Funds of Knowledge in Latino Homes: On Seeing and Interpreting in Complex Times

CEMELA Parents Module: DAY 2
Adapted from presentation by:
Carmen I. Mercado
Hunter College and the Graduate Center of CUNY,
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Purpose

To create a space to explore funds of knowledge as a theoretical construct and as a way of learning about intellectual resources in Latino households.
To explore implications of these ideas for educators or researchers who, as public intellectuals, will shape educational policy that affects the education of Latino students.
The Plan
Interrogate the author:
Where do you see implicit funds of knowledge in mathematics in the two case studies presented in Mercado chapter?

Had you joined us on these home visits, what would you have looked for/asked to make these funds of knowledge transparent? (20 min.)

Talk: Influence of research stance and geographic space on what we learn from families. (20 min.)

[Optional] Video Data Analysis (30 min.)

Implications and Conclusions (20 min.)
Assumptions or Beliefs of Funds of Knowledge Approach
Change in student performance among minority populations is directly associated with change in the relationship between home and school.

(Velez-Ibañez, 1995)
The best agents for change are teachers who become convinced that minority children and their homes are repositories for what we have termed, “Funds of Knowledge.”

(Velez-Ibañez, 1995)
And I would add parents as powerful agents for change.
What are “Funds of Knowledge”? 
Funds of Knowledge are the *intellectual residue* of the activities of households.

(Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005)
“I have used the term ‘Funds of Knowledge’ to mean all rural and urban skills, experience, technical knowledge of habitat and survival, and the full inventory of social knowledge that households have developed for survival.”

(Velez–Ibañez, 1995:253)
“intellectual, communicative, emotional, or spiritual resources for learning in Latino homes”
(Mercado chapter, 2005)
“Funds of knowledge, then, are the historically accumulated bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household functioning and well-being” (Gonzalez, Andrade, Civil, Moll, 2001)
Funds of knowledge--
a perspective
and
an approach
Funds of Knowledge Approach

A knowledge building community in which families, educators and researchers collaborate using tools and practices to see and understand intellectual resources of local Latino households that remain invisible within mainstream research, in schools and also to Latino communities and families.
Mercado says documenting the study of ‘funds of knowledge’ is scholarship of teaching as activism.
Mercado Study: Adapting and adapting ourselves to the Funds of Knowledge Approach
Distinct Features of Mercado New York Study

- Self-sponsored research requires tapping social networks to carry out activities.
- Adapted research tools and practices to be locally appropriate conceptually, linguistically, pragmatically e.g., framing questions, sequencing questionnaires, narrowing the pool of questions.
- Teacher researchers bear witness to living conditions of families, e.g., testimonial genre
- Collaborate, reflect & analyze with written/audio evidence in small and large groups and, subsequently during conference presentations; a never-ending story.
- Research Project adapted to one semester course
Lessons from the work...
Seeing what’s there may not be easy, even with powerful theoretical lenses, because of the influence of societal values.
The questions we ask make transparent (or not) a households’ funds of knowledge:

What kinds of things do you read?

Are there books in the house?
Experienced bilingual teacher-researchers were highly conscious of and sensitive to the role of language in establishing personal relationships.
“Language was a valuable fund of knowledge in the Navarro home.”

“Yo les enseño los dos idiomas porque you never know.”

“She continued to send her children to the bilingual school even after relocating 30 blocks south because ‘if the kids are not bilingual, the transition between NY and PR will affect them...’
“Every day I have to read something. I love to read newspapers, magazines, everything...from Mexico, the Dominican Republic, even Brazil..”

“Ita seeks to establish herself as an intellectual, someone who knows what she’s talking about...She is proud of her bilingualism and biliteracy and it is one of the most important gifts to her children”
“Knowledge of the US Puerto Rican community, especially its intellectual and literary tradition, is essential background reading” (Mercado, 2005, p.146).
Unfair simplifications about how Puerto Ricans in New York live has obscured the important contributions they have made. The fact that Spanish language and culture enjoys a well-deserved privileged status in the city today is largely due to them (Canas et al, Literary Cultures of Latin America II, 2004)
Guided home visits--a powerful way to learn
“I have come to theorize the power of these lived experiences lies in the somatic-emotional learning they make possible, which I do not believe have been adequately addressed in field studies that employ ethnographic methods.”

(Mercado, Educational Ethnography Conference, Argentina, 2006)
“The railroad apartment is small, everything appearing to be scaled down in size. ‘It’s a world like Macondo,’ writes the teacher, commenting on the impoverished living conditions she did not expect ‘here in America’. For this teacher Macondo, the setting for the novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, is symbolic of poverty. ‘Why bother to fix this apartment,’ Ita explains in Spanish. ‘If there is a fire, everything is lost.”

(Mercado, 2005, p. 142)
En cuatro pequeñas habitaciones conviven tres matrimonios, un hombre, y cuatro niños en una residencia diminuta de "dos familias," tipo "row house". Al entrar por la puerta principal se empieza a sentir limitaciones impuestas por el pequeño espacio. La entrada es tan estrecho que la escalera que nos lleva al segundo piso donde vive ‘La Familia’ toma la mayor parte del estrecho pasillo, apenas 3 pies de ancho.
Se abre la puerta del apartamiento y nos encontramos en la cocina pero la falta de espacio nos obliga a sentarnos en la mesa de comer. Luego Wilda nos contó que no le sorprendía este tipo de vivienda pero que se asustó al sentir el calor de la estufa a su espalda mientras tomaba notas.

(notas de campo, 13 de octubre 1996)
“Witnessing first-hand an economic reality that is at the core of health, social, and educational problems that have been documented and which require attention through social policy (for example, minimum wage legislation, access to post-secondary education, community health and nutritional programs) made more of an impact on us than any of the academic articles we read...no matter how insightful.”
Examples of Mathematics Funds of Knowledge from Work with Parents

- Insert Video Clips from instructor data or Data Excerpts from research articles for discussion.