

Funds of Knowledge Toolkit

The funds of knowledge concept was originally applied by Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg (1992) to describe the historical accumulation of abilities, bodies of knowledge, assets, and cultural ways of interacting that were evident in U.S.-Mexican households in Tucson, Arizona. Although these funds of knowledge were demonstrated as culturally, socially, and cognitively complex, it was pointed out that educators were not using them as a resource to enhance their students' academic progress. Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti's (2005) work on teachers engaging families outside of school contexts provided rich examples of how to recognize particular funds of knowledge and apply them in a school setting. In the past decade, many scholars have extended the funds of knowledge concept in a variety of different ways (see Hogg, 2011, and Rodriguez, 2013 for reviews of the literature). From a more practical perspective, a student's funds of knowledge can be described as:

- academic and personal background knowledge,
- accumulated life experiences,
- skills and knowledge used to navigate everyday social contexts, and
- world views structured by broader historically and politically influenced social forces.

How do funds of knowledge apply to teaching and learning?

Gaining a better understanding of a student's funds of knowledge can enhance classroom practices for both teachers and students. Using a funds of knowledge approach to understanding students' overall sets of abilities and experiences can help teachers draw on these skills in classrooms to enrich their understanding of academic content while also motivating them during classroom activities. Developing curricular content around the personal contexts, skills, and experiences of students helps scaffold their understanding of academic material.

The fundamental premise here is that most school-based practices, curricula, and behaviors are based on mainstream, middle class norms and perspectives. By integrating patterns of learning, knowing, and doing that are familiar to culturally and economically diverse students, academic content becomes easier to connect to their lives and is understood on a deeper level. This approach is especially relevant for English Language Learners. In fact, the funds of knowledge concept has been adopted as one the "guiding principles" for working with ELL students in the Washington state.



How can educators identify their students' funds of knowledge?

There are many ways for educators to identify their students' funds of knowledge. Many teachers apply strategies that can be done in class that involve having the students write essays about their backgrounds, do presentations about their interests, or create projects that represent their family heritage. Those types of assignments are very meaningful and help teachers learn a lot about their students. That said, much more can be learned about students by engaging with them and their families outside of the classroom. By visiting with families during home or community visits, teachers can gain a much wider understanding of their students' funds of knowledge.

One strategy that can help teachers connect their students' funds of knowledge to classroom content is to take note of specific experiences their students have had and/or the different home or community practices in which their students are involved. Once particular practices and experiences are noted (e.g., having immigrated from another country), teachers can categorize them in terms of funds of knowledge categories (e.g., geography and/or politics). Once teachers have this information recorded, they can brainstorm potential classroom applications (e.g., designing a social studies unit around immigration policies, or a math lesson around immigration demographic data).

How can educators integrate their students' funds of knowledge into classroom practices?

Integrating students' funds of knowledge into classroom lessons can be done across all content areas and easily be applied to standards-based instruction. Below are multiple examples of how fantastic teachers from across Washington described how they apply their students' funds of knowledge into their classroom lessons. The first group of examples demonstrates the range of funds of knowledge that can be gleaned from community contexts. The second group illustrates individual lessons based on specific content areas.

- [Community Contexts and Funds of Knowledge](#)
- Classroom Lessons
 - [Cherry Farming in Mattawa](#)
 - [Boxing in Kennewick](#)
 - [Making Kimchi in Tukwila](#)

For a more detailed description of how to connect student's funds of knowledge to classroom lessons, home visits, and student designed activities, read Johnson & Johnson (2016), [Enhancing Academic Investment through Home--School Connections and Building on ELL Students' Scholastic Funds of Knowledge](#).

