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**Compelling Counternarratives to Deficit Discourses:
An Investigation into the Funds of Knowledge of
Culturally and Linguistically Diverse U.S. Elementary Students'
Households**

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Compelling Counternarratives to Deficit Discourses: An Investigation into the Funds of Knowledge of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse U.S. Elementary Students' Households

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Abstract

This study focused on household funds of knowledge or “historically accumulated bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household functioning and well-being” (Gonzalez, Andrade, Civil, & Moll, 2001). A Funds of Knowledge approach provides both a methodological and theoretical lens for educators to understand both themselves and their students in more complex ways. Participants included five culturally, economically, and linguistically diverse students and their families. The study setting was a middle- and working-class first-ring suburb in the Midwestern United States. Data collection included visits to home, church, and Sunday school settings; observations in Language Arts classroom settings; and informal conversations and ethnographic semi-structured interviews with students, parents, and teachers. Data sources included interview transcripts; fieldnotes and reflections on those fieldnotes; and data collected from each student’s school cumulative folder. I coded parent and child interview and home visit data to create a multifaceted portrait of each household. Findings reveal that households possess a breadth and variety of resources, skills, bodies of knowledge, and strengths. These findings provide compelling counterevidence to deficit discourses by demonstrating that these households possess valuable knowledge and experiences.

Keywords: Funds of Knowledge, cultural and linguistic diversity, counternarratives

Contranarrativas Convincientes para los Discursos de Déficit: Una Investigación de los Fondos de Conocimiento sobre la Diversidad Cultural y Lingüística en los Hogares de los Estudiantes de Primaria de EE.UU.

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Resumen

Este estudio se centró en los recursos de los Fondos del Conocimiento o "cuerpos históricamente acumulados de conocimientos y habilidades esenciales para el funcionamiento de los hogares y el bienestar" (González, Andrade, Civiles, & Moll, 2001). Una aproximación a los Fondos de Conocimiento proporciona una lente metodológica y teórica para que los educadores entiendan a sí mismos ya sus estudiantes en formas más complejas. Los participantes incluyeron a cinco estudiantes y sus familias con diversidad cultural, económica y lingüísticamente. El ámbito del estudio fue un suburbio de primer anillo en el medio oeste de Estados Unidos con clase media y trabajadora. La recolección de datos incluyó visitas a la casa, la iglesia y la escuela dominical; observaciones en las aulas de Lengua y Literatura; y conversaciones informales y entrevistas semi-estructuradas etnográficas con los estudiantes, familias y docentes. Las fuentes de datos incluyen transcripciones de la entrevista; notas de campo y reflexiones sobre esas notas de campo; y los datos obtenidos de la carpeta escolar de la escuela de cada estudiante. Se codificó las entrevistas de familias e hijo y los datos de visitas a casa para crear un retrato multifacético de cada hogar. Los hallazgos revelan que los hogares poseen una amplitud y variedad de recursos, habilidades, saberes y fortalezas. Estos resultados proporcionan evidencias contrarias a los discursos de déficit, que demuestran que estos hogares poseen valiosos conocimientos y experiencias.

Palabras clave: Fondos de Conocimiento, diversidad cultural y lingüística, contranarrativas

During the past ten years, I have been fortunate enough to teach in culturally, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse elementary schools. Across this decade, it has often struck me how we teachers are generally unaware of students' lives outside of school. I have come to wonder about the cultural and linguistic resources which students and their families possess—largely invisible within schools—that could be leveraged for school learning. Consequently, students' lives, experiences, and knowledge outside of school have become of more interest to me. As a result, I embarked upon a dissertation study with the goal of trying to know students and their families in ways outside of the purview of the classroom.

Thus, informed by Funds of Knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992/2005; Gonzalez et al., 1995/2005; Gonzalez, Andrade, Civil, & Moll, 2001/2005) understandings, I designed a case study that documents the funds of knowledge of culturally and linguistically diverse elementary students and their families. The study focused upon five students and their families who are former students of mine and who live in the communities comprising the school district in which I had taught for the past decade. In the fall of 2011, I devoted one week per household to visit, observe, and interview participants in home, school, and sometimes community settings, in order to document the resources possessed by students and their families. Interviews conducted with students and their parents provided the basis for the majority of the findings regarding household resources. Findings indicate that students and their families possessed rich and varied cultural and linguistic assets. With these findings, I hoped to provide teachers and teacher educators with other ways of knowing culturally and linguistically diverse students—beyond the limited portraits often provided by schooled measures of performance. At the same time, the findings of the current study challenge pervasive deficit discourses that perceive diverse students as deficient or lacking in knowledge and resources. This dissertation was guided by the following research questions:

What funds of knowledge (or historically accumulated bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household functioning and well-being) do culturally and linguistically diverse elementary students and their families possess?

