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Review of Norma González, Luis C. Moll, Cathy Amanti (eds.), *Funds of Knowledge: Theorizing Practices in Households, Communities and Classrooms*

Abstract
This quote, which opens Chapter 2 of González et al.'s edited collection targeted at teachers and their educators, captures both the spirit and the promise of this volume on *Funds of Knowledge* research. Many readers are likely familiar with this research tradition, which invites educators outside the walls of the classroom to encounter the rich and varied cultural resources within their students' communities in order to foster educators' understanding of these resources as strengths rather than as cultural or cognitive deficits. The authors of these pieces are teachers, teacher educators and researchers, who explore their personal and professional journeys as they, in Bateson's (2000: 81) words, 'crossed the lines of strangeness' during this multi-year, multi-sited ethnographic project documenting and theorising their students' cultural histories and practices, and seeking ways to incorporate those cultural resources into their classrooms.

Comments
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Funds of Knowledge: Theorizing Practices in Households, Communities and Classrooms

Norma González, Luis C. Moll, Cathy Amanti (eds). NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2005. Pp. 307. ISBN 0-8058-4918-1. (Pbk): $ 39.95.

> The encounter with persons, one by one, rather than categories and generalities, is still the best way to cross lines of strangeness.
> – Mary Catherine Bateson (2000: 81)

This quote, which opens Chapter 2 of González *et al.*'s edited collection targeted at teachers and their educators, captures both the spirit and the promise of this volume on *Funds of Knowledge* research. Many readers are likely familiar with this research tradition, which invites educators outside the walls of the classroom to encounter the rich and varied cultural resources within their students' communities in order to foster educators' understanding of these resources as strengths rather than as cultural or cognitive deficits. The authors of these pieces are teachers, teacher educators and researchers, who explore their personal and professional journeys as they, in Bateson's (2000: 81) words, 'crossed the lines of strangeness' during this multiyear, multisited ethnographic project documenting and theorising their students' cultural histories and practices, and seeking ways to incorporate those cultural resources into their classrooms. In classic pieces reprinted here by authors

such as González, Moll, Vélez-Ibáñez, Greenberg and Amanti, readers are (re-)introduced to the theoretical and intellectual foundations of the well known *Funds of Knowledge* research and to a detailed explanation of the research methodologies employed. Researchers who have transformed and applied this research tradition in novel ways also document their journeys. Truly of value in this volume, however, are researchers', teacher educators' and classroom teachers' voices as they recount their first-hand experiences exploring the unfamiliar worlds of students' communities, and describe how they implemented classroom applications of their new understandings and relationships with students and their families.

Perhaps understated in these essays is the pressing importance of such training and knowledge for teachers in the current US political and educational climate, in which there appears to be increasing stigmatisation of minoritised communities. Pieces by teacher–authors express the deeply transformative nature of their experiences entering students' communities as learners. Herein lies the truly liberating quality of this project: rather than sending teachers into their students' homes as experts and evaluators who are seeking to correct perceived cultural deficits (the traditional 'home-visit' model), this project turns the dominant power dynamic on its head. Representatives of the powerful institution of the school enter children's homes and communities as novices and researchers, seeking to discover the strengths and resources of the community. It is common for educators, in their positions of power, to adopt mistaken yet widely held attitudes toward cultural groups who are treated as inferior simply because they differ from society's dominant groups. Unfortunately these attitudes are widely fostered in teacher training programmes, as Amanti points out: 'During my teacher training, I was led to believe that low-income and minority students were more likely to experience failure in school because their home experiences had not provided them with the prerequisite skills for school success in the same way as the home experiences of middle- and upper-class students' (p. 7). Ethnographic forays into these communities to 'encounter persons, one by one, rather than categories or generalities' (Bateson, 2000: 81) challenge these assumptions amongst the teacher–authors, who reflect on how this project awakened them to the cultural dynamics of labour relations, immigration, transnationalism, poverty and race relations and their students' experiences within the context of these realities. In addition to transforming the perspective of teachers, however, this research transforms the power dynamic within the community, critically reframing school–home, school–community and parent–teacher relationships. Teachers and schools become, for community members, partners in their children's education who value parents' input, and the essays here document multiple occasions on which parents' engagement with the schools and schooling was enriched as a result.

The volume consists of four parts: Part I, Theoretical Underpinnings; Part II, Teachers as Researchers; Part III, Translocations: New Contexts and New Directions; and Part IV, Concluding Commentary. In the introductory chapter, the editors narrate their experiences as they conceptualised, designed and implemented the funds of knowledge research, with detailed descriptions of the methodology and interview procedures, the teacher–researcher study

groups and even the experience of training novice ethnographic researchers. As a trainer of teachers and of novice researchers I found this introduction and the chapter by Buck and Skilton-Sylvester particularly useful in considering how to implement similar teacher inquiry projects. Part I, Theoretical Underpinnings consists of reprinted classic articles in the *Funds of Knowledge* paradigm, which outline the origins of this term, delineate the sociocultural perspectives on culture and cultural practices that are foundational to this research, and recount the early attempts of teachers and researchers to implement this project (González; Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg; Moll *et al.*; González *et al.*). Chapter 2, *Beyond Culture: The Hybridity of Funds of Knowledge* (González), would make an excellent required text in any introductory course on Anthropology and Education, as it beautifully traces the history and conceptual evolution of theories of culture, cultural difference and power, as well as the implications of these theories for education. Much of the information on research methodology and teacher study groups in this part of the volume is repetitive given that these chapters are reprinted from earlier sources, so one may wish to assign only selected parts of each chapter for reading within a course.

