Building and Not Building on Students' Out-of-School Experiences: How Teachers of English Language Learners Understand and Enact a Funds of Knowledge Approach to Teaching

By

Tanya Morin

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This dissertation is approved by the following members of the Final Oral Committee:
Margaret Hawkins, Professor, Curriculum and Instruction
Stacy Lee, Professor, Educational Policy Studies
Diego Roman, Assistant Professor, Curriculum and Instruction
Kate Vieira, Associate Professor, Curriculum and Instruction

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Theoretical Framework

As the number of public-school students classified as English Language Learners (ELLs)[1] has grown over the past several decades, the question of how to best meet these students' unique learning needs has become an issue of great interest to university-based researchers and educational practitioners alike. A quick survey of the literature published about this subject – particularly that aimed at classroom teachers - reveals that much of the research concerning ELLs, as well as the pedagogical approaches based on that research, has primarily focused on the linguistic needs of these students (August, Carlo, Dressler, & Snow, 2005; Echevarría, Vogt, & Short, 2008; Nutta, Strebel, Mokhtari, Mihai, & Crevecoeur-Bryant, 2014; Wong-Fillmore & Snow; 2000). In particular, many studies aim to identify strategies teachers can use to reduce the linguistic demands of academic content material for ELLs and/or to help ELLs acquire academic English. Although these issues are undoubtedly important, focusing solely on the linguistic needs of ELLs may not be enough to support the academic success of these students.

Educational researchers whose work is based on cultural-historical theories of learning (Cole & Griffin, 1983) have suggested that, in order to improve the educational experiences of ELL students and to help them develop into successful learners, it is necessary for schools and teachers to do a better job of creating learning spaces that validate and build on ELL students' personal knowledge and experiences (Gutiérrez, Baquendo-López, & Tejeda, 2003; Martínez, Orellana, Pacheco, & Carbone, 2008; Moje, Ciechanowski, Kramer, Ellis, Carrillo, & Collazo,

[1] I have chosen to use the term "English Language Learner" (ELL) to refer to students who are learning English as an additional language throughout this paper. Although there are other terms that are currently employed to refer to this group of students, including "English Learner" (EL) and "emergent bilingual," the teachers whom I interviewed used the term "ELL." In order to be consistent, I have opted to also use that term.

2004; Moll, 1992a; Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992; Orellana & Reynolds, 2008).[2] This assertion reflects the fact that "[a] cultural-historical approach assumes that individual development and disposition must be understood in (not separate from) cultural and historical context … We attend to individuals' linguistic and cultural-historical repertoires as well as to their contributions to practices that connect with other activities in which they commonly engage" (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003, p. 22). To that end, rather than focusing solely on the linguistic needs of ELL students, a cultural historical approach to education for ELLs takes into consideration the totality of children's experiences and suggests ways of leveraging those experiences for academic learning in classroom contexts.

A Response to Deficit Views of English Language Learners

Educational theorists who developed cultural-historical approaches to instruction for ELLs were responding, in large part, to deficit understandings of ELL students and their families. According to these researchers, and others whose work is influenced by socio-cultural theories of teaching and learning, one of the main reasons that students from working-class, immigrant backgrounds do not do better in school is that dominant school discourses characterize ELLs and other children from non-dominant backgrounds as deficient or lacking in the kinds of knowledge and skills that contribute to academic success (Compton-Lilly, 2003; González, Moll, Tenery, Rivera, Rendón, Gonzales & Amanti, 2005; Gutiérrez et al., 2003; Mercado, 2005; Moll et al., 1992; Orellana & Reynolds, 2008; Pacheco & Gutiérrez, 2009). This perspective stems, in part, from the fact that school-based practices and forms of knowledge

[2] Many of the studies done by this group of researchers have focused on Spanish-speaking children from immigrant Latino families. However, I would argue that the ideas underlying these studies – namely that schools need to do a better job of validating and building on the cultural and linguistic resources of children from non-dominant backgrounds – are ones that are also relevant to researchers and educators working with other groups of ELL students, particularly those from working class immigrant families.

have traditionally been seen as more valuable than those that are associated with informal, non-school-based learning activities (Schultz & Hull, 2002; Lave, 1996). For example, the work of Snow and her colleagues (Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman, & Hemphill, 1991) suggests that children whose parents read aloud to them and have extended discussions with them about the books – two activities that resemble school-based literacy practices – are more likely to become successful readers. Snow et al. conclude that when students struggle with learning to read, it is directly attributable to the fact that their families do not engage in these kinds of literacy practices. The privileging of school-like behaviors is problematic for children, like many English Language Learners, whose out-of-school language and literacy practices may not resemble school-based ones, because educators view them as being at a disadvantage (Gee, 2004; Hawkins, 2005, 2019; Gutiérrez & Orellana, 2006; Mercado, 2005; Zentella, 2005). The cultural, linguistic and literacy experiences that children do bring to the classroom are not viewed as valuable resources for learning and, in the case of students who speak a language other than English at home, may even be seen as obstacles to overcome (Gee, 2004; Mercado, 2005; Zentella, 2005, Valenzuela, 1999).

This deficit understanding of ELLs negatively impacts students in a variety of ways. One way in which it harms students is that it encourages teachers to view students as less ready or able to learn academic material, thereby prompting them to engage students in instructional activities that are not intellectually challenging (García & Kleifgen, 2018; Pacheco & Gutiérrez, 2009; Moll, 1992a; Moll et al., 1992). A deficit view of ELL students and other children from non-dominant groups is also harmful because it may communicate to students that the practices they engage in at home are not valuable resources on which to draw in academic settings (Lee, 2007). Another important way in which deficit discourses negatively impact students from

traditionally marginalized groups is that they invite educators to blame students and families when children do not do well in school rather than considering what schools might do differently in order to better meet students' needs (Auerbach, 1995; Compton-Lilly, 2003). As noted above, if students struggle with learning to read, it is assumed that it is due to the fact that families do not engage in the appropriate kinds of literacy practices at home. Rather than focusing on how they might change their own practices in order to build on the knowledge and experiences ELL students *do* bring to the classroom with them, teachers and schools instead focus on changing, or remediating, students and their families. These remediation efforts usually consist of early and intensive interventions aimed at teaching students and their families to engage in the kinds of practices that are valued in school settings, like storybook reading (Auerbach, 1995). For students, remediation typically also means receiving intensive doses of skills-centered instruction even if those kinds of instructional strategies have already failed to meet their learning needs (Cole & Griffin, 1983). This focus on teacher-centered, skills-focused instruction means that students have less access to meaning-centered instructional activities, thereby further limiting the kinds of educational experiences to which they have access (Moll, 1992a; Cole & Griffin, 1983).

A Cultural-historical Approach to Instruction for ELLs: Re-Mediation, Not Remediation

Cultural-historical theorists interested in improving the educational experiences of ELL students reject the notion that it is the family and the child who are in need of remediation. Rather than trying to change students and their families, these theorists advocate trying to "re-mediate" classroom spaces so that the knowledge and skills ELL students develop in out-of-school contexts are seen as assets (Pacheco & Gutiérrez, 2009). A play on the word remediation, the term "re-mediation" reflects an understanding of learning as a culturally mediated process and of classrooms as culturally mediated spaces. This focus on the idea of mediation stems from

the fact that cultural historical theory, like other types of theories that reflect a sociocultural understanding of learning, is heavily influenced by the work of the Russian psychologist Vygotsky and his colleagues. In particular, cultural historical theorists, like Cole, Rogoff, Lave and Moll, have built on Vygotsky's notion that all human experience – including intellectual activity - is mediated by external tools or artifacts (Cole, 1996; Cole & Griffin, 1983; Moll, 2000). This means that humans do not experience the world directly. As Cole and Griffin (1983) explain, "mediation involves regulating your interactions with the world indirectly … through objects that are made by human hands" (p. 69). These mediational objects include concrete tools, like books or computers (Pacheco & Gutiérrez, 2009). But they also include sign systems, like spoken and written language (Cole & Griffin, 1983; Moll, 1992a) and "ideational artifacts -such as theories, ideologies, belief systems, and the like" (Pacheco & Gutiérrez, 2009, p. 62). Because these mediational tools have been produced over time by groups of people, they can be characterized as both cultural and historical in nature. Because all human activity is mediated by these culturally and historically developed tools, in order to fully understand human experience, it is necessary to pay attention to the cultural and historical context in which it takes place (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003).

The fact that human activity is regulated by the use of culturally constructed tools means that it is culturally mediated (Cole, 1996; Moll, 2000). Given this understanding of human experience, it follows that classroom spaces - where intellectual activities are constantly mediated by various kinds of cultural tools - are also culturally mediated. As Moll (1992a) puts it: "classrooms (or households) are always socially and culturally organized settings, artificial creations, whose specific practices mediate the intellectual work children accomplish" (p. 21). This means that classroom activities can be mediated in different ways, depending on teachers'

beliefs about their students and how to organize classroom instruction in order to best meet their learning needs (Moll, 1992a; Pacheco & Gutiérrez, 2009). The experiences and knowledge that students bring to the classroom can be seen as resources for learning, or not. The practices students are expected to acquire can either be reductive in nature – reflecting an understanding of ELL students as in need of remediation – or they can present an opportunity for students to engage in meaningful language and literacy experiences that build on and contribute to their repertoires of cultural practice. Given this understanding of classrooms and classroom activities as culturally mediated, any effort to change classrooms, cultural historical theorists argue, means re-mediating the way classroom activities are organized. More specifically, re-mediation involves "a *shift in the way that mediating devices regulate coordination with the environment*" (Cole & Griffin, 1983, p. 70, emphasis in original). In these re-mediated spaces, ELL students' cultural and linguistic resources are seen as strengths rather than as obstacles and teachers focus on building on students' knowledge and experiences rather than on ways to remediate their supposed deficiencies (González, et al., 2005; Gutiérrez et al., 2003; Moll, 1992a; Pacheco & Gutiérrez, 2009).

There are two principal ways that cultural historical theorists believe classrooms can be re-mediated in order to better meet the needs of ELL students. The first is to re-organize instructional activities in order to take advantage of the full range of sociocultural resources that are available in the environment, including the cultural and linguistic resources of ELL students and their families (Moll, 1992a; Gutiérrez et al., 2003; Pacheco & Gutiérrez, 2009). In essence, cultural historical theorists advocate re-organizing the learning space so that students' experiences are treated as important resources for learning. This could involve encouraging children to use their native language when participating in classroom activities or designing

curriculum units that are reflective of students' out-of-school experiences. The second way cultural historical theorists advocate changing classrooms is by encouraging teachers to think beyond reductionist conceptions of teaching and learning that focus on remediating the supposed linguistic and academic deficiencies of ELL students (Cole & Griffin, 1983; Martínez et al., 2008; Moll, 1992a; Moll, 1992b; Pacheco & Gutiérrez, 2009). For example, in the area of literacy instruction, this would mean seeing reading and writing primarily as meaning-making activities (Cole & Griffin, 1983; Moll, 1992a; Moll, 1992b). The goal of this type of literacy instruction would be to encourage students to view their literacy skills as tools they can use make meaning of their experiences and to act on their worlds in ways that are meaningful to them (Martínez et al., 2008; Pacheco & Gutiérrez, 2009). Taken together, the two changes described above can contribute to the development of intellectually challenging instruction that "exceeds" (Moll et al., 1992, p. 132) the skills-focused instruction to which ELL students are often subjected.

Connections to Other Educational Theories

A cultural-historical approach to instruction can be situated within the larger conversation the education community is having about how to improve schooling outcomes for ELLs and other students from non-dominant groups. More specifically, it can be linked to other progressive educational theories that are concerned with questions of equity and social justice. First, I see a cultural-historical instructional approach as an example of a strengths-based pedagogy. In that sense, it is similar to other pedagogical approaches that encourage educators to see students of color from a strengths-based perspective, including culturally relevant pedagogy (e.g. Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Hawkins, 2019) and multicultural education (Banks & Banks, 2010; Gay, 2004; Sleeter & Delgado Bernal, 2004). As

noted above, an important aspect of the work that is being done by cultural historical researchers is that it assumes that all children come to school with valuable resources on which to draw. Moll (2001) explains that this kind of an approach "defin[es] diversity as an asset in theory and practice" (p. 24). Focusing on students' strengths directly challenges deficit discourses that position some students, like ELLs, as in need of remediation. For that reason, it might be said to encourage teachers to adopt a strengths-based understanding of students from immigrant families.

However, I would argue that cultural historical approaches to teaching for ELLs go beyond simply focusing on the strengths that ELL students bring to the classroom with them. Rather, these approaches also encourage teachers to question dominant school discourses about what counts as valuable knowledge and the purpose of schooling more broadly. González et al. (2005) refer to this as the "transformative" aspect of cultural-historical approaches. For that reason, I would also characterize a cultural-historical understanding of teaching as an example of critical pedagogy. Like other instructional approaches informed by critical education theory, cultural-historical approaches to teaching have the goal of de-stabilizing or de-centering dominant notions of valuable knowledge (Gutiérrez et al., 2003; Lee, 2007; Martínez et al., 2008; Moje et al., 2004; Moll, 1992a).

While it is hoped that re-mediated classroom spaces will allow ELL students to bridge their home and school worlds, thereby improving their educational outcomes, that is not the only goal of cultural historical approaches to teaching. Rather, it is expected that teachers - and students - engaging in this kind of work will come to question traditional school discourses about the relative value of different kinds of knowledge and lived experiences (Lee, 2007; Moll, 1992a; Gutiérrez et al., 2003; Pacheco & Gutiérrez, 2009; Martínez et al., 2008). More specifically, the

goal is to encourage teachers to see the out-of-school experiences and language and literacy practices of their ELL students as valuable resources for learning, even if they don't resemble practices that are traditionally privileged in classroom spaces.

Expanding the definition of what counts as valuable knowledge in academic settings de-centers dominant school discourses (Lee, 2007; Moje et al., 2004). It encourages both teachers and students to see the academic discourses traditionally privileged in classrooms as just one of many – equally valid and valuable – ways of knowing and being. De-centering school-based discourses also prompts teachers and students to acknowledge that some practices are valued over others and gives them opportunities to think critically about why this might be the case (Lee, 2007; Martínez et al., 2008). This desire to uncover and question the hidden power structures that exist in classrooms is a central component of cultural-historical approaches to strengths-based education for ELLs.

Funds of Knowledge

Cultural-historical theorists have developed a variety of constructs that have been used as frameworks for designing strengths-based instructional approaches for students who are classified as ELLs. One example is the idea that teachers should find ways to allow bilingual students to draw on the hybrid language and literacy practices they bring to the classroom (García & Wei, 2014; Gutiérrez et al., 2003; Manyak, 2002; Nixon & Gutiérrez, 2008). Another is the concept of cultural modeling, which involves identifying "points of leverage" (Martínez et al., 2008, p. 424) between the cultural practices in which students are involved outside of school and school-based discourses and then designing activities that build on those commonalities (Lee, 2007; Martínez et al., 2008; Orellana & Reynolds, 2008). The cultural-historical construct that has been taken up most broadly – both by educational researchers and by educational

practitioners - is that of funds of knowledge. The funds of knowledge approach, which was first developed by Luis Moll, Norma González and their colleagues, involves helping teachers identify and draw on the expertise, or funds of knowledge, that immigrant English Language Learners and their families have developed in out of school settings (González et al., 2005; Moll, 1992a; Moll, 1997; Moll et al., 1992).

I maintain that the funds of knowledge approach as originally developed by Moll and González consists of three interrelated components. First, Moll and González use the concept of funds of knowledge as a theoretical tool in order to re-value the out-of-school experiences of ELL students and their families. Second, their work is characterized by a focus on professional development and on supporting changes in teachers' thinking about immigrant ELL students and families. The third important component of Moll and González's approach is an interest in the pedagogical implications of the concept of funds of knowledge. I believe it is these three elements that distinguish their work both from other cultural historical approaches to strengths-based instruction for ELLs and from subsequent funds of knowledge studies. I will detail each of these three key elements below.

Funds of knowledge as a theoretical tool. The first, and perhaps best known, way in Moll and González (González et al., 2005; Moll, 1992a; Moll, 1997; Moll et al., 1992) employ the concept of funds of knowledge is as a theoretical tool. As noted earlier, students from immigrant families are sometimes viewed by educators as deficient (Auerbach, 1995; García & Kleifgen, 2018; González et al., 2005; Moll, 1992a). At times, it is assumed that these children lack the kinds of prior experiences and knowledge that contribute to academic success. However, Moll and González start from the assumption that the everyday activities in which these students and their families participate do provide them with bodies of knowledge – which

they term funds of knowledge – that can serve as resources for learning. Moll and González define funds of knowledge as the "historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being" (Moll et al., 1992, p. 133). Using this construct to make sense of ELL students' out-of-school experiences focuses the attention of researchers and educators on what these students and their families do know rather on what they do not. As such, the concept of funds of knowledge is a tool for re-valuing the lived experiences of these students from a strengths-based perspective. More specifically, it helps teachers see students and families as repositories of information and skills that can be applied to academic learning tasks. Approaching students and families in this way allows teachers to uncover areas of expertise that might have been otherwise ignored and to see topics that are not typically addressed in classroom contexts as valuable resources for learning.

In Moll and González's work, the concept of funds of knowledge is employed as a theoretical tool primarily in the context of ethnographic home visits carried out by researchers and teachers working together. As anthropologists, Moll and González believe that ethnographic work is essential to develop an understanding of people's lived experiences and uncovering their funds of knowledge (González et al., 2005; Moll et al., 1992). As a part of Moll and González's project, research teams visited students' homes, where they conducted observations and interviewed family members. The focus of these visits was the household itself. Although other theorists (e.g. Andrews & Yee, 2006; Hedges, 2011, 2015; Moje et al., 2004; Riojas-Cortez, 2001) have focused on children's personal funds of knowledge (i.e. funds of knowledge related to their own interests and experiences), Moll and González are primarily interested in the funds of knowledge that are associated with adult family members' experiences and everyday activities

(González et al., 2005; Moll et al., 1992). Researchers working with Moll and González used the home visits as opportunities to learn about families' "social and labor history" (Moll, 1992b, p. 217) asking about the household's "involvement in the formal and informal economies, as well as its domestic labor" (Moll, 2000, p. 258).

Moll and González encouraged the teacher-researchers they worked with to analyze "households as strategizing units; how they function as part of a wider economy; and how family members obtain and distribute their material and intellectual resources, their funds of knowledge, through social ties or networks or through other adaptive arrangements" (Moll, 1997, p. 191). This focus on the strategic networks that households develop in order to meet their daily needs reflects an understanding of knowledge as something that is distributed among members of a community. According to this perspective, people don't possess all the knowledge or resources they need to survive. Instead, they form strategic networks with others in their community in order to access the resources, knowledge, or expertise necessary to meet their needs (Moll, 1997). One reason that Moll and González highlight the number of social networks that households are a part of is to emphasize the depth of knowledge that families can access (Moll, 1992a).

Carrying out ethnographic home visits is meant to help teachers revalue the knowledge and experiences that ELL students bring with them to the classroom, showing them that children and families from immigrant backgrounds have access to a wide array of knowledge that can be applied to classroom settings (González et al., 2005; Moll, 1992a; Moll, 1997; Moll at al., 1992). Unlike home visits that teachers typically do, which often involve sharing information from the school, during these ethnographic visits teachers take on the role of learner, and family members are positioned as experts (Moll et al., 1992). This changes the nature of the relationship between

families and teachers, creating one that is more symmetrical. Adopting the role of learner also opens teachers up to recognizing the strengths possessed by their students and families (González et al., 2005).

This has important consequences for the classroom experiences of ELL students. As Moll at al. (1992) note, “it is the teacher … who is ultimately the bridge between the students’ world, theirs and their family’s funds of knowledge, and the classroom experience” (p. 137). Encouraging teachers to revalue the lived experiences of working class, immigrant students and their families makes it more likely that they will design instructional activities that build on those experiences. Additionally, it encourages teachers “to view their students as competent participants in households rich in cognitive resources” which, in turn, contributes to “raised expectations of their students’ abilities” (González et al., 2005, p. 106). The important role that teachers play as mediators between students’ out-of-school worlds and their classroom experiences is one of the reasons that Moll and González focus on collaboration with teachers and on teacher professional development in their research. I will discuss this aspect of their work in more detail below.

Funds of knowledge as a professional development tool. The second important component of Moll and Gonzalez’s funds of knowledge work is their focus on professional development. This interest in working with teachers reflects the researchers’ belief that, in order to improve the educational experiences of ELL students, it is necessary to help teachers develop a strengths-based way of thinking about those students and their families and about the relative value of the knowledge and experiences children bring with them to the classroom (Moll, 1992a). As noted above, Moll and González – like all socio-cultural and cultural historical theorists – see classrooms as “culturally mediated settings” that are “organized around beliefs

and practices that control and regulate the intellectual life of the students" (Moll, 1992a, p. 23). In these culturally mediated spaces, "[th]e role of the teachers … is critical, as are their conceptions of what counts or is appropriate in the education of bilingual students" (ibid). In other words, teachers' beliefs shape the ways in which they organize classroom instruction. As such, Moll and González posit that a key component of this work is to encourage teachers to view the experiences that children bring to the classroom with them as strengths and to see the everyday experiences of students and their families as important resources for classroom-based learning. Moll (1997) highlights the following three components of the funds of knowledge approach that contribute to shifts in teacher thinking: providing teachers with opportunities to carry out ethnographic home visits, to meet in groups to reflect on their learning, and to put their new knowledge into practice in their own classrooms.

Funds of knowledge as a pedagogical tool. In addition to describing the impact that researching students' funds of knowledge has on teachers' thinking, Moll and González' work gives concrete examples of the ways in which teachers used this knowledge in their classrooms. These examples offer an illustration of the pedagogical implications of a funds of knowledge approach. One teacher working with Moll (1992a) developed a unit on construction. Another teacher – whose work was described by Moll et al. (1992) – taught a unit on candy. In both cases, the topic was chosen because it was related to the specific areas of expertise, or funds of knowledge, of at least one of the students in the class. The inclusion of these topics represents an expansion of our understandings of "what counts" as knowledge that is relevant to school-based learning.

However, choosing topics of study that are related to students' out-of-school experiences and interests – while important – is only one piece of an instructional approach that builds on

students' funds of knowledge. Rather, it involves creating learning contexts that emulate important aspects of students' and families' social networks. As Moll (2000) explains, "[w]e usually suggest that teachers create *household analogs,* where the goal is not to replicate the household in the classroom, but to re-create strategically those aspects of household life (e.g., social networks, funds of knowledge) that may lead to productive academic activities within the classroom" (p. 260).

Moll (1992a) suggests that teachers can create household analogs by organizing classroom spaces so that students have opportunities to draw on the knowledge and expertise of a wide range of people; engaging students in reciprocal exchanges of knowledge; and providing them with opportunities to participate in contextualized learning activities. For example, during the unit on construction mentioned above, the teacher drew on the social networks of students' families and on her own social networks (Moll, 1992a). More specifically, she invited family members, other members of the community, as well as people she knew personally to visit the classroom as valued informants. According to Moll, one of the most important aspects of these visits was that family and community members were asked "to contribute … *intellectually*" (p. 234). As a result, students came to view knowledge that was developed in out-of-school settings as a valuable resource for academic learning. Similarly, González et al. (2005) highlight the fact that the candy unit involved important elements of the kind of learning that takes place in students' households. This included employing active learning strategies and, like the construction unit, drawing on resources from beyond the classroom. In both cases, Moll, González and their colleagues argue that a funds of knowledge approach is not just determined by *what* you teach, but also by *how* you teach.

Although Moll and González do not use the term in their own work, drawing on the work of Cole and Griffin (1983), I would characterize the classrooms of the teachers who participated in their project as re-mediated learning spaces. In these re-mediated spaces, students' cultural and linguistic resources are viewed as resources for learning and, as a result, ELL students can access their complete cultural and linguistic "toolkits" (Gutiérrez et al., 2003). Additionally, in these spaces, dominant understandings of "what counts" as valuable knowledge and skills are de-centered or de-stabilized. Teachers' thinking about their ELL students and their understanding of the concept of culture are transformed. This, in turn, contributes to changes in the way teachers organize their classroom instruction and transforms classroom spaces. More specifically, teachers develop curriculum units based on students' funds of knowledge, often touching on topics that are not usually considered worthy of inclusion in formal learning contexts. During these units, ELL students and their families are positioned as experts, thereby challenging the way power typically operates in classroom spaces.

The Current Study

Despite the fact that cultural historical approaches to strengths-based education, like funds of knowledge, have the potential to change the educational experiences of ELL students in powerful ways, carrying out this kind of work is no easy task (González et al., 2005). Employing a funds of knowledge approach, for example, is not just a matter of implementing new instructional strategies. Rather, it involves teachers challenging traditional school discourses about ELL students and their families and about "what counts" as valuable knowledge and skills. It also may also require teachers to confront their own assumptions about ELL students. In that sense, it can involve teachers developing new dispositions or ways of thinking about students, teaching and learning.

Learning about students' out-of-school experiences and designing curriculum that builds on those experiences, as is advocated by funds of knowledge theorists, may also present logistical challenges for teachers. Teaching in this way involves a significant time commitment on the part of teachers (González et al., 2005; Moll, 1997). Additionally, the current push for accountability and standards-based teaching may mean that teachers feel that they do not have the time or freedom to study topics that are not specifically mandated by their school districts (Gallo & Link, 2015; Sleeter, 2004; Thomson & Hall, 2008).

Most of the research that has demonstrated the potentially transformative effect that funds of knowledge-related instructional approaches can have on classrooms has looked at teachers who are working collaboratively with university-based researchers. Very little, if any, of the literature has explored what happens when teachers take up this theory on their own, without the support of researchers. Additionally, with the notable exception of the work done by Moll, González and their colleagues (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Moll, 1992a; Moll, 1997; Moll et al., 1992), the majority of studies using the construct of funds of knowledge do not examine the experiences of teachers who are attempting to carry out this kind of work. This means that the perspectives of teachers regarding what it means for them to carry out this type of work is missing.

This lack of focus on teachers, and particularly on teachers who are enacting funds of knowledge-related practices without the aid of researchers, is problematic. Most teachers do not have access to university-based researchers and it's important to understand what happens in those situations if the research community hopes to make the concept of funds of knowledge relevant and accessible to a wide range of practicing teachers. Furthermore, listening to

teachers' voices sheds light on the affordances and limitations of implementing a funds of knowledge approach to strengths-based teaching in real-world classroom settings.

The qualitative interview study described in this paper addressed this gap in the literature by exploring how elementary school teachers in one midsized Midwestern school district thought about and enacted instructional practices that involved learning about and building on their ELL students' out-of-school experiences. The overarching question that guided this study was*: How do teachers of ELLs understand what it means to build on students' funds of knowledge, or cultural and linguistic resources?* The following sub-questions are related to that guiding question:

1. Why might teachers choose to build on ELL students' fund of knowledge or out-of-school knowledge and experiences? What do they believe this approach affords them and their students?
2. Why might teachers limit the extent to which they build on ELL students' funds of knowledge in the classroom?
3. How do teachers of ELLs implement a funds of knowledge approach?
    a. How do they learn about and build on students' funds of knowledge or out-of-school knowledge and experiences?
    b. How do teachers define what counts as relevant out-of-school knowledge and experiences?

In order to answer these questions, I interviewed thirteen teachers who worked with ELL students at the elementary level in some capacity. Although not all of them were familiar with the term "funds of knowledge," they had all been identified by their peers as doing a good job of connecting to their ELL students' out-of-school worlds and they all indicated that they believed

it was important to build on their students' out-of-school lives in the classroom. Moreover, all of them were engaging in practices that involved learning about students' out-of-school worlds and drawing on students' experiences and areas of expertise in the classroom. None of the teachers I interviewed were currently working with university-based researchers and they had to find their own ways of making this complex theory work in their particular classroom and school contexts. As such, this study provides concrete examples of the ways in which practicing teachers learn about and build on students' funds of knowledge in real world contexts and it examines the potential of the concept of funds of knowledge, and others like it, to support the creation of expanded learning spaces for ELLs. It also explores the meaning that teachers who are engaged in strengths-based approaches to teaching ELLs give to this work and illuminates the reasons why teachers do or don't take up certain aspects of complex educational theories, like funds of knowledge.

Researcher Reflexivity

As a qualitative researcher, I am aware of the fact that I bring my own biases to the research process. These biases stem from my personal and professional experiences and they shape the way that I see the world. As such, they had an impact on many aspects of this study, including the choice of topic and the interpretive decisions I made while collecting and analyzing data. While it is incumbent upon qualitative researchers to acknowledge and examine their own biases (Eisner, 1998; Mishler, 1986), Eisner (1998) posits that the unique perspective that researchers bring to their work is also positive thing. As he explains, "… the way in which we see and respond to a situation and how we interpret what we see will bear our own signature. This unique signature is not a liability but a way of providing individual insight into a situation"

(Eisner, 1998, p. 34). Below, I will discuss several of the aspects of my personal and professional background that had a particular impact on the study that I carried out.

My perspective as a researcher was undoubtedly shaped by that fact that I am a middle-class white woman and a native speaker of English. However, it was also influenced by other formative experiences I have had throughout my life. As a child, I lived and attended schools in racially and economically diverse urban neighborhoods. Additionally, I was raised by a single mother who placed a high value on academic achievement and on working for social justice issues, values that I internalized. I am also a fluent speaker of Spanish and spent a year studying in Spain as a college student.

All of these things shaped my desire to become a teacher, and later to pursue a graduate degree in Curriculum and Instruction. In particular, I saw teaching as a way of working for social justice. I wanted all students to have equitable access to high quality schooling experiences, something which I had not observed happening in the urban schools I attended. As the result of my family's belief in the power of education, I saw educational attainment as the best way of ensuring that all students could achieve success later in life. I entered teaching as a member of Teach for America and, because I was fluent in Spanish, I was assigned to work as a bilingual teacher at an elementary school in Houston. After leaving Houston, I held bilingual teaching positions in Massachusetts and Wisconsin, teaching for a total of eight years. My desire to continue exploring how schools could better support students from non-dominant backgrounds, including English Language Learners, ultimately led me to leave the classroom and pursue a graduate degree in Curriculum and Instruction.

My experiences as a bilingual teacher, in particular, drew me to the topic of this study. Throughout my teaching career, I primarily worked with immigrant, Spanish-speaking students

and families. Although I was not familiar with funds of knowledge theory at the time, I knew it was important for me to find ways to honor the backgrounds and experiences of my students. Over the years, I learned a great deal from my students and their families about their lives, primarily by listening to them during classroom discussions, at recess, and during parent-teacher conferences. However, I was also aware of the deficit discourses about my students and their families that existed in the schools where I taught. I often heard colleagues assert that the immigrant students with whom we worked did not possess rich out-of-school experiences.

When, as a graduate student, I discovered the concept of funds of knowledge, and other cultural-historical approaches to teaching, I recognized them as powerful tools that could combat the deficit discourses I had heard while teaching and help teachers re-value the experiences of ELL students. At the same time, the years I had spent teaching had made me acutely aware of the pressures that teachers face and the lack of control they often have over their school day. I wondered what it was like for teachers to try to put this complex theory into practice in real world contexts. How did they make it work in their classrooms and what challenges did they face? These questions led me want to talk with teachers about their experiences with approaches to teaching, like funds of knowledge, that involve learning about and building on students' out-of-school experiences.

As a middle-class white woman and former teacher, I have internalized many of the dominant discourses about "what counts" as valuable knowledge and skills in a school. My personal belief in the power of education to provide access success later in life further also contributed to my acceptance of those discourses. Although I have come to question the privileging of certain ways of knowing and being in school settings as the result of my graduate studies, I still believe that it is important for all children to acquire academic discourses. I also

believe that an important part of any teacher's job is to support students' acquisition of school-based forms of knowledge. My familiarity with dominant school discourses may have made me less critical of the fact that many participating teachers privileged school-based forms of knowledge over non-school-based ones than I otherwise might have been. Additionally, the fact that my cultural and professional background was similar to many of the teachers I interviewed may have shaped how I viewed the data. Because I identified with them, it may have been more difficult for me to recognize the implicit biases that were expressed in their interviews.

Another bias I bring to this research project is related to my identity as a graduate student. During my graduate studies, I was drawn to cultural-historical theory and I read much of the original funds of knowledge literature published by Moll and González and their colleagues. As a result, at the time this study took place my understanding of what a funds of knowledge approach should look like was heavily informed by their work. During the research process, I found that my familiarity with Moll and González's work influenced how I perceived the reported practices of the teachers I interviewed. None of the teachers I interviewed were implementing a funds of knowledge approach to teaching as described in the original literature. This initially made it difficult for me to appreciate the value of the practices that the teachers were describing and to recognize them as examples of funds of knowledge-related teaching.

One way in which I have compensated for my biases as a researcher is to be open about them, both with myself and with the readers of my research. Throughout the study, I kept a reflection journal, which allowed me to reflect periodically on the way in which the personal lenses I brought to the research process might be shaping my collection and interpretation of the data. As noted above, I was aware that I identified with many of the participants and, as a result, may not have been sufficiently critical of the deficit discourses or implicit biases they expressed.

To compensate for this tendency, I purposefully looked for and examined instances of teachers privileging the types of knowledge that are typically valued in school settings, calling attention to them and considering what they meant.

Another way in which I addressed my biases was to adopt an emic, rather than an etic perspective. Although I was an outsider, I tried to view the data I had collected from the insider perspective of the participants. Rather than judging participants according to how "well" they were implementing a funds of knowledge approach, I tried to foreground their voices and their points of view. Approaching the data in this way allowed me to see that teachers were engaging in many practices that could be characterized as funds of knowledge-related and contributed to the creation of expanded learning spaces for ELLs. It also allowed me to position participants as knowledgeable actors who were making instructional decisions based on their own beliefs about teaching and knowledge of the context in which they worked.

Study Overview

This dissertation is organized into seven chapters. In this chapter, I have examined the theoretical ideas underpinning funds of knowledge and other cultural-historical approaches to teaching. In the next chapter of this dissertation, I will review the literature that has been published related to the concept of funds of knowledge, particularly those studies that focus on ELLs, elementary school students, and literacy instruction. In Chapter 3, I will describe the methods used to carry out this study, including the methodological approach, participant selection, data collection methods and the data analysis process. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 are the analytic chapters of the dissertation. In Chapter 4, I present profiles of five participants and consider the stories they told of themselves as "good" teachers of ELLs and the role that building on students' out-of-school experiences played in those stories. In Chapter 5, I explore how

teachers' larger understanding of their roles and responsibilities as teachers of ELLs both encouraged them to draw on students' out-of-school lives and limited the extent to which they did so. In Chapter 6, I consider how the district-level context in which participants taught shaped their enactment of funds of knowledge-related practices in the classroom, particularly with regards to literacy instruction. Finally, in Chapter 7, I summarize the study's findings, discuss the implications of this work, and suggest possible directions for future research on this topic.

Chapter 2: A Review of the Funds of Knowledge Literature

The body of literature that addresses a funds of knowledge approach can be roughly divided into two groups. The first describes the work carried out by Moll, González and the teachers they collaborated with as a part of their Funds of Knowledge for Teaching project (e.g., Civil, 2007, 2016; González et al., 2005; Moll, 1992a, 1992b, 1997, 2000; Moll et al., 1992). Because Moll and González were the first theorists to extend the concept of funds of knowledge to educational research, their work is considered to be the foundational literature of the funds of knowledge approach. The majority of the subsequent research that has applied the concept of funds of knowledge to the study of educational settings refers in some way to this original work. The second category of the funds of knowledge literature consists of work done by university-based researchers and teacher-researchers who have taken up the concept of funds of knowledge and applied it in a variety of ways (e.g., Andrews & Yee, 2006; Barton & Tan, 2009; Dworin, 2006; Hedges, 2015; Llopart & Esteban-Guitart, 2017; Marshall & Toohey, 2010; McLaughlin & Barton, 2013; Mercado, 2005; Moje et al., 2004; Smythe & Toohey, 2009).

In the previous chapter of this dissertation, I provided a detailed description of Moll and González's funds of knowledge work. For that reason, in this chapter I will only present a short overview of their work in this area. I will then review the funds of knowledge literature that has been published by other educational researchers, including some of the critiques that have been made of Moll and González' conceptualization of funds of knowledge. Educational researchers have applied the concept of funds of knowledge to the study of a variety of contexts, including post-secondary educational settings and family engagement programs. It has also been employed to study a wide range of topics and disciplines, including literacy, math, science, art, digital literacies, and teachers' personal and professional funds of knowledge. Given the topic of

the current study, in this literature review, I will focus on research that applies funds of knowledge theory to the study of elementary school settings. Additionally, because my particular areas of interest are ELLs and literacy development, I will primarily look at studies that explore those topics. However, I have also included studies that have contributed in a significant way to funds of knowledge research, even if they do not focus on literacy or ELLs.

The Funds of Knowledge Approach as Developed by Moll and González

As I argued earlier in this paper, Moll and González (González et al., 2005; Moll, 1992a, 1997, 2000; Moll et al., 1992) use the concept of funds of knowledge in three interrelated ways: as a theoretical tool; as a tool for professional development; and as a pedagogical tool. In their work, Moll and González employ the concept in all three of these ways in an effort to improve the educational experiences of ELL students (e.g., González, et al., 2005; Moll, 1992a; Moll et al., 1992). During and after ethnographic visits to their students' homes, teachers participating in Moll and González's Funds of Knowledge for Teaching project used the concept of funds of knowledge as theoretical tool to make sense of the data they had gathered about students' households and to identify areas of experience that might be classified as funds of knowledge. The process of documenting and reflecting on the extensive funds of knowledge possessed by students and their families functioned, in turn, as a form of professional development for participating teachers. Most significantly, it transformed the ways in which participating teachers thought about ELL students and their families and about the concept of culture in general (González et al., 2005).

This transformation in teachers' thinking had pedagogical implications. Because teachers saw students' out-of-school experiences and knowledge as potential resources for academic learning, they designed curriculum meant to build on those areas of expertise, or funds of

knowledge. Additionally, they emulated the way funds of knowledge are shared by households by creating strategic networks that allowed them to draw on resources from beyond the classroom (Moll, 1992b, 2000). Taken together, the theoretical, professional development, and pedagogical components of Moll and González's approach led the teachers they worked with to create instructional activities that were intellectually rich and that validated the resources for learning that were available in children's households and communities.

Educational researchers who have taken up the concept of funds of knowledge have employed it in a variety of ways. Some studies have preserved the three principal components of Moll and González's funds of knowledge approach, using funds of knowledge as a theoretical tool, a professional development tool and a pedagogical tool. Others have employed the concept of funds of knowledge primarily as an analytical tool, carrying out ethnographic research projects aimed at documenting the funds of knowledge of a specific group of students. Still others, including some studies done by teacher-researchers, have used the concept of funds of knowledge primarily as a pedagogical tool. These studies focus on designing and implementing classroom projects that help teachers identify and build on their students' funds of knowledge.

In the rest of this chapter, I will review studies that fall into all three of the groups described above. In reviewing research that has built on the foundational funds of knowledge work, I am particularly interested in exploring what the literature reveals about how complex educational theories get put into practice. In particular, I will consider what the literature says about the utility of funds of knowledge as a conceptual tool that can be used to revalue students' out-of-school experiences and as a framework for designing instructional activities that build on those experiences. I will also analyze what the literature has shown to be the limitations of a funds of knowledge approach, as well as the ways that previous research has addressed those

limitations. In exploring these issues, I will provide examples of how the theory has been successfully applied in real world settings, present critiques of the approach, and discuss how the original theory has been expanded by subsequent researchers.

Applications of a Funds of Knowledge Approach Beyond Moll and González

Funds of knowledge as a tool for revaluing students' out-of-school experiences. Research that has built on the work of Moll and González has confirmed that the concept of funds of knowledge can be a powerful tool for helping both researchers and teachers uncover and revalue the out-of-school experiences of ELLs and other students from non-dominant groups and the areas of expertise they develop as the result of those experiences. A number of researchers have employed the concept primarily as analytic tool, using it to document that students from non-dominant groups, like ELLs, possess areas of expertise that often go unrecognized in school-based settings (Andrews & Yee, 2006; Gallo & Link, 2015; Hedges, 2015; Moje et al., 2004). Although these studies do not directly take up the professional development and pedagogical elements of the original funds of knowledge research, their findings do support Moll and González's claim that it is important to work with teachers to identify and build on ELL students' funds of knowledge (González et al., 2005; Moll, 1992a, 1997, 2000; Moll et al. 1992).

In their study of two immigrant students living in England, Andrews and Yee (2006) found that both children had a wide variety of interests and took on a range of responsibilities within their families. However, the students' teachers were unaware of many of their funds of knowledge. For example, one student, who was an active participant in many of her household activities, was seen as lacking the confidence needed to share her ideas in the classroom. Andrews and Yee conclude that the lived experiences of the children they studied were "richer … than accounts of their school experience appeared to acknowledge" (p. 445). Furthermore,

they suggest that learning about students' funds of knowledge could help teachers form a truer and more positive assessment of their students' capabilities, thereby improving the schooling experiences of those students.

