



The incorporation of funds of knowledge and funds of identity of students and their families into educational practice. A case study from Catalonia, Spain



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HIGHLIGHTS

- The term 'funds of identity' enriches the 'funds of knowledge' approach by emphasizing students' interests.
- We illustrate how the students' funds of identity can be used pedagogically.
- The experience was designed in a school with a diverse cultural population in Catalonia, Spain.
- It stresses the significance of working through study groups for teacher development.

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ABSTRACT

This article illustrates how students' 'funds of identity' can be used pedagogically to enrich the 'funds of knowledge' approach. The concept 'funds of identity' emphasizes students' interests through the incorporation of their creative works within the pedagogical space conducted by the teacher. Students invest their identities in the creation of some artifacts, which become educational resources used by teachers in class to affirm students' identities and foster their academic development. The paper shows how a teaching unit using the funds of identity approach is created and discusses about the significance of working through study groups for teacher development.

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1. Introduction

Due to the increased linguistic, social and cultural diversity in contemporary societies, a great number of studies around more inclusive educational practices have appeared in the last years (Banks, 2015; Boylan & Woolsey, 2015; Wills, Lintz, & Mehan, 2004). In particular, some of these studies have shown the crucial role that family–school relationships can have to improve the school performance of both immigrant students and students who are at risk of social exclusion (Crosnoe, 2012).

In this sense, the program 'funds of knowledge', started in Tucson (Arizona), has become one of the most effective approaches to strengthen family, school and community relationships in contexts of high social and cultural diversity (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). After the first experiences carried out in Arizona (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992), the program has been applied in other parts of the world such as Australia (Zipin, 2013), New Zealand (Hedges, Cullen, & Jordan, 2011), England (Hughes & Pollard, 2006) or Spain (Vila & Siqués, 2013). The concept 'funds of identity' (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014a) has also been suggested quite recently to complement the term funds of knowledge with the aim that school practice not only recognizes the knowledge and skills historically accumulated in households to maintain their functioning and well-being but also recognizes the interests, knowledge and skills of the learners themselves.

Although there are some differences in how the funds of knowledge approach is conceptualized and implemented (Hogg,

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2011), one of the highlights of the program is the teachers' visit to some of their students households with the aim of detecting the families' funds of knowledge in order to link their curriculum contents with the experiences, skills and local knowledge of students. In order to accompany the teachers in this process of detection and use of the funds of knowledge of their students' families, the creation of *study groups* has been suggested (Moll, 2014) to allow teachers to work together with researchers and become familiar with the program, its development and implementation.

In that sense, the overall objective of this article is to illustrate how the concepts funds of knowledge and funds of identity can be used pedagogically in the context of a specific study group. Our objective here is not to implement and evaluate a particular teaching unit. Rather, our aim is to illustrate the work and experience of a teacher in the context of a study group meeting and the process that he followed in analyzing the children from a particular classroom in a specific school visiting a household and planning a teaching unit on the basis of the family funds of knowledge and the student funds of identity previously detected.

The study presented here is the result of the work carried out by a specific study group. The study group was composed of 8 primary school teachers and 2 researchers. In order to enrich the data and to be more informative and illustrative, we focus only on the experience carried out by one of the eight teachers. Our purpose is not to generalize data, but rather to provide an in-depth illustration of the process of planning an academic unit after having detected the families' funds of knowledge and the students' funds of identity.

1.1. Contextual background

Official data published by the [Institut d'estadística de Catalunya \(Statistical Institute of Catalonia\) \(2014\)](#) show that nowadays 7,660,464 people live in Catalonia (Spain), of whom 15.1% are of foreign origin (1,138,775 people). If we consider that in 2000 only 2.9% of the population living in Catalonia was foreign, it can be appreciated that the number of foreign residents has increased considerably in recent years. In the same way, the foreign student population has increased substantially and during the 2012–13 school year 12.9% of students in the classrooms of Catalonia were of foreign origin, from different places in Africa, South and Central America, Asia and Europe (MECD, 2013a). Today, the percentage of foreign students in the classrooms of the Spanish educational system is higher than that of all OECD countries (11.4%) as well as that of the whole European Union (9.4%).

The diversity of languages of origin, as well as the diversity of foreign students' levels of competence in the language of instruction in schools, represent challenges for schools, which are added to the identity, ethnic, national and religious plurality already present in the territory (Vila & Siqués, 2013).

Various national and international reports show that immigrant students obtain poorer academic results than native students. According to the latest PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) report, for example, the difference in the results obtained in solving real life problems between native and immigrant students was noticeable. In the general context of the OECD, foreign students obtain 36 points fewer than natives, while in Spain the difference is between 39 points and 61 points in Catalonia (MECD [Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport], 2014).

Data from the latest PISA report on mathematics and reading with computers (MECD, 2014) follow the same line as the PISA 2012 report, which evaluated performance in mathematics, reading and science (see Table 1).

Table 1

Differences in academic competences between immigrant and native students according to the PISA report 2012.^a

	Mathematics		Reading		Science	
	Immigrant	Native	Immigrant	Native	Immigrant	Native
OECD	468	500	473	503	466	508
EU	465	495	465	497	468	504
Spain	439	492	447	495	456	504
Catalonia	433	504	444	511	436	502

^a Compiled from MECD data (2013b).

1.2. An explanation of the academic performance of students from cultural minorities

To explain these results, the OECD has postulated the 'socio-economic and cultural index' variable as a relevant factor to explain the difference in results between native and foreign students. However, when controlling the index and comparing the results between native students and immigrant students, there are still differences in favor of native students (MECD, 2013b).

Another factor that might seem relevant is the native language of foreign students and its impact on the acquisition of the language skills needed for school performance. However, some studies do not attribute this failure to purely linguistic factors. Recent research, conducted with 10,415 students in primary education linguistic support classes in Catalonia, revealed that the 'school adaptation' variable was the one that modified the likelihood of students passing various oral and written tests to assess their language proficiency in Catalan. The length of stay and the native language played an important role; however, the authors stated that: 'our data support the importance of school adaptation of immigrant students as a key variable in their progress in the school language' (Siqués, Perera, & Vila, 2012). In this context, 'school adaptation' is understood to be: 1) the degree of knowledge students are shown to have in relation to the school (space, distribution of time, customs, habits, types of tasks), 2) the strategies they demonstrate (working habits, interests, participation, ability to ask for help), 3) the way they relate to and get on with other students and 4) the way they relate to and get on with adults (especially teachers).

Besides students' individual variables there are other factors, such as family environment, that can significantly contribute to student's adaptation to the school context. In particular, the framework of family–school mismatch (Poveda, 2001) has been suggested to explain students' academic performance from a systemic point of view.

1.3. The framework of family–school mismatch

From a socio-cultural perspective, we cannot understand the educational experience exclusively on the basis of individual variables. That is, we cannot explain the school performance of students only in terms of their personality (shyness, passivity, hyperactivity or language delay). At least we think this would be an overly simplistic view. In this sense, the so-called home–school continuity–discontinuity framework or home–school mismatch (Poveda, 2001) involves taking a systemic approach to understanding the academic performance of minority cultures. These groups, grounded in practices and contexts of activity often different from school culture, can experience a more difficult transition between their ways of life and what they find and what they should do in school.

Classrooms and schools often become decontextualized environments characterized by specific communicative practices that require students to participate in certain forms of interaction and

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