Funds of knowledge are defined as “historically developed and accumulated strategies (skills, abilities, ideas, practices) or bodies of knowledge that are essential to a household’s functioning and well-being.” Each student you encounter will possess funds of knowledge from their lives. These may include different languages, family customs, or beliefs.

Incorporating these diverse funds of knowledge is not an easy task for educators, but it is an issue that arises in the classroom. The underlying issue is the need to include every student in the curriculum. Students are diverse in racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds as well as socioeconomic status and languages. In such a mixed environment, it is important to find common ground. Doing so involves exposing hidden assumptions (for both students and teachers) and raising students’ awareness to those assumptions.

Ultimately, both the students and teacher benefit from funds of knowledge. Several case studies outline the difference in opinions when learned rich the of knowledge in class. Teachers recognized their hidden assumptions and in teaching their students to be open-minded, they learned as well.

Incorporating Funds of Knowledge into the Classroom: A Practical Example

How do I incorporate various funds of knowledge into my classroom?
- Weave knowledge about family and school matters exchanged between teachers and the families into academic content and lessons.

Example: one teacher utilized her awareness of one student’s experiences with selling candy from Mexico in the United States by creating a series of interdisciplinary lessons centered around the theme of candy production. During this time, it was discovered that one parent knew how to make Mexican candy, and came to the class to explain the process and help the students make their own candy. By the end of a week, the class had studied a wide range of concepts: math, science, health, nutrition, consumer education, marketing, and advertising.

“One advantage to studying human beings dynamically, within their social circumstances, in their full complexity, is that one can gain a much more complete — and valid understanding of them.” — Luis Moll

~ excerpt from “Funds of Knowledge: Learning from Language Minority Households” ~
References


How Do I Study Funds of Knowledge in My Classroom?

1. **Community**—an ethnographic study of the origin, use, and distribution of funds of knowledge among households in the community

2. **After-school Teacher Labs**—study groups created to enhance the collaboration between teachers/researchers to discuss research findings, and to plan, develop, and support innovation in instruction

3. **Schools**—classroom studies to examine existing methods of instruction and to implement innovations based on the household study of funds of knowledge and conceptualized in the after-school labs

**Overview**—A critical assumption in educational institutions is they do not view working-class minority students as emerging from households rich in social and intellectual resources. Rather than focusing on the knowledge these students bring to school and using it as a foundation for learning, schools have emphasized what these students lack in terms of the forms of language and knowledge sanctioned by the schools. This emphasis on so-called disadvantages has provided justification for lowered academic expectations and inaccurate portrayals of these children and their families.

**The Project**—teachers studied the community surrounding the classroom, met with other teachers, conducted interviews at home with parents, and selected a few students to interview at school. Some also kept journals during the inquiry process, noting their assumptions and views on their students’ lives. “I came away from the household visits changed in the way that I viewed the children. I became aware of the whole child, who had a life outside the classroom, and that I had to be sensitive to that. I feel that I was somewhat sensitive before the visits, but it doesn’t compare to my outlook following the visits”. Teachers recognized that they were not only teaching their students about different ways of life, but they were learning as well. Most felt more connected to their students, and felt their classrooms were richer because of the study.

Challenges to Applying Funds of Knowledge (Drawbacks and Dangers)

- Must be extremely careful of some family, personal, and confidential issues
- Difficulty in interviewing and gathering information
- Take caution in making incorrect assumptions based on gathered information
- Sensitivity of parents to teaching of some lifestyles
- Difficulty in incorporating funds of knowledge without hopelessness or pessimism

“People learn best when they are actively exploring, thinking, asking their own questions, and constructing knowledge through discovery.”

-W. Ayers-