Similarly, Moje et al. (2004) used funds of knowledge as a lens for analyzing the experiences of a group of Latino middle school students in both out-of-school spaces and in their science class. As a result of this analysis, Moje et al. concluded that the students they studied possessed valuable funds of knowledge that could have been applied in classroom settings, but were not. Although the teachers whose classrooms they studied were trying to build on their students' strengths by providing them with instruction in their native language and connecting subject matter to local issues, students' personal funds of knowledge – which were related to their experiences with immigration, their parents' work histories, and popular culture – were not viewed as important resources for learning by either the teachers or the students. One reason for this, the authors suggest, was that teachers did not know much about their students' specific funds of knowledge.

At times, teachers may not simply be unaware of students' out-of-school experiences. Rather, they may feel uncomfortable exploring certain aspects of their students' lives, particularly negative or difficult aspects. Gallo and Link (2015) used funds of knowledge as an analytic tool to identify the "politicized funds of knowledge" (p. 360) that a student named Ben had developed as the result of his family's experiences as undocumented immigrants in the United States. The authors found that Ben did not draw on his politicized funds of knowledge in formal classroom settings, which they attribute to the fact that his teachers did not know how to broach the subject of immigration with him and that Ben did not feel safe enough in the classroom space to share information about the immigration-related issues his family was facing.

Other researchers have documented the utility of funds of knowledge as an analytic tool and as a professional development tool. Both Mercado (2005) and Smythe and Toohey (2009) engaged teachers in projects aimed at helping them uncover students' funds of knowledge. The teachers with whom Mercado worked carried out ethnographic visits to the homes of Puerto Rican families living in New York in order to identify language and literacy practices that could serve as funds of knowledge in classroom settings. The teachers who participated in the study were often surprised by the fact that the families they observed engaged in a variety of literacy activities, including ones that that resembled school-based literacy practices (i.e., studying phonics charts or writing words on a chalkboard). Mercado suggests that learning about families' everyday lives enabled teachers to recognize the significance of language and literacy practices they might have otherwise ignored.

Smythe and Toohey (2009) also demonstrated that learning about students' out-of-school lives can help teachers uncover areas of expertise that they would otherwise not have known about. The authors worked with teachers and students to carry out a community scan in order to explore "the cultural resources and out-of-school literacies" (p. 41) of a community of Punjabi Sikh immigrants living in Canada. As a result of their survey of the community, Smythe and Toohey identified several important influences on the language and literacy practices of the students and families they studied. This included families' immigration histories, including their political and economic status, and the social organization of the family. Smythe and Toohey also found that most of the families they studied "live[d] multimodal and bilingual/multilingual lives" (p. 53), something which is often missed by teachers and schools, whose focus is on print literacy in English above all else.

These studies demonstrate that ELL students and their families possess a wide variety of knowledge and experiences that could be leveraged in classroom settings, but aren't because teachers typically aren't aware of them. These findings establish that there is a need for teachers to engage in the types of activities advocated for in the original funds of knowledge literature, including learning what students' lives are like outside of school and looking for potential connections between those experiences and school-based forms of knowledge. The studies that involved working with teachers to uncover students' funds of knowledge (e.g., Mercado, 2005; Smythe & Toohey, 2009) also suggest that viewing students' out-of-school experiences as funds of knowledge can help teachers revalue those experiences and see them as potential sources for academic learning. In the case of reading and writing, it can help teachers and researchers recognize home literacy practices that might not have been visible to them previously because they don't resemble the practices that "they have been conditioned to see" (Mercado, 2005, p. 136). Helping teachers engage in these practices is important because, as Moje et al. (2004) argue, if educators put their students' funds of knowledge on equal footing with the forms of knowledge that are traditionally privileged in schools, they will "de-stabilize" official academic discourses and create classrooms that function as transformative third spaces. It is in these transformative spaces that students are able to draw on the full range of their relevant knowledge and skills (Moje et al., 2004).

Funds of knowledge as a tool for creating expanded learning spaces. Another body of research on funds of knowledge has explored the pedagogical implications of the concept. These studies have illustrated the variety of ways that teachers can draw on students' out-of-school experiences in the classroom and have confirmed that, as Moll and González suggest, these types of activities can lead to re-mediated, or expanded, learning spaces for students from

non-dominant groups (González, et al., 2005; Gutiérrez et al., 2003; Moll, 1992a; Pacheco & Gutiérrez, 2009). As such, they have demonstrated the utility of the concept as a pedagogical tool. A number of studies have focused specifically on literacy-related activities that build on students' out-of-school experiences, including those carried out by Dworin (2006), Marshall and Toohey (2010), and Fuller and Hood (2005).

Both Dworin (2006) and Marshall and Toohey (2010) carried out studies that involved having students create bilingual books that were based on stories they had been told by members of their families. Dworin worked with a bilingual fourth grade teacher and her Spanish-speaking students to create an anthology of family stories written in English and Spanish. The project drew on students' funds of knowledge in that it took advantage of students' bilingualism and biliteracy as well as their previous experiences with translation. The group of elementary school student with whom Marshall and Toohey (2010) worked, many of whom were from Punjabi Sikh families, collected stories from their grandparents. The students then created books written in English and Punjabi that were shared with their grandparents and other family members. Like Dworin's study, this project drew on students' bilingualism – an important fund of knowledge of this group of children. It also acknowledged the important role that grandparents played in students' lives.

The projects described above involved students in authentic reading, writing, and translation activities that contributed to students' literacy development and their metalinguistic awareness. For that reason, these two studies offer an example of one way that teachers can use a funds of knowledge approach to support the acquisition of the kinds of language and literacy skills that are valued in academic settings. Fuller and Hood (2005) provide another example of a classroom literacy activity that is meaning-centered and builds on students' funds of knowledge.

The authors, both classroom teachers in Australia, were interested in modifying their literacy instruction in order to better reach students – many of whom were Aboriginal – who were often disengaged from classroom literacy activities. Based on their observations of students in the classroom, Fuller and Hood developed a unit on camping that involved students in a variety of meaning-centered, purpose-driven reading and writing activities. As a result, students who were usually reluctant to engage in classroom literacy activities willingly used reading and writing in order to accomplish authentic goals that had particular meaning for them.

The work of Dworin (2006), Marshall and Toohey (2010), and Fuller and Hood (2005) demonstrate that engaging students in activities that build on their funds of knowledge can lead to expanded learning spaces. Dworin's project involved bringing out-of-school knowledge – in the form of stories – into the classroom and encouraged children to make use of their native language - Spanish. Both of these things signaled to students that their out-of-school knowledge and skills were valuable resources on which to draw in an academic setting. Marshall and Toohey found that having students write texts in Punjabi led them to critically examine the dominance of the English language in their school. Additionally, Marshall and Toohey highlight that the texts created by students addressed issues – like violent acts and religious differences - that were usually "invisible" (p. 236) classroom settings. The unit implemented by Fuller and Hood built on an area of expertise of Aboriginal students, camping, which positioned a marginalized group of children as experts. As suggested by Moll and González (González et al., 2005; Moll, 1992a, 1997, 2000; Moll et al. 1992) and Moje et al. (2004), these studies illustrate that adopting a funds of knowledge approach can and should consist of more than simply incorporating children's prior experiences and interests into the curriculum. Rather, it should

also involve challenging the accepted definition of what counts as valuable and appropriate knowledge in school settings.

Although not literacy-related, Barton and Tan's (2009) description of a unit on nutrition implemented by a middle school science teacher also demonstrates how building on students' funds of knowledge can lead to expanded learning spaces. The authors found that the instructional strategies the teacher employed during the unit, which built on students' funds of knowledge in a variety of ways, had a number of positive impacts on students. It positioned them "as rightful experts of certain knowledges directly related and applicable to school science" (p. 52). Additionally, it "created new ways of participating … that were legitimate and that fostered new opportunities to engage the subject matter and promoted *both* academic achievement and inclusion" (p. 66). Drawing on the work of Moje et al. (2004), Barton and Tan conclude that the classroom space was transformed physically, pedagogically, and politically during the nutrition unit. For example, there was an increased sharing of power between the students and the teacher because everyone was positioned as an expert with "valuable resources to add to the dialogue" (p. 69). Taken together, these transformations contributed to the creation of a hybrid classroom space that affirmed and, at times, emulated important aspects of students' out-of-school learning experiences.

Critiques of Moll and González's Funds of Knowledge Approach

Complexity of the funds of knowledge approach. As evidenced by the studies highlighted in the previous section, the concept of funds of knowledge has the potential to be a powerful tool for helping educators recognize and build on the strengths that ELL students bring to the classroom. However, the approach is not without its limitations. Some of the most significant issues with Moll and González's funds of knowledge approach (González et al., 2005;

Moll, 1992a, 1997, 2000; Moll et al., 1992) – at least in terms of the implementing the approach in classroom contexts – are ones that they have highlighted in their own work. For example, González at al. (2005) and Moll (1997) acknowledge that their approach requires teachers, who are already spread thin, to spend significant amounts of time after school visiting their students' homes. As a result, it can be difficult to engage teachers in carrying out this kind of work. This is especially true in teaching contexts that are accountability-driven (González, Wyman, & O'Connor, 2011).

Another limitation of Moll and González's funds of knowledge approach is that it is not always clear to teachers how to make connections between the funds of knowledge they have uncovered and the classroom curriculum (Civil, 2007; González et al., 2005; Reyes, Da Silva Iddings & Feller, 2015). Civil (2007), a university-based researcher who collaborated with Moll and Gonzalez on the Funds of Knowledge for Teaching project, found that the mathematical implications of students' and families' the funds of knowledge were not always immediately evident to the teachers with whom she worked. Even when teachers were able to incorporate math into curriculum units that built on students' funds of knowledge, it was often not clear whether or not children were employing the mathematical skills the lesson was designed to introduce when completing instructional activities.

Subsequent research on funds of knowledge has suggested that the tension between drawing on students' funds of knowledge and providing them with the rich content area instruction described by Civil (2007) may lead teachers to think of funds of knowledge units as an add-on, rather than an integral part of the curriculum. Marshall and Toohey (2010) found that the teacher and students with whom they worked saw the funds of knowledge project in which they participated as "something special" that was "not really school" (p. 237). Similarly, the

teacher who was the focus of Barton and Tan's (2009) study on using funds of knowledge to teach science concluded that: "you just can't have these kinds of lessons everyday [sic] and with every class" (p. 70).

A number of studies have also documented that it can be difficult for teachers to fully grasp the concept of funds of knowledge and apply it to their own teaching contexts (Graue, Karabon, Delaney, Whyte, Kim & Wager, 2015; McLaughlin & Barton, 2013; Reyes et al., 2015). The original funds of knowledge literature posits that the process of learning about and building on students' funds of knowledge can contribute to a transformation in the way that teachers view their ELL students and the relative value of the experiences that they bring to the classroom with them (González et al., 2005). However, researchers who have attempted to replicate the work of Moll and González have found that it is difficult to support those types of changes in teachers' thinking.

In a study that explored how pre-service teachers made sense of their students' science-related funds of knowledge, McLaughlin and Barton (2013) found that study participants interpreted the information they learned about their students' funds of knowledge using a "utility lens" (p. 24). In other words, the student teachers primarily saw students' funds of knowledge as a means of "supporting … classroom activities, as well as behavioral and learning outcomes" (p. 24). The authors identify five ways in which the teachers found their students' funds of knowledge to be useful, some of which were more "productive" (p. 30) than others in terms of giving students opportunities to leverage out-of-school learning and experiences in the science classroom. By far the most common way in which pre-service teachers saw their students' experiences as useful was as a "hook" that made content material more interesting and increased student participation.

Both Graue at al. (2015) and Reyes et al. (2015) engaged teachers in projects that were modeled on the work of Moll and González. In both cases, despite carrying out home visits and participating in reflective conversations with their peers, the teachers with whom the researchers worked struggled to see the connection between students' funds of knowledge and classroom instruction. Reyes and her colleagues (2015) found that, although the pre-service teachers they studied were able to identify some of their students' literacy-related funds of knowledge, most were unsure of how to leverage students' home language and literacy practices in the classroom. Similarly, the practicing teachers who participated in Graue et al.'s (2015) study had difficulty expanding their understanding of the math-related funds of knowledge that 4K students brought to the classroom with them, as well as their understanding of what math instruction could look like in 4K classrooms. Graue and her colleagues posit that this was due to the fact that that they were asking teachers to "shift deep rooted ideational resources" (Graue et al., 2015, p. 50), or their understanding of what constituted good practice and of their role as 4K teachers. As a result, the shifts in thinking the researchers initially identified were small – what they refer to as "micro changes" (p. 50).

Limitations of funds of knowledge as a conceptual tool. Other critiques of the funds of knowledge approach have focused on the concept itself and its limitations as a theoretical tool. For example, Zipin (2009) has pointed out that the concept of funds of knowledge tends to encourage teachers and researchers to focus on the positive aspects of students' and families' lives. Less positive experiences, what Zipin calls "dark lifeworld knowledge" (p. 320), often get ignored or suppressed. This is especially true when these experiences involve things that teachers do not typically consider appropriate to discuss in the classroom, like violence, poverty

or drug use.[3] Smythe and Toohey (2009) warn that the relying on the concept of funds of knowledge can lead researchers and teachers to privilege certain kinds of knowledge and experiences over others. Specifically, they argue that focusing on students' households as the primary source of their funds of knowledge means that other aspects of their cultural and linguistic knowledge base may not be recognized. In particular, they highlight that teachers and researchers may not see students' knowledge of technology and/or popular culture as a fund of knowledge that can contribute to academic learning.

Another limitation of funds of knowledge as a theoretical tool is that it is possible to apply the concept in a way that downplays the overtly political elements of the approach (González et al., 2011; Oughton, 2010; Rios-Aguilar, Marquez, Gravitt, & Moll, 2011). At its core, funds of knowledge is an example of critical pedagogy. One of the central components of Moll and González's original funds of knowledge work is the idea that helping teachers see the value of ELL students' out-of-school experiences can encourage them to question dominant discourses about "what counts" as valuable knowledge, which in turn changes the way students are positioned in the classroom (González et al., 2005; Moll, 1992a, 1997, 2000; Moll et al. 1992). However, the concept of funds of knowledge is not always employed in a way that takes seriously questions about the balance of power in school settings. González et al. (2011) suggest that, at times, the idea of funds of knowledge is oversimplified and becomes a stand in for "home culture" (p. 483), or is applied in a way that reinforces cultural stereotypes and traditional power dynamics. Oughton (2010) also warns that the concept of funds of knowledge may be equated

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[3]An interesting counterpoint to Zipin's (2009) critique is the funds of knowledge project Marshall and Toohey (2010) carried out with a group of Punjabi Sikh students in Canada described above. Many of the stories students collected from their grandparents involved topics, like violence and religious difference, which are not typically discussed in classrooms. Marshall and Toohey concluded that using family stories as a means of incorporating students' funds of knowledge into the classroom actually introduced issues that were "usually invisible and seldom talked about" (p. 236) into the classroom.

with less complex ideas, like cultural practices, and cautions that, as the term gets taken up by policy makers, dominant groups may end up deciding "what does and does not constitute a fund of knowledge" (p. 68). Rios-Aguilar et al. (2011) suggest that funds of knowledge research is primarily focused on the recognition of students' and families' funds of knowledge and, as a result, ignores questions about how power operates in schools.

The fact that the concept of funds of knowledge is not always employed in ways that preserve the critical component of the approach is particularly evident in articles that are directed specifically at practicing teachers. In a piece published in the journal affiliated with the National Association of Bilingual Educators (NABE), Amaro-Jiménez and Semingson (2011) explain that a funds of knowledge approach is one way of creating additive classroom spaces for ELL students that are "responsive to their unique lived, cultural, and linguistic experiences" (p. 7). However, the ultimate goal of building on students' funds of knowledge, as described by Amaro-Jiménez and Semingson, is to encourage students and families to take up school-based discourses they might otherwise be reluctant to adopt. An article published in the on-line journal of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (Cohen, 2009) preserves even less of the original critical intent of Moll and González's funds of knowledge approach. In this piece, funds of knowledge becomes a stand in for the type of culturally sensitive curriculum – characterized by a "reliance on folkloric displays, such as storytelling, arts, crafts, and dance performance" (Moll et al., 1992, p. 139) – that Moll and his colleagues sought to move beyond. While the strategies described in these two articles may make students and families feel more welcome in school settings, they fail to take up the more complicated aspects of funds of knowledge theory, such as questioning "what counts" as valuable knowledge and skills in classroom spaces.

Expanding on the Funds of Knowledge Approach

Due, in part, to the limitations described above, funds of knowledge research that has built on the foundational literature has modified the funds of knowledge approach in a number of ways. One significant change has been an expansion in the definition of the term "funds of knowledge." In a comprehensive review of the funds of knowledge literature, Hogg (2010) highlights the fact that researchers have expanded the scope of the definition of funds of knowledge to include a wider range of experiences and areas of expertise. Whereas the focus of the original funds of knowledge work was on the bodies of knowledge underlying families' household practices, subsequent research has broadened the definition to include students' interests and talents, popular culture, peer relationships, and students' lived experiences, including their dark lifeworld experiences (Hogg, 2011). This is evident in Gallo and Link's (2015) investigation of the politicized funds of knowledge a student had developed as the result of his family's negative experiences with the U.S. immigration system and in Hedge's (2011) exploration of the funds of knowledge that stemmed from students' interest in Sponge Bob and other topics from popular culture.

An important aspect of way the definition of funds of knowledge has changed is that the focus has expanded beyond the family to include the student's personal experiences and areas of expertise (Hogg, 2010; Oughton, 2010). For example, Hedges (2015) focuses on students' interests and activities, rather than on the areas of expertise of their adult family members, in her study of preschoolers' funds of knowledge. Although Hedges' focus is on students' interests, she sees those interests as being, in many cases, directly related to the "social and cultural experiences" (p. 86) children have had with their families or in their communities. Similarly, Llopart and Esteban-Guitart (2017) employ the term "funds of identity" as a way of signaling

that children take up their families' funds of knowledge and express them as part of their own identity. They see the term "funds of identity" as an extension of the concept of funds of knowledge, one that involves "…recognising the particular cultural resources that young people are (re)making and not just inheriting" (p. 259).

In addition to broadening the definition of funds of knowledge, funds of knowledge researchers have attempted to make the approach more responsive to the real-world constraints faced by teachers, as outlined above. These studies have suggested less time intensive ways (i.e., ones that don't require ethnographic home visits) for teachers to learn about their students' funds of knowledge. One such strategy is the community scan that Smythe and Toohey (2009) employed in their study of a Punjabi Sikh neighborhood in Canada. Rather than visiting the homes of individual students, the teachers who participated in the study visited the community in which their students lived in order to learn about the community as a whole. Additionally, students acted as "junior ethnographers" (p. 41), taking photographs and collecting artifacts that documented literacy practices that took place in their homes and community. Involving students in the research process helped teachers learn about students' out-of-school lives without requiring them to engage in time intensive research themselves.

Another less time intensive technique that researchers and teachers have used to learn about students' funds of knowledge is "noticing" (McLaughlin & Barton, 2013, p. 22), which involves paying attention to the information that students share about themselves in the course of classroom activities. McLaughlin and Barton (2013) taught pre-service teachers enrolled in a science methods class to use open-ended "science talks" (p. 19) to elicit the science-related funds of knowledge of the diverse group of third and fourth grade students they worked with during their practicum experiences. During these conversations, the pre-service teachers uncovered a

variety of out-of-school experiences and knowledge that were relevant to the scientific topics being studied. This strategy has also been used productively by other researchers, including Barton and Tan (2009) and Fuller and Hood (2005). Fuller and Hood paid close attention to the times when students became most engaged in what was going on in the classroom in order to identify their areas of expertise and interest, which led them to design the camping unit described above.

Some researchers and teachers have also developed instructional activities that simultaneously help them learn about students' funds of knowledge and provide students with opportunities to build on those funds of knowledge. For example, Street (2005) provided her students with opportunities to write about their lives and areas of interest. Building on the work of Cummins (2007) and Cummins and Early (2011), Llopart and Esteban-Guitart (2017) suggest that one way for teachers to contextualize the curriculum, or connect it to their funds of knowledge, is to engage students in the creation of artifacts that reflect their lives and experiences, such as identity texts. These are texts in which "learners invest their identities" (p. 257). Llopart and Esteban-Guitart also reviewed the published literature on funds of knowledge to identify other ways that educators were using artifacts to uncover and make connections to students' funds of identity. This included the creation of texts, artistic works, photographs, and digital media. The authors highlight the "dual function" (p. 270) of these artifacts, arguing that the creation of artifacts both allows students and teachers to uncover students' funds of knowledge, or funds of identity, and to connect the curriculum to students' lives.

The classroom-based strategies for eliciting students' funds of knowledge described above do not require the time commitment that doing ethnographic research does. Therefore, this kind of an approach to funds of knowledge work may be more accessible to teachers. While

this is important, it is also possible that some elements of Moll and González's original funds of knowledge work may be lost when employing these types of techniques. Moll and González believe that doing ethnographic research and learning firsthand about ELL students' out-of-school lives and the wide range of knowledge they and their families possess helps teachers develop a strengths-based understanding of these children and encourages them to see their experiences as valuable resources for learning (González et al., 2005).

Paying close attention to the information students' share during class discussions or noticing when students respond enthusiastically to a topic of study, while useful techniques, may not always lead teachers to develop a full appreciation for the richness of their students' out-of-school experiences or to expand their understanding of "what counts" as valuable knowledge and skills in a classroom setting. McLaughlin and Barton's (2013) work, in particular, demonstrates that simply relying on "noticing" as a technique for identifying students' funds of knowledge does not necessarily lead teachers to develop productive interpretations of students' out-of-school knowledge and experiences, and it may even serve to reinforce deficit understandings of students and families.

Learning about students' funds of knowledge primarily in classroom spaces also means that teachers only have access to the knowledge and experiences that students are willing to discuss in a school context. As Moje et al. (2004) point out, students do not always share the full range of their knowledge related to the topic that is being studied in the classroom. Additionally, teachers' own pre-conceived notions about students' out-of-school experiences or interests may determine the kinds of funds of knowledge they "notice" and validate (Mercado, 2005). For that reason, limiting the scope of what teachers uncover about students' funds of knowledge to the

information students disclose during classroom activities may mean that teachers have access to a narrower range of student resources on which to draw.

Conclusion

As is evident from the review of the literature presented in this chapter, funds of knowledge research has demonstrated the utility of the concept as a tool for revaluing students' out-of-school experiences and creating expanded learning spaces. The literature has also highlighted some of the limitations of a funds of knowledge approach and has suggested ways of changing it to address those challenges. However, very little of the research has explored these issues from the point of view of teachers. With a few notable exceptions, including the foundational research done by Moll, González and their colleagues, most funds of knowledge-related studies have been led by university-based researchers and have not focused on the perspectives of the teachers charged with carrying out the work. I maintain that, in order to fully understand the usefulness of concepts like funds of knowledge as tools for creating expanded learning spaces in real world contexts, there is the need to foreground the voices of practitioners and to explore the experiences of educators applying the concept of funds of knowledge, and other similar theories, in their classrooms without the aid of university-based researchers. These teachers must find their own ways of making this complex theory work in their particular classroom and school contexts. As such, their stories have the potential to expand our understanding of the utility and limitations of a funds of knowledge approach in real world contexts.

In the three data chapters of this dissertation, I will address this gap in the literature by describing the experiences of thirteen teachers who were committed to building on their ELL students' out-of-school experiences and areas of expertise in their classrooms without the aid of

university-based researchers. I will explore how these educators understood what it meant to build on students' of funds of knowledge, highlighting what they saw as the utility of a funds of knowledge approach, their critique of the approach, the challenges they faced when implementing the approach, and the ways they responded to those challenges. It is my belief that exploring the ways in which teachers take up the concept of funds of knowledge, as my study does, sheds light on the affordances and limitations of this approach in terms of enabling teachers to challenge deficit understandings of ELL students and their families and to create expanded learning spaces for ELLs. It also foregrounds the voices and perspectives of teachers and provides us with a better understanding of how concepts like funds of knowledge are understood by teachers, as well as the ways in which their enactments of these theories are shaped by their professional beliefs and experiences.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

In the previous two chapters, I introduced the concept of funds of knowledge and the research questions related to that topic that this study explores. I also presented the theoretical and empirical frameworks for the study. This chapter will describe the methods of data collection and analysis that were used to explore teachers' beliefs and practices related to building on their ELL students' out-of-school experiences and areas of expertise. I will provide a detailed description of the study design, including: my choice in methodology and its relation to my research questions; the context in which the study took place; participant selection and recruitment; methods for collecting study data; and data analysis methods. I will also discuss the limitations of the study.

The overarching question that guided this study was*: How do teachers of ELLs understand what it means to build on students' funds of knowledge, or cultural and linguistic resources?* The following sub-questions are related to that guiding question:

1. Why might teachers choose to build on ELL students' fund of knowledge or out-of-school knowledge and experiences? What do they believe this approach affords them and their students?
2. Why might teachers limit the extent to which they build on ELL students' funds of knowledge in the classroom?
3. How do teachers of ELLs implement a funds of knowledge approach?
    a. How do they learn about and build on students' funds of knowledge or out-of-school knowledge and experiences?
    b. How do teachers define what counts as relevant out-of-school knowledge and experiences?

These research questions changed over the course of this project. The study's original research questions and related sub-questions were:

1. How do teachers of ELLs understand what it means to build on students' funds of knowledge or cultural and linguistic resources?
   a. How do they define the term "funds of knowledge"?
   b. How do they define what counts as relevant out-of-school knowledge and experiences?
   c. How/where do teachers of ELLs learn about the concept of funds of knowledge?
2. Why do teachers of ELLs believe it is important to build on ELL students' funds of knowledge or out-of-school knowledge and experiences? What do they believe this approach affords them and their students?
3. How do teachers of ELLs implement a funds of knowledge approach?
   a. How do they learn about students' funds of knowledge or out-of-school knowledge and experiences?
   b. What do they do to build on students' funds of knowledge or out-of-school knowledge and experiences in the classroom?

Data related to each of the original research questions and sub-questions was collected and analyzed. However, during the analysis process, I found that the questions I was asking of the data had shifted. This was primarily due to a change in the way I defined teacher understanding. I originally saw participants' understanding of the concept of funds of knowledge as being related to their level of familiarity with the "official" definition of the term developed by funds of knowledge theorists. I now see teacher understanding as consisting of the way in which the teachers themselves conceive of the work of building on students' funds of knowledge. In

particular, I see it as encompassing teachers' beliefs about building on students-out-of-school experiences, as well as the ways in which they act on those beliefs. As a result, I revised the study's original research questions to better reflect what, in fact, I learned from the data.

Methodology: Qualitative Interview Study

In order to answer the research questions outlined above, I carried out a qualitative interview study (Mishler, 1986, 1999; Seidman, 2006) that involved interviewing thirteen elementary school teachers who worked with ELL students in some capacity. An interview study was chosen because, as Seidman (2006) explains, "(a)t the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (p. 9). This desire to understand the experiences of others and the meaning they give to those experiences is a hallmark of qualitative studies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Eisner, 1998). Eisner (1998) refers to this focus as the "interpretive character" of qualitative research (p. 35). According to Eisner, qualitative studies are not just interested in discovering *what* has happened, but also in exploring *why* something has happened and what that event means for those who experienced it.

Although, as noted above, all qualitative research studies are focused on why things happen and the meaning people give to their experiences, qualitative research interviews are a particularly good method of answering these types of questions (Seidman, 2006). As Seidman (2006) explains, "(i)nterviewing provides access to the context of people's behavior and thereby provides a way for researchers to understand the meaning of that behavior" (p. 10). It is this emphasis on meaning that made a qualitative interview study particularly well suited to answering the questions that guided this study. This study stemmed from my interest in exploring how complex theoretical ideas, like funds of knowledge, get taken up and enacted by

teachers in real world contexts. However, rather than simply critiquing the way teachers implemented a funds of knowledge approach to teaching, I wanted to understand what the experience of enacting funds of knowledge-related strategies was like from the perspective of the teachers themselves. An interview study gave me the opportunity to ask participants directly about their beliefs and experiences related to strengths-based approaches to teaching ELLs, like funds of knowledge, which allowed me to develop a more nuanced understanding of what it meant to them to learn about and build on students' out-of-school experiences.

Interviewing is generally considered a method of data collection, rather than a methodological approach in and of itself. However, a number of qualitative research methodologies rely on interviewing as a primary source of data, including narrative research, phenomenology, and grounded theory (Cresswell, 2007). In designing and implementing this study, I drew on both phenomenological and narrative approaches to qualitative interviews. More specifically, the interview study that I carried out was informed by what Seidman (2006) calls in-depth phenomenological interviewing and by what Mishler (1986, 1999), writing from a narrative perspective, calls research interviews. As I'll discuss in more detail below, both of these research traditions are based in the belief that speaking with people about their experiences is a powerful way of learning about the meaning that they themselves give to those experiences.

A central characteristic of both phenomenological and narrative approaches to interviewing is a deep interest in the stories of others (Mishler, 1986, 1999; Seidman, 2006). This focus on stories reflects a belief that people tell stories as a way of making sense of their lives. Indeed, both Seidman and Mishler view telling stories as a meaning-making enterprise. According to Mishler (1986), "… a general assumption of narrative analysis is that telling stories is one of the significant ways individuals construct and express meaning" (p. 67). In other

words, people tell stories both to themselves and others to make sense of their experiences. Similarly, Seidman (2006) posits that,

> [t]elling stories is essentially a meaning-making process. When people tell stories, they select details of their experience from their stream of consciousness … It is this process of selecting constitutive details of experience, reflecting on them, giving them order, and thereby making sense of them that makes telling stories a meaning-making experience. (p. 7)

This interest in stories, and the belief that people use stories to make sense of their experiences, is one that I share and that informed my decision to carry out an interview study.

Influence of a phenomenological approach to interviewing. Although both narrative and phenomenological studies are centered on the idea that stories are an important way of understanding the meaning that people make of their experiences, there are some important differences between the two approaches. This study was more heavily influenced by a phenomenological approach to interviewing than a narrative one, particularly with regards to study design. In particular, there are three aspects of this methodological approach that informed the current study: a focus on interviewing people who have a shared or common experience; a desire to understand a phenomenon from the perspective of the people who experienced it; and an interest in understanding the way that people's experiences are shaped by the context in which they happen. I will explain each of these aspects in more detail, below.

Investigating a shared experience. Phenomenological research studies are generally interested in understanding a particular phenomenon by exploring how a group of people have experienced that particular phenomenon and the meaning that they give to that experience (Cresswell, 2007; Seidman, 2006). Interviews with participants are generally seen as the best

way of accessing this type of information (Seidman, 2006). In the case of this study, the shared experience that I was interested in exploring was the process of making sense of and implementing instructional strategies that involved learning about and building on ELL students' out-of-school experiences. As such, I interviewed teachers who had been identified by their peers as being particularly committed to these kinds of teaching practices. Additionally, the interview protocol that I developed and used to guide my conversations with participants consisted of questions that were related to that topic. Although the interview questions were open-ended, they were primarily focused on teachers' beliefs and experiences related to learning about and building on students' out-of-school experiences.

Foregrounding voices of participants. Another way in which this study reflects a phenomenological approach to interviewing is in its desire to foreground the perspectives of participants. Drawing on the work of Farrarotti (1981), Seidman (2006) posits that exploring the experiences of the people who make up an institution, like schools, or carry out a process, like implementing certain kinds of instructional strategies, is an important way of learning about that institution or process. Indeed, he argues that, "[s]ocial abstractions like 'education' are best understood through the experiences of the individuals whose work and lives are the stuff upon which the abstractions are built" (p. 10). Placing the experiences of participants at the center of the research process in this way has the effect of highlighting the voices of those participants. In the case of this study, interviewing teachers about their beliefs and experiences related to implementing funds of knowledge-related instructional strategies allowed me to explore what it meant, from the point of view of those teachers, to engage in those types of teaching approaches.

Focus on context. The third way in which this study drew on a phenomenological approach to interviewing was in its interest in exploring what participants' experiences revealed

about the context in which those experiences took place. In particular, Seidman (2006) suggests that looking at the connections between the stories told by a group of participants who have undergone a similar experience can help both the researcher and the study's readers to better understand the way in which context shapes those experiences. Indeed, Seidman, explains that interviewing can lead to "…a more conscious awareness of the power of the social and organizational context of people's experience" and provide "a deeper understanding of the issues, structures, processes, and policies that imbue participants' stories" (p. 130).

This focus on context informed the data analysis process for this study and ultimately led me to develop the arguments that are presented in the third data chapter, which explicitly focuses on context. Although I did not set out to explore the way in which context impacted teachers' enactment of educational theories like funds of knowledge, as I analyzed the interviews and considered how participants' experiences spoke to each other, I came to see that context was an important factor in their stories. More specifically, I realized that the particular context in which participants worked had shaped what they did and didn't see as being possible to accomplish in terms of learning about and building on their students' funds of knowledge.

Influence of a narrative research approach. Although this study was most heavily influenced by a phenomenological approach to interviewing, especially in terms of study design, it was also informed by a narrative research approach. This was particularly true with regards to the way in which I viewed and analyzed the data. According to Clandinin and Connelly (1994), in narrative research, people's stories or lived experiences are the object of study. However, the objective of the researcher is also to create a narrative of those lives. As they explain, the role of the researcher is to: "describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experience" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1994, p. 416). This view of narrative as "both the

phenomenon and method" (ibid.) shaped the way in which I made sense of the data. More specifically, I saw the data analysis process, in part, as an attempt to understand and retell the stories participants had communicated to me during their interviews.

In order to construct narratives of participants' experiences from the interview data, I primarily focused on what Mishler (1995) calls the narrative functions, or the "contexts and consequences" (p. 90) of the stories that participants told of themselves during our conversations. The focus of this approach is "on the 'work' stories do, on the settings in which they are produced and on the effects they have. What purposes do they fulfill, and what functions do they serve – for the storytellers themselves, their audiences, their larger communities?" (Mishler, 1995, pp. 107-108). Some narrative researchers focus on the temporality of the stories told by participants and others are interested in how participants use either language or narrative devices to construct a narrative about themselves (Mishler, 1995, p. 90). However, I was interested in how participants engaged in what Mishler (1995) calls the "narrativization of experience" (p. 109). In other words, I wanted to understand what participants were trying communicate about themselves and their experiences as teachers.

In looking at participants' stories in this way, I was influenced by idea that narratives can be seen as identity performances (Mishler, 1999, page 19). According to Mishler (1999), "We express, display, make claims for who we are – and who we would like to be – in the stories we tell and how we tell them. In sum, we perform our identities" (p. 19). As I coded the interviews, it became clear to me that the participants were telling stories of themselves in which they laid claim to the identity of a "good" teacher. This realization led me to craft profiles of participants that were meant to capture how they went about making that claim, which I present in Chapter 4.

Critiques of qualitative interview studies. Like all qualitative research, qualitative interview studies are subject to a variety of critiques (Kvale, 1994). Many of the critiques stem from the fact that qualitative interviews are not standardized and are therefore seen as not producing data that is objective and free from researcher bias (Kvale, 1994; Mishler, 1986). This type of criticism, which reflects a positivist stance, is based on the belief that the goal of research is to find one objective truth that explains the phenomenon under study (Mishler, 1986; Sipe & Constable, 1996). Qualitative researchers, including those who engage in qualitative interview studies, reject the idea that this outcome is desirable, or even possible (Kvale, 1994; Mishler, 1986; Sipe & Constable, 1996). Instead, they argue that there are many truths, or understandings, that can be uncovered by a research study (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Eisner, 1998; Mishler, 1986; Seidman, 2006). This is due both to the fact that participants experience the world in a multiplicity of ways and to the fact that researchers interpret data in different ways based on their own theoretical and methodological frameworks (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Eisner, 1998; Mishler, 1986).

In addition to rejecting the notion that the goal of research should be to uncover a single, objective truth, qualitative researchers also question whether any research, including quantitative interview studies, can be free from bias or researcher influence (Mishler, 1986). Qualitative researchers who carry out interview studies openly acknowledge the impact that the researcher has on the responses provided by participants (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004; Mishler, 1986) and they characterize interview data as being co-constructed (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004), highlighting the role that both the researcher and the participant play in the interview process. Indeed, qualitative researchers argue that one of the strengths of qualitative studies is that they encourage investigators to recognize and reflect on their own biases instead of simply pretending

that they do not exist, as may happen in a quantitative study (Mishler, 1986). This is something that I tried to do throughout the research process, as I'll describe in more detail in later sections of this chapter.

Qualitative interview studies are also critiqued because they typically involve a smaller number of participants than quantitative interview studies and, it is argued, that the findings of these types of studies are not generalizable (Kvale, 1994; Mishler, 1986). Researchers who carry out qualitative interview studies acknowledge that these studies may not yield results that are generalizable, however, they argue generalizability is not the goal of these types of studies (Mishler, 1986; Seidman, 2006). As Seidman (2006) explains,

> Because hypotheses are not being tested, the issue is not whether the researcher can generalize the finding of an interview study to a broader population. Instead the researcher's task is to present the experience of the people he or she interviews in compelling enough detail and in sufficient depth that those who read the study can connect to that experience, learn how it is constituted, and deepen their understanding of the issues it reflects. (p. 51)

In other words, the power of qualitative interview studies stems from the rich descriptions they provide of the experiences of a relatively small group of people that may resonate with readers and illuminate their understanding of the topic under study. This was my goal in this study.

Context for Research

All of the teachers interviewed for this study worked for Prairie Town Public Schools (PTPS), an urban school district located in Prairie Town, a medium-sized Midwestern city. PTPS was chosen as the site of this study in part because it drew many teachers from the local university's teacher education programs, which emphasized teaching for social justice and

teaching in culturally responsive ways (University of Prairie Town, n.d.). For that reason, I believed that there would be a pool of teachers in the district who were familiar with the concept of funds of knowledge or other teaching approaches that emphasized the importance of valuing and building on students' out-of-school experiences and areas of expertise.

According to the district's enrollment history and projections for 2014 (Prairie Town Public Schools [PTPS], 2014), at the time the study was carried out, the district had 32 elementary schools, serving students in grades 4K-5, 12 middle schools, serving students in grades 6-8, and six high schools, including two alternative schools, serving students in grades 9-12. The majority of the district's elementary schools enrolled students in grades 4K-5. However, in three cases, the district had paired a 4K-2 elementary school with one that served students in grades 3-5. This was done in an effort to ensure that the student bodies of those particular schools were better integrated than they otherwise would have been (Troller, 2006).

During the academic year that the study took place, the district served 25,107 students in grades K-12. Of those students, 44% were white, 18% were African American, 20% were Latino, and 9% were Asian (PTPS, 2014). Forty-seven percent of students were classified as low-income and 26% of students were classified as ELLs (PTPS, 2014). According to the district's *English Language Learner Three Year Plan* (PTPS, 2015), the number of ELL students enrolled in the district had increased dramatically over the course of the ten years prior when the study was carried out, growing from 14% of the school population to 27%. Approximately 58% of ELL students were Spanish-speaking and approximately 10% of the district's ELL students spoke Hmong (PTPS, 2015). The rest of the district's ELL population represented a mix of over ninety other languages, including Mandarin, Nepali, and Arabic (PTPS, 2015).

PTPS had been singled out as a district in need of improvement by the state department of education due to the large achievement gap that existed between its white students and its students of color (PTPS, 2011b). The district had undertaken a number of initiatives designed to improve the educational outcomes of students from non-dominant groups, including an effort to encourage teachers to use culturally and linguistically relevant teaching practices (CLRP) (PTPS, 2011b). Although the use of CLRP was mentioned in the district's ELL plan as one of the core instructional practices teachers were expected to use when working with ELLs, many of the teachers interviewed for this study viewed this initiative a mostly being aimed at the district's African-American population and did not necessarily see it as being relevant to their work with ELL students. Another way that PTPS was attempting to address its equity-related issues was to standardize the teaching practices used in the district (PTPS, 2013). For example, the district had embraced the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) and standards-based teaching (PTPS, 2013). Additionally, PTPS had recently adopted two new K-5 scripted reading curriculums.

At the time of the study, the district was also in the process of implementing a new initiative for ELL students at the elementary school level called Guided Language Acquisition Development (GLAD) (PTPS, 2015). GLAD is a set of instructional strategies that focus on supporting the linguistic and literacy-learning needs of ELL students (Be GLAD, n.d.). Some of the teachers I interviewed for this study had received GLAD training, but not all had. However, the approach was mentioned by many participating teachers, and even the ones who had not attended the district's formal GLAD training reported having learned some of the program's strategies from teachers who had been trained.

According to the district's *English Language Learner Three Year Plan* (PTPS, 2015), PTPS had a number of different program models in place that were intended to meet the needs of its ELL students. In some schools, ELL students were placed in a mainstream classroom where instruction was provided in English. These students received support for part of the day from an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher or a Bilingual Education Specialist (BES). A BES, a position that is unique to PTPS, is a teacher that is ESL and Bilingual-certified and is fluent in one of the languages spoken by ELL students in the school where he or she works. A teacher who works as a BES provides ELL students in mainstream classrooms with support in English, but can also draw on a student's native language, when needed. Study participants who were BESs reported that classroom teachers and school administrators typically wanted them to support ELL students during literacy and math-related instructional activities.

