ENGAGING WITH
Funds of Knowledge

Across Learning Environments

What are Funds of Knowledge?

"Funds of Knowledge are collections of knowledge – based in cultural practices that are a part of families' inner culture, work experience, or their daily routine. It is the knowledge and expertise that students and their family members have because of their roles in their families, communities, and culture."

How To Use Funds of Knowledge

In 2020, *The New York Times* released "Nice White Parents", a podcast reporting on the state of educational equity through five related stories. In Episode 1, we learn about the School for International Studies (SIS), a public secondary school in Brooklyn. The story opens with a new group of parents at SIS who are keen to start a French dual-language program. These parents are White, educated, and middle class; the French program is intended to attract other White neighborhood parents to SIS. With the support of the principal, the new parents organize a big-ticket gala at the French embassy to benefit the new language program.

Source: Apple Podcasts

In the same episode, we also meet the established parent leaders of the PTA, who reflect the majority Black, Latino, and Middle Eastern demographics of the school. These parents are puzzled and displeased by the new direction their school is taking – why were the new parents getting so much institutional support?

Why was the fundraising committee planning an event that the vast majority of SIS parents could not afford to attend? Why wasn't the PTA included in the decision to "re-brand" SIS as a French dual-language school? And why French?

We see these established parents enter a state of cognitive dissonance brought on by the difference between their perspectives and that of the new parents. Over the course of the episode, we learn the following:

- The new parents touted the French program as a way to promote bilingualism, although a large percentage of the students at SIS were already bilingual, speaking Spanish or Arabic at home.
- The established parent leaders saw community building as their core responsibility – "fun-raising" rather than the fund-raising that the new parents valued.
- Decision-making in the PTA had previously been collaborative and based on face-to-face relationships, rather than handed down as a fait accompli.

According to the Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center (ECLKC) site's Culture & Language page, funds of knowledge includes the following:

⭐ Families have abundant knowledge that programs can learn and incorporate into their family engagement efforts.

⭐ Students bring with them funds of knowledge from their homes and communities that can be applied towards concept and skill development

⭐ Classroom practices sometimes underestimate and constrain what children are able to display intellectually.

⭐ Teachers should focus on helping students find meaning in activities, rather than learning rules and facts.

While the new parents may have had good intentions, the unspoken message was that some forms of **cultural capital** were more important than others. The established parents had assets of institutional memory, ways of making decisions and interacting, linguistic diversity, work experience, and educational values – PTA funds of knowledge - that were subordinated when the new parents showed up.

Chana Joffe-Walt, the journalist reporting for *The New York Times*, recalls a visit she made to SIS to observe the French dual-language program in action. She watches Maya, an Arabic-speaking student, struggle to participate in a French-language drama class. Joffe-Walt muses, "There was money for a French program, which meant that at SIS, French had value. Arabic didn't. Spanish didn't. That's something Maya is learning at school, along with her French script."

SIS undervalued a resource that was right in its midst, one that has demonstrated its ability to enhance the academic progress of students. In this session, we will be exploring the importance of engaging with family cultural practices, experiences, skills, ways of interacting, and perspectives —collectively known as funds of knowledge.
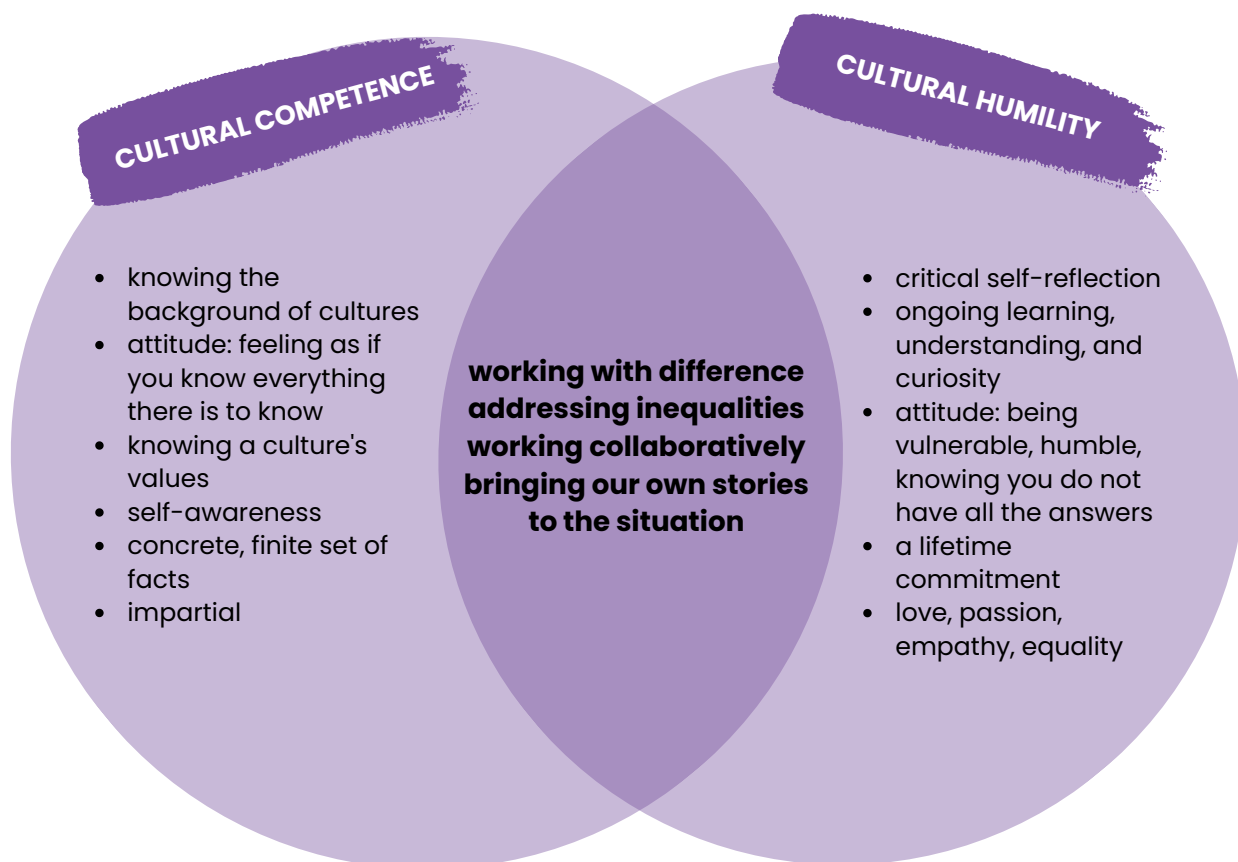
Embracing our students' funds of knowledge offers us a more complex view of the families we serve and can help us develop deeper relationships with them. Seeking out funds of knowledge is one of the practical applications of developing our own cultural competence.

