch societal learning notions on (pre-)vocational education as discussed above and was reinforced by her father, who shared Amanda's concerns about her future.

Simultaneously, the prevocational program better afforded Amanda to engage her FoLI *participating competently* than the intermediate program. Whereas Amanda deemed the schoolwork in the intermediate program unfeasible, this did not apply to the prevocational program. According to Amanda, less unnecessarily difficult words were used in the prevocational program. Moreover, Amanda reported that in the prevocational program, "if you are not able to do something, you can always ask for help" (Interview #1). In the intermediate program, in contrast, "they expect you to be able to do a lot by yourself" (Interview #1). As Amanda had a preference for participating competently and felt that in school this mainly meant getting high grades, there was a discrepancy between how she wanted to understand herself as a learner on the one hand, and the affordances to do so in the intermediate program on the other. Moreover, Amanda felt that there were no other affordances she could make use of to participate more competently in the intermediate program. Apart from working really hard for school (and still risking less competent participation), she did not perceive any other options to improve her grades: despite having completed the intermediate program themselves years ago, her parents could not help Amanda understand the subject matter of most of her classes. Also, they lacked financial resources to enroll Amanda in a tutoring program. Hence, discrepancies in affordances that might have been useful to succeed in the intermediate program and the ones that were available to Amanda at home further delimited possibilities for Amanda to manifest agency in this school context. The prevocational program, in contrast, did provide Amanda with affordances to engage her FoLI *participating competently*. In other words, Amanda experienced more space to manifest agency in the prevocational program to participate competently.

Another difference Amanda identified between the programs regarded less homework in the prevocational one. Furthermore, as Amanda found her homework in that program relatively easy, she got more work done during class. Therefore, the prevocational program provided Amanda with more affordances to engage her FoLI *having spare time left*. Whereas Amanda used to do homework almost all night every night and on the weekends, she needed to do less than two hours of homework per day in the prevocational program. What struck us in the analysis, is that Amanda wanted to position herself as someone who found it important to have *spare time left*, despite the facts that the prevocational program did not clearly afford the satisfaction of building a stable life and her parents were initially disappointed about her work attitude toward school; in their eyes, Amanda had not worked hard enough for school to get promoted to the next grade of the intermediate program. It seemed that Amanda could put this disappointment (of not building a stable life through school and of her parents) aside based on her lived experience of participating in the more academic program. Amanda knew how unrewarding it was to do that much homework, with what she perceived as limited payoff in the realm of participating competently. Therefore, she appeared to negotiate and claim space for her FoLI *having spare time left*; she started using her desire to have spare time left as a signifier of her identity, as a core value.

To summarize, the more comprehensible home- and schoolwork and the smaller amount of homework in the prevocational program granted Amanda more space to manifest agency: to use

tools, norms, values and skills that she thinks are or can be made available in order to engage her FoLI. Consequently, Amanda's school engagement was fostered, even though she feared that lesser prospects from finishing a prevocational program could conflict with her other primary FoLI *building a stable life*.

Amanda's disengagement from school

Later in the schoolyear, we found that Amanda was less engaged in school. She still wanted to finish her prevocational program because of her FoLI *building a stable life* (as not graduating from high school would further impede the pursuit of this preference) and so she made sure she would pass her tests and get promoted. However, Amanda was no longer motivated to get high grades and hence her desire to engage her primary FoLI *participating competently* diminished in the context of school. Amanda reported no longer enjoying learning in school, despite the fact that the affordances that reignited her school engagement at the beginning of the schoolyear were still present. The analysis based on our conceptual framework suggests that this shift in school engagement was caused by Amanda's access to a new context, namely work.

FoLI later on in the schoolyear

In essence, Amanda's primary FoLI did not change over the schoolyear (see Figure 2). However, her access to the context of work halfway through the schoolyear seemingly caused Amanda to foreground some additional lower level FoLI related to her FoLI *building a stable life*, such as earning a lot of money and getting work experience. Also, starting her job appeared to make Amanda aware of an additional lower level FoLI she had in the pursuit of her preference for *participating competently*. In the second interview, Amanda discussed a discontinuity she experienced between school and work. Amanda had mentioned in the first interview that to *perform competently* in school, she needed to be able to focus and have short classes. Yet, starting a job appeared to have made Amanda perceive the monotonous rhythm and lack of variety in school (long hours of listening). It seemed to not so much have been the short classes that helped Amanda to focus and to be able to understand everything, but rather "brief and alternating tasks", which she discovered as a new lower level FoLI in the workplace context.