Based on the descriptions provided by study participants, the district used a push-in model, rather than a pull-out model, when providing ESL support for students placed in mainstream classrooms. This means that the ESL teacher or BES did not pull students out of the classroom to provide ESL instruction. Rather, he or she worked with students in the classroom to help them access the content area material being presented. In many cases, according to study participants, these teachers led their own guided reading groups, which at times included both ELL and non-ELL students. Study participants reported that it was district policy to group, or cluster, all of the ELL students in a particular grade level together and place them in the same classroom in order to make it easier for the ESL teacher or BES to provide support to those students. In some cases, the classroom teachers to whom the ELL clusters were assigned were also ESL-certified. This was true of two study participants, Tara and Lena.

In addition to placing students in mainstream classrooms with the support of ESL teachers or BESs, PTPS also offered bilingual education programs for students who spoke Spanish. The district had historically used a developmental bilingual education (DBE) model. In a DBE program, students who speak the same native language are placed in a classroom together and receive instruction in their native language, as well as instruction in English. According to the district's ELL plan (PTPS, 2015), this model was still used at some of the district's schools. However, a few years prior to this study, the district had made the decision to transition many of its elementary school-level bilingual programs to a two-way bilingual (TWB) model. In a TWB program, students are placed in mixed groups of native English speakers and native speakers of a target language other than English and all students receive instruction in the targeted language and in English. The goal of the program is for both groups of students to become bilingual, biliterate, and bicultural (PTPS, 2015). In Prairie Town, there were ten TWB programs that provided instruction in both English and Spanish. Three of the teachers I interviewed, Rachel, Andrea, and Ainsley, taught in a TWB program at the same school.

In addition to the programs described above, schools with ELL populations also employed bilingual liaisons to provide support for those students and their families (PTPS, n.d.). Bilingual liaisons were fluent in a language that was spoken by a group of ELL students at the school – typically Spanish or Hmong. According to teachers interviewed for this study, they acted as liaisons between the school and the families, helping families register their children and complete paperwork. They also helped interpret for teachers during conferences and at other times when they needed to communicate with families. Additionally, bilingual liaisons served as classroom aides, providing support for ELL students in the classroom. Study participants also indicated that the school's bilingual liaisons typically knew the families of ELL students well

and helped them access resources they might need, including health-related services or food assistance. One of the educators interviewed for this study, Justin, was a certified teacher but had chosen to work as a bilingual liaison instead.

Table 1, below, lists the schools where participants taught and the types of programs that were in place to support ELL students at each of the schools.

Table 1. PTPS Schools Where Study Participants Taught

School Name	Grades Served; Services for ELL Students	Participants
Sycamore Elementary	K4-5th Grade ELL students placed in mainstream classrooms Support provided by a part time ESL teacher, three full time BES's, and a bilingual liaison	Anna, Justin, Kristy, Lily, and Quinn
Maple Elementary	K4-2nd Grade TWB program, Spanish-English Other ELL students placed in mainstream classrooms and supported by ESL teachers/BES's and bilingual liaisons	Ainsley, Andrea, and Rachel
Cedar Elementary	K4-5th Grade ELL students placed in mainstream classrooms Some mainstream classroom teachers ESL-certified Support provided by BES's/ESL teachers and bilingual liaisons	Elisa, Jenna, and Lena
Spruce Elementary	K4-2nd Grade ELL Students placed in mainstream classrooms Some mainstream classroom teachers ESL-certified Support provided by ESL teachers/BES's, and bilingual liaisons	Tara
Birch Elementary	K4-5th Grade ELL students placed in mainstream classrooms Support provided by a part time ESL teacher, a full time BES, and one bilingual liaison	Kasey

Participant Selection and Recruitment

The thirteen participants interviewed for this study were elementary school teachers who worked with ELL students in some capacity. All of them taught in the same school district, Prairie Town Public Schools. I employed snowball sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 28) to locate participants for this study. I drew on both my professional and personal networks to identify potential participants. I asked professional contacts who worked in PTPS to refer colleagues to me who they felt did a particularly good job of connecting with ELL students and their families. One participant, Kasey, had been a student in a bilingual education methods class I taught and I knew she was familiar with the concept of funds of knowledge and tried to build on her ELL students' out-of-school experiences. I contacted her directly and asked her if she would be willing to participate. Rachel was referred to me by a professional contact, but was also a former student of mine. In two cases, my professional contacts offered to be interviewed themselves, and I agreed. This included Justin and Elisa, who was a former colleague of mine. Additionally, a personal contact who was not affiliated with the school district but was familiar with the topic of my study suggested I interview Tara.

Following district policy, before contacting the teachers who had been referred to me, I emailed the principals of the schools where they taught, requesting permission to interview them. All of the principals I contacted agreed to let me interview the identified teachers. Once I had received consent from the principal, I emailed the teachers directly, introducing myself, sharing information about the study, including the level of commitment required, and asking if they were interested in participating. In total, I contacted approximately fifteen teachers, in addition to the professional contacts who referred potential participants to me. Eleven of the teachers I contacted agreed to be interviewed, as well as two of my professional contacts. In addition to the

three participants who I knew in other capacities, two of the teachers I interviewed, Jenna and Quinn, told me during their interviews that they had seen me present information about working with ELL students to their undergraduate-level education courses.

I originally proposed interviewing between ten and fifteen teachers for this study. I decided to stop recruiting new participants when I had interviewed thirteen teachers. When determining how many participants are enough for an interview study, Seidman (2006) advocates that researchers consider both sufficiency and saturation (p. 55). After talking with thirteen teachers, I felt I had reached saturation (Seidman, 2006). The themes I was hearing in the new interviews I was doing were similar to those that I had heard in earlier ones and I did not believe that interviewing additional teachers would substantially expand my understanding of the topic under study. I also believed I had reached sufficiency. I planned to interview teachers who fell into three groups – those who worked as BES's or ESL teachers, those who worked as bilingual classroom teachers, and those who worked as mainstream classroom teachers. I was able to talk with multiple participants who fell into each of those three categories.

For the reasons cited above, although some study participants offered to refer other teachers to me, I decided against contacting those potential participants. I would have made an exception if the teachers being referred to me were from the same cultural background as their ELL students. I felt that this was an important perspective that was missing from the study. Although I contacted two or three teachers who were Latina and/or native Spanish-speakers and one teacher who was Hmong during my initial recruitment process, I did not get responses from them. All of the potential participants referred to me by the teachers I interviewed were white and native English speakers. As a result, I was not able to interview any teachers who shared the cultural background of the students with whom they were working.

As noted above, I purposefully recruited teachers who held a range of teaching positions, including mainstream classroom teacher, bilingual classroom teacher, and BES/ESL teacher. I also intentionally included both teachers who were ESL-certified and those that were not. I chose to recruit teachers whose teaching experiences and training backgrounds varied because I was interested in exploring how different groups of teachers understood and enacted the concept of funds of knowledge. While I found that there were differences in the ways that teachers thought about the out-of-school experiences of their ELL students and reported building on those experiences in the classroom, there was not a clear link between those differences and participants' teaching roles or ESL-related training. Comparing these groups of teachers did not become a focus of my analysis.

Although I sought out participants who held a variety of teaching positions, I did limit participation primarily to teachers who held one of the three roles mentioned above and who were responsible for helping ELL students access the core academic content areas. For example, one of the teachers referred to me was the music teacher at the school where Anna, Justin, Kristy, Lily and Quinn worked. According to Justin, this teacher built extensively on her students' out-of-school experiences. However, I opted not to include her in the study because I wanted to maintain a focus on teachers who were charged with supporting the academic development of ELL students. I did make an exception for Justin, who was a bilingual liaison and did not hold a teaching position. I had not intended to interview him, however, when he offered to participate, I agreed because other professional contacts indicated that he was well-known in the district as someone who was particularly good at connecting with immigrant students and their families. Additionally, although he was not currently working as a teacher, Justin did have his teaching

certificate and part of his job involved providing support for ELL students in the classroom during instructional activities related to the core content areas.

Four participants were mainstream classroom teachers who had a cluster of ELL students assigned to their classrooms. Of those four teachers, two were ESL-certified. The other two did not have any formal training related to working with ELL students. Five of the teachers interviewed worked as Bilingual Education Specialists (BES's) and three were bilingual classroom teachers in one of the district's TWB programs. All eight of those teachers were certified ESL/Bilingual teachers or were working towards their ESL/Bilingual certification. One teacher, Elisa, was currently working as a reading interventionist, but had previously worked as a BES, an ESL teacher, and a bilingual classroom teacher. She also had her ESL/Bilingual teaching license. One participant, Justin, was a certified teacher, but was currently employed as a bilingual liaison. He did not have an ESL/Bilingual certification.

Participants ranged in age and years of experience as a teacher. Quinn was in her early twenties and had just finished her first year of teaching. Anna was in her early forties and had been teaching for more than twenty years. One participant, Justin, was male, while the rest were female. Eleven of the teachers interviewed were white. One, Rachel, was African-American and one, Lily, was biracial. Lily's mother was Japanese and her father was white. Ten participants were natives of the state where they were currently living and teaching and three had grown up in Prairie Town.

As noted previously, none of the teachers were from the same cultural background as the ELL students they taught, with the possible exception of Ainsley. Ainsley indicated that her paternal grandfather was from Mexico, but it was not clear if she identified as Latina. None of the participants were native speakers of a language other than English. However, nine of them

spoke Spanish fluently and six of them had lived and worked in Spanish-speaking countries. Many of those who those who had learned to speak Spanish and had lived outside the country indicated that those experiences had helped them develop a better understanding of how their ELL students might feel in school.

Participating teachers had varying levels of awareness of the concept of funds of knowledge. Five teachers indicated that they were not familiar with the term at all or did not know enough about it to offer a definition of what it meant. The other seven teachers were acquainted with the concept and were able to provide a definition of the term that aligned with the way it has been defined by funds of knowledge theorists. Including both groups in the study allowed me to investigate both how teachers familiar with the concept of funds of knowledge implemented it in their classrooms and to identify teachers who might be building on students' funds of knowledge but were not using that term to describe what they were doing.

Regardless of their familiarity with the specific term "funds of knowledge," all of the teachers in the study had some training related to culturally and linguistically relevant teaching practices. Nine participants had attended the local university's initial teacher education program, which was focused on teaching in ways that are socially just and culturally responsive (University of Prairie Town, "Elementary Education, BSE," n.d.). Four of those had been part of a special cohort of students that was designed to prepare teachers to work in urban settings. This program, which was called the Urban Schools Initiative (USI), was cited by these participants as having been an important source of information about building on students' out-of-school experiences. Six participants had attended, or were attending, the local university's ESL/Bilingual certification program, which also emphasized equity-oriented and culturally responsive ways of teaching (University of Prairie Town, "English as a Second Language &

Bilingual Education," n.d.). Two participants, Kasey and Andrea, had attended other teacher education programs, which they reported had included extensive information about the concept of funds of knowledge and teaching in ways that are culturally responsive. Additionally, all participants had received district-sponsored professional development that focused on culturally and linguistically relevant teaching practices. All of the teachers agreed that they believed it was important to draw on students' out-of-school experiences in the classroom and all of them indicated that this was something that they tried to do in their own classrooms.

Table 2 lists the thirteen educators who were interviewed for this study and provides details related to their personal and professional backgrounds, as well as their exposure to concepts like funds of knowledge and culturally relevant pedagogy.[4]

Table 2. Study Participants

Participant	**Background**	**Years Teaching**	**ESL / Bilingual Certified**	**Teaching Position**	**Exposure to concepts like FoK and CRP**
Ainsley	White female; Non-native speaker of Spanish; Lived and taught abroad	4	Yes (in progress)	Second grade teacher in TWB program	Very familiar with the term "funds of knowledge;" Attended initial teacher certification and ESL/Bilingual certification programs at local university; District-sponsored training related to CRP
Andrea	White female;	8	Yes	First grade teacher in	Very familiar with the term "funds of knowledge;"

[4] Not all of the teachers who attended the local university's teacher education programs reported having been exposed to information about building on students' out-of-school experiences as part of their teacher training. However, given the focus of university's teacher certification programs on progressive educational approaches, like teaching for social justice and culturally responsive teaching, I have noted when participants attended either the initial teacher education program or the ESL/Bilingual certification program as a possible indicator of exposure to ideas that are similar to those underlying a funds of knowledge approach to teaching.

Participant	Background	Years Teaching	ESL / Bilingual Certified	Teaching Position	Exposure to concepts like FoK and CRP
	Non-native speaker of Spanish; Lived and taught abroad			TWB program	Exposed to concept of funds of knowledge during initial teacher certification program; Attended ESL/Bilingual certification program at local university; District-sponsored training related to CRP
Anna	White female; Non-native speaker of Spanish	21	Yes	BES	Somewhat familiar with the term "funds of knowledge;" Some exposure during ESL/Bilingual certification program; District-sponsored training related to CRP
Elisa	White female; Non-native speaker of Spanish	11	Yes	Reading Interventionist	Very familiar with the term "funds of knowledge;" Attended initial teacher certification program at local university; District-sponsored training related to CRP
Jenna	White female	3	No	Fourth grade teacher in mainstream classroom	Not familiar with the term "funds of knowledge;" Attended initial teacher certification program at local university; District-sponsored training related to CRP

Participant	Background	Years Teaching	ESL / Bilingual Certified	Teaching Position	Exposure to concepts like FoK and CRP
Justin	White male; Non-native speaker of Spanish; Lived abroad	10	No	Bilingual Liaison	Somewhat familiar with the term "funds of knowledge;" Attended initial teacher certification program at local university; Participated in USI program; District-sponsored training related to CRP
Kasey	White female; Non-native speaker of Spanish; Lived and taught abroad	10	Yes	BES	Very familiar with the term "funds of knowledge;" Exposed to concept of funds of knowledge during initial teacher certification; Attended ESL/Bilingual certification program at local university; District-sponsored training related to CRP
Kristy	White female; Non-native speaker of Spanish; Lived and taught abroad	7	Yes	BES	Very familiar with the term "funds of knowledge;" Attended ESL/Bilingual certification program at local university; District-sponsored training related to CRP
Lena	White female	8	Yes	First grade teacher in mainstream classroom	Very familiar with the term "funds of knowledge;" Attended initial certification program at local university;

Participant	Background	Years Teaching	ESL / Bilingual Certified	Teaching Position	Exposure to concepts like FoK and CRP
					Participated in USI program; District-sponsored training related to CRP
Lily	Biracial (Asian/White) female; Non-native speaker of Spanish; Lived and taught abroad	3	Yes (in progress)	BES	Not familiar with the term “funds of knowledge;” Attended initial certification program at local university; District-sponsored training related to CRP
Quinn	White female	1	No	Fifth grade teacher in mainstream classroom	Very familiar with the term “funds of knowledge;” Attended initial certification program at local university; Participated in USI program; District-sponsored training related to CRP
Rachel	African American female; Non-native speaker of Spanish	7	Yes	Kindergarten teacher in TWB program	Very familiar with the term “funds of knowledge;” Attended initial certification and ELS/Bilingual certification programs at local university; Participated in USI program; District-sponsored training related to CRP
Tara	White female	18	Yes	First grade teacher in mainstream classroom	Not familiar with the term “funds of knowledge;”

Participant	Background	Years Teaching	ESL / Bilingual Certified	Teaching Position	Exposure to concepts like FoK and CRP
					Attended initial certification and ELS/Bilingual certification programs at local university; District-sponsored training related to CRP

Although all of the teachers interviewed for this study felt it was valuable to build on students' experiences and areas of expertise, their reasons for doing so and the ways in which they went about accomplishing this task varied. In reporting the study findings, I have tried to capture this range of beliefs and practices. To that end, I have shared examples that are illustrative of the variety of responses that I received. Although some teachers are quoted more heavily than others, I have drawn on as many of the interviews as possible. The only participant whose words I did not quote at all was Kristy. Kristy and Anna were interviewed together and Anna dominated the conversation, often answering the interview questions first. As a result, Kristy was not as forthcoming as she might have been in an individual interview. Rather than formulating her own responses to questions, she typically indicated that she agreed with the answer that Anna had given and expanded on it very briefly. Although I coded Kristy's responses and took them into account when identifying study themes, I did not quote her directly or use examples from her interview in the three data chapters.

Participants were given a consent form prior to starting the interview that described the study in detail, as well as the risks of participating in the study. All thirteen participants signed the form and agreed to have their interviews recorded. One participant, Rachel, declined

permission to use direct quotations from her interview. Prior to becoming a teacher, Rachel had been enrolled in a PhD program in psychology and indicated that she remembered reading and critiquing the words of study participants cited in published articles. For that reason, she preferred not to be quoted directly. I have tried to capture her thoughts by paraphrasing what she said, but staying as close as possible to what I understood to be the meaning of her words.

Although the other twelve teachers interviewed for this study did consent to being quoted, many of them indicated a discomfort with the interview process. For example, at the end of our interview, Elisa asked "How did I do?" Tara and Rachel repeatedly apologized for not being able to recall specific examples of the types of things they did in their classrooms to build on students' out-of-school experiences. Justin talked about himself in a self-deprecating way throughout his interview, insinuating that the way that he was expressing himself did not sound intelligent. A potential source of that discomfort may have been the fact that I was asking them about a specific theoretical concept and teaching practices associated with that theory. Although I tried to assure participants that I was not passing judgement on them, they may have felt that they did not understand the concept of funds of knowledge well enough or were not doing enough to build on their students' funds of knowledge. Indeed, at the end of my interview with Anna, she asked me for my definition of the term "funds of knowledge" and compared it to her own understanding of the term.

I have protected the identity of participating teachers by assigning each of them a pseudonym. This pseudonym was used throughout the transcription and coding process. Additionally, I have used pseudonyms to refer to the names of schools where they taught and the names of teaching positions and programs that are unique to PTPS. When participants referred to a colleague or a student in the course of their interviews, I recorded only the first letter of that

person's name in the transcript. I have also used pseudonyms to refer to the name of the city where the teachers lived and taught and I have purposefully kept my description of the city quite general in order to limit the use of identifying factors.

Data Collection Methods

Teacher interviews. The principal data collection method employed for this study was interviews with thirteen teachers who worked with ELLs in some capacity (for interview questions, see Appendix A). All participants had been identified by people familiar with their teaching approaches as educators who did a good job of making connections to the out-of-school worlds of ELL students. The interviews were semi-structured and lasted from approximately 75 minutes to two hours. The interviews took place from May 2014 to August 2014. Five teachers were interviewed in the spring, at the end of the school year, and eight teachers were interviewed during summer break.

Teachers were interviewed at a time and location of their choosing. All interviews took place during non-work hours. I met the majority of participants at coffee shops in or near Prairie Town. I interviewed one participant, Andrea, in her home. Rachel's interview took place at the playground of the school where she taught. Her daughter was participating in a soccer camp being held there and I spoke with her while she was watching her older daughter play soccer and, simultaneously, caring for her younger daughter. All of the interviews took place over the course of one day with the exception of Rachel's interview. Because I met with Rachel while her child was at camp, our time was limited. When her daughter's camp ended, we had not discussed all of the interview questions. For that reason, I met her the following day at the same location to finish the interview. All interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed, coded, and analyzed.

I had intended to do one-on-one interviews with all participants. However, in two cases, participants asked if they could be interviewed in pairs and I agreed. Anna and Kristy were interviewed together and Justin and Lily were interviewed together. These four participants were all members of the bilingual staff at one school and worked very closely together. Interviewing them in pairs had certain advantages. It allowed me to observe how these particular participants interacted with their colleagues and to develop a better sense of what their working context might be like. It may also have had the effect of making them feel more comfortable with the idea of being interviewed by someone who they did not know. However, in retrospect, I wish I had interviewed the four teachers individually. In both cases, one participant was more forthcoming than the other, which may have impacted the amount I was able to learn about the less talkative member of the pair. As noted above, this was particularly true of the interview I did with Anna and Kristy. Because Anna spoke much more than Kristy, I do not believe I developed as deep of an understanding of Kristy's beliefs and practices related to building on students' out-of-school experiences as I might have if I had interviewed her alone.

I chose to use a semi-structured interview format because it allowed me to elicit information about key topics from all participants, thus enabling me to compare their responses and look for common themes (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004). At the same time, it gave me the flexibility to pursue topics that were relevant to the study that arose during individual interviews that I had not anticipated discussing with participants (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004). Prior to the interviews, I developed an interview protocol that consisted of nineteen questions that were aligned to the study's three original research questions. I used this protocol as a guide during my interviews with participants. During the majority of the interviews, I went through the questions

in order, reading them aloud and giving participants time to respond. However, I also asked clarifying questions and follow-up questions that were not a part of the interview protocol.

The interview questions were primarily open-ended and focused on participants' professional knowledge and experiences related to working with ELLs, building on students' out-of-school lives, and literacy teaching. Participants were asked to describe the work they did with ELL students, their reasons for choosing to work with those students, and their beliefs about the types of support ELLs needed in the classroom. Participating teachers were also asked about their familiarity with the concept of funds of knowledge; the ways in which they learned about and drew on students' out-of-school experiences; the reasons why they chose to incorporate students' out-of-school experiences into their classroom instruction; and their beliefs regarding the kinds of out-of-school experiences that contribute to school success. If participants were unfamiliar with the term "funds of knowledge," I substituted the term "students' out-of-school experiences and areas of expertise" when asking questions relating to that topic area. Additionally, if participants were not familiar with the term "funds of knowledge," I did not ask them to define the term. Instead, I asked them what their definition of culturally responsive teaching was.[5]

While the majority of the interview questions focused on participants' experiences and beliefs related to working with ELL students and building on ELL students' out-of-school worlds, one of the questions asked them to describe the literacy-related instructional activities that they carried out on a typical day. I asked this question because I was particularly interested

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[5] Although not all participants had heard of the term "funds of knowledge," all of them were familiar with culturally responsive teaching and all of them, including those who were unfamiliar with the concept of funds of knowledge, believed it was important to teach in culturally responsive ways. While there is not an exact correlation between these two theories, I believe that the ideas underlying them are similar. Both advocate the importance of valuing the experiences that students bring to the classroom and finding ways to incorporate them into classroom instruction. As such, in asking these participants to define CRP, I was trying to get a sense of how they understood what it meant to build on students' out-of-school lives in the classroom.

in whether and how teachers incorporated students' out-of-school experiences into classroom reading and writing activities. I also asked about participants' literacy practices as a means of providing context. I wanted to understand what their approach to literacy teaching was and whether or not this approach made space for non-school-based forms of literacy. However, the question about literacy practices was less illuminating than I thought it would be. While participants did describe building on students' out-of-school experiences during literacy activities, most didn't do so in response to that particular question. Instead, they primarily described the components of the various curriculums they were expected to use. As noted above, at the time this study took place, there was a push to standardize the way literacy was taught in the district, which included the implementation of commercially produced reading and writing curriculums. This meant that there was very little variation in the descriptions that participants offered of their literacy instruction.

Interview notes and research journal. In addition to making a digital recording of my conversations with participants, I took notes during each interview in a notebook. These notes included the date and location of our meeting, as well as short summaries of their responses to many of the interview questions. This allowed me to refer back to their responses during the interview and to ask follow-up questions, as needed. In addition to writing interview notes, I kept a separate research journal in which I wrote my reflections immediately following each interview. These reflections included my own feelings about how the interview had gone, as well as my overall impression of how the participant had experienced the interview process. Additionally, I recorded things that had happened that I thought would be helpful to remember later in order to contextualize the interview. This included the logistical aspects of the interview, such as the factors that had determined the time and location of our meeting, as well the topics

we discussed before and/or after the recorder was turned on, and any notable occurrences that took place during the interview, such as interruptions to our conversation.

The research journal was more than a place for me to write down my immediate impressions of the interviews I had done. Throughout the study, I used the journal as a tool for reflecting on the steps of the research process in which I was engaging (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994). For example, during the data collection phase, I reflected on concerns I had about my own role in the interview process, including how I responded to the participants' answers and if I was influencing their responses. I also recorded my initial reactions to the information that had been shared during the interview in my research journal, including the salient themes that had emerged during each conversation. As I gathered more interviews, the notes I made in the journal included the connections I was beginning to see between interviews.

During the transcription process, I used the research journal as a place to record my initial thoughts after transcribing the interviews, again making note of the patterns that were beginning to emerge in the data. Many of the themes that I noted in the research journal later became codes that I used when analyzing the interviews. I also used the research journal as I coded the transcribed interviews to reflect on the coding process, including concerns I had about applying the codes consistently. During the coding process and later the writing process, I explored thoughts I had about the data in the research journal and began to develop the arguments that later became the basis of the three data chapters.

Document review. In addition to the interview data I collected and my research notes, I reviewed several public documents produced by the school district that I downloaded from the PTPS website. These included the district strategic framework that was developed three years prior to the study and was guiding the work of the district at the time of the study; the ELL plan

that was released the same year of the study; and an evaluation of the district's literacy program that was released three years prior to the study. I made the decision to review these documents after the study interviews were completed for two reasons. First, many of the same district mandates were mentioned across interviews and I felt it was important to learn more about those initiatives. Examining the official documents that described these mandates gave me a better understanding of them and helped me understand what messages were being sent to teachers about them. Second, reviewing these key documents gave me a better sense of the overall context in which teachers were working. The strategic framework, in particular, helped me understand what the priorities of the district administration were and how those priorities were being translated into specific policies that impacted what teaching and learning looked like in the district.

I did not code these documents in the same way I coded the interviews. The goal of reviewing the documents was not to analyze them in and of themselves, but rather, as noted above, to use them to contextualize the themes I saw emerging in the interviews and to better understand the context in which the teachers worked. When examining the documents, I primarily looked for content that was aligned with the main themes I had identified in the interviews. In particular, I looked for evidence of the messages teachers were being sent about the district's stance on supporting ELL students, literacy teaching, standards-based teaching, and the standardization of the curriculum. I was also interested in what messages, if any, were sent to teachers about building on students' out-of-school experiences. In many cases, the documents confirmed what I was hearing from teachers – particularly with regards to the standardization of teaching.

Although the documents I reviewed did not focus on drawing on students' out-of-school experiences, per se, they did mention using culturally and linguistically responsive practices as one way of meeting the needs of ELL students and addressing the district's achievement gap. However, the district's promotion of culturally and linguistically responsive teaching did not ultimately become a significant focus of my analysis of the data for several reasons. The teachers I interviewed reported that the district was no longer prioritizing those practices and was now focusing other initiatives. Additionally, participants described the initiative as primarily emphasizing the use of engagement protocols in the classroom, such as "Numbered Heads Together" or "Pick Sticks." These strategies were meant to provide equitable opportunities to participate in classroom activities, rather than building on children's experiences or areas of expertise. Finally, many of the teachers did not see the district's focus on culturally and linguistically responsive teaching as applying to their work with ELLs. These teachers indicated that the training they had received related to this area promoted specific practices that that they saw as being more relevant to African American students than to ELLs.

Methods of Data Analysis

Initial coding. I engaged in multiple rounds of data analysis. I began by using an initial coding approach (Charmaz, 2000) to code three of the interview transcripts, assigning provisional codes to themes that I identified in the data. As described by Saladaña (2009), initial coding, also known as open coding, is an open-ended coding approach that provides researchers with the opportunity to reflect on data and to identify "analytic leads for further exploration" (p. 81). During the initial coding process, I employed a variety of types of codes described by Saldaña (2009) that I felt were particularly appropriate for an interview study. These included process codes, which are meant to capture the actions of participants, and in vivo codes, which

are based on participants' own words. I also made use of descriptive codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Saldaña, 2009), which, according to Saldaña (2009), are helpful for answering the question "What is going on here?" (p. 70).

After coding three interview transcripts using an initial coding approach, I found that the list of codes I was developing was growing so long that it was becoming unwieldy. For that reason, I decided to condense the list of codes I had developed. In order to do this, I followed Miles and Huberman's (1994) advice to use the research questions guiding the study as a means of selecting the themes that were particularly important to pay attention to during the coding process. This focus helped me develop a list of master codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 58) that both reflected the principal areas of inquiry of the study and that synthesized the common themes that had emerged during the initial coding process. Some examples of these codes included, "Teacher Motivation – Funds of Knowledge," "Uncovering Funds of Knowledge," "Impact – Funds of Knowledge – Teacher." The master codes were primarily descriptive and were, for the most part, reflective of the general set of topics that were addressed by the interview protocol that was used to guide my conversations with participants. This made sense because many of the larger themes that appeared across interviews, such as "Uncovering Funds of Knowledge," were similar due to the fact that participants were responding to the same set of questions.

In addition to creating a list of master codes, I developed subcodes (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 58) for many of the main codes. The subcodes were a combination of descriptive, process, and in vivo codes and were based on many of the provisional codes that I had developed during the initial coding process. The subcodes were meant to capture the common types of responses that participants had provided related to the larger themes that were represented by the

master codes. For example, the subcodes related to the master code "Impact of Funds of Knowledge - Teacher," included "Affirming Previous Practice," "Change in Perspective," and "It Works."

I used the new list of codes and subcodes to recode the three interview transcripts I had already coded and to code the remaining transcripts. Prior to beginning, I developed definitions for each code and I referred to those definitions during the coding process to make sure that I was applying the codes consistently across interviews (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I coded the interviews by hand, focusing on chunks of text that were three to four sentences long as the coding unit. During the coding process, I remained open to creating new codes and subcodes if themes emerged that were not adequately represented by any of the existing codes. In a few cases, I realized that there was not a significant difference in the way I was employing two codes and I combined those codes. In addition to applying codes to the interview transcripts, during the coding process I used marginal remarks (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 67) as a way of recording my reactions to the data I was coding and of highlighting unique aspects of the interviews that I did not feel were adequately captured by the codes. This also enabled me to create a more nuanced picture of each participant that I drew on in later rounds of analysis.

As noted above, throughout the coding process, I wrote reflections in a research journal. These reflections included my thoughts on the coding process itself and how I was applying the codes. In some cases, my reflections led me to modify the codes I was using or to clarify my definitions of the codes. I also reflected on the salient themes that appeared in each of the interviews, as well as the common themes that I was beginning to see across the interviews. This allowed me to begin exploring the meaning of the patterns I was seeing in the data, and to develop possible explanations for those patterns.

Looking for connective threads. After completing the initial rounds of coding, I engaged in another round of analysis, drawing on Seidman's (2006) framework for analyzing interview data. Seidman argues that there are two ways of approaching the analysis of interview data – crafting profiles of individual participants and looking for thematic connections in the data. First, I followed the recommendations Seidman (2006) offers for finding thematic connections, or connective threads (p. 128), across interviews. Following the steps outlined by Seidman, I grouped interview excerpts according to code. Then, I sorted through all of the excerpts that belonged to a particular coding category, identifying the examples that I found most compelling and putting the others aside. In deciding which excerpts to keep, I referred back to the study's research questions and chose ones that I felt illuminated my understanding of those issues in some way. As I engaged in this process of "winnowing and sorting" (Seidman, 2006, p. 86), I looked for connective threads between the excerpts and began to develop explanations for those connections. At the same time, I did not ignore outliers or examples that were contradictory (Seidman, 2006). Instead, I considered what they meant and how they added to the tentative explanations I was developing.

Given the large number of codes that I had employed during the first round of analysis, I could not repeat the sorting and winnowing process for every category of codes. Instead, I chose to focus on those codes that were most relevant to the central research questions guiding this study. This meant that there were some interesting themes that emerged in the data that I did not explore. However, maintaining a focus on the study's research questions provided my analysis with the structure that was needed to develop explanations of the data that were both coherent and addressed the study's central issues.

As I looked for connective threads between the representative examples of a particular code, I developed a list of themes related to that code. I then sorted the interview excerpts according to those themes and considered how the examples I had placed in each category spoke to each other. I also tallied the number of excerpts that fell into each of the new categories in order to see which were the most prevalent. Although this is not a quantitative study, Miles and Huberman (1994) argue that counting can be a useful strategy for qualitative researchers for a variety of reasons, including aiding in "[s]eeing what you have" and in "[k]eeping yourself analytically honest" (p. 253).

Engaging in this process allowed me to both develop a better understanding of how a code was expressed by individual participants and to identify larger patterns underlying those responses. For example, when sorting through the excerpts that had been coded as "Uncovering Funds of Knowledge," I identified a variety of strategies that teachers used to learn about students' funds of knowledge, including asking students about their lives, visiting students' homes, and spending time in the community. At the same time, I searched for ways to group the various strategies employed by teachers into more general categories. Ultimately, I concluded that there were three main sources of information that the teachers drew on: students, families, and the community. The majority of the strategies employed by teachers could be placed into one of those three categories.

In addition to winnowing and sorting the coded transcripts and looking for connective threads in the data, I knew another step of analysis was needed to move from simply describing the codes and themes I had identified to explaining what those codes meant. In order to accomplish this, I drew on a series of questions that Seidman (2006) suggests interview researchers ask themselves in order to identify what they have learned from the data. These

questions included the following: What are the connective threads between participants' experiences? How do I understand and explain those connections? What do I understand that I did not understand before beginning the interviews? What has surprised me? Have any of my previous instincts been confirmed? How has the data been consistent with the literature? How has it been inconsistent? How has it gone beyond the literature? (Seidman, 2006, pp. 128-9).

I reflected on these questions and wrote about them in my research journal both during and after the winnowing and sorting process. Keeping these questions in mind and recording reflective notes based on them throughout the analysis process helped me move beyond describing the salient themes that had emerged from the data and pushed me to consider the larger meaning of the patterns I was seeing. These reflections, in turn, led me to develop the arguments laid out in the three data chapters of this dissertation.

Crafting profiles. While the process described above allowed me to identify and explain important themes that appeared across interviews, I also felt it was important to identify and analyze the central themes that characterized individual interviews. During the analytic process, I experienced a tension between wanting to explore the larger themes that were emerging from the data and a desire to tell the individual stories of participants, which I personally found compelling. In order to capture the experiences of individual participants, I followed Seidman's (2006) suggestion to use interview data to craft profiles. This allowed me to identify and analyze the themes that repeated themselves in individual interviews and to tell the stories of individual participants.

Seidman (2006) views the crafting of profiles as a way of sharing interview data and opening it up to the interpretation of others. However, I found the process of creating profiles of individual participants to also be useful as an analytic tool. Although I eventually did share the

profiles in a variety of ways in the data chapters of this dissertation, I first began the process of crafting the profiles as a means of making sense of the data for myself. Writing the profiles was a way for me to summarize the salient themes in an individual participant's story and to synthesize my own thoughts about an interview. It also helped me contextualize the larger themes that were appearing across interviews by allowing me to describe how the larger themes I had identified in the data played out in the individual stories of participants.

In creating the profiles, I also drew on the work of Mishler (1999) and the idea, discussed in more detail above, that the narratives that participants tell during interviews can be seen as identity performances. As I read and re-read the transcripts of individual interviews during the coding process, I came to see the stories that participants were telling me as part of an identity performance. I realized that they were laying claim to the identity of a "good" teacher, something which they accomplished by revisiting certain themes throughout their interviews. Crafting the profiles allowed me to capture the identity claims they were making by re-telling the story they had told of themselves as "good" teachers during their interviews.

My approach to crafting profiles differed from that laid out by Seidman (2006) in one significant way. While Seidman advocates crafting profiles that are made up solely of participants' own words, I opted to first write descriptions of participants using my own words. Later, I added quotes from the interviews to the profiles to illustrate my points. In approaching the profiles in this way, I drew on Lawrence-Lightfoot's work on portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). According to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997), portraiture is a method that allows social science researchers to combine art and science and present their findings in an aesthetic way. The researcher uses rich description to craft portraits that capture the experiences of study participants from their point of view. In so doing, the portraitist creates

a text, or weaves a tapestry (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 12), that resonates with readers.

I began the work of creating the profiles during the transcription process. After transcribing each interview, I developed a summary sheet that listed important background information about the participant (e.g., teaching role, years of experience, etc.), as well as the major themes that appeared in his/her interview. I based these summary sheets on Miles and Huberman's (1994) description of contact summary sheets (p. 51). I viewed the summaries as a tool for keeping track of key information about each participant's interview. After coding the interviews, I reviewed the participants' profiles and revised the themes, if necessary.

When I finished coding the interviews and the sorting and winnowing process described above, I wrote short narrative profiles of twelve of the thirteen participants, using the summary sheets as a reference.[6] In these profiles, I tried to capture in my own words the most salient parts of the story each participant had told me during his/her interview. As noted above, I found crafting the profiles to be especially useful in terms of making sense of the themes that had appeared in each participant's interview. In particular, they helped me think through the interviews as identity performances (Mishler, 1999) and to describe the way in which participants laid claim to the identity of a "good" teacher and how building on students' out-of-school experiences contributed to that identity.

In addition to helping me make sense of participants' individual stories, creating these profiles also contributed to my understanding of the general themes that had appeared across interviews. I used the profiles to compare the various narratives told by participants and to

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[6] I did not create a narrative profile for Kristy. As discussed above, Kristy was interviewed with Anna, who dominated the discussion. Although I created a participant summary sheet for her, I did not feel like I was able to develop a strong enough sense of who Kristy was a teacher to be able to write a narrative profile about her.

consider how the narratives spoke to each other. This allowed me to explore how similar themes were expressed by different teachers. In particular, it was useful in terms of comparing and contrasting the reasons that teachers implemented teaching strategies that involved building on students' out-of-school experiences and the ways in which they enacted those strategies in their work with students and families.

Because the profiles allowed me to examine participants' individual stories and the connections between those stories, they informed the arguments presented in all three data chapters. For example, I used five of the short narrative profiles I developed as the basis for the longer profiles that I share in the first data chapter. In that chapter, I primarily focus on the individual stories that those five teachers told of themselves as "good" teachers, although I also try to highlight some of the connections between those stories. I also referred to the profiles when considering how participants' larger, collective understanding of their roles and responsibilities as teachers impacted the extent to which they drew on students' out-of-school experiences – which is the topic of the second data chapter. Finally, the experience of crafting the initial narrative profiles led me to experiment with creating the two shorter profiles, or vignettes (Seidman, 2006), that consisted primarily of participants' own words. Those two vignettes, which are shared at the end of the third data chapter, are focused on the topic of literacy instruction and are meant to illustrate the way that different teachers responded to districtwide literacy initiatives, particularly in terms of drawing on students' out-of-school experiences during classroom reading activities.

Validation strategies. Qualitative researchers do not conceive of validation in the same way that quantitative researchers carrying out experimental studies do (Cresswell, 2007; Mishler, 1986). However, this does not mean that researchers engaging in qualitative studies should not

be concerned with ensuring the validity of their findings. Although qualitative researchers have come up with many alternative ways of talking about the concept of validation, I chose to follow the definition laid out by Cresswell (2007). Cresswell conceives of validation as a process that is meant to "assess the 'accuracy' of the findings, as best described by the researcher and the participants" (pp. 206-207). However, this definition also recognizes that interpretive nature of qualitative studies and the fact that "any report of research is a representation by the author" (Cresswell, 2007, p. 107). Drawing on the work of a range of other qualitative researchers, Cresswell (2007) highlights several validation strategies that researchers can employ to "document the 'accuracy' of their findings (p. 207). I made use of three of the strategies that he highlights: triangulation; identifying researcher bias; and providing readers with a "rich, thick description" of the data (Cresswell, 2007, pp. 208-209).

Triangulating data involves drawing on multiple sources of information to support a study's findings. Miles and Huberman (1994) posit that, "triangulation is not so much a tactic as a way of life. If you self-consciously set out to collect and double-check findings, using multiple sources of data and modes of evidence, the verification process will largely be built into data collection as you go" (p. 267). One of the ways in which I triangulated the data for this study was to make use of varied sources of data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I did this by collecting data from multiple participants and by choosing participants who represented a range of teaching experiences (e.g., teaching position; years of experience; schools; training related to working with ELLs). In addition to using varied sources of data, I used multiple methods of data collection (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Although the principal method used for collecting data for this study was participant interviews, I also reviewed documents published by the school district that outlined many of the initiatives described by participants during their interviews. I

also made use of multiple methods during the data analysis process. More specifically, I employed two different approaches when analyzing the data. While I looked for themes that appeared across interviews and used those themes to construct the collective story being told by participants, I also created individual profiles of participants in order to capture the internal coherence of their stories.

In addition to triangulating the data, another validation strategy I employed was to identify and address my own bias as a researcher (Cresswell, 2007). As discussed in more detail above, the primary way in which I did this was to write reflections in a research journal throughout the research process. This allowed me to reflect on the research process and encouraged me to acknowledge and reflect on my own role in shaping that process. It also led me to interrogate the decisions I was making and to make adjustments, if necessary. As such, it was a tool that I used to ensure that I was carrying out both the data collection and data analysis phases of the study in a way that was consistent and that accounted for bias to the extent possible. The final strategy I used to ensure the validity, or accuracy, of this study's findings was to provide "rich, thick descriptions" of participants and of the stories they shared (Cresswell, 2007, p. 209). I accomplished this by crafting the detailed profiles that are shared in the first data chapter and by drawing heavily on participants' own words to illustrate the arguments being made in the second and third data chapters.