Cultural Competence vs. Cultural Humility

Cultural competence is the ability to understand and appreciate cultural differences. The goal of cultural competence is to recognize our own cultural biases and improve our ability to work respectfully with people from diverse cultures.

The idea of **cultural humility** takes that one step further. Rather than thinking we have mastered – become competent at – understanding intercultural differences, the concept of cultural humility reminds us that striving for self-awareness, empathy, and mutual understanding is a lifelong commitment.

CULTURAL COMPETENCE

- knowing the background of cultures
- attitude: feeling as if you know everything there is to know
- knowing a culture's values
- self-awareness
- concrete, finite set of facts
- impartial

working with difference addressing inequalities working collaboratively bringing our own stories to the situation

CULTURAL HUMILITY

- critical self-reflection
- ongoing learning, understanding, and curiosity
- attitude: being vulnerable, humble, knowing you do not have all the answers
- a lifetime commitment
- love, passion, empathy, equality

Adapted from: Bringing Cultural Humility to Academic Advising

Engaging with Funds of Knowledge

Connecting to personal life experiences can help the learner find greater meaning in content learning. It also promotes retention when learning something new. The basic premise of the funds of knowledge approach is that classroom learning can be greatly enhanced when teachers learn more about their students and their students' households (Moll et al., 1992). The funds of knowledge approach consists of four "teacher moves":

1. Conduct some initial research on your students as learners in and outside school.
2. Use this knowledge to design a curriculum that provides students with opportunities to study their own lifeways.
3. Develop meaningful, challenging learning tasks and performance-based expectations for student learning.
4. Reflect on learning and make modifications for next time.

ACTION STEP	ACROSS LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS
1. Conduct research.	A funds of knowledge inventory matrix can be used as a collaborative Google Doc or interview tool (in-person or remote). Connect to families through story backpacks (in-person) or personalized Google folders (remote).
2. Use this knowledge to design a curriculum that provides students with opportunities to study their own lifeways.	Know the standards – where can we find relevant connections between the NYS Next Generation Learning Standards and the rich cultural information we are gathering? Develop a crosswalk document to map family funds of knowledge to learning standards.
3. Develop meaningful, challenging learning tasks and performance-based expectations for student learning.	**Examples of learning experiences:** • Have students create photo essays of a typical day or weekend in their home/family life. • Choose texts that reflect the cultural and ethnic diversity of the nation. • Incorporate popular culture (e.g., music, film, video, gaming, etc.) into the classroom curriculum.; • Create regular lessons in which families can join their children in virtual learning. • Embed linguistic diversity into written assignments. • Have students create a digital collage of hobbies/pastimes. • Have students interview multiple generations in their families. • Invite guest speakers from various linguistic communities to share traditions, celebrations, or slices of daily life. • Host a live or virtual event at your school where students and families can contribute food and/or music.
4. Reflect on learning and make modifications for next time.	**Portable professional reflective practices:** • Journaling • Peer coaching • Student feedback

We know that our students make meaning and retain learning better when the content is culturally relevant. We can extend that knowledge to our work with families. The PTA leaders featured in *The New York Times*' Nice White Parents brought specific funds of knowledge to their role in the school which could have informed and shaped the school's decision to start a French dual-language program.

Your Turn!

In the next session, we will be connecting funds of knowledge with elevating family voice in decisions that affect their children.

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About Us

The TALE Academy

The TALE Academy is a series of virtual learning experiences available to all New York State educators and offers a rich array of resources on topics related to teaching across learning environments (TALE). The TALE Academy is built upon the work New York State educators carried out during emergency remote teaching (ERT) throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and extends it toward the future. TALE invites educators to think beyond online learning to consider a broader perspective on teaching and learning that encompasses teaching across multiple environments (in-person, remote, and hybrid).

The Teaching in Remote/Hybrid Learning Environments (TRLE) Project

The TALE Academy is part of a broader New York State Education Department (NYSED) initiative known as Teaching in Remote/Hybrid Learning Environments (TRLE). In July 2020, NYSED was awarded funding through the United States Department of Education's Education Stabilization Fund-Rethink K-12 Education Models Grant to implement TRLE – a three-year project to build the capacity of teachers and educational leaders to effectively implement remote/hybrid learning for all students. Launched in the depths of the pandemic, the first phase of the TRLE project focused on getting resources to the field through partnerships with Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) and school districts across the state. The second phase, which began in February 2022, focused on aggregating lessons learned and emerging teaching and learning strategies to address a broader field of practice: teaching across learning environments.

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