How are these funds of knowledge employed by household members and for what purposes?

Conceptual Framework: Funds of Knowledge

“Funds of knowledge” refers to “historically developed and accumulated strategies (skills, abilities, ideas, practices) or bodies of knowledge that are essential to a household’s functioning and well-being” (Gonzalez et al., 1995/2005, p. 91-92). Rather than being limited to the individual child, this research takes “households” as the unit of analysis in order to discover and document domains of knowledge and skills to which the child might have access (Gonzalez et al., 1995/2005). A household includes not only the home itself but the knowledge and skills of those living in the home, along with participants’ social networks and relationships. These relationships include social and labor histories of families and social and reciprocal exchange networks—central to any household’s functioning—through which these bodies of knowledge and skills are produced and circulate (Gonzalez et al., 2005).

Funds of Knowledge research seeks to understand the knowledge and skills found in local households and to use this knowledge to improve educational opportunities for students in schools (Moll et al., 1992/2005). Households differ from classrooms in key ways. Households, in contrast to classrooms, draw from resources outside of the home in order to meet needs. However, classrooms tend to be more insular and isolated, as teachers are rarely aware of the resources students possess in their everyday lives and therefore do not mobilize them (Moll et al., 1992/2005). Furthermore, the social exchange networks and relationships households form are often reciprocal in nature. These relationships usually rely upon trust and often lead to long-term relationships. For example, a parent may provide housing for a family friend, and in return that friend helps with household repairs. Children can participate in these efforts, which provide a further opportunity for learning. In contrast, relationships and pedagogy within classrooms tend to be more “thin” and “single-stranded” (Moll et al., 1992/2005).

The basic premise underlying the FoK perspective is that “people are competent and have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge” (Gonzalez & Moll, 2002, p. 625). Funds of knowledge manifest themselves through events or activities and are therefore not possessions or traits of household members but are characteristics of people-in-an-activity (p. 326). By focusing on the particulars of everyday

life, or how people experience life “culturally” (Gonzalez & Moll, 2002), researchers come to recognize how people acquire and use a variety of resources across contexts.

In contrast to more deficit-oriented outlooks, FoK research reframes children’s language, culture, and intellectual capacities as resources—rather than problems to be remedied—that teachers can use in intentional ways to foster academic achievement and engagement (Moll & Diaz, 1987). As such, it represents a more “additive” or “asset-based” approach to education, as opposed to a more deficit-driven paradigm (Moll, 2005). Households are recast primarily in terms of the strengths and resources they possess, versus what they may lack. In this way, its methodological tools represent more than a series of techniques—it also represents a conceptual heuristic for viewing households. FoK advocates an ethnographic approach to data collection and interpretation, in that it seeks to center participants’ lives and experiences and attempts to understand the ways in which they make sense of their everyday lives (Agar, 1996; Spradley, 1980). Within FoK, ethnographic understandings function as a lens with which households are viewed as multifaceted and vibrant entities (Gonzalez et al., 2001).

Studying households in an ethnographic way provides an alternate view to schooled forms of pedagogy, relationships, and social networks. First, household networks are adaptable and dynamic and may involve individuals from outside the home; in other words, they are “thick” and “multi-stranded” (Moll et al., 1992, p. 133). For example, within a family, an uncle may teach a child about computers and may be the same person to attend church with that child, or go fishing with the father on weekends. In this way, the uncle and child then know and interact with one another throughout a number of different spheres. In contrast, teacher-student relationships within schools are “thin” and “single-stranded,” as the teacher knows and understands the student in very limited ways, typically based upon data collected from standardized measures (Moll et al., 1992). Further, the child is often an active learner in household practices, in contrast to the more passive role s/he plays within the classroom structure. Much of this learning is also driven by the children’s interests, rather than dictated by mandated curricula (Moll et al., 1992).