Study Limitations

One limitation of this study is that I interviewed each participant only once. Seidman (2006) argues that multiple interviews are needed in order to develop a deep understanding of the context of participants' experiences. In retrospect, I wish I had done two interviews with each participant – one that focused on their personal and professional backgrounds and one that

focused on their implementation of a funds of knowledge approach to teaching. Although I incorporated questions about their background into the interview protocol I used, giving participants more time to discuss their personal and professional experiences may have provided me with a better context for understanding the decisions they made related to their implementation of funds of knowledge-related strategies.

An additional limitation of this study is one that I mentioned above, namely that I was not able to interview any teachers who were from the same cultural backgrounds as the ELL students with whom they worked. Indeed, the majority of the teachers I interviewed were white, native English-speakers who had grown up in the state in which the study took place. It's possible that teachers who came from similar cultural backgrounds as their students may have been more familiar with the communities from which students came and may have employed different strategies for learning about and building on students' out-of-school worlds. Those teachers may have offered a different perspective with regards to what it meant to make connections to students' out-of-school worlds in the classrooms. For that reason, this study is missing an important point of view. However, I believe that this study does have valuable things to say about what it means to teachers to build on students' out-of-school experiences. Given the fact that the majority of elementary school teachers in the United States are white (Loewus, 2017), it is especially helpful to understand white teachers' perspectives on what it means to learn about and build the out-of-school worlds of students from non-dominant groups.

Another limitation of this study is that, because the primary source of data was teacher interviews, the findings are based solely on teachers' reported practices, rather than on practices that I observed. It's possible that if I had visited participants' classrooms, the practices that I observed may have been different from what they described to me. Given this study's focus on

what it meant to teachers to carry out funds of knowledge-related practices in the classrooms, I believe that verifying the practices they described by visiting their classrooms was less important than it might be in another type of study.

Finally, this study is limited by the fact that all of the teachers interviewed worked in the same district. For that reason, the findings are not generalizable to teachers working in other contexts. However, because the district-level pressures being faced by study participants – including an increased focus on standards-based teaching – reflect national trends, it's possible that the experiences of the teachers featured in this study will resonate with teachers and teacher educators who work in different contexts.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided a detailed overview of the study that I carried out, including a description of the methodological approach and the methods of data collection and analysis I employed. In the following three chapters, I will discuss the findings that resulted from this study. The first of these chapters will explore the individual stories that teachers told of themselves as good teachers and will highlight the role that making connections to students' out-of-school worlds played in those stories. The second will examine how participants' larger understanding of their roles and responsibilities as teachers both encouraged them to learn about and build on students' out-of-school experiences and constrained the extent to which they did so. The third data chapter will consider the way the context in which participants worked shaped their enactment of funds of knowledge-related teaching practices.

Chapter 4: Stories of "Good" Teaching for English Language Learners

When I began this project, my intent was to examine how "well" teachers were able to make sense of and implement a funds of knowledge approach to teaching. I didn't see myself as judging teachers per se, but rather exploring the viability of using a theory like funds of knowledge to encourage teachers to challenge deficit discourses about ELL students and to see the out-of-school experiences of these students as resources for learning. However, in the process of carrying out this study, I realized that discussing how well teachers understood and implemented the concept of funds of knowledge was not a particularly interesting, or fruitful, way to make sense of the data I had collected. I came to see that I was imposing my own theories about what it meant to be a good teacher of ELLs, or the theories of proponents of funds of knowledge, on the stories of the teachers I interviewed. I decided that a far more interesting question, and one better tailored to an interview study (Seidman, 2006), was what it meant to participating teachers to be "good" or effective teachers for their ELL students and how that shaped their enactment of funds of knowledge-related teaching practices.

What I found was that none of the thirteen teachers who I interviewed were carrying out a funds of knowledge approach as described in the original literature (e.g. Moll et al., 1992).[7] However, all of them were making some attempt to learn about and build on their students' out-of-school lives. The teachers who participated in this study had been referred to me, by professional and personal contacts, because they were seen as educators who did a good job of making connections with the out-of-school worlds of their ELL students. Some used the term "funds of knowledge" to describe what they were doing. Others used different terms, like

[7] By this, I mean that none of them were doing ethnographic home visits to uncover students' funds of knowledge and designing curriculum units that built on those funds of knowledge. Additionally, none of them questioned dominant school discourses about the types of knowledge and skills that have traditionally been valued in school contexts in the way the original funds of knowledge theorists envisioned.

culturally responsive teaching, culturally responsive pedagogy, multicultural teaching, or teaching for social justice. One participant, Justin, referred to it simply as "knowing your students." Regardless of the term they used, all of the teachers saw themselves as being committed to implementing a strengths-based approach to teaching for ELLs that involved learning about and building on the out-of-school experiences of their students. Moreover, they were engaged in work that they believed would make school a more equitable place for ELL students and their families.

It was important to all teachers to know about their students' out-of-school lives and to incorporate that information into their classroom instruction. Additionally, many of them saw a direct connection between drawing on students' out-of-school lives and teaching for social justice (e.g., McDonald & Zeichner, 2009). Those particular teachers took up the critical, or politically engaged, elements of strengths-based teaching approaches, such as funds of knowledge and culturally responsive pedagogy. Even those participants who didn't make an overt connection to social justice teaching saw themselves as trying to advocate for ELL students and families in order to create more equitable schooling experiences for them.

The ways in which teachers went about learning about and building on students' out-of-school worlds varied, as did the extent to which they did so. Some teachers, like Andrea and Jenna, appeared to be able to incorporate their students' experiences into almost everything they did. Others, like Anna and Tara, were more focused on making small connections to students' lives that would facilitate their acquisition of grade-level content material. Some, like Lena and Tara, were primarily interested in the cultural backgrounds and traditions of their students. Others, like Ainsley and Lily, were focused on students' interests and areas of expertise. Some, like Andrea and Jenna, were committed to opening up the classroom space to forms of

knowledge that are not typically valued in schools. Others, like Elisa and Quinn, were more interested in helping students and families access school-based ways of knowing and being. Some, like Tara and Justin, spent a significant amount of time in students' communities, while others primarily learned about their students during classroom activities. Some, like Rachel, focused on building relationships with parents and advocating for them. Others, like Quinn, were more focused on their relationships with students.

I would argue that all of the teachers were making strategic decisions about their implementation of this approach based on their own understanding of their role as teachers and their personal knowledge of the context in which they were teaching. This was evident both in the themes that emerged across interviews, as well as in the individual stories the teachers told of themselves in their interviews. In subsequent chapters, I will discuss the common themes that were evident across interviews and consider the larger story those overarching themes tell about teachers who are attempting to implement strengths-based approaches to teaching ELLs, such as funds of knowledge. However, in this chapter, I have chosen to focus on participants' individual stories. Doing this will allow me to highlight how different teachers understood what it meant to be a "good" teacher of ELLs and how they acted on that understanding.

This chapter will present profiles of five of the thirteen teachers who were interviewed for this study. As I'll describe in more detail below, these five teachers represent a range of approaches to learning about and building on students' out-of-school lives. However, all of them believed they were engaged in work that was supportive of ELL students and their families. The purpose of these profiles is to capture the stories these teachers told of themselves as "good" teachers of ELLs, and will highlight the role that making connections to students' out-of-school worlds played in that story. In particular, I will explore how study participants saw themselves

as enacting a strengths-based, politically engaged approach to teaching that involved challenging dominant discourses about ELL students and helping those students succeed in the classroom. By focusing on the experiences of individual teachers, these profiles will provide nuanced representations of participants that demonstrate the possibilities for carrying out strengths-based approaches to teaching for ELLs and other students from non-dominant groups, as well as the complexity of implementing these types of instructional practices.

Why Stories?

Rather than imposing my own idea of what it means to be a good teacher of ELLs on the stories told by participating teachers, crafting profiles that represent the individual stories told by participating teachers allows me to foreground the voices of participants and highlight their understanding of what they were doing and what this work meant to them.[8] Crafting profiles that tell the individual stories of participants allows me to convey a sense of who these teachers were, how they defined their work, why they were drawn to doing it in that way, and how they acted on their beliefs in and out of the classroom, something that reading interview quotes out of context cannot do. Using profiles to report data findings is also a way of illuminating themes that appeared across interviews (Seidman, 2006). The individual stories told by teachers contain many of the larger themes I identified in the data. As such, the profiles present those overarching themes in a contextualized way, showing what they meant to different teachers.

As discussed in the methods chapter of this dissertation, crafting profiles that tell the stories of participants is a format that lends itself particularly well to reporting the research findings from an interview study like this one (Seidman, 2006). According to Seidman (2006),

[8] Adopting this stance does not mean that I will approach their stories/interviews uncritically. Although I want to be respectful of the perspectives they bring to this work, I will also strive to acknowledge if/when participants privilege school-like practices or if/when deficit perspectives about ELL students and families are expressed.

the primary purpose of an interview study is to understand participants' experiences and the meaning they give to those experiences. For that reason, it makes sense to employ a reporting technique, like constructing profiles of individual participants, that highlights the stories of individual participants and tells those stories in a coherent way. Using profiles to share the findings from this study is also a way to explore what Mishler (1999) would characterize as the identity performances of study participants. As I noted in the methods chapter, people tell stories as a way of making claims about who they are (Mishler, 1999). The participants in this study told stories of their experiences working with ELLs and drawing on those students' out-of-school worlds and, in telling those stories, they crafted a larger narrative, one in which they laid claim to the identity of a good teacher of ELLs. The profiles in this chapter are way a of presenting the identity claims made by participating teachers and examining what it meant to them to be a "good" teacher of ELLs.

Structure and Organization of Profiles

How the profiles were crafted. The idea for crafting profiles came from Seidman (2006). Seidman posits, "telling stories is a compelling way to make sense of interview data. The story is both the participant's and the interviewer's" (p. 120). For this interview study, I made use of a semi-structured interview format, leading participants through a series of set questions related to the topic of funds of knowledge. Participants returned to repeated themes throughout their interviews and, in so doing, communicated stories about themselves. This accumulation of themes, rather than a chronological re-telling of their experiences, was what provided a coherence to their stories. For that reason, I decided I could capture participants' stories by crafting descriptive vignettes that highlighted each interview's salient themes, using participant quotes to illustrate how the themes were expressed. Thus, the profiles I present in

this chapter are a mixture of my words and those of the participants. By grounding my description in the themes that appeared repeatedly in their interviews, I hope to maintain a focus on the meaning participants made of this work, despite the fact that I am not relying solely on their words to tell their stories.

In crafting the profiles shared in the chapter, I have also drawn on Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot's work on portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). According to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997), one method social science researchers might use to share their study findings is to create portraits that "are designed to capture the richness, complexity, and dimensionality of human experience in social and cultural context, conveying the perspective of the people who are negotiating those experiences" (p. 3). Lawrence-Lightfoot suggests that constructing portraits is a way of combining science and art, making sense of study findings from an aesthetic point of view. In this chapter, I have used an artistic form – crafting portraits that tell the stories of participants – to share one aspect of my research study's findings. Additionally, like Lawrence-Lightfoot, I was particularly interested in creating profiles that reflected the perspective of participants. I wanted to communicate what it meant, from their point of view, to implement complex educational theories, like funds of knowledge, in their classrooms.

The profiles in this chapter are also reflective of Lawrence-Lightfoot's work in that they resist what Lawrence-Lightfoot calls social science's "tradition-laden effort to document failure" (p. 9). Instead, portraiture "is an intentionally generous, eclectic process that begins by searching for what is good and healthy and assumes that the expression of goodness will always be laced with imperfections" (ibid.). More importantly, portraits "are also concerned with documenting how the *subjects* or actors define goodness. The portraitist does not impose her definition of

'good' on the inquiry, or assume that there is a singular definition shared by all" (ibid). In the case of the profiles presented below, I have tried to capture how each of the participants understood what it meant to be a "good" teacher for ELLs, rather than imposing my own ideas of "goodness" on their stories. However, focusing on the "goodness" in their stories does not mean that I ignored the problematic aspects of their stories. In telling the stories of these participants, I have also used my voice as a researcher both to make observations and to make interpretations (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Both when making observations and observations, I have attempted to highlight the "goodness" in participants' stories, as well as the imperfections.

Lawrence-Lightfoot compares the process of crafting a portrait to "weaving a tapestry" (p. 12) and posits that the goal of the portraitist is create a text that resonates with readers in an authentic way. She highlights four dimensions that the portraitist must pay attention to while weaving this tapestry. Lawrence-Lightfoot describes the four dimensions this way:

> … the first is the conception, which refers to the development of the overarching story; second is the structure, which refers to the sequencing and layering of emergent themes that scaffold the story; third is the form, which reflects the movement of the narrative, the spinning of the tale; and the last is the cohesion, which speaks about the unity and integrity of the piece (p. 247).

When constructing the profiles shared in this chapter, I searched for the conception of each of the individual stories told by participants, paying attention to the themes that repeated themselves throughout their interviews. I then created a structure for the narrative based on the important themes of their stories – choosing quotes that were representative of those themes and using them as the subtitles for the profiles. I drew heavily on the voices of participants, sharing

examples in their own words, as a way of adding form to the profiles. Finally, I tried to capture the coherence of their stories by describing the approaches that each of them embodied.

As I noted above, the purpose of these profiles is to examine the individual stories told by participating teachers in order to show the different ways in which they conceptualized what it meant to be a "good" teacher for ELLs. Each of the profiles considers the following questions, which were themes I derived from interview analysis: Why were the teachers drawn to this work? What did they want to accomplish? How did this desire get expressed both inside and outside of the classroom? How did they see themselves as challenging deficit discourses about ELL students and their families? What were the aspects of this work with which they struggled? These profiles illustrate both how teachers found ways to enact their beliefs about "good" teaching for ELLs, as well as the difficulties they faced in doing so. Taken together, the strands that make up the profiles reveal the possibilities and the complexities of engaging in strengths-based approaches to teaching for ELLs.

How the profiles speak to each other. In this chapter, I will share the stories of five participants: Jenna, Andrea, Quinn, Elisa, and Tara. In some respects, these five teachers were similar – they were all white women; except for Andrea, they were all natives of the state in which they lived and worked; and they had all received some training related to building on students' out-of-school experiences. They had all decided to work with students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds than their own and they all believed it was important to build on those students' out-of-school experiences, or funds of knowledge. In other respects, the participants whose stories I highlight here were different: Jenna and Quinn were new teachers, while Elisa and Andrea had taught for approximately ten years, and Tara had been teaching for fifteen years; Jenna and Quinn did not have any formal ESL training, while Andrea, Elisa, and

Tara were ESL-certified; they held a variety of teaching positions, including mainstream classroom teacher, bilingual classroom teacher, and reading interventionist. All of these teachers believed they were engaged in important work and, throughout their interviews, made a claim for themselves as politically-engaged teachers who were challenging deficit discourses about their ELL students and families. However, the ways in which they went about accomplishing this goal were different.

I decided to include profiles of these five teachers because I found the stories they told of themselves to be particularly compelling. In their interviews, they gave voice to a definite point of view and the claims they were making for themselves as teachers was quite clear. For that reason, I believed their stories would lend themselves well to the crafting of a profile that would illuminate the important themes brought up by their interviews. Another reason I chose to highlight these particular teachers was because their stories represent a range of approaches to learning about and building on students' out-of-school worlds. While unique in some ways, their stories were representative of the narratives told by other teachers in the study. The motifs that appeared in their stories were ones that spoke to larger themes that were present across interviews. The final reason I chose to profile these five participants is that making connections to their students' out-of-school lives was a central part of the stories they told of themselves as "good" teachers. These were not the only teachers I interviewed for whom this was true. However, there were other participants who did not build on students' out-of-school lives as extensively as the ones described in this chapter.

Rather than putting teachers into discrete groups, I have placed profiles that touched on similar themes next to each other to draw attention to the ways in which the stories they were telling spoke to each other. In organizing them this way, I am following the advice of Seidman

(2006), who advocates grouping profiles according to topic both as a way of illuminating important themes in the individual profiles and highlighting connections between them. In each of the profiles, I do attempt to characterize and name the ways in which the featured teachers approached their work. Their approaches include ones I am calling "radical caring," "knowledge is power," and "teacher as mediator." These names are simply meant to highlight the most salient through-lines, or themes, of the profiles and aren't intended to suggest that these elements did not also appear in other stories. For example, the term "radical caring" is used to refer two teachers, Andrea and Jenna, who placed caring relationships at the center of their practice, but who also viewed those relationships as a way of creating expanded learning spaces where knowledge and experiences of students from non-dominant groups were treated as important resources for learning (González et al., 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1994). The two teachers whose approach has been characterized as "knowledge is power," Quinn and Elisa, were also concerned with social justice issues and re-valuing ELL students' out-of-school experiences, but were primarily focused on providing students and families with equitable access to school-based forms of knowledge. I employed the term "teacher as mediator" to describe Tara's approach because it maintained the traditional power dynamic between teachers and ELL students and their families. Although this approach involved building relationships with families, the teacher was still positioned as the expert, and families were positioned as being in need of remediation (Auerbach, 1995; Compton-Lilly, 2003).

By placing the profiles in conversation with each other, I hope to emphasize the fact that the name given to each teacher's approach should be read as an indicator of the extent to which certain ideas were expressed in a particular interview, rather than as a discrete category or group. Indeed, as will be discussed in later chapters, all of the teachers, to varying degrees, believed it

was important to build relationships with students and families, to support the academic success of students, and to provide families with the information they needed to navigate the school system. It is my hope that, in structuring and organizing the profiles in the ways described above, I am able to communicate to readers how the featured teachers related to their work, as well as the way in which their personal approaches fit into a larger story of teachers engaged in the project of learning about and building on the out-of-school experiences of ELL students and families.

The Stories

Jenna: Radical caring. Jenna was a white woman in her early twenties who had grown up in a small town in the state where she still lived and worked. At the time of our interview, she had just completed her third year of teaching, her first working with English Language Learners. During that year, Jenna had taught in a mainstream fourth grade classroom that had a group of ELL students assigned to it. She did not have any formal training related to working with English Language Learners, although she had worked closely with the ESL teacher at her school and learned some ESL strategies from her. Jenna had attended the teacher certification program at the local university, which had a focus on social justice teaching, culturally responsive pedagogy, and multicultural education (University of Prairie Town, “Elementary Education, BSE,” n.d.). As such, she had been exposed to the idea that it was important for teachers to know their students well and to design classroom instruction that was relevant to students’ lives. Although she was not familiar with the term “funds of knowledge,” learning about the lives of her students and their family members and using what she learned in the classroom was a central part of how Jenna approached teaching. Indeed, she credited this approach with helping her

succeed as a teacher, explaining, "That's, that's the reason why I have, I think, the, the success I do with all of my kids."

The small town where Jenna had grown up was primarily white and, prior to moving to Prairie Town to attend college, Jenna had little exposure to people from backgrounds that were different from her own. However, Jenna reported having always known that she wanted to work with students of color and had sought out experiences, both as a pre-service and practicing teacher, that allowed her to do that. For instance, she had chosen to do her student teaching at a school located in a large city in a neighboring state that primarily served African-American students. She had also spent her first two years as a teacher working at one of the schools in the Prairie Town school district that had the highest percentage of African-American students enrolled. Jenna positioned herself as a learner in these situations, particularly in relation to teachers of color and other teachers she saw as being successful with students from non-dominant groups. She reported emulating many of the strategies she had learned from these teachers and credited them with showing her the importance of building strong relationships with students and families and drawing on students' out-of-school experiences. I have characterized Jenna's approach to building on students' out-of-school lives as "radical caring." This term reflects both the importance that Jenna placed on building caring relationships with her students and the fact that she saw those relationships as being the key to providing equitable schooling experiences to students from non-dominant backgrounds.

"When we're pushed out of our comfort zone … that's when we really grow." The transformative effect the early teaching experiences described above had on Jenna was a recurrent theme in her interview. Working and spending time with students and families from backgrounds that were different from her own had been eye-opening for her and had given her a

better understanding of, and appreciation for, their out-of-school lives. As Jenna explained, "... it just started widening and broadening my perspective and my experience […] a lot of the families that we serve are really trying to do the best that they can with what they have." Even though Jenna, in this case, focused on the challenges that families faced, rather than on their areas of strength, Jenna herself saw this as example of how her understanding of the world had expanded. More specifically, she had come to see that not everyone's lives were like her own. This transformation in her thinking was something that Jenna actively sought out. She purposefully chose to put herself into situations that would challenge the way she saw the world because, as she explained, "… I think when we're pushed – when we're pushed out of our comfort zone and challenged, that's when we really grow."

In addition to choosing teaching positions at schools that primarily served students of color, Jenna also pushed herself by seeking out social situations that were outside of her comfort zone, including ones in which she, as a white person, was in the minority. Jenna explained that this was something one of her cooperating teachers had encouraged her to do when she was a student teacher in order to better understand her students and their experiences in and out of school.

> So I, like, just really didn't even – the only, I guess, ideas I had in my head were really what I saw, like, on TV. And there was just no experience. And so, [sighs], K. [cooperating teacher] was phenomenal in pushing me out of my comfort zone, and she, she made me the minority in situations. She's, like, you've got to do this because you need to know what it feels like.

Jenna recognized the worldview she had developed growing up in a predominately white small town was limited and she heeded her cooperating teacher's advice to seek out situations that

would help her understand how people who were dissimilar to her experienced the world. One of the ways in which Jenna chose to experience what it was like to be in the minority was to start attending an African-American church in Prairie Town. This had a profound impact on her and led her to decide she needed to spend more time with students outside of school. As Jenna explained,

> And I was just, like, blown away by just what it feels like to be the minority. And, like, then you start understanding, like, this is what some of our kids feel like every day. And, like, having to work – I think about, like, our kids, a lot of them don't identify with their teacher because they've had such different experiences. And so, what I did was, I just started – like, after I did that, I was, like, oh, my gosh. This is – I'm, I'm so sheltered. Like, I need to get some experience here. And so, I just started, like, going and spending time with the families of our students …

Jenna's experience at the church had driven home the fact that she had much to learn about her students' lives and the way the experienced the world in and out of school. Jenna characterized this gap in understanding as a bridge that needed to be crossed, and was adamant that it was important for her personally to cross that bridge, rather than relying on others to do it for her. As she explained,

> … putting yourself in those situations and just, like, experiencing what your kids go through gives you a different perspective and a different – like, it just makes me deal with my kids differently. Um, 'cause I think that […] there's that bridge that we need to cross. And I don't necessarily want to use people to cross that bridge. Like, I myself want to, like, go over the bridge and see what's going on. And you can't do that in every situation, but, like, for the majority of kids and families, you can.

For Jenna, spending time with students outside of school was a way of bridging the gap between her world and theirs. It helped her develop a deeper understanding of what their lives were like, something which she believed made her a better teacher.

"They really know I genuinely care." In addition to wanting to better understand the experiences her students were bringing to the classroom with them, Jenna's commitment to making connections to students' out-of-school worlds was driven by her belief that it was a way of showing students she cared about them. She explained that when she spent time with students outside of school "the kids trust me, and they really know that I genuinely care." This was important to Jenna because she believed that students can't learn from someone who doesn't care about them. Jenna explained the connection between caring and learning this way:

> And so, they're, like, more motivated to, like, be willing to learn. You know, I think kids can, I think we underestimate kids' ability, um, and, and they're so perceptive. Like, they know if a teacher truly likes them or not and truly cares about them. And if they don't feel like the teacher cares about them, it's not going to be a year of a ton of learning.

The desire to build caring relationships with her students and their families was an important theme in Jenna's interview. Indeed, I would argue that it was a central part of her identity as a teacher. Jenna's focus on building caring relationships was so strong that she saw herself as a quasi-mother figure for her students, explaining,

> I don't have kids of my own, but I really consider my kids like my own. I get really close to my kids during the school year. And part of it, I think, is just out of, like, me just wanting to be kind of like a mother.[9]

[9] I should note that Jenna's level of involvement with her students and their families sometimes seemed problematic to me. At times, Jenna seemed to be usurping the role of parent, freely offering her students' parents advice about how to discipline their children or intervening to take care of children when she felt parents couldn't be trusted to do so. For example, Jenna recounted how she had gone to one of her student's homes every morning to get her out of

Jenna believed that the strong relationships she developed with students and families was the key to her success and was what set her apart from other teachers. She felt that it allowed her to be successful in difficult teaching situations that other teachers couldn't handle and that it was the reason why her students grew more academically in her class than they had in previous years.

"School is a place where everyone's welcome." As the result of her desire to learn about students' lives and to build close and caring relationships with them, Jenna spent a great deal of time with them outside of school. Indeed, Jenna was involved in her students' out-of-school lives more extensively than almost any of the other teachers I interviewed. This included attending students' athletic events, visiting students' homes, going to birthday parties and even going out to dinner with some families. In addition to being personally involved in her students' out-of-school lives, Jenna made a concerted effort to incorporate students' experiences and interests into her classroom instruction, using popular songs as shared reading texts, playing YouTube videos, and facilitating the sharing of personal stories and artifacts, among other things.

Jenna's willingness to make space for her students' interests and life experiences in the classroom was informed both by her belief that it increased student engagement and by her desire to create an inclusive classroom space. For example, she regularly invited parents and community members into the classroom, believing it was an important way of showing students that school was a place where everyone belonged. As she explained,

> Sometimes I just, like, want other people in the room and, like, for the kids to understand, like, you know, school is a place where everyone's welcome. And, like, I want your

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bed, get her ready for school, and give her ADHD medication so that she could function in school. This happened while the girl's mother was either absent or "passed out on the couch." Although her student's family undoubtedly needed support, I would argue that it was not entirely appropriate for Jenna to take on the quasi-parental role that she did.

> parents to be here. I want your family to be here. Um, and that I learned from one of my practicum teachers, ’cause she has a ton of parent volunteers always in and out. And then, too, it was just broadening, like, more to community members. […] Like, I just want them to know, like, every person has a story.

Unlike some of the other teachers I interviewed, Jenna didn’t seem to find it difficult to carry out this work while also complying with the school district’s expectation that she ensure her students mastered grade-level standards and that she implement district-mandated curricula. Her sense of agency as a teacher was quite high, and she felt comfortable picking and choosing the instructional materials she used in her classroom. Jenna did not ignore the standards she was expected to teach, but she was able to find multiple ways to integrate the interests and background knowledge of her students and their families into standards-based instructional activities. For example, she organized book clubs for students that were based on shared interests, like sports, rather than only using the texts provided by the mandated reading curriculum. She also visited students’ homes and collected their families’ immigration stories, which she then turned into reading passages that the class used during a unit on immigration.

“It was such a hard class.” The fact that Jenna built on her students’ out-of-school lives in the classroom in a variety of ways, despite district mandates that limited teachers’ ability to make curricular decisions, highlights the possibilities of carrying out this type of work even in contexts that don’t encourage it. However, parts of Jenna’s story also illustrate the complexity of adopting a strengths-based, politically engaged approach to teaching, especially one that asks teachers to recognize and interrogate the deficit narratives they may have internalized about certain groups of students and families. For example, it was evident that Jenna, perhaps unconsciously, struggled with completely letting go of negative characterizations she held of the

students with whom she worked, particularly those living in poverty. Despite her desire to treat the experiences students brought with them to the classroom as resources for learning, Jenna was also focused on the parts of students' worlds that she saw as a negative. This was evident in Jenna's assessment, shared above, that "the families that we serve are really trying to do the best that they can with what they have."

Throughout our interview Jenna made repeated references to the "tough" or "hard" classes she had, both in terms of behavior management and level of academic achievement, a characterization which seemed to be linked to having a large number of students of color and/or students whose families were living in poverty. Jenna also repeatedly described the neighborhoods in which some of her students lived as dangerous and recounted several stories involving violence that she, or her students and their families, had encountered. The persistence of these negative stereotypes demonstrates the contradictions that can exist within a teacher's story, even in the stories of dedicated and well-intentioned teachers. On the one hand, Jenna was committed to building respectful relationships with students and families. However, at times she still gave voice to negative stereotypes about those students and families, revealing that she had not completely let go of the deficit discourses she hoped to challenge.

The persistence of these negative stereotypes in Jenna's story may have been due to the fact that her decision to learn about students' out-of-school lives and build relationships with them and their families was taken, in part, in response to challenging teaching situations in which she found herself. This is evident in Jenna's description of how she developed her relationship-focused approach to teaching:

> And then that first job that I was in, I knew that if I didn't do those things, I wasn't going to make it. 'Cause it was such a hard class […] I know I'll never have that difficult of a

> class ever again. Um, and so I knew it was, like, a make-or-break. Like, if I don't go out there and, like, really see what's going on with these kids and why they're acting the way they do, I'm not going to make it through this school year. […] It's, like, almost innate, though. Like […] it never was really, like, a question for me of, like, do I want to do this or not. It was, like, I need to go figure this out right now. So I'm walking you home tonight, and I'm sitting down with your mom and dad.

Jenna seems to have engaged in this work as a survival technique at first, making deep connections with students and their families was a way for her to reach "tough" kids and manage their behavior in the classroom. It had also become something which had garnered her a lot of acclaim from other teachers and from administrators. Perhaps as a result, as noted above, her ability to reach "tough" children by building relationships with them had become a central feature of her identity as a teacher.

Jenna's approach. Despite the problems discussed previously, I would argue that Jenna was carrying out work that she believed was addressing the inequitable experiences of students of color in U.S. schools. The story that Jenna told of herself was one of someone who cared deeply about her students. Her desire to build caring relationships with her students and their families was linked to a larger consciousness of the inequities that exist for students of color in schools and classrooms and her desire to address those inequities. This was evident in her wish to demonstrate to students and parents that school was a place where everyone belonged; her willingness to learn from people that were different from her, including families and teachers of color; her realization that not everyone came to school with the same experiences as her own; her willingness to use instructional materials that would not normally be considered appropriate in school settings (e.g., popular songs, YouTube videos); and her willingness to position family

members and community members as experts in the classroom. For that reason, Jenna's approach is one that I would describe as radical caring.

Andrea: Radical caring. Connecting with students and families on a personal level was also an important theme in Andrea's interview. Andrea, a white woman of about thirty, taught first grade in one of the district's two-way bilingual (TWB) programs. In this role, which she had held for four years, Andrea worked with a mixed group of native Spanish speakers and native English speakers, providing instruction in Spanish ninety percent of the time and in English the remaining ten percent of the day. Andrea had grown up in a western state and had come to the state where she now lived and worked to attend college. She had done her teacher training at a small liberal arts college located about an hour from Prairie Town. Andrea reported that her teacher education program had emphasized concepts like funds of knowledge and teaching for social justice. She had attended the ESL/Bilingual certification program at the local university, which also had a social justice focus and offered courses that included information about funds of knowledge and other strengths-based approaches to working with English Language Learners (University of Prairie Town, "English as a Second Language & Bilingual Education," n.d.). Like Jenna, I have characterized Andrea's approach to making connections to students' out-of-school worlds as an example of radical caring. In Andrea's case, this designation is meant to capture both her belief in the power of building relationships with her students and their families and her overt commitment to the social justice-related teaching practices she had learned about in her teacher education programs.

Andrea had learned Spanish in school and had honed her Spanish-speaking skills during the two years she spent living and teaching in Spain. Her experience as a language learner,

particularly during her time in Spain, was one of the reasons she cited for wanting to work with language learners. As Andrea explained,

> And so then, when I started teaching language, I felt like in teaching students who were learning languages, I felt like one of my strengths was, is that I'd done it. And that it was definitely not something that just, like, happened in my life. Like, it was something that I had put a lot of effort into and that then, when I was thinking about who I wanted to teach and who I wanted to support, having had that experience and feeling like I could relate on any level. And not comparable at all, but from my own perspective, felt like, oh, I have something there that I care about.

As a fellow language learner, Andrea both identified and empathized with her ELL students, something that she believed helped make her a better teacher for them.

"We're all so much bigger than the bubble we call school." Like Jenna, Andrea was someone who craved and strove for deep connections with her students and their families. This was due, in part, to her previous experience working as a community-based Head Start teacher for the Prairie Town school district. In that role, Andrea had led classes for young children and their parents in community spaces across the city, forming close relationships with the families with whom she worked. As a school-based classroom teacher, she yearned to establish the same types of connections with her students and their families, ones that transcended the limitations of the school as an institution and traditional teacher/student and teacher/parent relationships. This desire was evident in Andrea's explanation of why she prioritized spending time with students and families in out-of-school spaces:

> But, like, I like seeing students outside of school, and I feel like it's the worst part about being a classroom teacher, is that school is home base. And it's, like, the worst, handily

> the thing I like least about being a classroom teacher is that I don't want school to be home base. Like, I want school to be [a] starting place, not home. 'Cause it's not home. And it's not home for anyone […] Like, it's a great place. […] I don't want it to sound like – like, I love schools. I like where I work, but it's not what I want us to start from. […] So I want it to be a safe place where we meet, but, like, we're all so much bigger than the bubble we call school and the time – like, first grade.

Andrea recognized that school was only one part of her students' lives and, believed that, in order to truly know them as people, she had to spend time with them outside of school.

This belief reflected, at least in part, the transformative effect that spending time with families outside of school in her role as Head Start teacher had clearly had on Andrea. Working with students and families in community-based settings had prompted Andrea to question some of her own deficit beliefs about the families with whom she worked and led her to see them from a strengths-based perspective instead. Andrea described her change in perspective this way:

> … I don't think I could ever fully, like, define the way that that changed how I feel about working with families. Because, um, every day, I would go to these communities that would be, like, otherwise labeled. And I would see how dedicated and hard-working and motivated these families were and how isolated some of them felt. Like […] new country, new whatever. And not even a, like, poor-me kind of way, but in a, like, hey, what can I do in this city? Like, how can I do all the things that I know how to do and make me feel really good about myself? And, like, how do I navigate that in a new country? And […] all judgment had to, like, drop. Because you couldn't, like, sit there and simultaneously teach a kid and teach a parent in any sort of respectful way if it was going to be from a place of judgment. Like, it just couldn't exist.

As is evident from the above quote, the experience of relating to families in out-of-school spaces had a profound impact on Andrea and, I would argue, was one of the reasons that, even as a classroom teacher, Andrea continued to prioritize having contact with students and families outside of school, seeing it as an important source of information.

"It all matters, if it matters to them." Andrea's desire to establish deep connections with her students and their families was also reflective of her belief that it was important to fully understand her students as human beings in order to be an effective teacher for them. Perhaps more than any of the other teachers I interviewed, Andrea wanted to know her students as whole people. Like Jenna, Andrea believed that students needed to feel cared for in order to learn and that taking the time to get to know them and understand who they were was a way of demonstrating her caring. As Andrea explained,

> I feel like all the times in my life I've been most motivated to learn are the times when I felt like people cared about who I was. And so, I feel like knowing what a student is like and what they like to do and what their older sibling's name is or their younger sibling's name is or if they have Lightning McQueen sheets or not. Like, it all matters, if it matters to them. I really care because I know that, if we have a relationship, we're all going to learn more.

Andrea also believed that knowing her students well made her a more effective teacher because it allowed her to understand why they behaved in the way they did, to gauge their level of background knowledge, and to provide classroom instruction that tapped into their strengths or addressed their specific needs. When asked why she believed it was important to learn about her students' out-of-school lives, Andrea responded:

> [It] helps me understand what they love. It helps me understand what they don't love. It

> helps me understand if they got a lot of sleep last night. If they didn't. And, like, thinking about how I feel when I get a lot of sleep and when I don't. And, like, not in a, like, good or a bad way. Just, like, okay. That's information. That's something I need to keep in mind. Like, that's in the bank. And, like, if I'm going to pull from the bank, I need to understand what I'm pulling from […] and from all the good ways too.

In filling her bank of information about her students, Andrea did not shy away from aspects of her students' lives that could be considered negative, or what Zipin (2009) would call "dark funds of knowledge." Andrea felt it was important to know about a wide range of her students' life experiences, both ones that could be perceived as positive and ones that could be perceived as negative, in order to fully understand who her students were as people. This is evident in the following exchange from her interview, in which Andrea described the types of out-of-school experiences she believed contributed to school success:

> A: I mean, like – I mean this really sincerely. Like, when kids bring their reading books back and, like, they have, like, drug money in them. Or there's marijuana in their book bag. Like, I feel like those equally help me understand the success and the, like, life experiences of that student as when they come and they share their most, like, proud moment because they were baptized and they had a huge party and [chuckles] – you know.
>
> T: Yeah. Because it's just about knowing the student?
>
> A: I think it's about – I think that learning is about relationships, and I think that people are social. And I think that having relationships and being social contributes to learning.

In Andrea's mind, any information that helped her better understand her students helped her build relationships with them, which in turn supported their success as students. Unlike Jenna, in

noting the negative aspects of her students' lives, Andrea did not appear to be passing judgement or giving voice to deficit discourses. Rather, she seemed to see them as just a few of the many pieces of information she could use to connect with her students on a personal level and help them learn.

Andrea's focus on building relationships, and her view that learning was a social act, also led her to prioritize fostering relationships between her students. She wanted the children in her class to know each other as people, which she believed would lead them to learn from one another. According to Andrea "… when I think about who learns the least from each other in my classroom, I think it's the people who know the least about each other that learn the least from each other." As with her own relationships, Andrea wanted students to create connections that transcended the classroom space, explaining,

> …when I look, like, outside of the context of our classroom, like, when I see them in the halls the next year, and I'm, like, you guys were friends last year. Like, what is going on? Like, you know, like, almost as if they don't know each other the following year. And I'm, like – that tells me something about the relationship they had and what they learned from each other. Because if it wasn't a good enough relationship, then they didn't learn enough from each other for that to carry on outside of our classroom.

In order to help her students develop meaningful relationships with one another, Andrea tried to facilitate connections between them, pointing out the things they had in common. As she explained,

> And I also think that there – it's really important to have open time for kids to share so that, like, they're able to relate to each other's own experiences. […] So, like – I mean, like, something as simple as, like, oh, you said that you love Angry Birds. Look! That's

> on [G]'s shirt today! You guys have that in common. Like, great. It's super trivial, and it's also not because, like, then, when we need to write how-to books, we can write how to draw an Angry Bird. And, like, guess what? You get to be the experts because you know their names, and I don't.

In addition to highlighting her students' commonalities, Andrea provided students with opportunities to talk about how their lives were different. She believed that exploring these differences was another way that students could learn from each other. Furthermore, as someone interested in social justice teaching, Andrea wanted her students to be able to see the world from multiple perspectives. One way in which she accomplished that was to engage students in discussions that were meant to help them see that their classmates' out-of-school lives might look different than their own.

"I'm aiming for that bullseye." These desires – to form deep connections, to really know students, and to help students get to know one another and see things from each other's perspectives – led Andrea to make connections with her students' out-of-school worlds in a variety of ways. Like Jenna, Andrea was involved in her students' out-of-school lives more than most of the other teachers I interviewed. She visited students' homes, took them to the park to play, and went out to dinner with them and their families. She also paid close attention to the things her students did and said in the classroom and drew on what she learned in order to make classroom instruction relevant to their experiences and learning needs. As she explained,

> … I joke a lot that, like, when I teach whole group, I'm, sometimes I feel like I'm just, like, throwing the darts. And I'm, like, please hit a target. But, like, the joy of really knowing your students and teaching from a place of funds of knowledge is you're, like, whoo, I'm aiming for that bullseye. And I might miss, but dang it, I'm aiming for it. And

> I know why, that I'm saying exactly what I'm saying, and I know exactly who I'm hoping to hit with that statement.

Andrea made connections to her students' experiences and areas of expertise during independent learning activities, as is evident in the example, shared above, of her encouraging her student with an Angry Birds shirt on to write a "How-to" essay about that topic. In that case, Andrea saw her student's interest, and the expertise he had developed as a result of that interest, as a fund of knowledge that could be leveraged for literacy learning.

In addition to connecting with students on a personal level and making connections to students' personal interests and areas of expertise, Andrea tried to contextualize the subject matter she was charged with teaching so that students would understand why it was something they should care about. She wanted her students to understand why the material they were learning mattered and how it was related to the larger world. Andrea described what this looked like when teaching a required science unit on plants:

> … our unit of study is plants. And, like, our – enduring understandings are living things change and blah. You know, like, got it. Like, that's the standard. But, like, what's that mean to a first-grader? And, like, why do we want to talk about that? And why does that matter to, like, your life versus why does that matter to her life? […] Um, I think that we're just starting to, like, get better at saying, like, let's talk about, like, why plants matter and, like, where they come from because […] your dad helps, like, pick plants six months a year and isn't around so that your dad can go to the grocery store and buy them. And let's talk about, like, what's that feel like?

Although she started with the standards she had to teach, Andrea sought ways to make the material meaningful to her students and to connect it to a larger "why." One way in which she

did this was to invite family members into the classroom to share stories from their lives related to the topic being studied. In addition to making academic content material more relevant to students, involving family members in classroom instruction allowed Andrea to draw out the social justice implications of the subject at hand by exposing students to multiple viewpoints and helping them see that different groups of people experienced the world differently.

