



Funds of Knowledge

Funds of knowledge: concept

The development of the funds of knowledge concept involved anthropological research of multiple and ‘thick’ social relationships that constitute U.S.-Mexican households (Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 2005) and draws on Wolf’s (1966) research into household economy. The category has been adopted and further developed by Moll et al. (1992), who use the term ‘funds of knowledge’ to refer to those ‘historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being’ (p. 133), pertaining to ‘social, economic, and productive activities of people’ (p. 139) in local communities. Funds of knowledge include ‘social history of households, their origins and development ... the labour history of families’, ‘how families develop social networks’ ‘including knowledge skills and labour, that enhance the households’ ability to survive and thrive’ (p. 133). This approach explicitly confronts the deficit views that teachers have of some disenfranchised communities. Instead, there is an assumption that ‘people are competent and have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge’ (Gonzalez & Moll 2002: 625). Rather than the traditional curriculum that either misrepresents or ignore far too many communities, the funds of knowledge approach represents ‘communities in terms of the resources, the wherewithal they do possess, and a way to harness these resources for classroom teaching’ (p. 625).

Funds of knowledge: approach

Importantly, this idea of funds of knowledge has been borrowed by educators and further developed into an approach to curriculum and pedagogical development, especially in schools that service large numbers of U.S.-Mexican families. The basic premise of the funds of knowledge approach is that ‘classroom learning can be greatly enhanced when teachers learn more about their students and their students’ households’ (Moll & Gonzalez, 1997, p. 90). The funds of knowledge approach consists of three main interrelated activities:

Rather than the traditional curriculum that either misrepresents or mutes far too many communities, Moll’s approach represents ‘communities in terms of the resources, the wherewithal they do possess, and a way to harness these resources for classroom teaching’ (p. 625)

1. a qualitative analysis of the funds of knowledge in households of local students;
2. creation of after-school sites where researchers and teachers can think about their research and determine how to use that knowledge pedagogically; and,

3. actual classroom attempts to enact forms of ‘mediating instruction’ (Moll & Greenberg, 1990, p. 344), that is, the teacher provides opportunities for classroom learning that mediate student lifeworlds and school.

Or to summarise, the approach involves household analysis, the creation of study groups or lab settings with teachers, and the development of curriculum and pedagogy. Thus, the approach enables the use of the funds of knowledge of historically marginalised communities to make household assets ‘pedagogically viable’ (Moll, 2005, p. 278) and to reduce the ‘insularity of classrooms’ (Moll et al., 1992, p.139). The aim is to provide classroom instruction ‘that far exceeds in quality the rote-like instruction these children commonly encounter in schools’ (p.132). This approach has also been adapted by the Social Justice Education Project (SJEP), conducted in Tucson (USA)(Cammarota, 2007; Cammarota, & Romero, 2014).

Adapting the funds of knowledge approach to Australian Schools

The US version of the funds of knowledge approach has been adapted in Australia by the *Redesigning Pedagogies in the North Project* (RPiN) in response to concerns about: teachers’ work overload; that students are finding alternative sites for identity work outside of school and family; and that many Australian schools are located in suburbs in which our old ideas of community are now breaking down (Hattam, et al, 2009; Zipin, 2009; 2013; Zipin & Hattam, 2009; Zipin et al, 2012; Zipin et al, 2013). Firstly, as Gonzalez says, the early versions of the funds of knowledge approach suffer from a certain ‘naivete regarding the burdens under which teachers work’ (Gonzalez, Moll et al., 2005, p. 2). This approach demands that teachers can find the time for extensive ethnographic research into the funds of knowledge of their students’ communities prior to the development of curriculum and pedagogy. Secondly, the funds of knowledge approach under-estimates how young people create their own funds of knowledge in ways that are quite independent from their families (Moll, 2005, p. 279) and especially engagement in youth centres, (Dimitriadis & Weis, 2001), or with popular culture. Thirdly, the funds of knowledge approach, focuses its attention on specific cultural communities, such as U.S.-Mexican, African-American, etc. Cultural community in this case is understood to mean ‘a coordinated group of people with some traditions and understandings in common, extending across several generations, with varied roles and practices and continual change among participants as well as transformation in the community’s practices’ (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003, p. 21). In adapting this approach to Australian contexts, the challenge involves designing an approach that is responsive to ‘liquid communities’ (borrowing from Bauman, (2000)), communities that aren’t so readily identifiable and which may be itinerant, as well as those remnants of ‘cultural communities’ favoured by the funds of knowledge approach.

On the basis of these considerations, the *Culturally Responsive Pedagogies Project* designed an approach that involves the following four tasks:

1. Some initial research into your students as learners in and outside of school;
2. Use this knowledge to design curriculum that provides student with opportunities to study their own lifeworlds and has meaningful, challenging learning task(s), and a performative expectation for student learning;
3. Implement and research the design; and
4. Reflect on what’s been learnt and make modifications for next time.

It is worth noting that the transition from stage 1 to stage 2 is not that straightforward. What teachers find difficult, is making their research into student lifeworlds pedagogically viable (Moll, 2005). The actual curriculum development work of translating new knowledge about student lifeworlds is challenging and requires finding creative ways to connect with the official knowledge of the mandated curriculum. In comparison to the funds of knowledge approach, the *Culturally Responsive Pedagogies Project* asks teachers to research their students' lifeworlds, rather than family households, as a basis for curriculum and pedagogical design, and to focus on curriculum design that provides opportunities for students to be researchers of their lifeworlds and their communities. The *Culturally Responsive Pedagogies Project* approach does entail teachers undertaking ethnographic work of sorts as a preliminary to curriculum design, but there is an expectation that an ethnographic imagination is a significant theme in these designs for both teachers and students.

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