For these reasons, Funds of Knowledge methodologies uncover youths’ cultural and linguistic resources in useful ways. Such methodologies offer educators and researchers qualitative means to discover and understand the

strengths, knowledge, and skills of students' households beyond the scope of the classroom. These methods "mediate the teachers' comprehension of social life within the households... [and] serve as a strategic way of reducing theoretically ... the complexity of people's everyday experiences, without losing sight of the rich and dynamic totality of their lives" (Moll & Gonzalez, 2005, p. 21). This theoretical lens views youths' social worlds in a positive light and considers the ways in which they might be used to support academic learning. In other words, the framework offers both "theoretical provision and methodological guidance" (Moll & Gonzalez, 2005, p. 22).

Alternative Constructions of Difference

Funds of Knowledge research offers a significantly different set of understandings about linguistically, culturally, and socioeconomically diverse individuals than those put forth by psychological, measurement-based, or culture of poverty outlooks (Bomer, Dworin, May, & Semington, 2008). A Funds of Knowledge approach demonstrates that students and their families have access to a number of social and cultural tools and knowledge that teachers may employ. Rather than prescribe remediation or intervention, these scholars concentrate upon strengths and resources (or funds of knowledge) as students' "defining pedagogical characteristic" (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005, p. X). In other words, a FoK approach reframes these families as possessing, rather than lacking, rich and varied assets.

Culture of Poverty: The Assignment of Blame

Funds of Knowledge studies provide an important alternative to influential deficit views of cultural and linguistic difference, such as the work of Ruby Payne. Over the past decade, Payne's (2003) book, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, has been central to professional development efforts in school districts across the country to help teachers understand poverty (Bomer et al., 2008)—including Tri-County School District, in which the current study took place. Payne's fundamental assertion is that the key to understanding poverty is exposure to the hidden rules of class (e.g., rules across topics like education, food, clothing, entertainment, and

family structures). Payne's book exemplifies the deficit model of difference that FoK and sociocultural research critique. The basis for this criticism is the way in which a "culture of poverty" approach blames the victims of poverty (i.e., children and their families)—and their poor life choices, orientations, and behaviors—for perceived shortcomings. Payne's work is predicated on the view that there is something wrong with students in poverty, and they are in need of intervention, remediation, and fixing, thereby individuating and construing the problem as something other than systemic (Osei-Kofi, 2005; Kunjufu, 2006). It also conveys these potentially harmful and reified views toward culture and poverty to preservice teachers (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Bomer et al., 2008; Sato & Lensmire, 2008).

In contrast, FoK views culture and language as assets for, rather than hindrances to, learning and education. In this tradition, the present study documents the rich and varied knowledge and experiences of diverse households and posits that such knowledge can actually enhance the learning experiences of children within school. This contrasts starkly with the more intervention- and remediation-based approaches, like the "culture of poverty" outlook described above. Deviating from such deficit-oriented approaches further contributes to extant discourses of diverse families as capable and knowledgeable.

Measurement: The Assignment of Labels

My study also gets behind the labels that many schools assign to learners in order to challenge notions of diverse learners as less capable, in need of intervention and remediation. The labels and categories which we ascribe to students (e.g., mainstream, English Language Learner, limited English proficient, "at risk") affect the ways in which we perceive these students, in terms of their abilities and competencies, and indeed for the ways in which they view themselves (Enright, 2011).

By emphasizing the varied resources and assets of diverse students, rather than comparison to established norms and standards, the present study aims to unsettle these labels. Recently, with the passage of No Child Left Behind and consequent emphasis upon high-stakes testing, socioeconomically disadvantaged students and English Language Learners (ELL) have become a named subgroup in state standardized testing.

Students assigned these labels have thus garnered attention in education discourse about how to “close the gap” between non-minority, middle-class students and their socioeconomically-disadvantaged and/or ELL peers. Importantly, Bomer, Dworin, May, and Semingson (2008) asked:

What happens when a category of student is constructed, through language, as a uniform group in need of improvement? ... A category has been created, and along with it, a charge to change the members of that category... The easiest answer is to bring in a program, especially one that will not overly drain already depleted budgets, one that does not ask too much of already overworked teachers. An affordable program is identified, and its language begins to form ways of thinking for the teachers in their interactions with the children from the identified group. The program’s language creates representation, frames for thinking about “these kids.” (p. 2498)

In contrast, the current study examines the resources, rather than “limitations,” that students possess and thereby assists in countering the deficit narratives by which these students have traditionally been constructed and defined, or “single stories”—normalized, unproblematized stereotypes, assumptions, and inaccuracies which negatively define and label children (Lopez-Robertson, Long, and Turner-Nash, 2010). As teachers’ socioeconomic, cultural, racial, and linguistic experiences and backgrounds often differ greatly from those of their students—“other people’s children” (Delpit, 1995)—the current study provides a portrait for educators of children’s multiple cultural and linguistic worlds, communities, and identities, apart from those represented by commonly-used labels and categories.