"But … does that feel fair?" Like Jenna, Andrea seemed to feel a fair amount of agency as a teacher. This freed her to find ways to build on her students' out-of-school worlds, while still complying with district mandates. This was particularly evident in how she approached teaching grade-level standards, as described above. Andrea's belief in the importance of relationships and her interest in social justice teaching led her to prioritize making connections to students' out-of-school lives, even though it wasn't always easy to do. Her story highlights some of the possibilities that exist for being a politically engaged teacher and treating students' knowledge and expertise as important resources for learning. However, Andrea's story also illustrates some of the complexities inherent in this work. Although she was committed to building on students' experiences in the classroom, Andrea admitted that she felt like she was only doing it in "tiny pieces." The need to cover a specific set of standards and the lack of time in her day to do much else meant that Andrea was not able to make as many connections to students' out-of-school lives as she would have liked.

Perhaps more surprisingly, Andrea seemed to reject the idea that she should take on the responsibility of uncovering students' funds of knowledge by doing home visits, as is suggested by the original funds of knowledge literature (González et al., 2005; Moll, 1992a, 1997, 2000; Moll et al., 1992). There were many things Andrea did in her role as a teacher to learn about her students and their families. This included sending a survey home to parents that asked about

their areas of expertise and recording students' interactions while they worked on classroom tasks in order to discover their interests. As discussed above, she was also committed to spending time with families outside of school. Nevertheless, Andrea stated that she did not feel it would be fair for her to visit the homes of only a few of her students to learn about their families' areas of expertise, or funds of knowledge. As she explained, "… I mean, like, there's stuff we can do that, like, we do all the footwork. But then there's also lots of stuff about funds of knowledge that's, like, not our, like, not that it can't be our work […] you know, I could go to their house and find out for them. But, like, does that feel fair?"

This focus on fairness seemed to be at odds with Andrea's commitment to working for social justice. Although it was clear that Andrea was aware of the inequities that existed in society and that played out in her students' own lives, there seemed to be a slight disconnect between that belief and the desire to treat all of her students equally. One of the central tenets of funds of knowledge theory is that teachers are often not aware of the resources that students from non-dominant backgrounds bring to the classroom because their knowledge and experiences don't resemble those typically valued in school settings (González et al., 2005; Hawkins, 2019; Zentella, 2005). For that reason, it is particularly important for teachers to make an effort to learn about the lives of those students and to draw on that information in the classroom. It is not as necessary to do this for white, middle class students because their out-of-school experiences and areas of expertise are already valued in school-based settings. However, perhaps because of her intense focus on building relationships with all students, Andrea did not feel comfortable with the idea of investing time in learning about the experiences of some students and not others, even if it would have meant better meeting the needs of students from non-dominant groups, like ELLs.

Andrea's approach: Radical caring. Like Jenna, the story Andrea told of herself was of someone who prized relationships above all else. She truly wanted to know and connect with her students as people. Also like Jenna, Andrea was interested in addressing the inequities she believed existed in society, particularly those experienced by people of color, and in making space in the classroom for many types of experiences. For that reason, I would also characterize the approach that Andrea took to learning about and building on students' out-of-school lives as one of radical caring. However, while Jenna believed it was important to incorporate the experiences of students and their families into classroom instruction as a way of showing them that school was a place where everyone belonged, Andrea's reason for doing so was more explicitly political. Andrea was deeply committed to social justice teaching (e.g., McDonald & Zeichner, 2009) and she wanted to expose her students to multiple viewpoints and to help them understand social inequities. One way in which Andrea accomplished this was to invite both students and families to share their life experiences. This resulted in an expanded learning space (Gutiérrez et al., 2003), one in which topics that are not usually discussed in classrooms were explored and students and their families were positioned as experts.

Quinn: Knowledge is power. Building meaningful relationships with students and their families was also an important theme in Quinn's story. Quinn was a white woman in her early twenties who had grown up in a working-class suburb of a large urban center in the state where she still lived and worked. She had come to Prairie Town to attend the local university, where she had majored in elementary education. At the time of our interview, Quinn had just finished her first year of teaching. She was not a certified ESL teacher, but, like Jenna, her mainstream fifth-grade classroom had a group of ELL students assigned to it. Quinn reported that she had been drawn to teaching out of a desire to work in diverse urban schools and had been attracted to

the teacher education program at the local university because of its focus on social justice teaching. During her teacher training, she had been exposed to ideas like funds of knowledge and culturally relevant pedagogy, which had helped her understand the importance of learning about and building on students' out-of-school worlds.

Like several other participating teachers, Quinn had been a part of the special cohort of students from the teacher education program who received further training related to teaching in urban contexts. Quinn credited her participation in this cohort, called the Urban Schools Initiative (USI), with helping her develop strategies for working with students she characterized as "high needs."[10] In particular, she highlighted the open and honest conversations the pre-service teachers in the USI cohort were encouraged to have about race and poverty. As a part of the cohort, Quinn had also come to believe that it was important to learn about students' out-of-school worlds, particularly by spending time in the community in which they lived. As Quinn explained, "… that's what generally, USI, when we would talk about the community aspect, it built the relationship so much more. It was like in a way that you couldn't do if you didn't go into the community." Although Quinn valued relationship building, her approach to making connections to students' out-of-school worlds primarily is one that I would characterize as "knowledge is power." At the end of her first year of teaching, Quinn had come to see drawing on her students' out-of-school lives primarily as way of ensuring that they acquired the knowledge and skills they needed to succeed in school and beyond.

"I was there. I was with them." The way in which Quinn positioned herself vis-à-vis her ELL students was quite complex. On the one hand, like Jenna and Andrea, Quinn believed it

[10] When using the term "high needs," Quinn appeared to be referencing students who had experienced trauma, were living in poverty, or were students of color.

was important to build trusting relationships with her students and craved a deep connection with them. As she explained,

> … the relationship aspect just makes teaching so much more fun. Like, well, that's why you go into teaching, right? You don't do it because it's like, oh, I'm so psyched about Common Core. You do it because you want to make relationships with kids. Like, you want to get to know kids and you want to inspire them to do something great one day.

Quinn saw learning about students' out-of-school worlds as a means of forming relationships with them and demonstrating that she cared about them. To that end, she positioned herself as their friend and protector and actively tried to connect with them on a personal level. She invited them to have lunch with her and reported that they felt comfortable enough with her to ask questions about personal topics like menstruation. Quinn also felt it was important to know and be seen in the community where her students lived because it allowed her to build stronger relationships with them. This is evident in Quinn's description of what she had learned from the time she spent volunteering at the local Boys and Girls Club as a pre-service teacher:

> … I think it gave me more, I don't know, it established, like, a connection with the kids and the fact that they knew that I knew where they were going after school or I knew their family or I know their neighborhood. Like, they could reference something, like, [local skating rink], and I would know where it is and they would know I've been there. You know what I mean? It just, it changed my relationship with the kids and, for some of the kids, I definitely think it earned a little bit more respect. You know, I'm just not, like, one of those people who doesn't come into the community. Like, I was there. I was with them. You know what I mean?

For Quinn, spending time in her students' community was both a way of learning more about her students' lives and a way of demonstrating that she cared about them and their communities.

In addition to forming relationships with her students, Quinn believed it was important to establish good lines of communication with their family members, and she made a concerted effort to reach out to them in a variety of ways, including texts, emails, phone calls, and home visits. Quinn was aware that not all parents felt equally comfortable in school spaces and was willing to expand her definition of what parent engagement could look like in order to make connections with as many parents as possible. As she explained,

> … I felt like a lot of the parents I worked with from the high trauma situations didn't want to enter the school. Like, they had a negative view of school. So, coming to them with these views of, like, I want to use the same language as you do, I know school's probably not the most comfortable place for you, can we talk over the phone, can we, um, go somewhere else, that's fine. Like, just keeping those things in mind, that, like, parent participation can look different in different ways. It doesn't have to be volunteering to do, like, math or reading. Parent participation can come in so many varieties, and valuing all those varieties is really important. So, that was my mantra this year, okay, well, if we're only going to contact over email, that's fine, I've still got contact.

As the above quote demonstrates, Quinn also tried to expand the traditional parent/teacher relationship by positioning herself as a learner in relation to parents. In particular, Quinn viewed parents as the experts on their children and treated them as such. As a new teacher, Quinn was especially focused on classroom management and she regularly consulted parents to learn how they communicated with their children so that she could use the same language in the classroom.

Quinn believed that approaching parents in this way had made it easier to for her address behavior issues.

"I found myself getting lost in just talking about their lives." Despite her desire to know her students as people and to form meaningful relationships with them and their families, over the course of her first year of teaching Quinn had realized that she had to balance that impulse with the other demands of her job. As a result, she felt she had to limit the time she spent establishing personal connections with her students. This decision was due, in large part, to the fact that Quinn had come to believe that her primary responsibility as a teacher was to prepare her students for middle school, high school, and beyond. In particular, she wanted to ensure they mastered grade-level standards and were able to speak English with native-like fluency. Quinn worried that spending too much time learning about her students' lives would keep her from accomplishing that part of her job. As she explained, "… I was just trying […] to know them so much, and trying to find that balance of, I have to meet the standards, but I want to know about what's going on in their lives. Finding that delicate balance was really important."

Quinn's focus on standards-based teaching led her to limit the extent to which she built on students' out-of-school worlds. As a pre-service teacher, she thought she would be able to design classroom activities around students' interests and areas of expertise, finding ways to address the standards within a context that was meaningful to them. Now, she believed it was necessary to plan lessons with the standards in mind and to make connections to students' out-of-school worlds only if they were relevant to the academic content that was being covered. Quinn described her struggle to deal with these competing beliefs about her role as a teacher this way:

> […] I've always wanted kids to, like, succeed in school, especially kids who feel like they are failing in school. I've always wanted them to succeed, but I think the route I've

> decided to take has changed over time. I think I used to be more like, funds of knowledge are the most important thing, this is what we need to build on, and completely focus on this. But, I found myself getting lost in just talking about their lives. I can't be a therapist, I need to be a teacher. [laughs] You know what I mean? So, focusing on the standards and then using the funds of knowledge to do that is where I've ended up.

Although Quinn had started the year thinking she could focus primarily on learning about her students' lives and designing instructional activities that built on their interests and areas of expertise, she had come to see the connections she made to students' out-of-school lives as a means to an end. She now understood her primary responsibility as a teacher to be ensuring that her students mastered grade level content. Making connections to students' experiences, interests, and areas of expertise was a way of accomplishing that goal.

"If I don't meet those standards, I can't continue teaching." Quinn's focus on the academic achievement of her students was, in part, the result of the messages that were communicated to her by the school and district in which she worked. Quinn had been drawn to teaching out of a desire to make school a more equitable place, one where students of color and students living in poverty were able to flourish academically. She had also embraced the tenets of social justice teaching that she had been exposed to during her teacher education coursework. However, at the end of her first year in the classroom, it was obvious that Quinn was struggling to balance the teaching philosophy she had developed during her teacher training program, particularly related to social justice teaching, with the pressure she faced from her school and district to focus on the academic achievement of her students. Over the course of the year, she had learned that, in order to keep her job, she had to make sure that her students mastered grade-

level standards. This internal struggle is evident in Quinn's response when asked how her ideas about teaching had changed since entering the classroom:

> It changes so much, because I was a big, I was, I still *am*— but it's so hard, like, there's so much turmoil, because I'm a big believer that, like, you learn things in school to think critically so you can incite change later in life, right? So you can change things in your life that you feel need to be changed, and that you can do good in the world. But there also is a real focus on standards and how to meet those. And, if I don't meet those standards, my observations are going to go poorly, and then I can't continue teaching.

As noted above, Quinn had come to see building on students' out-of-school lives primarily as a tool she could use to facilitate their acquisition of academic content material. Perhaps for that reason, Quinn mainly looked for small-scale ways to acknowledge and build on students' experiences in the classroom. These included referencing neighborhood landmarks during classroom lessons, providing students with opportunities to draw on or share their expertise, and seeking out instructional materials that were relevant to and reflective of students' lives and interests. Quinn appeared to feel a certain level of agency as a teacher and repeatedly mentioned finding workarounds that would allow her to better meet the needs of the students in her class. This included opting not to use the texts prescribed by the new reading curriculum if she felt they were not relevant to her students or designing her own lessons rather than using the scripted ones the reading curriculum provided. Despite that feeling of agency, as a first-year teacher, Quinn hadn't yet found a way to teach her students grade-level standards while also drawing on their interests, knowledge, and experiences in a large-scale way.

"It's not from a deficit view … It's not." It is possible to see Quinn's embrace of standards-based teaching as an example of a new teacher turning away from politically engaged

and culturally relevant teaching practices when faced with the realities of working in an accountability-focused context. However, I would argue that Quinn's focus on supporting her students' acquisition of academic knowledge and skills can also be seen as an extension of her desire to work for social justice and equity. Quinn believed that helping her students acquire school-based forms of knowledge was a way of empowering them because it would make it possible for them to accomplish their larger life goals. For example, when asked what she believed her responsibility was to her ELL students, Quinn explained she wanted to help them speak English with native-like fluency.

> Um, I think, I wanted them to not have language barriers impede their learning. That was my biggest concern. […] For example, I taught idioms. I had so many ELL students that didn't understand idioms and, I would just, while they had snack, I would teach idioms so that they seemed like, you know, completely English is your first language speakers. Like, when we say "elbow grease", they're not, like, looking, like, "Huh?" […] Like, little things like that. Like, I always valued their language, but I wanted to make sure that nothing would ever stop them from all they wanted to achieve because of those little nuances of English language that are so confusing. […] So, we would have lots of discussions about stuff like that.

Quinn herself recognized the inherent tension between valuing students' cultural and linguistic resources and wanting them to acquire skills traditionally valued in school settings, like speaking English fluently. Indeed, after describing her focus on teaching her ELL students English idioms, she insisted "… it's not from a deficit point of view. It's not. But, I don't know how to say it correctly." It could be considered problematic that Quinn did not question the privileging of skills like learning to speak English or acquiring academic discourses. Indeed, I do see it as

another example of how difficult it is for teachers, even politically-engaged teachers, to recognize and question their own biases about the relative value of certain ways of knowing and being. However, in Quinn's view, helping her students master these skills was a way of leveling the playing field for them. She believed that it ensured they had access to the knowledge and skills they would need to succeed later in life. In that sense, providing students with equitable access to these forms of knowledge was a way for her to work for social justice.

Quinn's approach. Like Jenna and Andrea, Quinn valued making personal connections with students and saw learning about their out-of-school lives as a way of accomplishing that goal. Building caring relationships with students was an important part of the story that Quinn told of herself, and she believed it was an important part of the work she did to meet the needs of ELL students and other students from non-dominant groups. In that sense, there are elements of the approach that Quinn took to this work that could be described as radical caring. However, I would argue that an equally important aspect of Quinn's story was the responsibility she felt to help her students master grade-level standards. This focus on the academic success of her students reflects another approach to this work, one I am calling "knowledge is power." For Quinn, supporting her students' acquisition of grade-level content material was empowering for them because it provided them with equitable access to the knowledge they needed to be successful in middle school, high school and beyond.

While Jenna and Andrea also made reference to standards-based teaching, they did not see it as something that was in conflict with their desire to connect with students on a personal level. However, the struggle to integrate these two competing visions of her role as a teacher was a central theme of Quinn's interview. This may have been because, as discussed above, as a first-year teacher, Quinn was still trying to balance the realities of working in a school, including

managing student behavior issues and complying with district mandates related to standards-based teaching, with her desire to know her students as people. It also may have been due to the fact that, as mentioned earlier, Quinn made an explicit connection between supporting the academic success of her students and working for social justice. As a result, she prioritized teaching to the standards over finding ways to build on students' out-of-school lives. This dual desire to build relationships with students and support their learning led Quinn to make personal connections with students during non-instructional times and to use students' out-of-school experiences in small-scale ways to support their acquisition of school-based discourses.

Elisa: Knowledge is power. The belief that providing access to school-based forms of knowledge is a way of working for social justice was also a central theme in Elisa's story. Like Quinn, Elisa was motived to build on her students' out-of-school lives by a strongly held conviction that knowledge is power. A white woman in her early thirties, Elisa had been teaching for a total of eleven years and had worked with ELL students in some capacity for all of those years. At the time of our interview, Elisa was working as a reading interventionist at an elementary school in the Prairie Town district. Prior to that, she had worked as a Bilingual Education Specialist (BES) at her current school and as a bilingual classroom teacher and an ESL teacher in another district. Elisa had grown up in a suburb of a large city located in the state where she still lived and worked. She had learned to speak Spanish in school and had initially decided to work with ELLs because she was bilingual, which had made it easier for her to get hired in her preferred district. Elisa had attended the teacher preparation program at the local university and had obtained her masters in ESL from another school in the state's university system. Elisa did not remember having been exposed to concepts like funds of knowledge in her undergraduate teacher education classes or during her graduate program. Rather, she reported

learning about the importance making connections to students' out-of-school experiences over the course of her teaching career.

"Build on the known." One way in which Elisa had learned about drawing on students' out-of-school experiences was from another teacher who had mentored her early in her teaching career. As a new teacher, Elisa had worked with an experienced ESL teacher who had instilled in her the importance of making connections to children's prior knowledge or, as she put it, "building on the known." As Elisa explained:

> One thing that she [ESL teacher] reinforced over and over again: "Build on the known, build on the known, build on the known." Very difficult to learn something when you have no other knowledge to build it on, right? Always, that's very present in my mind. "Build on the known. Build on the known." Um, so, [pause] these [culturally responsive] strategies and funds of knowledge – build on the known. That's, that's what it is.

Additionally, Elisa cited the training district teachers had received related to culturally responsive practices (CRP) as a source of her knowledge about this topic. While many of the other teachers I interviewed described the district-sponsored CRP training as providing information that was relevant only to African-American students, Elisa had made a connection between the ideas being presented and the work she did with ELL students. When asked what she had learned from the training that she believed applied to working with English Language Learners, she explained:

> … talking about, just because students don't know what we want [pause] them to know for school doesn't mean that they don't know anything. Of course, they have, you know, of course they talk and they have all of this rich oral background and they have family structures and they know how to, you know, they have all these experiences. Are they

> the same as white, middle-class families? No. But, does that mean that they're not valid? Of course not. And you have to honor it, and respect it and incorporate it how you can.

As the result of professional experiences like these, Elisa had come to realize that her students brought a variety of lived experiences to the classroom that could serve as resources for learning, even if they didn't resemble those typically valued in classroom settings. To that end, Elisa saw herself as helping students and families bridge their home and school worlds, explaining,

> I mean, there are these different kinds of streams that people swim in. And, they maybe don't often cross or they cross at school, right? Where it's kind of, pretty high stakes. Um […] but am I as a teacher helping these children build these bridges so that they can cross over, you know, they can go back and forth between these two different, I don't know, would you call them ways of lives? I think they're kind of streams, right? These discourses that you swim in. Um, and all of that work about CRP and they talk about building a bridge, you know. How do you get your children from their language or their [pause] experiences and how do you get them to be successful in this [pause] white, middle-class school system that we have set up?

Elisa was aware that schools privileged certain kinds of out-of-school experiences, ones that didn't always match those of her ELL students, and she believed it was important for her as a teacher to make connections with the experiences her students did have. However, like Quinn, her ultimate goal was to help her students acquire school-based discourses. Rather than questioning the underlying power structure that existed in the schools where she taught, Elisa saw her role as helping her students be successful within that context.

"All of these parents love their children." Elisa's perspective on the out-of-school lives of her students and their families had also been shaped by home visits she had done when she

was working as a bilingual classroom teacher. Elisa was candid in her examination of how this experience had helped her confront her own biases. For example, she acknowledged that visiting her students' homes challenged some of the deficit discourses she had internalized about ELL students and their families.

> I have to say, this is very, um, I don't know, makes me feel a little vulnerable, but I don't know, everyone thinks about, and I guess I did, everyone always says "Oh these, all these students, they're immigrants and they're illegal and they're poor." But, my students, I mean, some of them, yes, but they, I don't know, these families owned homes or they were able, you know, they had enough money to rent homes, you know, houses, nice houses. And they had nice things and …

When asked how doing home visits had changed the way she saw her students and their families she explained,

> I was, these aren't these poor country bumpkins who are illiterate. You know, these are families who are working and striving. […] These families had books and they had, I don't know […] what I really took away from those home visits was all of these parents love their children and they all want their children to succeed. And they are doing their best with the resources they have and the knowledge that they have of both English and the school systems to help their children succeed. I would say that, now a small sample size, right, but […] more than just that class, the families that I've gotten to know since then, they all want the best for their children. They might not be able to read. Sometimes they'll say, you know, "Maestra I, I only finished sixth grade, but I want him to graduate from high school." Um, yeah […] that was a shift, right? A paradigm shift.

For Elisa, visiting her students' homes had transformed her thinking about students and their families and had led her to develop a more positive perspective of what their lives were like outside of school.

This did not mean Elisa had completely let go of her beliefs about what it meant to be a good parent – like providing a nice home with nice things, or wanting children to succeed in school. However, she had come to see the families of her students as equal partners who wished for and were capable of supporting their children's academic success. Indeed, Elisa noted that, while many teachers believed that immigrant families thought education was the sole province of the teacher, she had come to realize that that wasn't the case, explaining, "… as I've gotten to know some families, I would say no, the families are involved as well." Learning that the families of her ELL students cared deeply about their children's academic success had further contributed to the strong sense of responsibility Elisa felt to help her students succeed in school.

"I just want them to know they can achieve these dreams." Although Elisa was primarily focused on helping students succeed academically, I would argue that her reason for privileging school-based forms of knowledge was related to her desire to work for social justice. Like Quinn, Elisa wanted to level the playing field for her students, and she viewed this as being closely linked to facilitating their academic achievement. While she saw her primary role as supporting the academic learning of her students, her motivation for doing this was her deep belief in the power of education to help students realize their dreams. Indeed, the idea that educational achievement was a form of empowerment was a theme that appeared repeatedly in Elisa's interview. This was evident in Elisa's explanation of why she believed it was important to get to know her students well. As she explained,

> … I know that some of these children want [pause], you know, they talk about being police officers and fire fighters. And I say: "That's wonderful, and make sure that you have to finish elementary school and middle school and high school and then do two years of college. And then you can do that." And they open up their eyes and I say: "But, you know, you can come back. You know, you stay in school, you read a little bit at home, you can come back and ask for help." I don't know. I just want them to know that they can achieve these dreams. You know, are they gonna want to do it if the teachers [pause] don't seem to know them or connect with them or build a relationship? Maybe not. They'll, maybe they'll turn off, you know, kind of disengage with school.
>
> But, I want them to stay engaged and [pause], I don't know, I want them to be successful.

Like Quinn, Elisa saw building on the known as a means to an end – a way of helping students more easily acquire school-based forms of knowledge. Making connections to students' out-of-school experiences was a way of helping them access academic content material, which she believed was the key to achieving success later in life. Because of her belief in the power of education to change lives, I believe that Elisa saw providing her students with equitable access to school-based forms of knowledge as a way for her to work for social justice.

Elisa's desire to support the academic achievement of her students led her to build on students' out-of-school lives in a variety of ways. In the classroom, she attempted to "build on the known" by making connections between academic content and students' lived experiences. For example, she tried to find instructional materials that were reflective of students' backgrounds and to model classroom activities using examples that were relevant to their lives. Elisa also allowed students to read and write about topics of interest to them, even if they were

ones that were not typically valued in school settings or ones that she personally valued. As she explained,

> Um, you know if you want students to write about their lives, you have to let them write about their lives [laughs]. If it's playing video games, as much as I hate reading and helping students write about video games, if that's what they're doing, if that's what they know, they don't have to work on the content aspect, they just have to work on the mechanics of getting the writing down on the page. If they're in the library and they want another book, you know, about [pause] all these different characters that I don't even know about. I mean, they're reading, so you just have to encourage it and accept, you know.

Elisa herself clearly did not value video games or reading books about characters from popular culture, which may have been reflective of the fact that she continued to privilege school-based forms of knowledge. However, she made space for her students to explore those topics because she knew they were important to them, and could be used to enhance literacy skills and learning.

"I just wanted them to have as much control and power and knowledge as I could give them." In addition to helping her ELL students acquire school-based forms of knowledge, Elisa wanted to help their parents learn how to successfully navigate the school system. To that end, she provided families with information she thought would help them understand and comply with school norms. Although this could be seen just as an attempt to get parents to conform to the expectations the school had of them, it was not quite that simple. Elisa recognized that the students and families with whom she worked may not be familiar with school norms and she saw providing them with that information as something that could be empowering for them. As she explained,

> I made magnets with contact information for the school and I gave a copy of, you know, school information and, you know, the school calendar. [pause] I just wanted these families to have as, [pause] I don't know. I just wanted them to have as much control and power and knowledge as I could give them in that little bit of time.

When asked why she believed that providing parents with this type of information was a means of giving them power and control, she responded,

> I just wanted these families to kind of have the same, I don't know, give them a little more of an equal footing to the middle-class families who [pause] had successfully negotiated the school systems already. [pause] You know, and people, I don't know, people in the school sometimes talk bad, "Well, why can't they just call in?" or "Why didn't they know?" Well, now I know that at, at least at one time they had these phone numbers and this school calendar and they knew the expectations.

It is problematic that Elisa expected parents to be responsible for challenging the deficit discourses that some school staff members had of them, rather than putting the onus on school staff to interrogate their own biases. In asking parents to comply with school norms, Elisa also failed to question the underlying assumptions on which those norms were based about what it meant to be a "good" parent or parent who cared about education. However, I would argue that Elisa herself believed that making explicit the implicit expectations her school had of families was a form of empowerment. For Elisa, providing families with information about how schools worked was a way of leveling the playing field because it gave them access to the same information that middle-class families familiar with the U.S. school system had. In that sense, as with the work she did to help students succeed academically, Elisa's effort to educate families

about school expectations for parents could be seen as a way for her to work for social justice as a teacher.

The tension between wanting to both challenge and accept school norms that is evident in Elisa's story illustrates the complexity of engaging in politically engaged, strengths-based approaches to teaching for ELLs. Elisa wanted to change the way she thought about her ELL students and their families, and indeed believed she had, but she also found it hard to let go of long held beliefs about what counts as valuable knowledge and, ultimately, to question how schools are structured. She recognized that schools are set up to privilege the types of experiences that white, middle class students and families are more likely to bring to school with them. However, she didn't question the privileging of those experiences. Although Elisa did work to educate herself about her students' out-of-school worlds and to open the classroom space to different types of experiences, ultimately her primary focus was still on helping students acquire academic discourses and helping parents comply with school norms.

"The scared part of me thinks it's okay not to know." Elisa was seemingly not aware of the tensions inherent in her desire to both challenge and accept school expectations for students and their families, as described above. However, she was conscious of other difficulties she faced when trying to carry out an approach to teaching that involved learning about and building on the out-of-school worlds of her students and their families and talked more openly than any of the other teachers I interviewed about those challenges. At several points during her interview, Elisa mentioned having to overcome feelings of fear or discomfort in order to do this work. For example, she repeatedly mentioned not needing, or wanting, to know about certain aspects of her students' lives, particularly the difficult life circumstances that families shared with the school

social worker or bilingual liaison at her school. When asked to describe some of the things she didn't think she needed to know about her students and their families, Elisa responded,

> You know, things like a family coming to somebody or [pause] some people know that the family doesn't have enough food but they won't go to the food pantry. So, they "win" a [local grocery store] gift card. You know, she [bilingual liaison] said: "That's not the kind of thing you need to know. I just want you to know that that's a child, [pause] you know, [starts to cry] whose family loves them and wants them to do, you know, wants them to succeed." So, I did know about some difficult situations, but, I don't know, the scared part of me thinks it's okay not to maybe know all of that.

She went on to explain,

> I don't know. Sometimes […] you know, as the tears indicate, sometimes they were pretty heavy issues and I didn't necessarily have the [pause] community connections or the knowledge of where to go to get help, you know? Some, you know, for undocumented people, you know, undocumented families or families with no insurance, you know. But, that's the job of these other school staff members, to know that.

While Elisa willingly communicated with parents regarding aspects of their children's lives, like their sleep habits, that she felt were relevant to her as a teacher, she didn't feel she had the necessary resources, emotional or otherwise, to help families confront the challenges they were facing outside of school.

Elisa also acknowledged that opening up the classroom space itself to the sharing of students' out-of-school experiences could result in situations that felt risky or uncomfortable for her as a teacher. For example, Elisa recalled a Mother's Day writing activity that had not gone as planned. Students were asked to make a card thanking their mothers for something they did

for them and a few of the children had written “Thank you for not hitting me.” Faced with a response she had not expected, and one that could be arguably construed as negative, Elisa was unsure of whether to honor her students’ original intent. Ultimately Elisa decided to encourage them to write about something that she saw as more positive, and thus more appropriate for a Mother’s Day card. Elisa also mentioned the risk she felt she was taking when she read her students an overtly political book about the unionization of Latino maintenance workers in Los Angeles. While the book had resonated with her students, several of whom had parents who held similar types of jobs, Elisa described having to overcome her own feelings of discomfort about addressing social justice topics like the exploitation of low wage workers and union organizing in the classroom space. In both of the examples above, Elisa’s honest description the feelings she experienced when addressing topics that are not typically discussed in classroom settings further highlights the complexity of adopting politically-engaged approaches to teaching that open the classroom space to a wider range of life experiences.

Elisa’s approach. I would describe the approach that Elisa took to working with her ELL students and their families as one that is based in the belief that knowledge is power. The idea that providing students and families with access to knowledge was a form of empowerment appeared in other interviews, including Quinn’s. However, it featured most prominently in Elisa’s story. Indeed, the main through-line of the story Elisa told of herself as a teacher was her belief in the power of education to change lives. As discussed above, Elisa saw helping students to access school-based forms of knowledge as a way of working for social justice because she believed it would allow them to achieve their life goals. Similarly, she believed that providing the families of her ELL students with the knowledge they needed to successfully navigate the

school system was a form of empowerment, putting them on equal footing with families who already understood how U.S. schools worked.

Elisa's desire to empower students and families led her to learn about and build on their out-of-school worlds. It also led her to do things that felt unfamiliar or uncomfortable to her, like visiting her students' homes or opening the classroom to topics that are not typically discussed in school settings. However, her focus on the acquisition of school-based discourses also meant that Elisa, like Quinn, continued to privilege those types of knowledge over others and didn't often challenge school norms. Although Elisa recognized that the types of experiences that are typically valued in school spaces were associated with white, middle class ways of knowing and being, she didn't question that privileging, per se. Rather, she used the connections she made to students' and families' out-of-school worlds as a way of facilitating the acquisition of those discourses. Like Quinn, Elisa ultimately saw building on students' out-of-school lives as a means to an end – a tool she could use to help students acquire academic discourses.

Tara: Teacher as mediator. Many of the themes evident in the profiles presented above, including the importance of relationship-building and the desire to support students' academic achievement, were also present in the story told by Tara. Tara, a white woman in her early forties, was an experienced first-grade teacher who taught in a mainstream classroom that had a group of ELL students assigned to it. Tara grew up in Prairie Town and had worked for Prairie Town Public Schools for approximately fifteen years. She had attended the local university for both her initial teacher training and graduate training and was ESL-certified, trained in Reading Recovery, and had a master's degree in curriculum and instruction. Tara was not familiar with term "funds of knowledge," but had received training related to culturally

responsive teaching, both as a part of her teacher education classes and during district-sponsored professional development opportunities. When asked to describe what she believed it meant to be a culturally responsive teacher, Tara explained,

> I think I would say it's having the knowledge of the student's culture, um, having, you know, them represented in literature, in pictures, in greetings, in, you know, some of the language. Um, you being in their space as well as inviting parents repeatedly into your space to have equal – you know, they're as welcome at school as you are at their home. Um, I think it's, you know, stepping back and not judging right away and trying to understand how their perspective might be different.

Tara's definition of culturally responsive teaching touches on many of the themes mentioned by the other teachers described above. This includes the desire to create an inclusive classroom space where students' experiences are represented and families feel welcome; the belief in the importance of spending time with students and families outside of school; and the understanding that it is important to try to see things from other people's points of view. However, in her interactions with immigrant families Tara positioned herself as the expert, thereby maintaining the traditional power dynamic that exists between teachers and families. For that reason, I have characterized her approach as teacher as mediator.

"Some of our personality was lost." While Tara believed it was important to be a culturally responsive teacher, she repeatedly mentioned the fact that she was less able to build on her students' backgrounds and experiences than she had been in the past. District initiatives, particularly the adoption of a new scripted reading program, meant that there was less time and less freedom to use culturally relevant materials as a part of classroom instruction. For example, when asked how she built on students' out-of-school experiences in the classroom, Tara

explained, "… I feel like last year was a poor example because I was getting used to Mondo [new reading curriculum], and we were trying to, like, give it a fair shake doing it our first year. And so I feel like some of our personality was lost last year because we were sticking to the program."

Although she was an experienced teacher, Tara appeared to feel less agency than Jenna and Andrea did with regard to designing classroom instructional activities that differed from what was prescribed by district mandates, like the new reading program or the focus on standards-based teaching. This may have been due to Tara's personality or her understanding of her role and responsibilities as a teacher. It's also possible that it may have been due to the way that the requirement to use the new reading curriculum was enforced at the school where she taught. Indeed, Tara reported feeling pressure from many sides to "stick with the program." As a result, she had limited the extent to which she built on her students' out-of-school worlds in the classroom, a fact which she mentioned repeatedly throughout her interview.

Perhaps, in part, due to the pressures described above, in the classroom Tara was primarily focused on supporting her students' acquisition of English and academic content material. This meant she looked for mostly small-scale ways to use materials that were reflective of her students' lives and to make connections to their cultural backgrounds. Some examples of the types of things Tara did in the classroom to build on students' experiences included having students and parents share cultural artifacts, like Hmong story cloths, and using books that had characters of the same ethnic or cultural background of her ELL students. She also pointed to writing as a time when she was able to provide students with opportunities to draw on their out-of-school experiences, explaining "… I love writing because that's when kids get to talk about their lives. And so, I've tried to, like, respond to them so that they know I'm interested." For

Tara, writing was a time when students were able to share their out-of-school experiences and it was an opportunity for her to show them that she was interested in those experiences.

Many of the classroom examples Tara provided of the ways that she made connections to her students' out-of-school worlds involved the sharing of cultural artifacts or traditions. Moll et al. (1992) posit that focusing primarily on traditional representations of culture, like food, traditions, and celebrations, is reflective of a static conception of culture, rather than the dynamic, or processual, understanding of culture on which funds of knowledge theory draws. However, I would argue that Tara's conception of culture was more nuanced than the classroom examples she shared suggest. Indeed, Tara noted multiple times that her students' culture was constantly evolving. For example, she pointed out that while her Hmong students had not celebrated Halloween in the past, that had begun to change, explaining,

> … we used to have this phenomenal, um, [bilingual liaison]. […] He kind of translated culture between us white teachers and the Hmong community. And, like, when he first started working at [Spruce Elementary], it was considered freaky to have Halloween masks on, and now all the kids trick-or-treat. […] So it's getting more Americanized.

Because of changes like these, Tara believed that it was important for her as a teacher to continue learning about her students' backgrounds, explaining "… you think you know everything up to a point, but their culture's changing just like American culture's changing. So just being open." In that sense, Tara recognized that culture is dynamic, rather than static and unchanging. Instead of assuming that the things she learned about her students would always be true, Tara recognized that they may change in the future.

"That's the Hmong teacher." The ways in which Tara drew on her students' out-of-school experiences in the classroom were more limited than teachers like Andrea and Jenna, both

in terms of frequency and scope. As previously discussed, Tara primarily drew on traditional representations of culture when connecting to her students' out-of-school worlds in the classroom and even those linkages had become less frequent after the adoption of the new reading program. Despite this, Tara did consider herself to be someone who strove to make connections with students' out-of-school worlds in meaningful ways. The majority of the ELL students with whom she worked were Hmong and Tara positioned herself as an advocate for and protector of her Hmong students and their families and as a bridge between them and the school. She repeatedly mentioned how important she believed it was to build relationships with families, and she was proud to be known in the Hmong community for the work she had done with students and families over the years.

Tara's pride in the connections she had made to her school's Hmong community was evident in her description of an encounter she had with some children while visiting the community center located in the apartment complex where many of her Hmong students lived. Tara explained,

> Even though we can't always speak, I mean, they definitely know who I am. And, um, one time [chuckles] I was at [community center], and, um, somebody said, "Hi, [Tara]." And I said, oh, hi […] or whatever. And the kid he was with said, "Who's that?" And he said, "That's the Hmong teacher." [laughs] And I didn't have them. That's why it was, it was cool. […] I'm on – some families, I'm on, like, their third or fourth sibling.

Tara believed that her status as the "Hmong teacher" was the result of the relationships she had built with families over time, particularly those with multiple children who had been in her class. She also attributed it to the time she spent in the community where her Hmong students lived. Indeed, Tara spent a significant amount of time visiting her students' community. She held

parent-teacher conferences at the community center located in the apartment complex where many of her Hmong students lived or in their homes and, at the time of our interview, was teaching summer school at the center. Tara also made it a point to attend community events, like Hmong New Year, and to go to places in the community, like the local Asian food market, that she knew her students frequented.

The idea that it was important to be present in her students' community was a significant theme in Tara's interview. Like Jenna and Quinn, she believed that being seen in the community was a way of building trust with students and their families. This is evident in Tara's response when asked why she believed visiting her students' community made her a better teacher. As she explained,

> I think part of it is that they trust me because I know their family, and I have been in their space. I think that's a big thing is I'm in their space. […] I think that's a big thing for me […] So it's, I think, just relationships. Even if you can't talk. [laughs] Just being present and caring about the kids and the families and asking about little brother or sister, [or] that your mom just had a baby.

In addition to building relationships, Tara also believed that the time she spent in the community helped her better understand how her students and their families experienced the world. More specifically, Tara thought spending time in a community that was not her own helped her experience what it felt like to be an outsider. Like Jenna, Tara believed it was important to put herself in situations where she felt uncomfortable in order to understand how the families of her ELL students might feel at school. As she explained, "… it's important to feel uncomfortable too because that's how parents are feeling coming to school, so just trying to get perspective." For Tara, being present in her students' community was both a way of becoming more

comfortable in the spaces inhabited by her ELL students and their families, thereby building closer relationships with them, and a way of making herself uncomfortable, which allowed her to better empathize with them.

"I had to … protect the parents." Another way in which Tara was involved in students' and families' out-of-school lives was as the teacher-leader of a parent group at her school specifically for Hmong families. In that role, she saw herself as a bridge – providing families with information they wanted to know about the school and acting as a go-between for them and other school staff members. She explained,

> … a lot of times, um, I might not be the teacher, but then I can get to the teacher. And, you know, it's, like, five people down the chain, but at least you can get their question answered, instead of never having it answered.

Although the group was originally designed to empower parents by giving them opportunities to explore topics of interest to them, Tara noted that families often deferred to her, as the teacher, to decide what was important for them to know about school. As she described,

> …the first, um, meeting of the year [chuckles] we would always say, okay, what do you want to learn about this year? What are you not familiar with? And a lot of the time […] the Hmong parents would say, well, whatever you think. You're the teacher.

Tara saw the group as an alternative way that parents could be involved in school, especially for those who might not participate in ways that schools traditionally expect. She explained, "… in terms of the Hmong group, um, I feel like the parents are involved if they come to the [name of parent group] meeting. Because they're coming to talk about school."[11]

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[11] Although Tara saw participation in the Hmong family group as an alternative form of parent involvement, it still involved parents showing that they cared about their children's school success, something which, arguably, is closely aligned to the other types of family involvement that are valued by schools.

Tara's involvement in the Hmong parent group reflected her desire to expand her own understanding of what family engagement could look like – a theme that appeared throughout her interview. Indeed, the primary way in which Tara saw herself as challenging deficit discourses about ELL students and their families was in regards to family engagement. Tara believed it was important for her as a teacher to understand that parental involvement was shaped by cultural beliefs about the role of parents in a child's education, as well as the lack of familiarity with the U.S. school system and life circumstances that might make it hard for parents to participate in the ways the school expected of them (e.g., volunteering or attending school events). This is evident in her description of the evolution of her thinking about parent attendance at her school's Open House event.

> Like, um, it used to be a big deal to get parents to come to, like, Open House and all that. And so then, after a few years of rehashing it at the parent meeting afterwards – they're, like, well, why – we didn't understand anything, why – and so I've kind of let that go. […] And we actually just talked about this as a staff, um, about what is the point of Open House if you already do [beginning of the year] conferences, and they already have seen the classroom, so why are we making them come again? And it came up at the Latino parent meeting too that parents take off work for that stuff. And so, they want to know, what is important, and what is not important.

Rather than judging parents for not complying with school-based norms regarding parental involvement, Tara wanted to try to see things from their point of view and to expand her own understanding of what it meant for parents to be involved in supporting their children's education. In her work with the Hmong family group, Tara also saw herself as actively working to facilitate alternative forms of parental involvement.