Manifesting agency later on in the schoolyear

Amanda's access to work offered her new affordances to engage her FoLI *building a stable life*. For example, in the second interview Amanda elaborated on how getting work experience and wages currently helped her to learn personal bookkeeping, and would help her to find a decent job that paid well in the future. Moreover, pursuing a stable life in school *and* in out-of-school contexts was afforded by the context of home: Amanda's parents thought it was crucial for Amanda to finish high school, but they were very concerned too with teaching Amanda things about managing a household and how to find and keep a job. Additionally, due to some continuities, Amanda could draw on affordances from home at work that she could not draw on at school: Amanda's mother, and most of her other family members from her mother's side, used to work in the same restaurant as Amanda now did. Consequently, Amanda's family understood the lingo when she talked about work, and could vividly picture and recognize how Amanda experienced her work and why. Furthermore, if necessary, they could generate sound solutions for any problems Amanda would face at work, thus contributing to her FoLI *participating competently*. Our analysis suggests that this fostered Amada's high level of learning engagement at work. However, this does not yet explain why Amanda disengaged from school.

An explanation of why Amanda disengaged from school was found in the affordances Amanda's work offered her to engage her FoLI "brief and alternating tasks" in her pursuit to *participate competently*. Compared to school, the tasks at work did not require extended focus on one thing, which she found difficult. Also, because the tasks at work were shorter and perhaps therefore clearer, Amanda's mind could wander off every once in a while ("being in myself") while not being distracted

to the extent that she could no longer participate competently. Amanda experienced her work to require less focus, or perhaps a different form of focus that came more easily to her. Additionally, Amanda's work, unlike school, exclusively provided opportunities for hands-on learning, which made it easier for her to participate competently too. Our framework suggests that this helps to explain why Amanda, to a certain extent, no longer manifested agency to position herself as a competent (high achieving) learner in school, and shifted her focus to define herself as such in the context of work instead. At work, there was no discrepancy that needed to be overcome in how she wanted and could best learn and how she was expected to learn.

Starting a job clearly did not contribute to the possibility to engage the FoLI *having spare time left*, though. Amanda mentioned sometimes not appreciating it that her employer required her to work one long weekend day. However, Amanda was aware that, for example, working in a supermarket came with shorter shifts, but also with lower income. For her, this was the reason to keep working at the restaurant. This indicated that, to Amanda, *having spare time left* did not have priority over engaging her FoLI *building a stable life*. Such a prioritization of FoLI may have further been afforded by her parents' ideas about the importance of working hard to build a stable life.

In sum, by starting a job, Amanda found that engaging her FoLI *participating competently* was more readily afforded by work than by the school context. Moreover, while still being aware of the importance in current society 'to finish high school, Amanda also considered "gaining work experience" as crucial to *build a stable life*. Our framework suggests that these factors contributed to Amanda disengaging from school, where manifesting agency to engage two of her primary preferences was less readily afforded.

Discussion

This paper aimed to make the potential that is present in the notion of FoI, as a means to study patterns of inequalities in school engagement, more explicit. We did so by stressing adolescents' possibility to manifest agency when it comes to their learning engagement: their possibility to *use* tools, norms, values and skills that they think are or can be made available *in order to* engage their Funds of Learner Identities (FoLI) – their deep, long-term learning-related goals, values and beliefs that they develop in relation to the sociocultural affordances and constraints that they experience as they move across contexts. In this way, we intended to better integrate FoI research in the sociocultural and CHAT perspectives it originally emerged from in two ways: First, by emphasizing that adolescents are active subjects. Second, and relatedly, by explicitly acknowledging that adolescents' FoI and identity as phenomena are continuously constituted in interaction with the sociocultural contexts they participate in rather than phenomena that are stable and can simply be uncovered.