Psychology: The Assignment of Cultural Traits

The current study also calls into question many mainstream approaches to educating diverse learners. Often in education, cultural diversity is treated as a set of static “traits” located in individuals, rather than dynamic practices. Doing so does not account for change within the individual, the context for the activity, or the community (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003). Oftentimes, ascribed learning or cognitive style traits (e.g., holistic learners, analytical learners) of students from nondominant groups are used to

account for school failure. Moreover, viewing learning styles as cultural traits is a common way to prepare teachers to work with diverse populations. As such, this approach risks overgeneralizing and essentializing groups of people on the basis of ethnic or cultural group membership (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003).

In contrast, this study presents another approach to understanding linguistic and cultural “difference.” Within a Funds of Knowledge perspective, cultural differences are believed to be due to the variations in people’s varied histories of participation and engagement in practices within particular cultural communities. Therefore, it is more helpful in our pedagogical and scholarly treatments of difference if we direct our gaze toward “cultural processes in which individuals engage with other people in dynamic cultural communities” (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003, p. 21). Thus, the current study counters more psychological, static outlooks toward culture by entering homes and communities with an eye toward learning about the cultural and other practices therein, which are not fixed and immutable and thus able to be described in advance, but are in perpetual need of discovery (Gonzalez, 2005).

Methodology

Context

This study took place in Cloverdale, which lies several miles from the center of a major metropolitan area in the Midwestern United States. It is a middle- and working-class first-ring suburb with a residential population of 15,000 that has experienced demographic change over the last decade. Between 2000 and 2010, censuses revealed a slight decline in overall population but a near-doubling in Black residents and a near-tripling of Hispanic residents in the town. This demographic change manifested itself in the local school district—Tri-County School District—and the two schools attended by participants of this study, Elmwood Elementary and Lakeside Elementary.

Tri-County School District

The two elementary schools represented in this study are part of a larger school district, Tri-County School District, which is comprised of eight elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. According to demographics website proximityone.com, approximately 61% of the district's total population is White, almost 27% are Black, 7% are Hispanic, and approximately 4% are Asian. Approximately 10% of the population was born outside of the United States, nearly three-fourths of whom were born in Latin America or Asia. Twelve percent of households speak a language other than or in addition to English. Nearly seven percent of families within the district live below the poverty level. There are nearly 6,000 students enrolled in the schools, with almost half of these students characterized as economically disadvantaged, while 15% have been diagnosed with disabilities. Given these statistics, Cloverdale and Tri-County Schools are reflective of the increasing heterogeneity and diversity present in many classrooms across the U.S. (Enright, 2011; Genishi & Dyson, 2009).

Participants

All five student participants were former students of mine who lived and attended schools within the Tri-County School District, where I have taught for the past ten years. The participating third and fourth grade students—Frank; Phineas; Hannah; Zack; and Jack—represented the linguistic and cultural diversity present throughout the district and schools.

Frank lived in the Sully household. Frank was a White, monolingual fourth grader at the time of the study. The Sully family included Frank's mother and father and an older and younger sister. Mr. Sully worked in carpentry, and Mrs. Sully worked at a footwear retail store. For 11 years, the family had lived close to Elmwood Elementary which Frank (student participant) attended. The Sully family spoke English exclusively.

The Ramirez household consisted of Phineas (student participant), his mother and father, and younger brother who was in the first grade. At the time of the study, Phineas was a Latino, bilingual, nine-year-old third grader at Elmwood Elementary. The family spoke Spanish at home, though Phineas and his brother would occasionally speak English to each other.

Mr. Ramirez worked in construction, while Mrs. Ramirez worked occasionally cleaning houses. They had lived in the area for nearly six years, living in Georgia previously and emigrating from Mexico prior to that.

The White family included student participant, Hannah, who lived with her father and stepmother half of the week, while the rest of the week she lived with her mother (who lived nearby), stepfather, and younger sister. At the time of the study, Hannah was a White, monolingual, nine-year-old fourth grader at Elmwood Elementary. Both families spoke English at home. Her father had recently begun a job as an instructional technology design consultant and was taking a hiatus from pursuing his doctorate in this area. They had recently moved to a townhouse so that they could be closer to Hannah's mother.

