



First Years, Funds of Knowledge and Third Spaces

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Summary:

Universities that engage with diversity embrace the demographic of their broader communities and ensure that their first-year programs cater for diverse student populations (Rissman, Carrington & Bland, 2013). They redress “marginalisation of certain forms of knowledge and ways of knowing” (Gale & Parker, 2014, p.747). Students’ cultural knowledge and the resources that they bring to their formal education are of great importance to their sense of belonging, an important aspect of the first year experience (Barton & Tan, 2009; Gonzalez & Moll, 2001; Hogg, 2011; Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014; Kift, Nelson & Clarke, 2010; Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011). Funds of Knowledge (FoK) can be described as social and cultural capital (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011) in the form of the wide and varied resources that are possessed by adult learners. They are a useful model for research into the understandings and practices that adult learners bring to the classroom (Oughton, 2010).

This contribution emerges from the current Australasian sociopolitical context with its emphasis on widening Higher Education participation and improving student attainment. This has resulted in increasingly diverse student populations, particularly in teacher education. The presenters work in a School of Education where 85% of the students study off-campus (externally) and a significant proportion of these are mature age students who are taking up new careers. Strategies to engage these students within an online learning community are paramount and there is the need to embrace these students’ existing funds of knowledge. In this presentation we address the urgency of this issue and explore differing strategies for engagement and support.

The substantial prior experience and funds of knowledge that the first year off-campus pre-service teachers bring to their studies are an important focus for exploration and recognition within the School. These students comprise a significant proportion of the student body and with the growing popularity of distance learning it is important to consider the e-pedagogy that enhances the first year experience and is respectful of the diversity within the student body. In accordance with Gale and Parker’s (2014) typology of student transition in Higher Education research, policy and practice, the authors view that engaging with first year FoK is less of a process of induction or development, as outlined in Gale and Parker’s (2014) typology of student transition, and more a transition-as-becoming approach that encompasses identity development and an acknowledgement of the complexities of life (Gale & Parker, 2014).

Our approach positions first year pre-service teachers as competent and recognises the importance of examining the interrelationship between knowledges, discourses and funds of knowledge that constitute the sociocultural resources that pre-service teachers bring with them from their lifeworlds to their Education courses. As a fluid concept, the content and meaning of FoK can be negotiated through inclusive e-pedagogies that

evoke student lifeworld Discourses. Furthermore, we explore the hybrid negotiated third spaces (Williams, 2013) that exist between the first space of academic Education Discourse and the second space of student lifeworlds. Gale and Parker (2014) argue that there needs to be future research that is “cognizant of students’ lived reality, not just institutional and/or systemic interests” (p.747). It is this area that the presenters are currently researching.

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