Recording Students' Funds of Knowledge

To make this process easier to document, the following Funds of Knowledge Inventory Matrix can help teachers record their observations and potential classroom ideas. Information for this particular instrument can be accumulated over longer periods of time for specific students, or it can be filled out after completing a home/community visit so that the information is still fresh in the teacher's memory. Record your observations of a student's interests, activities, and skills that s/he is involved in outside of school. Once you note what a student is doing (e.g., selling vegetables at a flea market), you can then identify what type of funds of knowledge academic category best applies (e.g., "economics" or "mathematics" for the flea market context). Then brainstorm ways to integrate the skills involved in that particular context to an academic lesson (e.g., Math: figuring out how to maximize profit margins for selling corn by the pound vs. by the ear). Since this is a cumulative document, multiple examples can be added to any particular category. Although it is easier to use one matrix per student, multiple students' information could be included on one document. The idea is to have a reservoir of information and examples available to help guide lesson development when needed. Below is an example of a Funds of Knowledge Inventory Matrix that a teacher assembled after conducting a home visit with her 1st grade ELL student from El Salvador:

Funds of Knowledge	Home/Community Practices	Classroom Application
Economics	When Ruby's parents lived in El Salvador the currency was different. They had saved their old money in a small box.	We could use this in math, money in math is very common but using different currencies would bring in their funds of knowledge, especially if we have other cultures in our classroom that we may not know about.
Geography	There were a lot of maps around their home. I saw a large world map of South and North America. I also saw small maps on key chains of El Salvador. Ruby's mother also brought out a towel that resembled the Salvadorian flag.	This could be used in social studies. We could look at cities in Washington and take it a step farther and move from each continent and have table groups look closer at cities in specific continents or regions.
Politics	Ruby's family has Direct TV so they got to watch news that came right out of El Salvador. Her mother and father even recorded the news so they would not miss it when it came on.	We could use this in social studies, young students most likely will not be very interested in the news but they could have an assignment that has them work with their parents to choose a topic or find a story in the news together that is relevant to today's dates.

Funds of Knowledge	Home/Community Practices	Classroom Application
Agriculture	In the back yard Ruby shows me where her father would be planting tomatoes this summer.	We could use this idea to create a classroom garden or talk about plant growth in science.
Technology	Ruby's home was full of technology. They had a TV in almost every room, and they had lots of computers throughout the home as well.	We could use technology during math with online math games. We could also have the students begin typing their own stories on the computers. I do think we should start off with a typing lesson beforehand. Or we could even find sorting games to introduce the different kinds of technology.
Religion	Ruby's family is Catholic. Throughout the home there were a lot of paintings and portraits of Jesus Christ. They also had gold jewelry with angels and other figures on them. In Ruby's room she had showed me a Rosario she and her mother had wrote down together from the Bible.	For social studies, we could compare Christianity with other prominent religions around the world and research different religions and places of worship in our city. For math, we could compare numbers of practicing members of the different religions around the world.
Language	The home is Spanish dominant, but her mother does speak a bit of English and her brothers and sisters speak English fluently. In one photo of her mother and sister it has a heading which says "Mi Familia". Most of the home posters/ writing/ pictures are in Spanish. She did explain to me that the accent or dialect in el Salvador is different than your usual Mexican accent.	For language arts, we could compare different dialects of Spanish and read texts from different regions of Latin America to see how those dialects are represented. I could invite Ruby's mom to talk about El Salvador and her experiences with Spanish in the U.S.
Cooking	Ruby's mother was cooking while I visited. She was in the process of making <i>platanos con frijoles y crema</i> . I had never tried this before, so I knew it was one of their family's favorite recipes.	I could work on procedural vocabulary by having students work with their parents to write their favorite recipes. This would also apply to math by pointing out quantity words in addition to measurements.

Funds of Knowledge Inventory Matrix

<i>Funds of Knowledge</i>	Home/Community Practices	Classroom Application
Economics		
Geography		
Politics		
Agriculture		
Sports		
Technology		
Religion		
Language		
Health		
Childcare		
Art		
Cooking		
Entertainment		

References

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Hogg, L. (2011). Funds of knowledge: An investigation of coherence within the literature. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 27, 666-677.

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