The Smith household consisted of 10-year-old Zack (student participant), his mother Stacy and her 10-month-old toddler, and a family friend from Jamaica. At the time of the study, Zack was a nine-year-old Black, monolingual, third grader at Lakeside Elementary, where it was his first year attending. Zack's mother spoke English at home primarily but occasionally spoke Jamaican Patois with the family friend who also lived in the home. Stacy worked as a State Tested Nurse Aide at a care center where she assisted elderly patients in their daily living. In addition, she was enrolled in school to become a Registered Nurse. Stacy had emigrated from Jamaica to the United States when she was in high school, about ten years prior to the study.

The Ledezma family household consisted of Jack (student participant), his mother, father, and younger sister, and his father's cousin. At the time of the study, Jack was a Latino, bilingual, ten-year-old fourth grader at Elmwood Elementary. The family moved to the United States from Mexico about eleven years prior to the study, shortly before Jack was born. The family spoke primarily Spanish and some English at home. Jack's father worked an overnight shift at a meat-packing facility, and his mother worked part-time during the day cleaning houses while Jack was at school. The family had recently begun renting a house about a year prior to the study, which was close to the apartment complex where they had lived previously.

Data Collection

In keeping with a Funds of Knowledge approach, this qualitative study employed ethnographic observations of participants in home, school, and some community settings. Data collection included peripheral non-participant observation (Spradley, 1980) in home, community, and language arts classroom settings; observation fieldnotes and reflections upon these fieldnotes; and informal conversations and ethnographic semi-structured interviews done during home visits. Data sources included interview transcripts; fieldnotes and reflections on those fieldnotes; and data collected from each student's school cumulative folder. I collected data for each household intensively over a one-week period, visiting each household for approximately 2 to 3 hours for 3 or 4 evenings in order to make observations, and most importantly, to conduct parent and student interviews. Similarly, I observed the Language Arts classroom of each participant across 1 week, observing approximately 2 hours each for 4 class sessions.

Home Visits

I coordinated with each family's schedule and visited each home 3 to 4 times in a 1-week period for approximately 2 hours each visit. During these visits, I made notes of each family member's activities, conversations, and interactions and also conducted interviews with parents and children. In addition, I recorded notes regarding the interior and exterior of the home itself.

Interviews

I supplemented home visits with interviews and other data in order to create a complex portrait of each household—my unit of analysis. I conducted interviews with students, their parents, and their teachers. A Funds of Knowledge approach to inquiry centers upon the ethnographic interview, or mix of guided conversation and interviewing, in order to both glean information and to establish relations based upon trust between researcher and interviewee. FoK parent interviews are typically conversational in

nature and organized into three questionnaires to be used as general guides rather than formal protocols (Gonzalez & Moll, 2002).

The first interview focused upon social and family histories—largely based on narratives about family roots, labor histories, and geographical movements. For instance, I asked parents about how they learned of their job and how they then learned the skills necessary for that job. In particular, discussions of labor histories revealed a breadth of knowledge in a vast array of areas. Additionally, discussions of familial ties pointed to areas of knowledge possessed by members outside of the nuclear family, like aunts, uncles, and grandparents.

In order to develop a complex and multiple view of the scope of potential funds of knowledge present within the household, the second interview focused upon the regular household activities of everyday life and the role of children within these activities. Some questions asked participants to discuss times in which they had helped friends or family members in need, or vice versa, and thus uncovered the complex social networks in which households participate. Other questions dealt with ongoing daily, weekly, and monthly household activities and routines.

The third interview centered upon language use in the home, the ways in which parents viewed their roles as caretakers, their own experiences in schools, and how this compared to or contrasted with their child's school experiences. I asked parents about their hopes and goals for their children, in terms of their behavior, values, and educational accomplishments. I audio-recorded all interviews (for all but two parents and one teacher who declined) and later transcribed them.

Although in most FoK studies interviews are conducted only with parents, I also interviewed student participants. With its emphasis on parents within households, many FoK studies have overlooked the funds of knowledge, lives, experiences, and networks of the children (Moll, 2005; Nesper, 1997). Interview questions focused upon uses of written and spoken language and favorite subjects and activities in and outside of school.

Additionally, I conducted interviews with each child's Language Arts teacher in order to determine the general perception of the teachers toward the student participants and their families—in particular, their academic abilities and performance. I also asked more general questions regarding their perspectives on teaching diverse populations, the resources they

believed their students to possess, their means in determining these resources, and whether and how they utilized these resources in planning instruction and/or curricula. To supplement this data, I also collected the standardized test scores for the each participant and noted which, if any, specialized services they received within the school. Together, these data helped to create a multidimensional portrait of each participant as a student.