More specifically, we presented a conceptualization of when, why and how adolescents may or may not manifest agency to negotiate engaging learning experiences in school. We believe that our conceptualization of FoLI and agency contributes to understanding and studying processes of student (dis-)engagement from a FoI perspective in an important way. Our conceptual framework explicates how adolescents' school engagement is informed by the extent to which school's affordances and constraints provide room for students' manifestations of agency to engage their FoLI. This creation of theoretical space for agency allows researchers to more explicitly study what motivates adolescents' school (dis-engagement) and the ways in which disengaged students may be reengaged in school. Furthermore, because of this, our framework also differs from what some structural power analyses (such as Willis, 1977) have found, characterizing disruptive students as manifesting agency, but complicit in contributing to their own victimization at the hands of structural class exclusion by rejecting school. Whereas such analyses emphasize the resistance to school culture as a whole, our conceptual framework emphasizes both what the affirmative affordances are which attract agentic engagement with FoLI, and how they are present in the multiple contexts of learners' lives. The framework presented in this paper more explicitly positions adolescents as not only active subjects, but also reasonable ones, who see multiple contexts and therefore diverse ways in which they can engage

their FoLI. In brief, the framework's first premise is that it is reasonable that adolescents engage in school when school's affordances and constraints are perceived as already considerably helpful (compared to other contexts) to manifest agency *or* when school's affordances and constraints are perceived as changeable and negotiable so that ultimately more space in school will be available compared to other contexts to manifest agency. Our second premise is that it is reasonable that adolescents disengage from school when they deem school's affordances and constraints to be considerably unwelcoming places (compared to other contexts) to manifest agency, both now and in the future. In such cases, adolescents will look at other contexts to engage their FoLI, leading to school disengagement. From the exemplary case study on Amanda, three different causes that may motivate school disengagement can be derived. First, adolescents may experience too little space in school to manifest agency, which was the case for Amanda when she was in the intermediate program where she did not get to position herself as *a competent participant* who *had some spare time left* (both FoLI). Second, new contexts (or perhaps altered affordances and constraints in already accessed out-of-school contexts) may more readily afford the possibility to engage FoLI, which is what we saw when Amanda started a job that more readily allowed her to *participate competently*. Third, in interaction with new contexts (or perhaps with changed affordances and constraints in already available out-of-school contexts), adolescents may come to develop new FoLI that cannot be easily engaged in school which we saw happen too when starting a job made Amanda realize that, while learning, she preferred to engage in "brief and alternating tasks", rather than in the monotonous rhythm she experienced in school. Hence, school has to compete with other contexts in order to have students engage in the learning experiences it provides. Adolescents' out-of-school contexts should be taken into account in understanding and studying their school engagement (Bronkhorst & Akkerman, 2016; Esteban-Guitart, 2012).

Our study implies that integrating a diverse set of topics, assignments and values into the formal curriculum may more readily afford adolescents possibilities to build meaningful connections between school and their out-of-school contexts. This requires that teachers, through the curriculum and pedagogy they utilize, get to know their students and their FoLI better, as is commonplace in approaches based on funds of identity (Esteban-Guitart, 2012; Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014).

Future studies may benefit from collecting observation data to triangulate findings regarding adolescents' learning engagements and manifestations of agency. Teacher and parent interviews may help to triangulate findings on adolescents' FoLI too. Additionally, the conceptual framework that is presented in this paper leaves important questions about priorities of and interactions between FoLI unanswered. Why did Amanda prioritize building a stable life at times, whereas having spare time left or being a competent participant at others? How did the manifestations of agency represent, implicitly or explicitly, her navigating and negotiating her FoLI that seemed to be in conflict in a setting? We invite fellow scholars to further investigate these issues. In doing so, we hope that the conceptual framework presented here can be further tested and expanded, so as to gain more insights into how adolescents' school engagement can be fostered.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

ORCID

Monique Verhoeven http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9931-3968
Bonne J. H. Zijlstra http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9924-4387
Monique Volman http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9217-1402

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