Tara's desire to be respectful of the different ways families chose to participate in school also led her to feel protective of the Hmong families with whom she worked, especially when she believed other parents at the school placed unreasonable demands on them regarding participation in school-sponsored events. This was particularly evident in her description of an interaction she had with a white parent at her school who was pressuring Hmong parents to attend a school event. Tara explained,

> … there were some people on PTO one, a few years back that were very pushy about, um, getting the Hmong parents to all of these events – to [school-sponsored science program for families] and all that. And they said, well, if you want us to go, we'll go. But we knew it was, like, a hardship for the parents to, like, take off work or to get childcare and all that. And so, the other facilitator and I were kind of, like, you know, it's very, very kind of you to invite everyone, but it just seems like this year won't be a good year. And the woman was very, very persistent. And so, I felt like I – it sounds weird, but I had to, like, call her off and just kind of protect the parents and be, like, look, you just want them there so you can see people of color at your thing.

In this instance, Tara positioned herself as a protector of the Hmong families with whom she worked. One way to read this is that, because she had developed a broader understanding of what family involvement could look like, Tara felt like she had to stand up for Hmong parents and shield them from the expectations of others, especially when those expectations seemed to her to be onerous, or even harmful, to Hmong families. In that sense, she saw herself as mediating the interactions Hmong families had with the school as an institution and with other people associated with the school (e.g., other teachers and other parents). However, this mediating role could also be seen as paternalistic. Rather than letting the parents themselves

decide what they did or did not want to do, she took on the role of deciding what was too much for them to handle or what would be harmful to them.

"We knew how much we could push them." While she resented the demands of other parents on the Hmong families with whom she worked, Tara also felt she knew when and how to "push" Hmong families to be more involved in their child's schooling. When reflecting on the incident with the PTO parent described above, Tara noted, "… I feel like, because we knew sort of – we knew how much we could push them to do something. And this seemed too much. So we were being protective." "Pushing" families represented a change for Tara, who believed that, as a culturally responsive teacher, she should honor different forms of family involvement, even if it meant parents not participating in the ways schools typically expect them to. Indeed, Tara admitted that her ideas about honoring different types of family participation were evolving. She explained that, over the years, she had come to believe that her real duty was to her students, who, in her words, were the ones who were "going to make it." To that end, she sometimes pushed families to provide the support she thought their children needed, even if it was a departure from the way they traditionally interacted with the school.

The conflict that Tara felt between wanting to honor different forms of parent participation and continuing to believe that parents should support their children in certain ways is evident in Tara's description of an interaction she had with a father, encouraging him to stay and watch his child's performance in the school play, rather than just dropping him off.

> Like, for example, there's a Hmong student in our class, and his dad sort of speaks English. And he brought him to our end-of-the-year play, which I used to go and pick kids up and bring them. And he said, what time should I pick him up? I said, oh, no, you're going to stay and watch the show. And so, I just, like, [laughs] made him stay.

> And it's probably – like, I wouldn't have done that years ago, but I was, like, well, dang, you, you know, he's here already. It's a 50-minute show. He can just stay and watch his kid. So I think I pressed some of my values on him, but I don't think it did any harm, I guess. [laughs] […] And I think that's – I look out most for the kid now. Whereas, maybe I was more like family-centered before. […] I feel like I'm more, all right, this kid is the one who's going to make it, so I'm going to put everything into the kid.

This idea of knowing when and how to push the parents to do things they wouldn't otherwise do, like the effort to protect parents described in the section above, could be seen as paternalistic. It is another example of Tara, as the teacher and expert, believing she knows what is best for parents and their children. Tara herself seemed to recognize this, as her observation that she had "pressed some of my values on him" indicates. It is also an indication that, despite her attempts to expand her own definition of family engagement, Tara continued to hold deficit views of families who didn't provide the types of support she believed students needed to "make it."

Tara's desire to "push" parents can also be read as an example that demonstrates the complexity of taking up approaches to teaching, like CRP and funds of knowledge, that require teachers to question ingrained ideas about the types of out-of-school experiences and parenting practices that contribute to school success. While Tara wanted to be open to the idea that family involvement might look different for different types of families, she also appeared to struggle with letting go of certain expectations about how families could best support their children's education. For example, Tara didn't expect Hmong families to read at home with their children. However, it was clear that she still believed this practice was important and she noted that she was glad her Hmong students did get an opportunity to read with the tutors at the community center where they did their homework. As she explained,

> And, um, what's happened is that the people at the community center have asked more and more questions of us as we've met there. And so, I've built a relationship with the director there. And they have homework club. So the, essentially, the kids are going home, and they're doing their homework at the center with English-speaking staff. […] So we're still getting the kids to read, but they're still not reading with their parents, necessarily. That I know of.

Tara went on to explain, "So at least they're reading to somebody outside of school. So I feel like, you know, it's not ideal, but it's better than nothing." Although Tara wanted to honor different forms of parent involvement, she still believed that parents participating in the ways teachers traditionally expect them to (i.e., attending school events and reading with their children at home) led to better outcomes for students.

While Tara acknowledged elsewhere in her interview that Hmong families valued education, something which she saw as positive, she ultimately did not appear to believe that these families possessed the resources needed to help their children succeed in school. Indeed, as the examples above make clear, she continued to value parenting practices that are traditionally privileged by schools (Hawkins, 2019; Zentella, 2005). In that sense, despite her efforts to build meaningful relationships with the families of her Hmong students, Tara continued to see them from a deficit perspective. This apparent disconnect in Tara's approach to working with Hmong families illustrates that simply teaching educators to not expect that all families will engage in the types of parent practices that are typically valued by schools (e.g., reading aloud, attending school events, etc.) is not enough to combat deficit perspectives. Rather, as suggested by the original funds of knowledge literature (González et al., 2005; Moll, 1992a, 1997, 2000;

Moll et al., 1992), teachers must also be encouraged to recognize and find value in the ways that families are engaging with and supporting their children.

Tara's approach. Like the other teachers described in this chapter, Tara believed she was engaged in meaningful work that would lead to more equitable experiences at school for her ELL students and their families. However, despite her deep commitment to, and involvement with, the Hmong community at her school, Tara was less successful than the other teachers profiled in this chapter at challenging deficit discourses about ELL students and families and recognizing the wide range of resources they possessed. This was due, in part, to the fact that Tara positioned herself as an expert in relation to families, rather than as a learner, as suggested by the funds of knowledge literature (González et al., 2005; Moll, 1992a, 1997, 2000; Moll et al., 1992). In her interactions with Hmong families, she maintained what Moll and González would characterize as the traditional power dynamic that exists between teachers and families, playing the role of transmitter of knowledge, particularly with regard to supporting student academic achievement.

Given this focus on imparting knowledge to families, I would characterize the story that Tara told of herself as that of teacher as mediator. In part, this meant that she, like many of the other teachers profiled in this chapter, saw herself as helping ELL students and their families bridge their home and school worlds. Like Jenna, Andrea, and Quinn, Tara believed it was important to spend time in the community in which her students lived in order to build relationships with them and their families. And, like Elisa, she believed it was important to provide parents with the information they needed to navigate the school system. However, I would argue that Tara's work as a mediator went beyond simply building bridges. Indeed, Tara saw it as her role to mediate the interactions that Hmong families, in particular, had with the

school. Families' experiences with the school both went through her and were shaped by her. In her role as teacher-leader for the Hmong parent group she explained aspects of the schooling experience that the families wanted to understand better. She also mediated their relationships with other teachers – serving as a go between and helping them get answers to their questions. Finally, she mediated their interactions with other parents, protecting them from demands that she saw as unreasonable.[12]

Discussion

At the end of each of the interviews I did with participating teachers, I asked them to reflect on the impact they thought learning about and building on students' out-of-school experiences had on them as teachers and if it was something they would continue to do. All of them indicated that they saw it as valuable and many of them responded with some variation of the answer given by Elisa, "how [would] you do it any other way?" As this quote illustrates, for many of the teachers in this study, including those profiled above, making connections to students' out-of-school worlds was a central part of who they were as teachers. More than that, it was a central part of what they believed it meant to be a "good" teacher, particularly for ELL students. Although their approaches differed, participating teachers shared a belief that they were involved in work that made school a more equitable place for ELL students and their families, and an important part of that work involved valuing and finding ways to validate the lived experiences of those students and families.

The profiles presented in this chapter examine the ways in which five of the teachers I interviewed for this study laid claim to the identity of being a "good" teacher of ELLs.

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[12] This may have been due to the fact that, as she remarked repeatedly, Tara was less able to build on her students' experiences in the classroom than she was in the past. For that reason, she focused on describing the things she was currently doing, which primarily consisted of her outreach to families.

Although, as noted above, the approaches they took to this work differed, these teachers also drew on shared ideas about what good teaching for ELLs should look like. Common themes appeared in their stories, ones that reflected larger notions of “good” teaching for ELLs. Their ideas about what it meant to be a good teacher reflected a variety of influences, including educational theories like funds of knowledge, as well as culturally responsive teaching, multicultural teaching, teaching for social justice, and ESL pedagogy.

I would argue that many of the educational theories mentioned above, particularly those that could be considered politically engaged theories of teaching, call for teachers to adopt certain dispositions and/or practices in order to better meet the needs of ELL students and other students from non-dominant groups. Many of these dispositions and practices were mentioned in the stories told by teachers, including:

- Transforming one’s thinking about ELL students and their families, as evidenced by a re-valuing of the lived experiences and areas of expertise of those students and families
- Recognizing that schools and classrooms traditionally privilege certain ways of knowing and being and acting to expand “what counts” as valuable knowledge and skills in the classroom setting
- Learning about students’ out-of-school worlds and building meaningful relationships with them and their families
- Providing opportunities in the classroom for students to draw on the knowledge they have developed in out-of-school contexts, thereby communicating to them that school is a place where their experiences are valued and are resources for learning

- Positioning oneself as a learner and positioning students and families as experts by providing them with opportunities to share their expertise in the classroom
- Exposing students to different perspectives and communicating to them the importance of learning from others, particularly those who have different experiences than they do

These ideas functioned as tropes of good teaching in the stories told by the teachers featured in this chapter. In other words, these practices and dispositions were mentioned by participants as a means of signaling they were a certain kind of teacher – one who was committed to making things more equitable for ELL students and their families.

The ways in which the five teachers described in this chapter understood and enacted the practices and dispositions described above provide us with examples of what it looks like when teachers take up and implement complex educational theories like funds of knowledge and culturally responsive teaching. As such, their profiles point to the possibilities that exist for carrying out these kinds of approach to teaching. However, the stories told in the profiles also illustrate that these teachers sometimes struggled to fully accept and/or enact these dispositions and practices. In particular, the descriptions of these teachers showed the persistence of deficit discourses about students from non-dominant groups and their families and the difficulty of letting go of the belief that school-based forms of knowledge are more valuable than others. Their stories also point to some of the contextual factors that make implementing these educational theories difficult – like the loss of agency teachers were experiencing and the need to comply with district mandates. Taken together, the struggles faced by the featured teachers highlight the complexity of engaging in teaching practices that involve fundamentally

questioning one's own biases and working to create learning spaces where non-school-based forms of knowledge are treated as important resources for learning.

This chapter explored how the complexity of carrying out a politically-engaged, strengths-based approach to teaching, like funds of knowledge, was embodied in the stories of five individual teachers. These stories were meant to foreground the experiences of teachers and to position them as knowledgeable actors, making sense of and acting on complex theories of teaching and learning. Teachers featured in the profiles took up these ideas to varying degrees, based on their own understanding of what their role was as a teacher and their sense of what was possible given the context in which they worked. In the following two chapters, I will continue to explore the strategic decisions teachers made related to implementing a teaching approach that involved learning about and building on students' out-of-school experiences. However, rather than using detailed descriptions of individual teachers to explore this question, I will look across interviews to identify examples of classroom practice shared by participants that illustrate the decisions teachers made related to building on students' out-of-school experiences and the factors that influenced those decisions.

In the next chapter, I will explore how participants' larger beliefs about their roles and responsibilities as teachers shaped the extent to which they were willing to make connections to students' out-of-school worlds in the classroom. The subsequent chapter will look at the most common ways that teachers built on their students' out-of-school experiences in the classroom and will consider how the context in which the teachers worked, and the knowledge they had developed as a result of their experiences working in that context, both created and limited possibilities for making connections to students' out-of-school worlds. In both chapters, I hope to highlight some possible points of leverage that teacher educators might draw on when helping

pre-service and practicing teachers make sense of politically engaged approaches to teaching, such as funds of knowledge.

Chapter 5: An Exploration of Teacher Decision-Making Related to Building on Students' Out-of-School Experiences

The five participant profiles presented in the previous chapter illustrated how different teachers took up politically-engaged, strengths-based approaches to teaching for ELLs, such as funds of knowledge. In this chapter, I will continue to explore how participating teachers understood what it meant to build on the experiences of their ELL students. However, I will look more closely at the reasons why the educators interviewed for this study believed it was important to learn about and build on those experiences. In particular, I will consider how participants saw making connections to students' out-of-school lives as a means of helping them meet the needs of their ELL students. In addition, I will examine how those motivating factors shaped their enactment of this approach to teaching.

Teachers' Enactment of a Funds of Knowledge Approach: The "Why" Impacts the "How"

All thirteen of the educators I interviewed for this study stated that they believed it was important to learn about and build on students' out-of-school lives. However, as was evident in the five profiles presented in the previous chapter, teachers' personal understandings of what it meant to do this work varied, as did the ways in which they embodied these ideas in their practice. Additionally, the extent to which they were willing or able to incorporate students' out-of-school experiences into classroom activities differed from teacher to teacher. Despite these differences, there were common themes that emerged across interviews related to the reasons why teachers believed it was important to make connections to students' out-of-school worlds. Upon analyzing the interview data, it became apparent that teachers' reasons for building on students' out-of-school experiences were related to their larger understanding of their own roles and responsibilities vis-à-vis ELL students. More specifically, these teachers believed it was

important to care for students, support their academic learning, and address issues of equity or fairness in the classroom.

Caring for students and supporting their learning, which were mentioned by all study participants, are closely related to larger professional discourses about what it means to be a teacher. In particular, they reflect two roles traditionally associated with teaching: teacher as facilitator of student learning and teacher as nurturer (Acker, 1995; Noddings, 2012). The third reason, addressing equity, was mentioned by a small number of participants and appeared to be connected to those teachers' understanding of themselves as progressive educators – particularly as teachers who were concerned with multicultural teaching practices (Sleeter & Bernal, 2004) and teaching for social justice (Cochran-Smith, Shakman, Jong, Terrell, Barnatt, & McQuillan, 2009; Dover, 2013; McDonald & Zeichner, 2009). For the teachers in this study, building on students' out-of-school experiences is a way of accomplishing these larger professional goals.

The connections participating teachers made between building on students' out-of-school lives and the three professional goals highlighted above informed the decisions they made about whether and how to draw on students' out-of-school knowledge and experiences as a part of their teaching practice. For all three roles, the connections teachers made between building on ELL students' out-of-school experiences and meeting students' needs in the ways described above opened up spaces that encouraged them to incorporate students' out-of-school knowledge and experiences into classroom instruction. However, it also constrained the extent to which participants were willing or able to implement these strategies. Below, I will discuss in greater detail the connections the teachers I interviewed made between building on students' out-of-school worlds and each of the three roles mentioned above. I will also give examples of the ways in which these connections both facilitated and limited their implementation of this

approach to teaching. Although one of more of these themes were apparent in all of the interviews done for this study, I have drawn the examples shared in the chapter from the stories of seven participants: Andrea, Anna, Lily, Justin, Kasey, Rachel and Quinn.

Connection to Funds of Knowledge Theory

Funds of knowledge as a pedagogical tool. As discussed in the introductory chapter of this dissertation, I maintain that the theory of funds of knowledge as proposed by Moll and González (e.g., González et al., 2005; Moll, 1992a; Moll, 1997; Moll, 2000; Moll et al., 1992) functions in three different ways – as a theoretical tool that researchers and practitioners can use to re-value the lived experiences of immigrant students and their families; as a professional development framework that involves teachers spending time in students' communities and homes and reflecting on what they learn about families with other teachers; and as a pedagogical approach that can be used to design classroom instruction that builds on ELL students' out-of-school experiences and positions them and their families as experts.

The previous chapter explored how teachers made use of funds of knowledge as both a theoretical tool and a pedagogical tool. In this chapter, the analysis will primarily focus on the use of funds of knowledge as a pedagogical approach. Rather than examining how teachers employed the concept of funds of knowledge as a means of interpreting the experiences students were bringing to the classroom, my focus in this chapter is on how teachers reported enacting the theory in the work they did with children. Although I will primarily examine the practices teachers reported using in the classroom, I will also look at some interactions that teachers described having with children and their families outside of school. I have chosen to define teacher practice more broadly in order to capture the wide range of strategies teachers said they employed to provide their students with the support they believed was needed.

Classrooms as culturally mediated spaces. As noted in the introduction to this dissertation, Moll and González, like other cultural-historical theorists, see classrooms as socially constructed, culturally mediated spaces (Gutiérrez et al., 2003; Moll, 1997; Pacheco & Gutiérrez, 2009). As such, the organization of the learning space privileges certain cultural resources – including ways of using language; prior knowledge; and literacy practices – over others. In order to ensure that all students are able to draw on the resources they bring to school with them, cultural historical theorists, like Moll and González, argue that classrooms need to be "re-mediated", or re-organized, to create expanded learning spaces where the skills and experiences of ELL students, and other students from non-dominant groups, are seen as assets rather than as obstacles to overcome (Cole & Griffin, 1983; González et al., 2005; Gutiérrez et al., 2003; Moll et al., 1992). In these re-mediated spaces, activities are organized so that a wider variety of cultural and linguistic resources can be used as tools for learning. As a result, students from non-dominant backgrounds, like ELLs, can make full use of their cultural and linguistic "toolkits" (Gutiérrez and Rogoff, 2003; Gutiérrez et al., 2003).

According to Moll and González, one important factor that impacts how classrooms are organized is the teacher him or herself. Indeed, Moll (1992a) argues that "[th]e role of the teachers … is critical, as are their conceptions of what counts or is appropriate in the education of bilingual students" (p. 23). In other words, the ways in which teachers position themselves in relation to their ELL students, as well as their understanding of how and what ELL students should learn, shape the ways in which they organize classroom instruction. In this study, teachers' understanding of their role vis-à-vis their ELL students, and their larger understanding of their role as teachers, as well as their understanding of "what counts" as appropriate knowledge and skills in a classroom setting, did appear to shape how their classrooms were

organized and impacted the extent to which they built on students' out-of-school experiences. In some, but not all, cases, the classrooms described by participating teachers functioned as expanded learning spaces where students' experiences were treated as important resources for learning.

Reading teachers' enactment of funds of knowledge theory as a critique. As noted in the previous chapter, the teachers interviewed for this study did not receive theories like funds of knowledge uncritically. Rather, the ways in which they made sense of these theoretical ideas were informed by their own beliefs about their roles and responsibilities as teachers of ELL students. Teachers' reasons for carrying out this work sometimes aligned with the tenets of funds of knowledge theory and sometimes departed from those tenets. Likewise, the decisions teachers made about whether and how to build on students' out-of-school experiences sometimes converged with the practices advocated by funds of knowledge theorists and sometimes diverged from them. However, I maintain that teachers' enactment of a funds of knowledge approach should not be read as simply a misunderstanding of the theory or as a failure to take up the more difficult aspects of the approach, although that may partially be true. Rather, the decisions teachers made related to the implementation of this approach can also be read as a critique – a commentary on the ways in which participating teachers felt the theory did or didn't speak to the parts of their job they believed were important.

Organization of Chapter

The rest of this chapter is divided into three sections, each dedicated to exploring one of the three professional concerns described above – caring, facilitating learning, and addressing equity. In each of the sections, I will begin by providing a general overview of the professional concern in question. Then I will provide examples of the ways in which the connections teachers

made with each professional goal informed the decisions they made about drawing on students' out-of-school experiences. I will consider both how their larger understanding of their professional roles encouraged them to learn about and build on students' out of school experiences and how, at times, those understandings limited the extent to which they believed they could or should make those types of connections.

As in the previous chapter, this chapter will foreground the experiences of teachers, positioning them as knowledgeable actors who are making sense of and acting on complex theories. The examples will include rich descriptions of participants and use participants' words to illustrate the claims being made. However, while the previous chapter looked closely at the individual stories of five participants, in this chapter I will present examples from a range of participating teachers that illustrate larger themes that emerged in the data related to the decisions participants made about learning about and drawing on students' out-of-school worlds. Doing this will allow me to highlight patterns in the data related to how these particular teachers experienced this work and to examine what those patterns tell us about the what it means for practicing teachers to implement an approach to teaching that involves making connections to students' out-of-school worlds. Although the sample size of this study is too small to be generalizable, identifying common themes and looking for explanations related to those themes is one way of understanding how people experience a particular phenomenon, in this case incorporating students' out-of-school worlds into one's teaching practice.

Caring

One of the primary reasons participating teachers gave for learning about and drawing on their ELL students' out-of-school knowledge and experiences was that it allowed them to fulfill what they saw as an important professional role – that of caring for children. I define "caring" as

a concern for the feelings of students and their families, or an interest in the affective aspects of teaching. This theme appeared in most, if not all, of the interviews. Participants gave voice to this idea in a variety of ways. In many cases, the teachers themselves used the word "caring," stating that learning about and building on students' out-of-school worlds was a way of showing children they cared about them. Another common way in which teachers expressed this idea was in terms of connecting with students or building relationships with them. These teachers saw learning about and acknowledging student's out-of-school lives as a way of establishing personal connections with them. In some cases, the desire to care for students was expressed as genuine interest in knowing students as people and understanding who they were, both in and out of school. These teachers were particularly interested in their students' likes and dislikes, personal interests, and experiences outside of school.

Another theme that emerged from the interviews that I would characterize as a form of caring was that drawing on students' out-of-school worlds contributed to a sense of belonging for students and families. For some teachers, this was expressed as wanting to create a feeling of community or family in their classrooms. A closely linked idea, expressed by some teachers, was that making connections to student's out-of-school lives was a way of validating the knowledge and experiences they brought to the classroom with them. Some teachers noted that this made students feel good about themselves and/or helped them feel proud of who they were and their cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Others mentioned that it helped students see that their knowledge and experiences were valued in the school context and contributed to a sense of belonging or feeling of comfort in the classroom.

The act of caring was not seen as an end in-and-of-itself. Participating teachers cared about children and wanted to connect with them on a personal level, but they also saw doing this

as an important way of supporting student learning. Indeed, many teachers viewed feeling cared for as a necessary requisite for learning. Others believed that students learned better when they felt a sense of connection to school and the people in it. Some expressed that it was important for students to feel comfortable in the classroom in order to be able to learn. In that sense, teachers didn't just believe in caring for caring's sake, but saw it as a means to an end. Although for the purposes of this chapter I am examining the impulse to care for students and the desire to support student learning separately, these two ideas were inextricably intertwined for many of the teachers interviewed for this study.

One way in which participating teachers talked about the connection between drawing on students' out-of-school worlds and creating a caring and comfortable context that encouraged learning was through their use of the term "affective filter." This term, which comes from ESL pedagogy, was used exclusively by the ESL-trained teachers in the study. According to Krashen (1982), there are a variety of affective factors that impact language learning, including the learner's level of self-confidence and feelings of anxiety. These factors can contribute to the formation of a filter that can make language acquisition more difficult. Krashen argues that teachers should create conditions in the classroom that reduce student anxiety and lower their affective filters in order to facilitate the language acquisition process. Although Krashen's use of the term applies only to language learning, the teachers in this study appeared to apply the concept to learning more generally. In particular, they expressed the belief that building relationships with students and drawing on their out-of-school worlds was a way to make students feel more comfortable in the classroom, thereby lowering their affective filters and making it easier for them to learn academic content material, in addition to learning English.

The connection participants made between building on their students' out-of-school lives and caring for children meant that they found ways to make space for activities that accomplished this despite the pressure they faced to teach to the standards and implement district mandated curricula. However, seeing this type of teaching as a form of caring at times constrained teachers' willingness or ability to make connections to their students' out-of-school worlds. Below, I will present examples that illustrate how the desire to care for students shaped the ways in which three participants made connections with students' out-of-school worlds. I will also consider how the decisions these three educators made related to learning about and building on students' out-of-school worlds can be read as an implicit critique of this type of approach to teaching.

Caring: Examples of practice. The examples presented in this section illustrate how a concern for caring impacted the practice of three study participants: Justin, Kasey, and Quinn. These examples will demonstrate how the wish to show students they cared about them encouraged these teachers to make connections to their students' out-of-school lives in substantial ways. They will also show how, in other cases, their interest in caring for students led these same teachers to question the extent to which they could or should learn about and build on students' out-of-school lives. I chose to highlight the participants featured below, in part, because their stories illustrate many of the larger themes related to caring that emerged from the data summarized above. I also selected these teachers because caring was a particularly salient theme in their interviews. However, their stories are also significant because they highlight, perhaps more than the other interviews, the caring-related concerns that teachers had about pursuing a teaching approach that involved making connections to students' out-of-school lives. For that reason, these examples demonstrate how prioritizing a professional identity based on

caring can impact the ways in which teachers enact a funds of knowledge approach to teaching, or other similar approaches.

Justin: "It helps make everyone feel like, we care about your life." Justin, a white man in his early thirties who worked as a bilingual liaison at a K-5 elementary school, was motivated by a deep desire to show his students and their families that he cared about them. Like Andrea and Jenna, two of the teachers profiled in the previous chapter, his main focus as an educator was on building caring relationships with students and their families. In fact, although Justin had trained to be a teacher, he had opted to work in a support role instead because it allowed him to spend more time establishing the inter-personal connections he desired. What was most striking about Justin's interview was the extent to which he used the language of caring, and even love, to describe what he was doing. However, Justin's decision to work as a bilingual liaison also indicates that making meaningful connections with students' out-of-school worlds was not something he felt he could accomplish as a classroom teacher.

"I'm a little nosey … but then you find out what they need." Justin's commitment to caring for students and families led him to make connections with students' out-of-school worlds in a variety of ways, many of which were directly related to his job as a bilingual liaison. For example, one of the key ways in which Justin talked about caring was in terms of being able to meet the needs of students and their families. Justin's position, which he had held for eight years, combined the duties of interpreter, family-school liaison, and classroom aide. Given his role, Justin was not just concerned with addressing the academic needs of students, but also with addressing their social and emotional needs and even the socio-economic needs of their families. Meeting the needs of students and families involved actively working to learn about their out-of-school lives or, as Justin called it, being "nosey." Justin explained, "I'm a little nosey. I meet

everyone. [laughs] […] But, then you figure out what they need." Although being nosey typically has a negative connotation, for Justin this impulse was a good thing because it allowed him to provide students and families with the support he believed they needed.

Justin sought out information about students' lives a variety of ways. One way in which Justin created opportunities for families to share information with him was to make himself available for informal conversations both in-person and over the phone. As Justin described,

> In our office […] we have nice little comfy furniture, and families just show up to chit-chat. Or, I have some moms who, I love the fact that they will call just to fill me in on gossip. 'Cause, then I know what's going on in the neighborhood. But, I find out who just went to jail, whose parents were fighting and that's, that's good to know.

Justin didn't just see interactions like these as a way of learning information about families, he also saw them as opportunities to build relationships with them. Relationship-building was another central way in which Justin talked about caring for families and students.

This dual focus on learning helpful information and building relationships is evident in Justin's description of his approach to doing home visits. Unlike most of the other teachers in this study who did home visits, when Justin visited a family's home, he had no agenda. Instead, he was there to spend time with the families and show them he cared about their children. As he explained,

> … I love home visits. I maybe go on a few too many visits. […] The last one I went on was just a student teacher who, for an assignment, had to go on a home visit. So, we just called and said, "Hey! Could we come over?" And we spent three hours there, just chatting. […] I find that families are really receptive if you just say, "I want to come over

> to learn more about you and your kid." It's like, "Oh! The school cares about my child." And then, we just sit and chat.

Although Justin learned about students' and families' lives during the home visits, the most important aspect of the visits for him was that they allowed him to establish relationships with them and let them know he cared about them. When asked what he learned from doing home visits, Justin answered,

> … well actually we were talking mostly about soccer and then the kid showed us his video games. Just hanging out with no real agenda. […] I'm trying to think of something specific I've learned, but it's, mostly it's building a relationship. But, it doesn't need to be based on anything besides this kid, who you've created and love, spends a lot of time with me. I take care of him and I love him too. And then, that makes it a lot easier when there's issues later, of, you know I love you, you know I love him and this happened and it's not good.

Unlike funds of knowledge theorists, who see home visits primarily as information-gathering opportunities, Justin saw them as opportunities to build personal connections with students and families and to show them he cared about them. It also created a feeling that he and the families were partners in a joint project – one which was based in caring for their children. As Justin pointed out, this had the benefit of making parents more open to working with the school if issues did arise with their children.

"He felt loved and special and that's good." Justin also believed that he could support his students by making sure they felt safe and cared for at school. Justin used what he knew about students' out-of-school worlds – both good and bad – to accomplish that goal. For example, in his role as bilingual liaison, Justin learned about many of the negative things that

were going on in his students' lives and he believed it was important for him to be sensitive to any trauma students may have suffered and to make the accommodations they needed to feel safe in school. In the quote below, Justin described how he had recently handled a situation involving a family in crisis, explaining,

> One of the upper-grade buddies who had a rough winter […] mom cries and we talk […]. Can I tell the teacher about this? And you can say "no." But, then I'll make sure that […] Lily knows, you know, what you need to know. That this is going on in this kid's life. And, they might be tired. They might be sad. You know. Mom says the kid doesn't want to talk about it, so, let it go. But, just so you know, this is what's going on.

Knowing about the issues students and families were facing allowed Justin to ensure that other school staff understood why students might be behaving as they did and to respond to that behavior sensitively.[13]

Justin also believed it was important to be aware of and acknowledge the positive aspects of students' lives. This was evident when Justin recounted what happened when he printed out pictures of a student's recent soccer game sent to him by the student's coach and gave them to the student. Justin described the student's reaction this way,

> The way he screamed when I gave them to him, I just passed them to him when he was in breakfast, whatever, but he's screaming, showing off to his friends that "Mr. Justin, gave me pictures. He didn't give you anything from your weekend." I'm like [exaggerated sigh]. But, he felt loved and special and that's good. You didn't need to brag to try to make everyone else feel bad and we talked about that [laughs]. But, like, he knew that

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[13] As noted in the previous chapter, many of the teachers in this study did not shy away from learning about students' negative out-of-school experiences, or what Zipin (2009) refers to as "dark" funds of knowledge. Rather, they saw these experiences as important pieces of information that helped them understand student behavior and respond to that behavior in appropriate ways.

> he's valued, he's special, people at school care about him. And then, his teacher sat down and got to talk through pictures of his teammates. And just, it helps make everyone feel like, we care about you and your life.

For Justin, knowing about and responding to both the negative and positive aspects of students' out-of-school worlds was an important way of making them feel cared for and ensuring that school was a safe and welcoming place for them. His desire to be a caring educator encouraged him to draw on his knowledge of students' out-of-school experiences in order to provide them with the support they needed.

Although he himself had taken a role that allowed him to focus primarily on addressing the social and emotional needs of families and students, Justin saw a direct connection between making students feel cared for and supporting their learning. Indeed, Justin believed that strong teacher-student connections were a prerequisite for learning. For example, when asked why he thought it was important for educators to spend time in the communities in which students lived, Justin responded,

> … the kids realize that you're part of the community or, at least, care about it. And then, you can connect better to them and keep them interested in school and feel like they are part of school. 'Cause if you walk into a classroom and don't connect to a kid, how much success are they going to have if, you know, I have a life and then I go to this other place for a few hours a day and then I go home. If you don't connect [with] them at all, why is the kid going to want to go to school or, you know, be there?

For Justin, caring and learning were linked. Students needed to feel connected to their teachers in order to feel like they belonged at school and to feel invested in learning. Showing a real interest in students' lives was an important way of creating that sense of connection.

"If I had a classroom full of kids waiting ... that couldn't happen." Justin's desire to position himself as a caring educator in relation to his students and their families encouraged him to make extensive connections with their out-of-school worlds. However, Justin felt he was able to do this only because he had opted not to work as a teacher. In fact, Justin saw his interest in forming caring relationships with students and families as being incompatible with the role of teacher and believed that taking on that role would have meant limiting the extent to which he made personal connections with them. Justin explained his decision to not pursue a classroom teaching position this way:

> I mean, I just kind of realized, but wait, by switching from, like, a classroom over to bilingual liaison, I keep the same kids and the same families for almost a decade. And I really get to know you and I get to work with the family 'cause I have time to call you and just, well, like, today, when I'm sitting there chit chatting with the mom of a fourth grader for twenty-five minutes. If I had a classroom full of kids waiting for their reading assessments, that couldn't happen.

Justin's decision can be read, in part, as an implicit commentary on the feasibility of implementing teaching approaches, like funds of knowledge, that require deep knowledge of the out-of-school lives of students and their families. In choosing not to take on a teaching role, Justin indicates that this was not work that he felt he would have had the time or flexibility to adequately pursue as a teacher.

Kasey: "You're celebrating what I did at home?" Another teacher who was motivated to build on students' out-of-school worlds by a desire to care for them was Kasey. A white woman in her early thirties, Kasey was a Bilingual Education Specialist (BES) at an elementary school serving students in kindergarten through grade five. As a BES, Kasey visited the

classrooms of students classified as ELLs, providing them with the support they needed to access grade-level academic content. Her role was different from Justin's in that her primary focus was on providing academic support for ELL students. However, like Justin, Kasey was seen as a point of contact for immigrant families and was often approached by them when they had questions or needed help navigating the school system. Indeed, Kasey herself believed that a central part of her job was to make her school a place that was responsive to the needs and experiences of ELL students and their families. In that sense, Kasey positioned herself as someone who cared about the children and families with whom she worked. For Kasey, caring for her students often meant using what she knew about their lives to create a more welcoming school environment for them. However, it also meant knowing when to respect students' privacy and their right not to share all aspects of their out-of-school lives with her or their peers.

"I belong here." Kasey gave voice to her desire to care for her students in a variety of ways. Like Justin, Kasey strove to establish personal connections with her students and their families and was focused on building relationships with them, something which she believed was part of being a good teacher. She also believed it was important to help students feel connected to school. Kasey's focus on making ELL students feel like school was a place where they belonged encouraged her to draw on students' out-of-school experiences in the classroom. For example, Kasey believed it was important for students to see their experiences reflected in the classroom space, something which she believed validated those experiences and contributed to a sense of belonging, pride, and confidence. Some of the ways in which Kasey accomplished this included: giving students opportunities to share cultural artifacts or traditions with their classes; designing instructional activities that positioned students as experts and encouraged them to

share their expertise with peers; and using instructional materials that were reflective of her students' cultural backgrounds and lived experiences.

Another important way in which Kasey tried to make the classroom space more inclusive for ELL students was by compensating for the cultural bias that existed in some of the classrooms in which she worked. More specifically, Kasey looked for ways to connect classroom discussions to the experiences of her ELL students. For example, Kasey would provide alternative examples if she believed the ones being given by the classroom teacher were not culturally relevant to them. As Kasey explained,

> … I think that sometimes the comments are still geared toward [a] white perspective because it's the teacher's perspective. We have almost all white teachers in our school. Actually, really, all are white. And so, I sometimes think the line of questioning isn't always geared towards our ELL students for bringing out funds of knowledge. […] I mean, I feel like our examples, right? Like, "Can you think about a time you were making a bowl of cereal? How much milk did you pour?" Well, not everybody has cereal for breakfast. Right? "Can you think about a time you were making chocolate chip cookies?" Well, not everybody makes chocolate chip cookies. […] And so, I feel like sometimes, [pause], it still gets skewed toward the white perspective.

Kasey believed that providing alternative examples that were reflective of her ELL students' lives validated the out-of-school worlds of these students and increased their sense of belonging. As Kasey explained,

> … I mean, even in small groups sometimes I'll do this [thing] of, you know, like, "Well, I know A. [name of ELL student] was telling me about [pause] what food he ate at home." And it's like, "Oh, you're celebrating what I did at home?" […] Whereas, like, normally

> when teachers are talking, “Well, I was at home and I ate pizza and made chocolate chip cookies.” That’s not a connection for them. But, if I’m talking about what they’re doing or putting them in this light of, like, they did something awesome at home, I feel like it’s just, “I belong here” Yeah, “I belong here.”

For Kasey, there was a direct link between drawing on students’ out-of-school experiences and communicating to them that school was a place where they belonged. In that sense, her desire to care for students led her to make connections to students’ out-of-school lives in the classroom, thereby validating their experiences and communicating that those experiences were valuable resources for learning.

“Is it really my business?” As discussed above, Kasey’s concern for her students’ feelings and her desire to care for them led her to make space for their out-of-school experiences in the classroom. However, Kasey’s understanding of herself as a caring teacher also prompted her to limit, at times, the extent to which she learned about and built on her students’ out-of-school worlds. In particular, Kasey was concerned with respecting the privacy of her ELL students and did not feel like she had the right to know everything about their lives that she might want to or to use what she did know in the classroom. This concern is evident in Kasey’s response when asked how she learned about her ELL students’ out-of-school lives. Kasey explained,

> Um, I think [pause], [sighs], it’s a little bit tricky I feel like, sometimes, you know, what you want to um, [pause], what to [pause], what’s just their business, you know? And, what happens at home is kind of, you can share it or you can not share it. Um, is it my, is it really, you know, my business to poke and prod into their world? Versus, hey I want to get to know you ’cause you’re a great kid. Versus, if I really get to know you and do a

> home visit and talk to you or talk to your family regularly and ask you about your weekend, that's an important part of your education. So, I feel like it's a little bit of a tricky fine line between being nosey but also it being purposeful in knowing about what their life is like.

Unlike Justin, who was proud of his "nosiness," Kasey saw being nosey as negative because it might lead her to overstep the boundaries of what she, as a teacher, had the right to know about her students. In that sense, Kasey's desire to care for her students by being respectful of them and their feelings sometimes acted as a constraint on her efforts to learn about their out-of-school lives.

Kasey's concern for her students' privacy also impacted the extent to which she drew on students' experiences in the classroom. More specifically, Kasey did not always feel like she had the right to decide which aspects of her ELL students' lives should be shared with the larger class. When asked if there were some out-of-school experiences that she was more willing to draw on in the classroom than others, Kasey responded:

> … I think that, just like what we were talking about, like, the line is tricky of how much, how curious you can be about their lives, right? […] Like, what's their own personal business versus what you can use to draw on to help them learn. […] I mean, with [these] fourth and fifth grade students that are bilingual Arabic-English, you know, I keep thinking about them just because, um, especially the fifth grader's so open about talking about, "Oh, I have a different culture at home. And, this is what it's like and …" She's so aware […] that, "Hmm, school's a different place than home and I do things differently at school than I do at home." And she's so, just, like, conscious about and verbal about it that, I think, you know, some things are [pause] just her business.

Her students' own awareness of the differences between their home and school worlds led Kasey to carefully consider how the students themselves might feel about her sharing certain aspects of their lives in the classroom. To that end, she often asked students if it was alright for her to share information about their lives with the rest of the class. As she explained,

> … if there is an example that I want to use in class […] you know, I just ask, "Can I … use it? This is a, this is a cool learning experience. Can I tell the class about that?" And, sometimes they'll say yeah and sometimes they'll be shy and say no and that's okay. But, I think, with older kids, or even with the younger kids, you know, just ask them. And sometimes that's a way for me to sort out, like, "Is this your own personal business?"

For Kasey, part of being a caring teacher meant trying to figure out what, in her words, was her business, and what was her students' personal business. Although she wanted to know her students as people and wanted to create a classroom environment that was inclusive of their experiences, she believed it was equally important to be respectful of her students' privacy and their right to have control over the parts of their lives that were or weren't shared with other students. In that sense, her interest in caring for students both encouraged Kasey to learn about and build on students' out-of-school worlds and, simultaneously, limited the extent to which she did so.

Quinn: "The relationship part makes teaching fun." Like Kasey, Quinn's desire to care for her students both encouraged and limited the extent to which she drew on her students' out-of-school experiences in the classroom. As noted in the previous chapter, at the time of our interview Quinn had just completed her first year of teaching. Although she was not ESL-certified, Quinn's mainstream fifth-grade classroom included a cluster of ELL students. A major

theme of the profile of Quinn presented in the previous chapter was her struggle as a new teacher to reconcile her desire to build close personal relationships with students and the realities of working in a school context that required she focus on standards-based teaching. Over the course of the year, she had come to view building on her students' out-of-school lives primarily as a tool she could use to help her students acquire school-based forms of knowledge. However, it was also evident that Quinn continued to value the personal connections she made with students and believed that building relationships with them was an important part of her job. This desire to build caring relationships shaped when and how Quinn made connections to her students' out-of-school worlds. Although Quinn believed it was important to show an interest in students' lives and let them know that she valued them and their experiences, she was also sensitive to the fact that her students did not feel comfortable sharing personal information with the rest of the class. This meant she kept the information she learned about their lives private and did not build on it extensively in the classroom.