Data Analysis

I coded parent and child interview transcriptions and field notes by employing the following codes, created by Tenery (2005): The Strategizing Household (behaviors, activities, and customs to sustain the household); Interactional Patterns (social and familial networks); Domains of Knowledge (knowledge, skills, and talents); Cultural Practices (linguistic, literate, religious, and cultural traditions and events). These codes allowed me to uncover and index the funds of knowledge present in the households, across a variety of domains.

Coding in this manner provided a means to document the resources and bodies of knowledge possessed by students and their families within these domains of knowledge. I then met with participants to receive their feedback regarding my characterizations of the household and to gain additional information as needed. Additionally, I analyzed the classroom observations, cumulative folder data, and teacher interviews to gain a sense of the child as a student; the type of language and literacy instruction taking place in the school; and the perspectives of the teacher toward working with a culturally, socioeconomically, and linguistically diverse population. For the purposes of this article, I will present findings related to household bodies of knowledge.

Findings: Bodies of Knowledge

The households possessed a range of knowledge and skills, many of which were related to labor histories or funds contributed by extended family members. Mrs. Ledezma's family had a background in agriculture; both her brother who lived nearby and her parents in Mexico were farmers. Mr. Ledezma's cousin was proficient in computer programming and repair. He and Mr. Ledezma, along with Mr. Ramirez, also had knowledge and

experience in construction and car repair and used this knowledge to maintain the family home and vehicles. Mrs. Ledezma and Mrs. Ramirez both had knowledge in the areas of shopping, cooking, household chores, clothing repair, gardening, and herbal remedies. Mrs. Ledezma was also skilled in language, able to read, write, and speak in both Spanish and English. Further, she communicated with friends and family back in Mexico and therefore had knowledge of and skill with social networking media.

As described, Ms. Smith had knowledge in the area of nursing. Knowledge in the medical field also extended beyond the household since her mother was a nurse and she had an aunt who was a registered nurse studying to be a general practitioner. Other extended family knowledge included agriculture and chemistry. Household knowledge also included gardening, household chores, shopping, cooking, language, higher education, and social networking media like Facebook. Cooking was an especially important fund of knowledge for Ms. Smith. She had been taught by her family to cook at an early age and worked at a restaurant and a hotel when first moving to the U.S. She made sure that her children only had fresh food—no fast food or processed food—and even made her own baby food for the toddler. Ms. Smith passed this knowledge on to Zack by teaching him to cook. She felt that knowing how to cook (“knowing what to do with food”) would provide him a certain amount of independence, along with educating him about nutrition and how to save money.

Based on interviews and observations, the White household possessed knowledge across a number of domains. For instance, as mentioned previously Mrs. White cooked for the family often, a skill she was taught by her mother when she was growing up. While she had gained much of her cooking knowledge from her mother, she also consulted a number of cookbooks and recipes when cooking. In addition, Mrs. White had also majored in fashion design in college and was also a proficient seamstress who could both make and repair clothes, another skill that she and her sisters had learned while growing up.

Additionally, Mr. White also did basic maintenance for the cars owned by the household. His occupation was as an instructional technology designer. As such, he possessed a number of funds of knowledge related to his profession, like grant writing. In addition to grant writing, he was required to reports for his job, which required him to read other reports and

entire books. According to Mr. White, reading and writing tasks accounted for approximately 50% of his work day.

Prior to his current position, Mr. White had worked in a position in which he designed professional opportunities for teachers, related to how to integrate mobile technologies into the classroom. This position also called for him to conduct educational research. Additionally, he had also been a medical research coordinator for a children's hospital, gathering data on topics like traumatic brain injury. Funds of knowledge could also be gleaned from extended family members. For instance, Mr. White's brother was a general contractor so he often turned to him when making household repairs or looked for resources on the Internet.

The Sully household possessed knowledge and skills across a number of domains, many of which were related to Mr. Sully's occupation as a Computer Numeric Controlled (CNC) Machine Operator. Mr. Sully described this position as "program[ming] stuff to cut, cut different kinda shapes and different kinda things. We make display units that go to a lot of companies." He had been at this job for ten years and received training through a trade school; he was a warehouse manager prior to his current position. This position required him to do a lot of reading throughout the day: "I have to read different things to make sure what I'm gonna do for different like depth of a different blade for a different piece of wood or stuff like that or size the wood that I'm gonna use or how it's gonna be put together, like if I'm gonna use laminate." These skills translated into the home, as well. At the time of the study, the Sullys were beginning to remodel their kitchen. Using the skills and knowledge from his job, Mr. Sully was able to do a large part of this work himself, such as cutting and installing the laminate countertops. Table 1 provides an overview of the domains of knowledge possessed across all five households.