Part II, Teachers as Researchers, focuses on the voices of the teachers themselves and their experiences navigating *Funds of Knowledge* projects. In these chapters, the authors recount stepping outside of their comfort zones to explore the depth and complexity of their students' lives which they had previously overlooked, describing how they transform this knowledge into culturally enhanced classroom practices and curricula that empowers parents and students alike (Floyd Tenery; Amanti; Hensley; Sandoval-Taylor; Browning-Aiken). The first-hand accounts of novice ethnographers are a valuable resource for teachers and researchers unfamiliar with ethnographic inquiry who will recognise their own discomforts and struggles in these essays. These chapters provide rich detail on the process of transforming these teachers' newly gained knowledge into curricula, including how they discover culturally informed topics and skills on which to base these curricula, such as candy, copper mining, horses and costume design, how they use this knowledge and skills to scaffold students' learning, and how they assess student progress. For example, in *Beyond a Beads and Feathers Approach*, Amanti presents a critical look at the typical implementation of multicultural curricula where culture is presented as special events frozen in time. This 'static, normative and exclusive' (p. 131) approach makes invisible the emergent, dynamic and ever-changing nature of cultural practices. This organic project highlights one of the foundational aspects of *Funds of Knowledge* success: Amanti does not teach her students what they already know about horses, but instead uses their base knowledge to scaffold their learning to new abstract and scientific knowledge. Rounding out this part of the volume, Messing skilfully documents the transformational impact of participation in this project on the teacher–researchers involved, presenting themes that have been visible in each chapter, such as using ethnography to question the status quo, teachers as learners and the benefit of teacher collaboration in curricular planning which are neatly woven together through the voices of the teachers themselves.

The chapters included in Part III describe projects based on the *Funds of Knowledge* philosophy and methodology that nonetheless represent significant departures from the typical settings and dynamics of the original research, including Brenden's ethnographic research project on labour practices in the oil industry in southern Louisiana and how they structure the everyday lives of families, Buck and Skilton-Sylvester's experiences implementing a team ethnography project for pre-service teacher training, Mercado's 4-year ethnography examining the often unnoticed language and literacy practices within one Puerto Rican community in New York City, and González, Andrade, Civil and Moll's ethnographic investigation into students' funds of knowledge in the realm of mathematics. Teacher educators in particular will appreciate Buck and Skilton-Sylvester's chapter, which examines with piercing honesty both the potentials and the pitfalls of such teacher inquiry projects as they navigate the fine line between fostering a deeper understanding of these communities and perpetuating pre-existing stereotypes. They reflect on their experiences implementing a curriculum in which teams of pre-service teachers conducted historical and ethnographic investigations of the neighbourhoods surrounding their schools in order to uncover the 'community-based assets' that 'reveal infinite foci for curriculum development that fosters the creation of learning environments defined by community pride and realization of student agency' (p. 215). They describe the persistence and honesty required in guiding one particular student to delve below the surface of seeming hopelessness in an urban neighbourhood to obtain a more informed perspective.

Moll's concluding chapter, 'Reflections and Possibilities', examines the successes and ongoing challenges of the *Funds of Knowledge* research presented in this volume. This research paradigm has produced increased understanding of the strengths and resources in students' communities, in addition to an enriched perspective on the historical, economic and social forces that have produced current racial, labour and class dynamics. A major success of this project lies in the transformation of teachers' knowledge of their students, their communities, their own agency as teachers, and of their relationship to students and their families. Moll also mentions several challenges and future directions, calling for further investigation of the roles of social class, gender and the social worlds of children.

With reflection questions included at the end of each chapter, this edited volume will be an excellent textbook not only for pre-service and in-service professional training in ethnographic teacher inquiry, but also for introductory courses in qualitative and ethnographic educational research. As microethnographers, we would like to see a broadening of the concept of practice as represented, for example, in research that examines more closely the embodied cultural activities in which children are engaged in various settings in their social worlds, which González *et al*. allude to in their chapter on mathematical funds of knowledge, asserting that these practices 'must be mediated though the activity of the group, the artifact of the sewing patterns and tools, and distributed among the participants of the group' (p. 266). Finally, while this volume calls on teachers to 'cross the lines of strangeness' (Bateson, 2000: 81) in order not only to better understand their communities

but also to critically examine their own perspectives and assumptions, it nonetheless mirrors current dominant discourses in the field of anthropology and education that seem to draw the line of inquiry at the US border. There is no doubt that we must examine the cultural and historical contexts in which US schools are embedded, however the USA constitutes a particular historical, political, institutional and discursive context that can only be fully comprehended by interrogating its uniqueness in relation to other possible contexts. Without fostering educational research in vastly different international settings and sharing this with our student teachers, the field risks turning a blind eye to the particularities of power and dominance in US society, making certain aspects of those processes invisible rather than illuminating them.

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