"I wanted them to know I was genuinely interested." As noted above, Quinn saw relationship-building as a key part of her role as a teacher. I would argue that this interest in establishing close personal relationships with students reflects her belief that it was important for her, as a teacher, to care for her students. Quinn saw making connections to students' out-of-school worlds as an important way of establishing the relationships she desired. Indeed, when asked about the impact that learning about her students' out-of-school lives had on her on as a teacher, Quinn made it clear that she saw it as a means of demonstrating to students that she cared about them, explaining:

> It made teaching fun. Just like, so many, like, jokes or funny things that happen. Or, just […] like, little stuff. Like knowing what the kid wants for breakfast and being able to get

> that for them and then just sit it down in front of them, and they know they're taken care of. And the relationship aspect just makes teaching so much more fun.

Knowing her students well was important to Quinn because it allowed her to do things that made them feel cared for. It was also what made teaching enjoyable for her personally.

One of the ways in which Quinn learned about students' out-of-school lives and built relationships with them was to invite small groups of ELL students to have lunch with her, a practice she referred to as a "lunch bunch." During these lunch bunches, Quinn was able to establish close connections with students by talking to them about important things going on in their lives. As Quinn explained,

> Also, just with understanding, like, what's going on in their lives. They would really trust me with anything, too. Like, we, we talked about, like, home safety, [laughs], we talked about, one of the girls asked me about, like, menstruation and periods because she was comfortable enough, like at these lunch bunches. Like, so, I guess it was, our relationships were a lot closer than some of the other students in my classroom, and they were willing to come to me with stuff that even they weren't, like, I asked her if she talked with her mom about this stuff, she goes, "No, I just wanted to talk to you." So, it was like, I don't know. So, it wasn't, academically, it wasn't the most outward, like, oh I'm really excited. But, in a personal way, the kids were very excited that I was interested in where they were coming from and what's going on with them.

Quinn believed these small group interactions were powerful because they communicated to students that she was interested in their lives and because they provided her the opportunity to learn information about their lives that could be referenced later. Quinn described the dual purpose of the lunch bunches this way:

> I wanted to be more, like, genuinely more interested in what they were telling me. You know what I mean? Like, I wanted them to know I was genuinely interested, not just like, "Oh, hey. How are you doing?" Like, more than that. You know what I mean? I really wanted to take what I knew from them and then reference it back. I would always ask them about what's going on in their life and then check up on it. Or, try to come to it, if I could, stuff like that.

As the above quote makes clear, Quinn had a real desire to know her students as people. Moreover, by showing an interest in students' lives and giving them opportunities to share information about their lives in a safe environment, Quinn was able to form trusting relationships with them that meant that they felt comfortable enough to share personal information with her and ask her difficult questions.

"I kept it as a private thing." Quinn's decision to focus primarily on making connections with students in small group contexts like the lunch bunches was due, in large part, to the fact that her ELL students were reticent to share personal information in front of the whole class. As Quinn explained,

> Um, it would take a long time. A lot of them were really shy to talk about home or even embarrassed to talk in Spanish, which was so depressing to me. I was so sad about that. Um, it took a lot of relationship building and patience. They definitely do not, they would not talk about it immediately. That was something they were pretty quiet about. But, I would do lunch bunches a lot [laughs]. So, I'd have lunch with them.

Although Quinn was able to learn about her students' lives in these small group situations, she was hesitant to share that hard-won information with the rest of the class, noting:

> I kept it as a private thing just because they only were willing to talk to me about [it] in private. So, I figured it was best to keep it that way. Um, yeah, ’cause if I, if I asked – the one time I had K. [ELL student in Quinn’s class] translate that book that I was talking about, that was in May. Before that? No way. And it was, our group, um, of readers, there were only ten of them. She would never do it, um, in front of all twenty-four of us [laughs]. I don’t think so. So, yeah, I kept it more private, unfortunately.

Like Kasey, Quinn recognized that school did not always feel like a safe place for her ELL students to share their out-of-school experiences. As a result, protecting students’ privacy trumped any attempt to build on students’ out-of-school lives in more public ways. In that sense, Quinn’s concern for her students’ feelings and her desire to show them she cared about them led her to limit the extent to which she drew on students’ out-of-school lives in the classroom.

Quinn herself recognized the tension inherent in her desire to show students she was interested in their out-of-school lives and her decision not to share the information she learned publicly. As she explained,

> I wish I would have figured out a way to use it as more of a resource, but I wanted to respect how they felt about it too. So, you get in this weird position as a teacher. You’re like, “I want you […] to know I value this, but the only way to let you know that right now is to, kind of, keep it between us.” I don’t know.

Ironically, Quinn’s desire to show students that she valued the personal information they had shared with her meant that she elected not to incorporate it into her classroom instruction. Indeed, given her students’ reticence to share personal information with the class, Quinn believed that respecting their desire for privacy, and keeping the things she learned about them to herself, was a way of showing her students that she cared for them. Her concern for her students,

and her desire to be a caring teacher, limited the extent to which she was willing to draw on students' out-of-school experiences in the classroom.

In choosing to limit the extent to which they built on their ELL students' out-of-school experiences, both Quinn and Kasey offered an implicit critique of teaching approaches, like funds of knowledge, that rely on students and families sharing personal aspects of their lives in a public space. Both of these teachers recognized that school and classroom spaces did not always feel welcoming or safe to ELL students. They also recognized that asking students to share aspects of their personal lives – particularly when their out-of-school experiences differed from those of the dominant culture – required students to make themselves vulnerable in a way that might not feel comfortable to them. For Kasey and Quinn, the personal information they learned about students in an effort to build relationships with them was not necessarily meant for public consumption.

While I do believe that it is important to be respectful of children's privacy, choosing not to draw on ELLs' out-of-school lives also reinforces, perhaps inadvertently, the idea that these experiences are not relevant to classroom instruction, which could serve to further marginalize these students. Kasey was able to find a way to balance her concern for her ELL students' feelings with her desire to acknowledge their experiences in the classroom, thereby validating those experiences and supporting the creation of an expanded learning space. However, Quinn's decision to keep the information she learned about her students private meant that the knowledge and skills they had developed in out-of-school spaces were not positioned as important resources for learning, for them or for their peers. It also may have communicated to students that their experiences were not worthy of inclusion in the classroom.

Caring: Analysis. As the examples shared above demonstrate, participating teachers saw making connections with students' out of school worlds as a form of caring for a variety of reasons. They believed it allowed them to make the classroom a more comfortable place for students, one where ELLs, in particular, felt safe enough to take the risks they needed to learn a new language and acquire academic content material. Teachers also saw it as a way of forming personal relationships with students, which made students feel connected to school and contributed to their ability to learn. Additionally, they believed it showed students that they valued their out-of-school experiences, which helped ELLs feel proud of who they were and increased their sense of belonging. Intentionally incorporating students' out-of-school experiences into classroom instruction was also a way of acknowledging and addressing the fact that classrooms activities don't typically reflect the lives of students from non-dominant groups. In that sense, it can be seen as an example of teachers challenging the status quo, which tends to privilege the experiences of students from white, middle class backgrounds. This had the potential to validate the experiences ELL students brought to school with them, thereby leading to an expanded understanding of "what counts" as valuable knowledge and skills in the classroom.

However, the desire to care for students also meant that the participants featured above made decisions as teachers and educators that communicated a belief that it might not always be appropriate or possible for teachers to learn about and build on their students' out-of-school experiences in the extensive ways outlined in funds of knowledge theory. As such, these decisions function as an implicit critique of a funds of knowledge approach to teaching. For example, an approach like funds of knowledge is based on students and families sharing personal aspects of their lives with the larger class. However, as these teachers made clear, the classroom

space did not always feel safe enough for students to do this type of sharing. There was also a discomfort, expressed by Kasey, with asking students and families to share, just for the sake of sharing. This highlights that this type of approach to teaching may feel invasive to some students and families. The concerns expressed by these teachers related to drawing on students' out-of-school lives in the classroom explain why some teachers may limit the extent to which they publicly build on students' out-of-school worlds. Decisions like these reflect real concerns teachers have based on their desire to care for students and their lived knowledge of the contexts in which they work.

Justin's decision not to pursue a teaching career can also be read as a critique of approaches to teaching – like those proposed by funds of knowledge theorists – that require teachers to develop a deep knowledge of the out-of-school worlds of students and their families. Justin wanted his work to center on building close relationships with students and families, but believed he couldn't accomplish that goal as a teacher. In that sense, his story can be understood as a critique that is based on the time and the emotional labor that is required to implement in teaching approaches that are predicated on teachers having extensive knowledge of the out-of-school worlds of students and families. Justin noted that being tied to a classroom all day and being responsible for completing student assessments and planning reading groups would mean that he wouldn't have the time necessary to interact with families, form close relationships with them, and address their needs.[14] In his role as BES, Justin had the time, energy and knowledge

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[14] The issue of time was also mentioned by other teachers I interviewed. For example, both Quinn and Ainsley described getting lost in their students' lives or feeling like they were spending too much time getting to know their students on a personal level – something which they believed could get in the way of teaching the academic content material they were required to cover.

that was required to connect families with the resources they needed.[15] This is something that may have been harder for a teacher, particularly a classroom teacher, to do.

Facilitating Learning

In this section, I will examine how teachers' commitment to facilitating student learning shaped the ways in which they understood and enacted pedagogical strategies that involved learning about and drawing on students' out-of-school knowledge and experiences. I am using the term "facilitating learning" as a way of characterizing the references that study participants made to supporting their students' acquisition of academic knowledge and skills, as well as their English language development. In many cases, participating teachers made direct references to helping students master grade-level standards, access the required curriculum, and develop their English language skills. It also includes other, more general, mentions of making classroom content more accessible to students. The majority of teachers interviewed for this study made a connection between building on their ELL students' out-of-school worlds and facilitating these students' acquisition of academic knowledge and language skills. However, these connections were primarily ones that would be considered small-scale. Most, if not all, of the participating teachers based classroom activities on the standards and looked for opportunities to make connections to students' out-of-school lives when possible within that framework. They expressed that they did not feel like they had the time, or the freedom, to design and implement larger-scale projects based on students' out-of-school lives, as originally envisioned by funds of

[15] As noted in the previous chapter, this concern was also a theme in Elisa's interview. In particular, Elisa mentioned not feeling like she had the resources to address the economic issues the families with whom she worked were facing. She depended on other school staff members, like the BES and social worker, to learn about and address families' needs.

knowledge theorists (e.g., González et al., 2005; Moll, 1992a; Moll, 1997; Moll, 2000; Moll et al., 1992).

In response to questions about why they chose to build on ELL students' out-of-school lives, teachers said that doing so helped them facilitate student learning in a variety of ways. Their responses can be divided into two general categories. The first category was related to the belief that ELL students needed to be exposed to content material that was interesting to them and was relevant to and reflective of their lives and experiences. This was one of the principal reasons teachers gave for drawing on students' out-of-school lives. The second category was related to the belief that it was important to ensure that classroom content was comprehensible for ELL students. Bilingual Education Specialists (BES's) and English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers, in particular, talked about drawing on students' experiences as a way of scaffolding students' learning by making content comprehensible for them (Echevarría et al., 2008; Gibbons, 2015; Hadley, 2001).

The most common way in which participating teachers talked about building on students' out-of-school lives as a means of facilitating learning was in terms of increasing student engagement. Many participants believed this was particularly important for ELLs because the instructional materials used in classrooms did not always reflect their out-of-school experiences. Teachers expressed that drawing connections between students' out-of-school lives and classroom instruction was a way of making content more interesting or relevant to them, something which helped students become more engaged in lessons. One way in which teachers did this was to make connections between classroom content material and students' personal interests and/or experiences. Many teachers mentioned looking for a "hook" that would get students invested in a lesson. This included making references to popular video games, like

Minecraft, sports, and/or popular music during instructional activities. Another way in which teachers did this was to use instructional materials that were reflective of students' lived experiences and cultural backgrounds. For example, teachers chose books, or other reading materials, that reflected students' experiences or backgrounds in some way. Some teachers also talked about the importance of using culturally relevant examples when modelling classroom activities and others provided opportunities for students and families to share their cultural celebrations or traditions with the class.[16]

As stated previously, the second category of responses related to facilitating student learning had to do with the idea that building on students' out-of-school experiences supported their comprehension and retention of academic content material. Although this was mentioned by many study participants, it appeared most frequently in the interviews of teachers who were ESL-certified. These teachers made connections between building on students' out-of-school worlds and important concepts from ESL pedagogy, like comprehensible input, activating schema, and scaffolding (Echevarría et al., 2008; Gibbons, 2015; Hadley, 2001).

Although none of the teachers I interviewed used the term "activating schema," they did refer to the underlying idea – that building on students' background knowledge is a way make academic content material more comprehensible to them. Elisa's focus on "building on the known" is an example of this. One term that was used by many of the bilingual and ESL-certified teachers I interviewed was that of scaffolding. Scaffolding is a term that has been widely taken up in the field of ESL pedagogy (e.g., Echevarría et al., 2008; Gibbons, 2015). It

[16] According to González et al. (2005), focusing on students' cultural celebrations and traditions reflects a static, rather than processual, or practice-based, view of culture. While funds of knowledge theorists argue that viewing culture in this way is limiting, the teachers interviewed for this study did see a value in having students share these aspects of their lives. Indeed, almost every study participant mentioned these kinds of examples when describing how they built on their students' out-of-school experiences. Teachers believed it was a way of demonstrating that those experiences were valued in the classroom space and reported that students felt a sense of pride after sharing these kinds of things with their classmates.

refers to the idea that teachers working with ELL students must provide them with additional supports, or scaffolding, that make grade-level content presented in English accessible to them (Echevarría et al., 2008; Gibbons, 2015). Participating teachers talked about drawing on students' experiences as a way of scaffolding student learning by making content easier to comprehend. Indeed, one participant, Lily, who was unfamiliar with the term "funds of knowledge," opined that it sounded like scaffolding, a concept she was learning about in her ESL certification classes. As noted in the "Caring" section of this chapter, the ESL-trained teachers I interviewed also referred to another concept from ESL pedagogy – that of lowering students' affective filters (Krashen, 1982). This concept is connected to supporting student learning because it is predicated on the belief that making students feel comfortable and safe in the classroom facilitates second language acquisition. Because this concept focuses on how students feel in the classroom, I have chosen to categorize it as an example of caring for the purposes of this paper. However, this highlights the fact that caring and facilitating learning were very much intertwined for the study participants.

Connecting the idea of building on students' out-of-school worlds to one of their primary roles as teachers – facilitating student learning – led teachers to make room for students' lived experiences in the classroom. At times, teachers' willingness to draw on ELL students' funds of knowledge to support their acquisition of academic skills and to develop their linguistic proficiency positioned these students and their families as experts and created opportunities for children to see their experiences as resources for learning, even if those experiences were ones that are not normally included in classroom instruction. However, seeing the connections they made to students' out-of-school lives primarily as a way of facilitating learning did not always lead teachers to create expanded learning spaces. Rather, I found that, at times, these constrained

the extent to which some teachers were willing or able to draw on the knowledge and experiences that students had developed in out-of-school spaces.

Facilitating learning: Examples of practice. As I argued in the introduction to this chapter, teachers' decisions related to when and how to draw on students' out-of-school experiences can be read as an indication of what they saw as being possible given their larger understanding of their responsibilities as a teacher of ELLs and the types of support they believed these students needed. The four examples presented below illustrate both the ways in which an interest in supporting student learning encouraged participating teachers to draw on the out-of-school experiences and areas of expertise of their ELL students and the ways in which that concern discouraged that practice. Although there were two teachers, Andrea and Jenna, who found more extensive ways of incorporating students' experiences into their classroom instruction, I have chosen not to feature them here.[17] Instead, I chose to focus on examples that illustrate both the push teachers felt to draw on students' out-of-school experiences and the impulse to limit those connections if they weren't seen as directly related to academic learning.

Justin and Lily: "He got there, but in a way that he cared about." At times, teachers' understanding of a funds of knowledge approach as a means of facilitating student learning led them to provide students with opportunities to build on their out-of-school experiences in extended ways. One example of this is an immigration project described by two participants, Justin and Lily, in a joint interview. As noted above, Justin was trained as a teacher but had chosen to work as a bilingual liaison – a support position that involved acting as a liaison between immigrant families and the school. In this role, Justin spent time supporting students in

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[17] Both Andrea and Jenna are featured in other parts of this dissertation, including in the previous chapter and later in this chapter. It is my hope that the descriptions of their work that can be found elsewhere sufficiently capture the important work these two teachers were doing with regard to making connections to students' out-of-school worlds.

the classroom, but his role was closer to that of an aide than that of a teacher. Lily had just finished her second year working as a Bilingual Education Specialist (BES) at the same school. In that role, Lily, a biracial (white and Asian) woman in her early twenties, provided instructional support for ELL students enrolled in mainstream classrooms. Both Justin and Lily worked with a fifth-grade student who was an undocumented immigrant. As part of a social studies project on immigration, they had encouraged him to use the assignment as an opportunity to tell his story of coming to the United States, which involved spending time in a detention center – a subject that is not typically covered in a fifth-grade unit on immigration. Justin was aware of this, noting: "It's, I wouldn't be the one to be teaching the kids about, 'Oh, and this is what happens a kid's thrown in a jail cell.' But, he already knew [about] it [being in jail] and, [we said] 'Okay, we'll support you while you learn more 'cause that's what you want to do."

Encouraging this student to tell his story led him to engage in a variety of important academic activities, including reading about other people's immigration experiences and interviewing another immigrant, in a way that was meaningful to him. As Justin explained: "It let him pull in the reading and the writing. He got there but in the way that he cared about." It also increased the student's engagement with the required social studies curriculum. Lily described the impact the project had on the student, explaining,

> … immigration is, like, part of their social studies curriculum. But, because he had that experience, it kind of motivated him to, like, take it even further and, like, to do this big project on it and he interviewed someone about it, he read a lot of different stories, um, in books, um, like firsthand experiences. Um, so, yeah, I mean it connected to the social studies unit, but, I mean, that project was so much more useful than just that unit alone could ever be for anyone [laughs].

The fact that the topic of immigration was one that was directly related to the social studies curriculum may have been one reason why Justin and Lily were open to allowing their student to draw so extensively on his out-of-school experiences. Justin and Lily saw the project as a way of supporting his academic learning and, thus, aligned with one of their primary goals as educators.

However, the immigration project carried out by Justin and Lily's student didn't just support the acquisition of academic content knowledge. Beyond providing the student with a meaningful context for learning new academic skills, the project also positioned him as an expert on immigration and re-positioned his arguably negative experience as a valuable resource on which to draw. Justin was aware of this fact, explaining,

> It's important to help remind them that anything you've done is, it's your experience. I'm thinking of one little guy last year that Lily had. Lil had to help him write some of this […] huge research project. I don't know how many months you all worked on it, but his was all based on the fact of, "When I was crossing the border and put in an immigration detention center." Somehow, she [Lily] tied it into social studies standards and government, but it was built off of what he knew that his classmates didn't know. They've never had that, but he knew it and, okay!

In choosing to encourage this student to explore his immigration experiences and make public the fact that he had been detained as a part of the immigration process, Justin and Lily made a different decision than the ones made by Kasey and Quinn described in the "Caring" section, above. Kasey and Quinn recognized that students might not feel safe sharing highly personal parts of their lives with other students and, as a result, they limited the extent to which they asked children to share personal information with the class. Justin and Lily, on the other hand, chose to let their student publicly share information that might put him at risk, namely his immigration

status, because they believed that it was an important way of validating his experiences and communicating to him that it was a valuable resource for learning.

As the above example demonstrates, finding connections between content material and students' personal experiences can lead to the creation of classroom spaces where teachers' and students' understanding of "what counts" as valuable knowledge is greatly expanded. However, understanding funds of knowledge-related teaching practices primarily as a means of facilitating learning does not always lead teachers to create expanded learning spaces. Rather, I found that the connection participating teachers made between building on ELLs' out-of-school experiences and the acquisition of academic knowledge and language also constrained the extent to which some teachers were willing or able to draw on the expertise that students had developed in out-of-school spaces. As I will discuss below, this was true both for Justin and Lily and for other study participants.

Justin and Lily: "We don't just need to teach Minecraft." Although Justin and Lily were happy to let their student explore the topic of immigration in depth, they were less sure about the extent to which other topics, particularly those related to students' personal or popular culture-related interests, should be incorporated into classroom instruction. While Lily and Justin did draw on those topics, like the majority of teachers interviewed for this study, they largely looked for small ways to make connections between students' interests and areas of expertise and academic language or content material. This was something Lily, in particular, reported doing as a part of her regular teaching practice, primarily as a way of engaging students or scaffolding their comprehension of content material.

Lily specifically mentioned using her students' knowledge of sports and videogames as a way of supporting their comprehension of academic content material. For example, she

recounted drawing on her students' interest in sports to help them understand the concept of visualization, explaining,

> … I taught a lesson about, like, synthesizing last year and so, like, putting all these pieces together. And so […] I related it, I knew that the majority of my kids […] who tended to, like, have a more difficult time, like, understanding, um, and relating to a lesson, really liked sports. [laughs] […] They were just really interested in that and they would talk about it all the time. So, um, I used, like, the example of, like, visualizing. So, like, if you just are seeing the person, like, dribble and make a basket and then, um, you're asking questions in your head like, "Oh, I wonder if that counted?" Or, you know, "I wonder what, what's going to happen next. Um, and, like, taking that experience, um, and then, like, relating it and saying, "Well, when you're doing a book, you should be doing the same kinds of things."

As is evident in the quote above, Lily viewed the sports-related knowledge that her students had developed outside of school as an important resource for learning and she tapped into that knowledge as a way of helping her students understand an abstract academic concept, like synthesis. This was also undoubtedly powerful for the students, who saw that their expertise was a resource on which they could draw on in academic settings.

Despite this, Lily expressed some doubts with regards to the academic value of topics, like sports, that were related to students' out-of-school interests, as did Justin. Indeed, it appeared that neither Lily nor Justin necessarily saw students' areas of interest as potential topics for more in-depth exploration in the classroom. This was evident in their description of their students' enthusiasm for Minecraft, a popular videogame. On the one hand, Lily and Justin

recognized that making connections to a topic like Minecraft was a powerful way of engaging students and supporting their learning. Lily explained,

> You'd be surprised how many things kids can connect to Minecraft [laughs]. I don't know if that's exactly a positive thing. But, like we were reading a, […] there's a book on spiders that we were reading and they saw the word "paralyzed." So, the spider's venom paralyzed its prey. And they were like, "Oh, 'paralyze'!" And we talked about what "paralyze" meant. They're like, "Oh, that's like in Minecraft! You have a paralyze," um, I don't know what they call it, "trick" or something, I don't know [laughs].

Lily's quote makes it clear that she recognized the potential of a topic like Minecraft to contribute to student learning. In the example she gave, her students' Minecraft-related expertise did not just function as a hook, but rather served as source of valuable information on which students were able to draw in order to make sense of a difficult vocabulary word they had encountered while reading. However, as her comment "I don't know if that's exactly a positive thing" indicates that Lily also harbored some doubts regarding the academic value of this kind of connection.

This hesitation to fully accept students' popular culture-related interests as valuable sources of knowledge in a classroom setting is particularly evident in the following exchange from Justin and Lily's interview, which took place right after Lily's description of her students' use of their Minecraft-related knowledge to understand the word "paralyze."

> L: But, I'm like, "Well, it's good that you know that name, but …" [laughs]. I do think that it should [be] less about video games, though. And more about, like …
>
> J: We don't just need to teach Minecraft.
>
> L: No. We do not [laughs].

J: [laughs] But, it does work.

L: It, yeah, it, I mean, it has helped them in some things, but …

J: They have their paralyzing spell. There's levitation something or other.

L: Yep.

J: So, you have to combine the flint with the other thing to make the sparks. They ignite. Um, okay, that's all well and good. I'm building off your background knowledge, but mm-mm-mm [doubtful sounding noise]. I'll take it if it's all we got. Yeah, [laughs].

Even as they acknowledged that building on students' interest in and knowledge of Minecraft "does work," both Justin and Lily expressed the belief that they should limit the extent to which they incorporated discussion of videogames into classroom instruction. As Justin's comment, "I'll take it, if it's all we got," indicates, he did not view all types of out-of-school experiences as being equally valuable. Unlike the topic of immigration, which was directly related to the school-sanctioned curriculum and Justin and Lily embraced, Minecraft didn't appear to fit with their understanding of what "real" academic learning was supposed to look like.

As the examples discussed above illustrate, understanding connections to students' out-of-school experiences as a strategy for facilitating student learning both encouraged Justin and Lily to seek out these connections and limited they extent to which they did so. In some cases, when students' areas of expertise aligned with the curriculum, they were willing to provide opportunities for students to make more in-depth connections with their out-of-school worlds. However, in other cases Justin and Lily's understanding of what constituted "real," or academic, learning constrained that work. Their student's experience with immigration was directly linked to the school-sanctioned curriculum and was thus seen as worthy of further study. However, topics like sports and Minecraft were not seen as potential points of leverage (Lee, 2007), or

areas of expertise that could be built on in more sustained ways. Instead, they were seen primarily as topics that were suitable to small-scale, in-the-moment connections that were employed to make an academic concept or skill more comprehensible and/or interesting to students.

Anna: "It just hooks them." Anna was another study participant who made a distinction between students' popular culture-based interests and "real" or academic learning. A white woman in her early forties who had been teaching for over twenty years, Anna was a BES who worked at the same elementary school as Justin and Lily, a position she had held for eight years. Like Justin and Lily, Anna recognized that tapping into the areas of expertise her students had developed in non-school-based settings was a powerful way of supporting their learning of academic content and language. In particular, she saw making connections with students' out-of-school worlds as a way of making content relevant to students and increasing student engagement. As she explained,

> Like, if you just, like, start presenting information and you don't take time to find out what they already know, what their experiences have been with that concept it's a lot harder, I think, to get them to relate to what you're teaching them. But, when you take the time to do that, I feel like it just hooks them. Um, and so, I think I've done it and I think I've not done it and I've seen, like, you know, [pause] it works.

Like Lily and Justin, Anna primarily built on her students' out-of-school experiences and areas of expertise in small-scale ways. When asked how she drew on students' out-of-school worlds, she responded "You know, so it's just, like, those little incidental ways of making connections." The connections that Anna made were typically not planned out. Rather they were small connections that she made in-the-moment between content material and students' lives. They

often consisted of references to students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds, like mentioning the Spanish word for something she was discussing with students or referring to a type of food the students might eat at home.

"Now, every time he sees me, he's talking to me about Pokémon." Although most of the examples of building on students' out-of-school worlds that Anna provided during our interview consisted of the small-scale connections described above, she did point to one example of a larger-scale connection that she made to an area of expertise possessed by one of her students. When asked to share how she built on students' out-of-school knowledge and experiences, Anna described her attempts to build on a shy ELL student's deep interest in and knowledge of Pokémon. As a BES, supporting her students' linguistic development was an important goal for Anna. It was her interest in helping this student practice his English-language skills that led her to learn more about his out-of-school world. As Anna explained,

> Okay, so I've got this little guy who went from a [level] one to a three and I'm really, really trying hard, [laughing], to get him to say more and talk all the time. And so, his mom and I met and […] we decided we're going to give him Pokémon cards for talking all the time, 'cause he loves that.

In this case, Anna saw tapping into her student's interests as a way of increasing his engagement in classroom activities that were designed to help him move up a level on the linguistic (English) proficiency scale.

Although she was initially planning on using Pokémon cards only as an incentive for his participation in small group discussions, Anna's acknowledgement of her student's interest in Pokémon did lead to more meaningful connections. Upon seeing how excited her student became when she gave him the cards, Anna decided to bring in more Pokémon-related materials

to share with him and to engage in one-on-one discussions with him about those materials. In the quote below, Anna describes how, together, she and her student looked at Pokémon books and discussed the names of different characters, speculating about the possible meanings of those names. Anna explained,

> … one day he was, [laughs], he was so sad that he didn't get a Pokémon card. But, then I brought in, like, books for him to look at […] and now, every time he sees me, he's talking to me about Pokémon. And, I have no idea what he's saying. But, he's talking and he, it's unbelievable, he pronounces these crazy names of these Pokémon characters and, you know, like one of them was Sewaddle and he was in a, it was like a little caterpillar wrapped in a leaf or something. [I said] "Oh, like 'swaddle,' a baby, was 'swaddle[d]'."

Anna's desire to facilitate her student's acquisition of English by encouraging him to participate in class discussions led her to seek out information about his outside interests and, ultimately, to find ways to tap into that interest in order to further extend his language learning.

The connection that Anna made to her student's interest in Pokémon had an impact both on her and the student. It encouraged the student to speak more in school, which was Anna's original intent. However, it also opened up a space for literacy activities, like reading books about Pokémon characters and discussing the meanings of their names, which touched on a topic from popular culture that is not traditionally valued in classroom settings but that was personally meaningful to the student. Additionally, as is evident in the quote above, it led Anna to develop an appreciation for the depth of her student's expertise in this area, including his ability to remember and pronounce the complicated names of Pokémon characters. It that sense, it helped her re-value his knowledge of popular culture. These interactions also positioned the student as an expert and allowed him to draw on his expertise in a classroom setting.

"You can't always just stick with their interests." Anna herself seemed to recognize how powerful her willingness to draw on his interest in Pokémon had been for her student and even saw possibilities for further incorporating that topic into classroom instruction. Anna reported that she had considered designing a writing project based on the Pokémon characters on the cards she had given her student. As she explained,

> And I think that there's more I could do there. […] I was thinking more about it. Like, there's an app on the iPad called Educreations and I was thinking, "Well, we could take a picture of the card and then he could, like, dictate what he knows about that card and even make, like, a little slide show, like all the cards he got for that week or something like that and …" I mean, we could definitely go further.

For Anna, the experience of incorporating her student's interest in Pokémon into classroom activities had helped her develop a more positive assessment of an area of expertise possessed by the student, re-casting that knowledge as a potential resource for academic learning. As a result, she had considered designing instructional activities that would have allowed her student to draw on that expertise in an even more extensive way.

Ultimately, however, Anna decided that the writing project she envisioned was not one she should pursue further because, in her mind, it did not involve using academic language. She explained,

> But, you know, that's kind of, somewhat social language and so, like, trying to build that academic language is sometimes a little bit, [pause], more difficult. So, I think, you can't always just stick with their interests or it sometimes is a little bit limiting. So, our job is to always kind of push them into something maybe that's a little harder for them.

Anna's larger commitment to developing her student's academic language led her to reject a project that would have provided that student with rich opportunities to use spoken and written language to communicate about a topic that was meaningful to him.

Anna's understanding of what constituted "real" academic learning kept her from recognizing the potential for academic and linguistic development, specifically in the areas of reading and writing, inherent in a project that was based on her student's deep knowledge of a particular domain of popular culture. Like Justin and Lily, Anna did see her student's Pokémon-related expertise as a point of leverage (Lee, 2007) that could be used to support academic learning. However, her understanding of her role as a teacher, and specifically as a teacher tasked with supporting her ELL students' acquisition of academic English in this case limited the extent to which was she willing to build on her student's knowledge of a topic from popular culture that is not typically considered appropriate for inclusion in school-based settings.

Quinn: "School has to be different." Like Anna, Quinn's understanding of what counted as "academically valuable" limited the extent to which she built on her students' out-of-school experiences. As was discussed in the previous chapter, Quinn's focus on facilitating her students' learning, which had become her primary goal over her first year of teaching, acted as a factor that both encouraged her to build on her students' out-of-school worlds and limited the extent to which she did so. Although Quinn had entered the classroom planning to base her instruction on students' experiences, she had come to believe that she must focus first on covering the state standards. By the end of her first year of teaching, Quinn saw making connections to students' out-of-school worlds principally as a means of helping them master grade-level standards. In particular, she viewed it as a way of increasing student engagement in classroom activities. Quinn explained her approach this way:

> … you can change the content so it’s relevant and use their funds of knowledge to teach them how to do something. […] It’s like looking at, like, all the standards that you need to meet and you’re like, “Okay, this is what I need to do. Now, how can I change this so it’s actually interesting to them?”

As a result, Quinn limited the connections she made to topics that she saw as being relevant to the standards she was charged with teaching.

Different names for the police. Like the other teachers described in this section, and most of the other teachers who participated in this study, Quinn mainly looked for small-scale ways in which she could make connections between the academic content material she had to cover and her students’ out-of-school experiences. However, Quinn offered a few examples of more significant attempts she made to build on her students’ out-of-school experiences, including a vocabulary lesson she led that explored different terms that students used to refer to the police. Quinn’s description of this lesson captures her struggle to reconcile the desire to teach students about topics that were personally meaningful to them with the pressure she felt to ensure her students successfully acquired grade-level content material.

Quinn initially saw her lesson about names people call the police as an opportunity to engage her students in a vocabulary-related discussion that touched on a topic that was relevant to their lives. As she explained,

> For example, I did a lesson on vocabulary once and we talked about different names for the police, ’cause we had [the] [S.A.F.E.] program [police-led safety education program for elementary-school students] going on. So, we had an officer come in every week and talk about, like, alcohol, drugs, whatever, stuff like that. [...] And, we talked about

> different names of the police and we openly discussed, like, 'po-po' versus, I think even, like, 'pigs' came up, at one point.

The lesson Quinn describes provided her students with an opportunity to draw on their own experiences with the police and may have prompted them to consider larger sociopolitical issues – like why people use different terms to refer to the police and what that says more broadly about the way police interact with different types of communities. These kinds of conversations can contribute to the creation of an expanded learning space where topics that are not usually discussed in classroom settings, like differing attitudes towards the police, are taken up and explored.[18] The activity Quinn describes also could have, and may have, functioned as an opportunity for students to practice important academic skills while discussing an issue of importance to them. For example, participating in a discussion like the one Quinn describes could encourage students to think critically, make an argument for their own point of view, and see things from other people's perspectives, all valuable academic skills.

"Is this academically valuable?" Despite the potential positive impact that conversations like the one Quinn described might have on students and the classroom space, Quinn herself did not recognize the academic value of the activity. Indeed, she ultimately decided that the lesson was not one she would repeat. As Quinn explained,

> And, looking back at that lesson, I was trying to figure out the academic value of it. I was like, "Is this just a lesson that I think is important because I think that everybody needs to know different names for police and why it's important to call them one thing versus another? Or, is this academically valuable?" And, that's where I think, as a first-year

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[18] This type of conversation is one that some CHAT theorists advocate having with students in order to help them develop sociocritical literacies (Pacheco & Gutiérrez, 2009). These types of discussions, it is posited, provide students with opportunities to explore social justice issues relevant to their own lives, while also practicing important academic skills.

> teacher I kind of separated it. Are these funds of knowledge helpful to everyone? In, you know what I mean? That, even though I think it's important that, you know, we have an open discussion about why not to call police officers pigs, does this help them in the long run, academically? No. I'm not going to do that lesson again.

Although Quinn felt the topic was an important one to address with her students, she did not see a clear connection between it and the standards she was required to teach her students. For that reason, she concluded that the lesson was not "academically valuable" and decided it was one she wouldn't do again.

Quinn's interest in facilitating her students' learning, and her commitment to social justice teaching, initially led her to design a lesson based on her students' out-of-school experiences. However, it was also her focus on supporting her students' learning, and her limited definition of what that meant, that ultimately discouraged her from further pursuing the topic. Quinn's definition of "academically valuable" was narrowly focused on the acquisition of school-based knowledge and forms of language. When asked what the term "academically valuable" meant to her, Quinn responded. "I think academically valuable is recognizing what they want you to do in middle school, high school, and college […] and for career. Like, having them understand how to write, how to read, things like that." Given her focus on preparing her students for future schooling, it was difficult for Quinn to recognize the academic value in the exploration of a topic that was not explicitly related to the standards or one that was not part of the school-sanctioned curriculum. As Quinn herself explained,

> So, because, well, we had a police officer come in, so I thought it was a valuable discussion like that, because a lot of them had very negative views of the police officer

> coming in. But, in the same, uhh, I'm going back and forth on this, in the same breath, what standard am I meeting?

In Quinn's view, in order for a lesson to be academically valuable, and therefore worthy of inclusion in a classroom setting, it had to explicitly address the standards in some way.

Although she doesn't say it explicitly, it is also possible that Quinn herself may have been uncomfortable with the topic and the ensuing conversation. Based on her description of the lesson, it appears that Quinn saw the conversation as a way to get her students to understand why they shouldn't use negative names for the police and to help them develop more positive views of them. This was something she believed was important to do in order to help students feel better about having a police officer come into their classroom on a regular basis. However, Quinn's negative assessment of the conversation that ensued may indicate a discomfort with addressing controversial topics in the classroom, ones that elicit strong opinions on both sides. Quinn's discomfort may also have been related to her belief that school should be different than home and that the types of topics discussed in out-of-school settings were not always appropriate for inclusion in classrooms. As Quinn explained,

> So, you don't want to bring […] every single thing that a kid does at home into a school, because school has to be different. Right? You can't, the way that they act home is going to be different than the way they act at school, and having open discussions about that is important. However, that doesn't mean that it has to be a completely separate entity. It's still connected. But, there's certain expectations that can't transfer from home to school.

Given the distinction she made between home and school worlds, Quinn may have believed that a discussion about her students' negative views of the police was not appropriate in a classroom setting.

It's possible that this discomfort was reinforced by the fact that Quinn saw drawing on students' out-of-school worlds primarily as a way to get them interested in the subject matter being presented. This focus on engagement may have limited the types of topics Quinn thought were appropriate to incorporate into classroom instruction. Rather than seeing this approach to teaching as a way of helping students develop critical literacy skills or understand multiple viewpoints, Quinn saw it as a hook. For that reason, she may have believed that the connections she made to students' out-of-school experiences should be limited to non-controversial topics that could be easily related to the content material she was teaching.

Quinn's characterization of her class's discussion about the police as not "academically valuable" highlights that it can be difficult for teachers to truly expand their understanding of "what counts" as valuable knowledge in classroom spaces. It also illustrates the ways in which the continued privileging of school-based forms of knowledge limited both the extent to which some teachers drew on their students' out-of-school experiences and the types of topics they considered appropriate for classroom discussion. Like Justin, Lily, and Anna, who did not see their students' popular culture-related interests as sources for extended exploration, Quinn did not view her students' experiences with the police, which may have been more negative than her own, as a topic that lent itself to "academically valuable" learning.

Facilitating learning: Analysis. As is evident from the four examples shared above, building on students' out-of-school experiences allowed study participants to support student learning in a variety of important ways. In particular, it allowed them to address their ELL students' academic and language learning needs. It increased student engagement by exposing students to content that was relevant to their lives and/or reflective of their personal interests. As Justin put it, students "got there … in the way that [they] cared about." It also provided students

with opportunities to draw on their schema, or background knowledge, which in turn supported their comprehension and acquisition of classroom content. In the words of the teachers interviewed for this study, it allowed teachers to provide students with the scaffolding they needed to access academic content material.

In some cases, the connections these teachers made to their students' out-of-school experiences re-cast those experiences as valuable resources for academic learning and contributed to the creation of an expanded learning space where students were able to make use of their cultural and linguistic toolkits (Gutiérrez and Rogoff, 2003; Gutiérrez et al., 2003). At times, it also prompted teachers to re-value students' areas of knowledge – particularly related to topics from popular culture, such as Minecraft and Pokémon. This, in turn, may have helped students see their areas of expertise as "points of leverage," or skills that were aligned with the academic skills they were expected to develop in school and, as such, could be applied in classroom settings (Lee 2007).

The examples above also illustrate that participating teachers' interest in supporting student learning at times led them to limit the extent to which they drew on students' out-of-school lives, particularly in terms of the types of experiences or areas of expertise they saw as being worthy of sustained exploration in the classroom. More specifically, it appeared to be difficult for teachers to see the academic value in topics, like video games, Pokémon, and students' negative experiences with the police, that are not typically included in classroom instruction. While teachers made small-scale, in-the-moment connections to these types of expertise, they were less willing to build on them in a sustained way. This illustrates the difficulty of challenging long held and institutionally-sanctioned beliefs about "what counts" as valuable knowledge and skills in a classroom setting.

As noted previously, participants' decisions about when and how to build on students' out-of-school worlds can also be read as a critique of funds of knowledge theory, rather than simply as a misunderstanding of that theory. In the case of the examples shared above, this critique was based on what these participants saw as being possible for them to accomplish given their understanding of their role as teachers, particularly in relation to supporting their students' acquisition of school-based forms of knowledge and language. As facilitators of students' learning, participants believed that the connections they made to students' lives had to be relevant to the content material or language skills they were teaching. This highlights the fact that teachers did not feel they had the time or the freedom to cover topics that were not part of the district-sanctioned curriculum or aligned to academic content or language in some way.