Table 1.
A sample of household funds of knowledge¹

<i>Material & Scientific Knowledge</i>	Education/pedagogy
	Domestic pets/animals
	Computer technology, programming, repair
	Nursing
	Instructional design & technology
	Carpentry
	Construction
	Automobile repair & maintenance
<i>Education</i>	Teacher: Instructional design & technology, child psychology
<i>Household Management</i>	Childcare
	Comparative shopping
	Budget & finances
	Home repair & maintenance
	Cooking & nutrition
	Clothing repair
	Gardening
	Cleaning
<i>Communications</i>	Bilingualism
	Translation & interpretation
	Patient care charts
	Written reports
	Oral presentations
	Social networking media
<i>Recreation & Hobbies</i>	Computer & video games
	Movies
	Television
<i>Policies & Practices</i>	Courts
	Hospitals
	Religion & rituals
	Higher education
	Bible studies
	Volunteer work with elderly
<i>Folklife</i>	Celebrating traditions
	Religious beliefs & practices
	Traditional foods

Discussion and Implications: Reframing Constructions of Difference

As Moll and Gonzalez (2004) noted, working-class and language-minority households are often viewed as “places from which children must be saved or rescued” and “lacking worthwhile knowledge and experiences” (p. 162). The findings of this study provide compelling counterevidence to deficit discourses by demonstrating that these households possess “valuable knowledge and experiences that can foster children’s development” (Moll & Gonzalez, 2004, p. 162) and thus offer a significantly different set of understandings about linguistically, culturally, and socioeconomically diverse households. The findings outlined above show that students and families had access to and employed a number of social and cultural tools and specialized knowledge acquired through labor histories, formal schooling, social networks, cultural and linguistic practices, and so forth. As a result of these varied experiences, each participant household had accumulated, deployed, and discarded a number of varied funds of knowledge. Younger members of households also had access to the content of these funds, along with the opportunity to experiment with them, as in the case of Frank and his father making household repairs, or Hannah and Zack learning to cook with their mothers. In this way, these findings contribute to asset-based discourses of diverse families as capable and knowledgeable. That is, the study focuses on strengths and knowledge as students’ primary defining pedagogical characteristics, rather than perceived shortcoming of students and their families, such as those related to language learner or socioeconomic status. This is not to deny the existence of troubling aspects in students’ lives, such as poverty, but to mitigate against these circumstances becoming the sole means by which diverse students are represented.

The findings of this study also challenge the labels that many schools assign to culturally and linguistically diverse learners as less capable and in need of intervention and remediation. In contrast, the current study examines the resources, rather than “limitations,” which these students possess. For instance, based upon their status as a “limited English proficient,” Jack and Phineas were thereby considered “at-risk” according to school logic. Throughout their elementary school careers, they had received pull-out services, special accommodations for standardized testing, and during the time of the study, were in below-grade level reading groups.

Jack's teacher also described a need for his comprehension and written expression levels to increase. However, cumulative records demonstrate the two boys' relative success in school, according to report cards and standardized test results. In spite of this, their defining pedagogical characteristic continued to be "English Language Learner" and "limited English proficient." Despite academic progress and successes, this label stayed with them as a sort of 'academic baggage,' illustrating how "socially constructed differences take on material effects" (Gutierrez & Orellana, 2006, p. 122).

In this case, these labels continued to define them primarily in terms of what was lacking, rather than what the two boys possessed in terms of resources. In this way, Jack's and Phineas' cases serve as "telling" cases (Mitchell, 1984) for the ways in which race and ethnicity can intersect with socioeconomic status to complicate educational outcomes for children. For instance, though Zack and Frank were characterized as socioeconomically disadvantaged, through their academic performance they eventually largely avoided the "at-risk" label typically associated with low SES status. However, Jack and Phineas, though they performed similarly well on many measures, continued to receive remedial instruction, in the form of pull-out intervention services and participation in a below-level reading group. In this sense, the school district's focus on the "adequate yearly progress" of its largest-growing (and lowest performing on state standardized tests) subgroup—English Language Learners—had consequences for the ways in which "difference" was inscribed in the boys' academic identities, as well as in the patterns of instruction they had received throughout the course of their school years. So though teachers themselves spoke of participating students in this study in fairly positive terms, there were practices in place at an institutional level that were rooted in deficit perspectives.

In spite of evidence of empirical knowledge to the contrary, some findings from teacher interviews show deficit discourses about parents to persist, discourses based on attitude rather than observation. For example, in response to a question about the possible challenges of teaching diverse students, one teacher replied, "Some families don't feel that education is 'number one' and don't recognize the importance of their job at home"—a common refrain regarding families experiencing poverty, and which contains reverberations of Ruby Payne's work, which was required reading several years ago within this school district. Another teacher, when asked if

there was anything a child's parents could do to help him do better at school, replied, "Don't let him speak Spanish." Consciously or not, such teacher comments resonate with deficit perspectives toward diverse households—outlooks which are countered by the findings of this study.

Both tangibly and intangibly, the parents of this study supported the educational goals which they held for their children. Most helped with nightly homework and had some children's books in the home, as is the general expectation within mainstream education. However, many parents supported and prepared their children for schooling in ways not broadly recognized. Research has shown that other, non-school related activities like those in which study participants engaged (such as shopping, using the computer, and playing sports) to contribute to children's language and literacy development (e.g., Volk & Long, 2005). Within the current study, Mr. and Mrs. Sully shopped with Frank, and Frank's father taught him to aspects of his work with computers, along with how to repair televisions—skills which could support Frank at school in his learning of math and science. Mr. Sully and Frank also played video games together, and read comic books and children's novels together. Mrs. Ledezma and Mrs. Ramirez encouraged their children's bilingual and biliterate development; the family attended Spanish-language mass on Sunday, and Jack and Phineas also attended the Sunday school class with instruction in Spanish, following the service. Research has demonstrated second-language development to flourish with concurrent development of students' first language (Silverman, 2007). During my visits to their home, I observed Ms. Smith talking continuously to her youngest child, and would assume she likely did the same with Zack when he was a toddler. This more than likely was one of the factors contributing Zack's strong vocabulary as pointed to by his teacher (Duke & Moses, 2003), and challenges those studies which suggest that children from socioeconomically disadvantaged households are less likely to engage in conversation with adults (e.g., Hart & Risley, 1995).

Counternarratives, like the ones provided by this study, are important in challenging what might be called "deficit habits," or "deficit perspectives that often exist more from habit, hearsay, and institutional tradition rather than from real experience and knowledge" (cited in Lopez-Robertson et al., p. 93). Contrary to what teachers might believe, all parents in this study believed education to be 'number one' and all worked with and their children to the best of their ability to ensure their child's success at school,

though not always in ways that might be recognized by White, middle-class educators (Rios, 2010). The Ledezma and Ramirez households made visible the importance of education within their home by displaying all of their children's awards and medals won at school on the family room wall. Mrs. Ledezma also kept all of Jack's tests and other schoolwork stored in drawers of furniture within the home. Three out of the 4 parents interviewed named education as a value that they felt important for their child to hold, expected their children to pursue higher education in some form, expressed this expectation to their children, and supported them in these goals.

Final Thoughts

I designed this study with the goal of trying to understand and come to know some of my students and their families in ways outside of the purview of the classroom. Five families were hospitable enough to allow me to enter their homes, sometimes their churches, and to share meals and birthday celebrations with me. In doing so, they also shared with me the cultural practices, skills, bodies of knowledge, and resources shaped by their diverse backgrounds and experiences. Too often, current educational discourses cast students and their families in negative lights, concentrating on limitations and shortcomings. This is especially true of students from non-mainstream backgrounds, particularly in today's educational climate of standards, accountability, and high-stakes testing. As Bomer and Maloch (2012) cogently argued: "Policies that make teachers fearful of a test rather than curious about their students' lives and cultures may obscure those riches and position teachers to think of immigrant students as problems rather than signals and agents of exciting social transformation" (pp. 47-48). In this vein, Campano and Ghiso (2010) urged us to view students, particularly culturally and linguistically diverse students, as "cosmopolitan intellectuals," who "by virtue of their diverse vantage points and transnational negotiations...are uniquely positioned to educate their peers and teachers about the world" (p. 166). The invitation of this study, in its methodology, conceptual framework, and findings, is to provide a foundation for this shift toward viewing the potentials and promise of diverse students and families.

Notes

¹ Adapted from Mercado, 2005

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