Another critique implicit in the decisions teachers made about building on students' out-of-school lives was related to the belief that, as Quinn put it, "school needs to be different." In some cases, this meant that teachers made a distinction between topics that they saw as being directly related to academic instruction, like immigration, and others they didn't, like Minecraft or Pokémon. In other cases, teachers believed that some topics, like negative experiences with the police, were not appropriate for inclusion in classroom spaces. While this could be seen as a failure to fully embrace an expanded understanding of "what counts" as valuable knowledge and skills in a school-based setting, it also points two areas of concern teachers had about building on students' out-of-school worlds as a means of facilitating student learning. First, it highlights the fact that some teachers believed they had a responsibility to push students beyond their own personal experiences in order to acquire academic discourses. Second, it points to the discomfort teachers may feel when opening the classroom space to controversial topics and highlights the

fact that this kind of teaching may involve teachers taking risks that push them outside their comfort zone.

Addressing Equity

Another reason that some teachers interviewed for this study believed it was important to build on students' out-of-school worlds was that they saw it as a way of addressing social justice or equity-related issues with students. By this I mean a focus on helping students grapple with difficult issues related to fairness and equity in society at large.[19] The teachers who mentioned this goal had been influenced by politically-engaged educational approaches, like teaching for social justice (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009; Dover, 2013; McDonald & Zeichner, 2009) and multicultural education (Sleeter & Bernal, 2004). These teachers expressed a desire to include multiple points of view and to expose students to stories that aren't always included in classroom settings. They believed that including different voices in the classroom would help students understand that their experience of the world was not the only one. In exploring the experiences of a diverse range of people and groups, these teachers also tried to help their students develop a sense of what was or wasn't equitable or just about the society in which they lived.[20]

[19] I see this as being different than an interest in equity or social justice, expressed by some of the teachers profiled in the previous chapter, that was based in providing ELL students with equitable access to academic success. In those cases, teachers wanted to level the playing field for English Language Learners by providing them and their families with the support they needed to successfully navigate school norms/expectations and acquire school-based knowledge and skills. In that sense, those teachers – most notably Quinn and Elisa – saw facilitating their students' acquisition of school-based discourses as a way of working for social justice.

[20] The desire to validate students' out-of-school lives, discussed above, could also be seen as a part of this category. After all, it involves opening the classroom to the experiences of children from non-dominant groups – ones that are not typically included in classroom activities. However, I decided to categorize this interest in validating students' experiences as an example of teachers wanting to care for students, rather than as an example of addressing equity. A few teachers in this study did link their wish to validate students' experiences to an interest in expanding "what counts" as appropriate knowledge in a classroom setting. However, for the majority of the teachers, the desire to validate students' experiences by including them in classroom instruction appeared to be more focused on the impact this would have on the individual child and how he/she felt in the classroom than on exploring the way power operates in society. For that reason, I see it as more related to caring and discussed it in that section of this chapter.

This commitment to teaching for social justice encouraged teachers to build on students' out-of-school lives. Indeed, one of the primary ways in which these teachers accomplished this goal was to invite students and families, especially those from non-dominant groups, like ELLs, to share their experiences with the class. By intentionally opening the classroom to the experiences of people from non-dominant groups, these teachers took up the critical, or politically-committed, aspects of a funds of knowledge approach to teaching in ways that other study participants didn't. However, these teachers' interest in exposing students to worlds beyond their own also meant that they were wary of focusing only on students' own experiences, something which they saw as potentially limiting. They also wondered if it was fair to focus primarily on the experiences of students whose parents were able to make time to visit the classroom. Below, I present examples taken from the interviews of two teachers, Rachel and Andrea, that illustrate how an interest in addressing equity both encouraged teachers to build on their students' out-of-school experiences and limited the extent to which they did so.

Addressing equity: Examples of practice. Of the thirteen teachers interviewed for this study, Andrea and Rachel were the ones who gave voice most explicitly to a desire to engage in a social justice approach to teaching – one that involved exposing children to multiple viewpoints and discussing complicated issues like racial and economic inequities with their young students. Although other teachers mentioned some of the same ideas, like inviting family members and/or community members into the classroom in order to show students that it was a space where their experiences were valued, Rachel and Andrea talked about doing this explicitly in terms of addressing social justice issues with students.

Andrea and Rachel were teachers in a two-way bilingual program (TWB) at the same K-5 elementary school. In addition to being colleagues, Andrea and Rachel were friends. Their

friendship appeared to be based, in part, on the fact that both had small children, but also on a shared interest in teaching in a politically-committed way. For both of them, this commitment to teaching for social justice led them to draw on students' out-of-school experiences in certain ways. However, it also led them to question the idea that, in order to be culturally responsive, teachers should primarily base their instruction on students' own experiences. Both Andrea and Rachel mentioned believing that a focus on the personal, while undoubtedly important, could also be limiting for students, and both felt that it was also important to expose students to experiences beyond their own and those of other students in the classroom.

Rachel: An advocate for families and students. Rachel taught kindergarten in her school's TWB program, a position she had held for five of the seven years she'd been teaching.[21] This meant that her class consisted of a mixed group of native English-speakers and native Spanish-speakers who received instruction in both languages. An African-American woman in her early thirties, Rachel was one of only two teachers of color interviewed for this study. Rachel was married to a man from Mexico and, thus, had a personal connection to Prairie Town's Latino community. During our interview, she recounted meeting many of her students and their families at her husband's soccer games and at a family member's quinceañera. Rachel was more openly critical of the district and school in which she worked than many of the other teachers I interviewed. In particular, she believed that the district was not doing enough to meet the needs of students of color or students with mental health needs.[22]

[21] Rachel was the only teacher interviewed for this study who did not consent to having her interview quoted directly. I have tried to summarize her words in a way that captures the thoughts and experiences that she shared with me during our conversation as accurately as possible.

[22] This was both a professional and a personal concern for Rachel. At the time of our interview, Rachel was struggling with the decision of whether or not to send her own daughter to kindergarten in the district. Based on what she had witnessed as a teacher and what she had learned from families of color who had students enrolled in the district, Rachel was not sure her daughter would receive an equitable education if she attended one of the district's elementary schools.

Rachel's beliefs about teaching were informed in large part by her own experiences growing up in a large urban center, as well as her more recent experiences as a person of color in the majority-white city where she now lived and taught. She valued the exposure she had had as a child to people from different backgrounds, which she believed had helped her understand that not everyone experienced the world in the same way. Rachel expressed frustration that her colleagues did not have the same breadth of experiences that she had and, in her estimation, were less interested in exposing their students to a diversity of viewpoints than she was.

Throughout her interview, Rachel positioned herself as someone who cared about social justice issues, both in and out of the classroom. One way in which she acted on this was to advocate for her students of color, including her ELL students, and their families. Sometimes this involved working directly with families who needed help. In one case, she and her principal found legal help for one of her student's mothers, who was being detained for an immigration violation. Rachel also advocated for her students more generally within her school community, actively calling her colleagues' attention to the needs of students of color and promoting the district's work on culturally responsive teaching.

In addition to being an advocate herself, Rachel worked to empower families to advocate for their children to ensure that their needs were met by the school and/or district. For example, she described conversations she had with the parents of her students, telling them what to do to ensure that their children received the services that were due to them. Rachel knew that making families aware of the inequities inherent in the school system and telling them how to address those inequities carried a risk for her. Indeed, she recounted often asking herself how to accomplish this task in a way that would not result in losing her job. Rachel also knew that her advocacy could potentially isolate her from her colleagues. She was acutely aware of being the

only African-American teacher on staff at her school and of often being the lone voice of dissent in discussions she had with other teachers about how to best meet the needs of students of color at her school.

When asked why she believed it was important to build on students' out-of-school experiences, the reasons Rachel gave were closely related to her desire to be an advocate for her students of color and their families. Rachel stated that making connections with her students' out-of-school worlds was a way of legitimizing their experiences. She also saw it as a way of communicating to students and their families that she cared about the children's success and that she was ensuring that they were getting the support they needed to succeed. Rachel primarily built on students' out-of-school experiences in small-scale ways, including asking questions designed to encourage certain student to share their experiences during whole class discussions; using language that was familiar to students to discipline them; and incorporating popular music and/or dancing into her classroom instruction. Rachel also invited family members and community members into the classroom to share experiences that were relevant to instructional units she was teaching.

Multiple viewpoints. Perhaps the most significant way in which Rachel's interest in addressing issues of equity encouraged her to build on her students' out-of-school worlds was through her attempts to expose students to multiple viewpoints. The idea that it was important to teach students that there was a world beyond their own was a recurrent theme in Rachel's interview. As a result of her own experiences growing up in a diverse community, Rachel believed it was important to expose her students to points of view that were different from their own. This led her incorporate her students' out-of-school experiences into classroom activities in a variety of ways. Rachel reported that when she planned units of study she considered the

standard(s) she was required to address and then asked herself what it was important for students to know about that particular topic that they might not be exposed to in the course of their daily lives in Prairie Town. This led her to incorporate perspectives that differed from those of the dominant culture into her lessons, something that she sometimes accomplished by inviting parents of different backgrounds and Spanish-speaking members of the community into the classroom to share their experiences with students.

Rachel’s interest in exposing her students to different points of view also led her to discuss overtly political, or social justice-related, topics with her students, like discrimination and the struggle for civil rights. Given the young age of her students, Rachel approached these discussions by making connections to students’ own lives. This is another example of how Rachel’s desire to teach her students that people experienced the world differently, and not necessarily equitably, encouraged her to build on students’ own lives. When she taught students about the civil rights movement, Rachel framed it as people effecting change and encouraged her students to consider how they could do the same in their lives. When addressing the topic of discrimination, Rachel connected the issue to students’ own experiences, openly discussing issues like skin color and how students could respectfully refer to people who were of different races than they were. She also taught students to be respectful of the differing linguistic backgrounds and abilities of their peers. This was an issue of particular importance in her TWB class, which included both native English-speakers and native Spanish-speakers.

Exposing students to a world beyond their own. Although Rachel’s interest in addressing issues of equity and exposing her students to multiple viewpoints did encourage her to make connections to her students’ out-of-school worlds, it also contributed to a belief that building on students’ experiences could be limiting. Indeed, in some respects, Rachel appeared to be less

interested in building on students' out-of-school worlds than she was in helping them see things from different perspectives. This was perhaps most evident in Rachel's description of a running disagreement she had with the other kindergarten teachers at her school regarding the types of celebrations that should be studied as part of a yearly unit on celebrations. Rachel described trying to convince her grade-level team to include traditions and holidays that weren't necessarily celebrated by anyone in the class in order to expose them to worlds beyond their own. Although her colleagues were willing to teach students about Las Posadas, a Mexican Christmas tradition, and perhaps Hanukkah, they didn't believe it was necessary to include other traditions, particularly ones that weren't celebrated by any of their students.

When Rachel brought up the possibility of teaching students about Hmong New Year, her colleagues expressed reluctance because they weren't personally familiar with Hmong New Year and did not have many Hmong students at their school. However, Rachel believed this was an important topic because many of her Latino students lived in neighborhoods where Hmong families also lived. Her students referred to their Hmong neighbors generically using the Spanish word for Chinese. Given this fact, Rachel wanted her students to have a better appreciation for their neighbors and to develop a more nuanced understanding of the cultures of groups other than their own. In Rachel's view, the desire to be culturally relevant sometimes meant her colleagues only included things that were relevant to their students' lives and didn't expose them to the experiences of a wider range of people who were different than they were. For Rachel, this was problematic because it didn't help students develop a more complete picture of the world. In this case, Rachel's interest in addressing equity-related issues by exposing students to multiple viewpoints made her wary of basing her instruction entirely on her students' own experiences of the world.

Andrea: "What are we talking about every day that really matters?" Andrea, one of the teachers profiled in the previous chapter, was a first-grade teacher in her school's TWB program. A white woman in her early thirties, Andrea had been teaching for six years, four of those years in her current position. Along with Jenna, another teacher profiled in the previous chapter, Andrea was one of the few teachers interviewed who built on students' out-of-school worlds in a substantial way. As noted in her profile, Andrea was motivated to learn about her students' lives by a deep desire to know her students as people. She believed that people learned best from those they knew well and she strove to establish close and caring relationships with her students and their families. This involved spending time with them outside of school and taking steps to learn about students as part of her daily interactions with them in the classroom.

When asked how she built on students' out-of-school worlds, Andrea responded that it was something that she did as a regular part of classroom instruction. Indeed, it appeared to be something she tried to infuse into every aspect of her classroom instruction. Like Rachel, Andrea pointed to the types of questions she asked students as one example. In particular, she tried to ask questions during whole group discussions that were designed to connect with the experiences of at least one of the students in the class. Andrea also intentionally looked for opportunities to incorporate students' experiences and those of their family members into the units of study that she designed for her class. Andrea described this approach as trying to teach standards in a way that demonstrated to students why that particular topic mattered to them and their lives. As Andrea explained, when planning a unit she asked herself, "What are we talking about every day that really matters?" She believed it was important to frame the topic she was teaching "so that it really matters to somebody."

Andrea's desire to show students why the topics they were studying mattered to them was something she explicitly connected to her interest in teaching for social justice and exploring the larger implications of the topics she was covering with students. Although she looked for connections to students' lives to show them how the material they were studying mattered to them personally, she also drew on their experiences as a way of providing students with a larger context for understanding the issue being studied. Often, that context was related to the larger socio-political implications of the topic. In that sense, Andrea's interest in addressing equity-related issues in the classroom led her to make connections between the content material she was teaching and her students' own experiences. However, like Rachel, Andrea's wish to expose students to worlds beyond their own also meant that she was hesitant to only focus on the experiences of the students in her class.

Multiple viewpoints. Andrea's interest in contextualizing content material and showing students how it mattered to them and their peers, as described above, reflected a desire to expose students to multiple viewpoints. Andrea believed that the best way to show her students why something mattered was to show them how it affected their lives or the lives of their classmates. In particular, Andrea wanted her students to understand how issues impacted the lives of different groups of people in different ways, and she drew on the experiences of her ELL students and their families as a means of accomplishing that goal. Including the experiences of these students and families often led to a discussion of explicit social justice-related issues with students, like the status of farmworkers or what it means to have a parent deported.

The example below shows how Andrea's desire to present a topic in a way that "mattered" to students' own lives also led to an exploration of how the students in her class experienced the world differently and an examination of the sociopolitical implications of the

topic. In this example, part of which was quoted in the previous chapter, Andrea describes how she taught a unit on plants in a way that highlighted the connections between the topic and her students' own lives. As Andrea explained,

> … okay, so we're talking about plants. It's a huge unit of study in first grade. But, like, why? Why do, [laughing], plants matter? Like, what is really important about plants that, like, we want to talk about day to day so that we can talk about plants for the next eight weeks? Like, 'cause they're super cool. It's super fun to learn. Like, but that's pretty all-encompassing. Like, if we're just going to talk about plants to, like, teach the parts, that's not as exciting as to understand why. So then, like, we might start to figure it out. Like, you know, whose jobs are dependent on us having [plants]. You know, like, beyond just, like, it makes us breathe.

Andrea's interest in highlighting what "mattered" about the topic of plants led her to look beyond the topic as it was defined by the standards, (i.e., what are the parts of plants and what role do they play in our ecosystem), to explore the socio-political implications associated with plants, particularly with regard to the lives of her students.

Andrea specifically wanted to explore how the families of the children in her class – which included both students whose parents had professional jobs and those whose parents worked in agriculture – might relate differently to plants and the production and availability of plants in the larger world. This is evident in Andrea's description of the types of questions that she used to frame her class's discussion of the topic. Andrea explained,

> But, like, what's that mean to a first-grader? And, like, why do we want to talk about that? And why does that matter to, like, your life versus why does that matter to her life? […] Um, I think that we're just starting to, like, get better at saying, like, let's talk about,

> like, why plants matter and, like, where they come from because [...] your dad helps, like, pick plants six months a year and isn't around so that your dad can go to the grocery store and buy them. And let's talk about, like, what's that feel like?

The desire to further explore the topic of plants from an equity-based perspective led Andrea to invite the mother of one of her students into the classroom to share her experiences as the wife of a farmworker. Andrea explained,

> ... last year, we had a parent come in and talk about, what's it like to – like, this woman came in and she talked to the class. Like, what's it like to have her husband gone for six months of the year? And, like, she cried, and she was upset. And, like, I think our last year's group of students will never, like, go to the farmers market again and not realize that, like, somebody picked those plants. And, like, somebody's mom, dad, brother, cousin, uncle gets paid to do that. But, like, at what expense?

In this case, Andrea's interest in presenting the topic of plants in a way that mattered to her students meant she incorporated a range of viewpoints related to the role plants play in people's lives into classroom instruction. Doing this involved making connections to her students' out-of-school lives and, in turn, opened the classroom space to stories and issues that aren't typically discussed in that setting.

Exposing students to a world beyond their own. Although Andrea's interest in exploring equity-related issues encouraged her to draw on her students' out-of-school lives, her concern for equity also led her to believe that basing classroom instruction solely on students' own experiences was potentially limiting. Like Rachel, Andrea recounted having an on-going discussion about holidays and celebrations with other members of her grade-level team. Andrea described the conversation this way:

> And I feel like every year, we sit down, like, as a team of first-grade teachers, and we argue over, like, what's the best way to celebrate culture for all of these students? […] Because, like, one of our standards is, like, celebrations. […] And, like, every year, we go back and forth. Like, is it most important to just do the ones of the families that are in your classroom and ignore all the other celebrations in the world?

Like Rachel, Andrea wanted her students to learn about the world beyond their own and she worried that focusing only on the experiences of the students in her class would mean they weren't exposed to perspectives that were different than their own. As she explained,

> Like, if we're going to talk a lot about what is your experience, it's also important to understand that, like, that's also not the only experience. And, like, what happens in [Prairie Town] isn't the only experience in the world. And that feels like a huge piece of funds of knowledge. Like, if you're going to, uh, celebrate and understand and have deep compassion for what we are, you also have to celebrate and understand that we aren't the only thing. Like, it's not just me. It's not just you. And it's not just us. Like, that's much bigger. And that feels like a huge piece of – like, a social justice piece of, like, funds of knowledge that comes into play. And it feels impossible to not, I don't know, struggle with that in some way every year.

As this quote makes clear, Andrea's commitment to working for social justice meant helping her students develop an understanding of and empathy for different ways of experiencing the world. Although this might, in the case of the plant unit described above, mean drawing on the experiences of students and families, is also meant exposing students to points of view that went beyond the ones represented in her classroom or in the city in which she and her students lived.

Equity vs. fairness. Andrea's belief that focusing solely on the experiences of her students could be limiting can be seen as an equity-based critique of a funds of knowledge approach to teaching. However, Andrea gave voice to another concern about building on students' out-of-school lives that she believed was equity-related, but that I would characterize as being more related to the idea of fairness. In particular, Andrea expressed the belief that only building on the experiences of one student, or a small number of students, could potentially be unfair to other students in the class. While Rachel raised a similar concern, in her case it seemed primarily related to the issue of equitable access and whose family members had the time and resources to visit the classroom and contribute to class lessons. It didn't feel fair to Rachel to draw only on the experiences of students whose families had jobs that allowed them to take time off or who had one parent who didn't work outside the home. For that reason, I would characterize Rachel's concern as equity-related. The way in which Andrea gave voice to this worry, however, seemed to be more reflective of a concern for fairness than equity.

Like Rachel, Andrea worried that inviting parents in to share their experiences could privilege families that had the time and resources to visit the class during the school day. However, Andrea also appeared to be uncomfortable with the idea of focusing on the experiences of some students to the exclusion of other students. In other words, she seemed to feel that, in order to be equitable, she had to find a way to draw equally on the experiences of all students in the classroom. This feeling is evident in the quote below, in which Andrea describes the concerns she had about designing an entire unit of study around the experiences or areas of expertise of one student's family, as outlined in the original funds of knowledge work (e.g., Moll, et al., 1992). As Andrea explained,

I'd say, in terms of, like, a traditional funds of knowledge unit, I'd say we're there in tiny

> pieces. […] And I think the reason it gets so tricky – and this is where, like, I think our colleagues have really intense debates is, like, okay, if we're going to do something like that, how are we going to make sure we do that for everybody and make sure that, like, everyone gets something that's just about them? And do that in any sort of equitable way. And I don't know that it needs to be equitable, but, like – I don't know. Like, it definitely feels like it's better to do it in small pockets than to privilege some people over others. And to be, like, oh, well, your parents can come into school and talk about your said interest. But your parents can't. So, then what do we do? It feels really unfair to be, like, oh, it's fine. We'll just let the parents who can come talk – or, like, the students who can present about this and bring stuff in, do that.

Although Andrea framed this concern in terms of equity, I believe it is more accurately classified as being related to fairness. When people are treated fairly, it means that everyone is treated in the same way. From a fairness perspective, all students should have equal opportunities to share their experiences with the class. The idea of equity, however, acknowledges that not all groups of people are treated in the same way and that the way society typically operates privileges some groups over others.

Approaches to teaching, like funds of knowledge, that advocate for the inclusion of the experiences of children and families from non-dominant groups in the classroom attempt to address the problem of equity as described above. These approaches are based on the idea that the experiences of children from middle class, white backgrounds are already represented in classrooms and are typically privileged in those spaces. For that reason, focusing on the knowledge and experiences that students from non-dominant groups bring to the classroom is not unfair to middle class, white students. Rather, it is a way of putting children of color and

children from poor or working-class families on equal footing by communicating to them that their experiences are also valuable sources of knowledge that can be used as resources for academic learning.

It is notable that Andrea, who seemed to understand the equity-related aspects of a funds of knowledge approach to teaching in a way that many other study participants did not, still gave voice to the belief that it would not be fair to base a unit of study on the experiences of one student if she couldn't do the same for everyone else in the class. It's not entirely clear if Andrea was concerned with excluding students whose parents didn't have the time to visit the class to share their experiences or if she believed that focusing on the experiences of her ELL students would be unfair to other students in her class. Regardless, I believe this example highlights, once again, the difficulty of engaging in politically-committed approaches to teaching in diverse classrooms, like funds of knowledge, and how hard it is for teachers to truly challenge the underlying way power is structured in schools and classrooms.

Addressing equity: Analysis. As the above examples illustrate, for Rachel and Andrea an interest in equity encouraged them to make connections to students' out-of-school lives, particularly as a means of exposing students to multiple points of view and showing them how the topics being covered in the classroom mattered in real world contexts. The ways in which these two teachers went about accomplishing that goal, which often involved intentionally including the experiences of non-dominant groups of students, led to an expanded learning space. In their classrooms, students explored complex topics, like racism and the status of farmworkers, which are not typically discussed in school spaces, particularly in the primary grades. Additionally, Spanish-speaking community members and members of ELL students' families were invited to share experiences with their classes that were relevant to grade-level

content standards being studied. This communicated to ELL students that members of their families and of their larger community possessed important knowledge and skills that allowed them to contribute intellectually to classroom activities (Moll, 1992a).

However, the desire to broaden their students' understanding of the world also led Rachel and Andrea to conclude that building only on students' out-of-school experiences could be limiting. In particular, both worried that focusing primarily on the personal meant teachers couldn't, or wouldn't, expose students to different perspectives. This concern highlights Rachel's and Andrea's belief that some teachers, like the other members of their grade-level teams, may take up ideas like funds of knowledge in ways that are limiting for students because they ignore the experiences of groups of people other than those represented in their classrooms. This is problematic because, as Andrea explained, it doesn't help students develop an understanding of or empathy for people whose lives are different than their own. It also limits students' knowledge of the larger world beyond their immediate community.

Conclusion

The examples of teacher practice presented in this chapter illustrate how participants' understanding of their roles and responsibilities as teachers of ELLs shaped the extent to which they learned about and built on those students' out-of-school experiences. In particular, they demonstrate how three professional concerns - caring for students, facilitating student learning, and addressing equity-related issues in the classroom - both encouraged teachers to make connections to students' out-of-school worlds and, at the same time, constrained that work. In each of these three areas, the decisions teachers made related to building on students' out-of-school lives were reflective of their own perceptions of the needs of ELL students. As such, the examples presented above highlight the intersection between teachers' beliefs about ELL

students' needs and educational theories like funds of knowledge. These examples demonstrate that teachers did not accept educational theories, like funds of knowledge, uncritically. Rather, they considered what an approach like funds of knowledge afforded them as teachers and made decisions regarding the implementation of funds of knowledge-related strategies based on that assessment.

Taken together, the examples presented above reveal that the teachers in this study believed that their ELL students had a range of needs that could potentially be addressed by learning about and building on their out-of-school lives. These can be grouped according to each of the three areas of concern mentioned above. Teachers believed ELL students had the following affective, or caring-related, needs: feeling comfortable and safe in the classroom; being known as people and feeling a sense of connection with others at school; and having opportunities to share information about their lives and having their experiences validated. In terms of supporting student learning, teachers felt that students needed to feel engaged in classroom content; to be exposed to content material that was relevant to their lives and based on things that they cared about; and to have opportunities to draw on their schema, or background knowledge, as a way of scaffolding their comprehension of classroom content material and their use of academic language. Teachers who were interested in addressing equity-related issues also thought it was important to provide ELL students with a classroom space that was inclusive of a wide range of experiences and points of view. In some cases, teachers concluded that drawing on students' out-of-school lives allowed them to address these needs. In other cases, they decided they could better provide students with the support they needed by not making connections to their out-of-school lives in the classroom.

Participants' understanding of the needs of their ELL students and the ways in which building on students' out-of-school experiences could address those needs sometimes aligned with the tenets of funds of knowledge theory and sometimes diverged from that theory. For example, funds of knowledge theorists do believe that designing classroom activities that draw on the out-of-school experiences of students from non-dominant groups is an important way of supporting student learning. However, rather than seeing it as a way of increasing engagement or making content comprehensible, like the teachers in this study, these theorists posit that this practice supports student achievement because it re-casts those experiences as important resources for academic learning and positions students as the possessors of valuable sources of knowledge and skills that can be applied in classroom settings (Moll, 1992a). Additionally, they believe that incorporating the experiences of students and families from non-dominant groups into instructional activities is a way of de-stabilizing the traditional power structures that exist in classrooms by expanding "what counts" as valuable knowledge and skills in that setting (Moll, 1992a).

Similarly, funds of knowledge theorists, like the teachers interviewed for this study, do believe that it is important for teachers to develop a deep knowledge of their students' out-of-school worlds and to know who their students are as people outside of the classroom. While study participants believed it was important to know students in this way in order to address students' affective needs, funds of knowledge theorists do not frame this practice as a form of caring, per se. Funds of knowledge literature suggests that uncovering the funds of knowledge of students and families is a way of building relationships with them that transcend the limitations of more typical teacher-student and teacher-parent relationships (González et al., 2011). However, according to the funds of knowledge literature, the primary intent of learning

about the out-of-school worlds of students and families is to uncover information that helps teachers develop a more positive assessment of the knowledge and skills possessed by students and families from non-dominant groups and to identify areas of expertise that can be used in the classroom (González et al., 2005; Moll, 1992a; Moll, 1997; Moll at al., 1992).

Like study participants, funds of knowledge theorists also believe that drawing on students' out-of-school experiences in the classroom is a way of re-valuing, or validating, those experiences. However, study participants framed this validation as a way of addressing students' affective needs – something that helped students feel proud of who they were and fostered a sense of belonging in the classroom. Funds of knowledge theorists, meanwhile, believe that re-valuing the experiences of students from non-dominant groups contributes to the creation of an expanded learning space where these students are positioned as experts with valuable knowledge and skills that can be applied to academic learning (Moll, 1992a). In that sense, they are more concerned with changing the traditional power dynamics in classrooms than with the affective impact of these practices on students (i.e., how it makes students feel in the classroom).

The goals of the two teachers, Andrea and Rachel, who were interested in addressing issues of equity in the classroom, were arguably most aligned with the original intent of funds of knowledge theory. Both of these teachers were committed to creating expanded learning spaces by including the experiences of non-dominant groups and openly discussing social justice-related issues with their students. However, for the majority of teachers interviewed, this was not necessarily their primary intent when making connections to students' out-of-school lives. Teachers were interested in validating students' experiences and believed that drawing on children's out-of-school lives in the classroom was a way of doing that. And, in some cases, the actions that these teachers took to build on students' out-of-school worlds did position their ELL

students as experts and created expanding learning spaces where those students' out-of-school experiences were treated as important resources for learning. Nevertheless, the majority of the teachers interviewed for this study were less concerned with the political implications of this approach to teaching than funds of knowledge theorists. Unlike the proponents of funds of knowledge, study participants did not have as their ultimate goal de-stabilizing the underlying power structures of schools and classrooms. While teachers recognized that the experiences of ELL students aren't typically well represented in schools and strove to make classroom activities more reflective of those experiences, they did not question the inherent value of the types of knowledge and experiences that are typically privileged in school-based settings.

As is evident above, the reasons teachers drew on students' out-of-school experiences and the decisions they made about when and how to employ this strategy differ in significant ways from the ideas put forth by funds of knowledge theorists. One way to interpret this difference is that participating teachers misunderstood, or only partially understood, the theory of funds of knowledge and other similar theories. It could also indicate that teachers failed to take up the more difficult aspects of the theory, in particular the ones that required them to question their own understanding of "what counts" as valuable knowledge in a classroom setting and to challenge the dominant power structure of schools and classrooms. However, as I argue above, while those things may be true, it also possible to view the decisions teachers made regarding the implementation of funds of knowledge strategies as an implicit critique of this approach to teaching. The decisions teachers made regarding whether and how to build on students' out-of-school experiences reflect what the teachers themselves saw as being important, and possible, to do given their understanding of their role as teachers of ELLs. These decisions can be read as a

commentary on the feasibility of implementing this approach to teaching, as these particular teachers saw it.

The differences between funds of knowledge theory and the ways in which participants implemented that theory also highlight the tensions that exist between the ideas put forth by funds of knowledge proponents and what teachers themselves believe is important and/or possible for them to do in terms of carrying out those ideas. The tensions that were present in the examples shared above include the following areas of concern:

- Students and families may be asked to share experiences they may not want to share or may not feel safe sharing.
- Connecting deeply with students and families requires emotional labor that teachers may not feel they have the time or the resources to take on.
- The job of teachers is to prepare students for middle school, high school, and beyond. As such, they can't ignore district mandates regarding standards-based instruction and the topics they incorporate into classroom instruction must be relevant to the content material being taught.
- It may not be possible to connect all required grade-level content to students' personal experiences or interests.
- Focusing on the personal experiences of students may mean that they are not exposed to ways of knowing and being that are different from their own.
- Drawing extensively on the experiences of a small number of students may not be fair to other students in the class. It may end up privileging students whose parents have the time and resources to arrange a visit to the classroom during the school day.

These tensions reveal how teachers made sense of a complex educational theory using their own professional beliefs and lived experiences as teachers as a framework. Paying attention to these tensions provides us with a more nuanced view of why teachers do or don't take up certain aspects of theories like funds of knowledge, and helps us understand why some aspects of that theory may be difficult for teachers to integrate into their general teaching practice.

In this chapter, I have tried to present teachers as agentive sense-makers, rather than as passive recipients of educational theories communicated to them by experts. By framing their enactment of a funds of knowledge approach to teaching as an implicit critique of that theory, I hope to position them as knowledgeable actors. I want to highlight the fact that teachers make decisions related to complex theories, like funds of knowledge, based on their own understanding of what is required of them as teachers and what they believe is possible to accomplish given those requirements. In the next chapter, I will continue to explore how the educators I interviewed for this study made sense of concepts like funds of knowledge and how that impacted the ways in which they drew on their ELL students' out-of-school experiences in the classroom. However, rather than focusing on participants' beliefs about their roles and responsibilities as teachers of ELLs, I will examine how their knowledge of the context in which they worked shaped their practice. In particular, I will explore how the literacy-related initiatives mandated by the school district in which participants taught impacted the extent to which they incorporated their students' out-of-school experiences into the reading and writing activities they carried out on a regular basis.

Chapter 6: The Impact of District Literacy Initiatives on Teacher Use of Funds of Knowledge-Related Practices

In the previous chapter, I examined the ways in which study participants' professional beliefs about their roles and responsibilities as teachers of ELL students impacted the decisions they made related to learning about and building on those students' out-of-school lives. In this chapter, I will explore another factor that shaped the ways in which teachers did or didn't make connections to students' out-of-school worlds – namely the district level context in which they worked. Although they taught at five different schools, all thirteen of the educators interviewed for this study were employed by the same school district. I will examine how participants' knowledge of the district influenced how, and to what extent, they drew on ELL students' out-of-school experiences in the classroom. In particular, I will consider how district mandates, in some cases, encouraged teachers to build on students' out-of-school lives and, in other cases, discouraged this practice. In order to illustrate how district-level initiatives affected teachers' use of this strategy I will analyze how the districts' literacy-related initiatives, in particular, impacted the ways in which teachers incorporated students' out-of-school experiences into classroom reading and writing activities.

I have chosen to focus on literacy in this chapter for several reasons. The first is that when designing this study, I was particularly interested in exploring how teachers incorporated students' out-of-school experiences into literacy-related instructional activities and the interview protocol I used included a question that asked teachers to describe their literacy instruction. As a result, themes related to literacy teaching appeared in all of the interviews done for this study. Another reason for the focus on literacy in this chapter is that there were two significant literacy-related mandates that had recently been implemented at the time these interviews took place: the

adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts (ELA) (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) and the implementation of two new scripted reading programs. Both of these initiatives had impacted teachers' literacy-related practice, in general, and the extent to which they were able to draw on students' out-of-school experiences as part of their reading instruction, more specifically. Due to the recency with which these mandates had been adopted and the change they represented for teachers, they were mentioned repeatedly by study participants. Indeed, participants' reactions to these initiatives was a significant theme in the majority of the interviews I did.

The final reason that I have decided to focus on literacy in this chapter is that district initiatives related to two of the main components of literacy instruction at the elementary school level, namely reading and writing, appeared to have had different effects on the decisions participating teachers made about whether and how to incorporate students' out-of-school experiences into instructional activities in those two areas. Whereas the changes that had been made to reading instruction in the district appeared to have limited the extent to which teachers made connections to students' out-of-school worlds during classroom reading activities, the district's writing-related initiatives seemed to encourage teachers to make those types of connections. Given this difference, focusing on literacy allows for an exploration of the ways in which decisions made by the district could either open up or limit possibilities for drawing on students' out-of-school lives in the classroom.

The findings presented in this chapter align with research that has shown that accountability-based policies, like a focus on standards-based teaching, can limit the range of educational experiences available to ELLs (Menken, 2008; Pacheco, 2010; Valenzuela, 2005).

In these contexts, ELL students are often exposed to a narrowed curriculum that is focused on the knowledge needed to pass standardized tests, rather than participating in activities that are meant to promote meaningful learning experiences (Pacheco, 2010). Although very little of the funds of knowledge literature looks specifically at the impact of mandated curriculums and standards-based teaching on the use of funds of knowledge-related strategies in the classroom, a few studies have suggested that these types of initiatives may lead teachers to feel that they do not have the time or support necessary to design and implement instructional activities that build on the knowledge and experiences that students bring to school with them (Gallo & Link, 2015; González et al., 2011; Thomson & Hall, 2008). Additionally, the literature suggests that these types of policies can make it more difficult for educators to engage in culturally responsive teaching practices more generally (Comber & Nixon, 2009; Sleeter, 2004).

Structure of Chapter

The rest of this chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section, I will present a description of the district-level context in which participating teachers worked and the effect it had on them. In the second section, I will describe the literacy-related context in which the teachers worked, including the district's general approach to literacy teaching, as well as the specific reading- and writing-related initiatives being implemented in the district. This section will also include an overview of the ways in which district mandates regarding reading and writing instruction impacted the extent to which teachers built on students' out-of-school experiences. The final section will present the stories of two teachers, Jenna and Kasey, and their responses to the newly adopted reading program. This section is meant to illustrate how teachers' reactions to the mandated reading program shaped the decisions they made about incorporating students' out-of-school experiences into classroom reading activities.

As I did in the previous two chapters, my goal in this chapter is to position teachers as knowledgeable actors who draw on their own beliefs and experiences to make sense of complex educational theories, like funds of knowledge. I will attempt to make sense of the decisions teachers made related to building on students' out-of-school experiences, not as a misunderstanding of funds of knowledge theory, or other similar theories, but rather as a reflection of their deep knowledge of the context in which they worked and what they saw as being possible for them to accomplish as teachers given that context. In doing this, I am drawing, in part, on two concepts developed by Clandinin and Connelly, who argue that it is important to pay attention both to the "personal practical knowledge," (Connelly, Clandinin & He, 1997, p. 666), that teachers possess, as well as the "professional knowledge landscape," (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996, p. 24), or context in which they work.

Like Clandinin and Connelly, I am interested in exploring the knowledge that teachers have developed as the result of their teaching experiences, as well as the way in which that knowledge interacts with and/or is shaped by the context in which they work. In order to capture the personal practical knowledge of the teachers I interviewed, I will highlight their voices, as I did in previous chapters. In the first two sections of this chapter, I will use quotes from multiple teachers to illustrate the points I am making. In the final section, I will use extensive quotes from the interviews of two teachers in order to capture the contrasting ways in which they made sense of district mandates and the impact those mandates had on their implementation of funds of knowledge-related strategies.

Before I continue, I should note that my understanding of the district context in which these teachers worked primarily reflects the perspectives of study participants. As noted in in the methods chapter, I did not have the opportunity to observe teachers in their classrooms to see for

myself how the teaching context was structured. The description I present in this chapter of the context in which participants taught is reflective of how the teachers I interviewed perceived of it and is based on common themes I identified in the data related to this topic. Because my focus in this chapter is on the meaning that teachers themselves made of the messages they were receiving from the school district, I believe this approach is a valid one. I am not trying to arrive at one single truth of how the district was operating. Rather, I am trying to capture how study participants themselves understood what was happening in the district and how that understanding impacted their practice related to building on students' out-of-school experiences.

I did not rely solely on the perceptions of participants to develop an understanding of their teaching context. I also reviewed several key documents in order to learn more about the district initiatives I heard being described in the interviews. This included the strategic framework that the district had in place during that time period, as well as the district ELL plan, and a review the district had produced of its literacy-related policies. Additionally, I researched the reading and writing programs that the district was implementing at the time. While not the focus of this study's information gathering, these documents did provide me with a clearer understanding of what was happening in the district at the time of this study and gave me a better sense of the messages that were being sent to teachers. Where relevant, I will highlight that information.

Connections to Funds of Knowledge Theory

In the original funds of knowledge literature, Moll and González and their colleagues advocate that teachers use what they learn about the experiences and areas of expertise of students and their families as the basis for classroom instruction (González et al., 2005; Moll, 1992a, 1997, 2000; Moll et al., 1992). They envision teachers designing units of study that are

based on specific areas of expertise that students and/or their family members have developed as the result of their participation in daily activities. These units are meant to highlight the academic knowledge and skills inherent in those bodies of knowledge. Because it starts with what students and families know and then looks for ways to draw out connections to relevant standards or academic skills, the type of instruction proposed by these theorists involves a fundamental reorganization of classroom teaching.

Although most of the participants in this study were familiar with the concept of funds of knowledge and agreed with the basic tenets of funds of knowledge theory, they were not carrying out a funds of knowledge approach to teaching as described by funds of knowledge theorists. They primarily made use of funds of knowledge as a theoretical tool, treating it as a concept that helped them re-value the experiences that their ELL students brought with them to the classroom. While participating teachers did use the idea of funds of knowledge as a pedagogical tool, or as a way of organizing classroom instruction, they did so on a much smaller scale than that envisioned in the original literature. As was discussed in the previous chapter, this was, in part, due to the influence of their larger beliefs about teaching and about the roles they were expected to fulfill as teachers of ELL students. However, as I'll discuss in the rest of this chapter, I believe that it was also the result of the context in which they worked.

District-Level Context and its Impact on Teacher Practice

State of change: Description of general context. At the time that these interviews took place, the district where study participants taught was undergoing significant changes. The state in which the district was located had recently adopted new state standards for math and literacy that were modelled on the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). In

addition, a new superintendent had been hired who was focused on standardizing the ways in which grade-level content areas were taught across schools in the district (Prairie Town Public Schools, 2013). As a result of these changes, the district had begun to emphasize the importance of standards-based teaching – a fact that was mentioned by many study participants. The school district was also in the process of adopting commercially-produced content area curricula that were aligned with the new standards and which provided teachers with a common roadmap for planning classroom instruction.

According to the teachers I interviewed, decision-making in general had become more top-down in the district. The standardization of the curriculum was one example of this. Another, mentioned by Rachel and Tara, who taught at two different schools, was the fact that some school principals had begun to exercise more control over teachers' daily classroom schedules. Whereas, in the past, classroom teachers were able to decide how to organize their day and when to teach various content areas, some principals now told teachers when to schedule their instructional blocks for literacy and math. This, participants reported, was done in order to more easily coordinate the schedules of school staff who visited classrooms to provide additional support for students, like ESL and Special Education teachers. Although teachers recognized why school administrators made these types of decisions, they still experienced this practice as a loss of control over their work day. For example, Tara, when explaining how she built on students' out-of-school worlds noted, "we try to do as much as we can … but it's a very managed day, and next year, it's going to be even more managed, where they are planning our literacy block and planning our intervention block."

These efforts to standardize instructional approaches and to encourage teachers to align instruction to state standards were, in part, an effort to address disparities that existed between

different groups of students in the district (PTPS, 2013). Prairie Town Public Schools had been singled out by the state educational agency as a district in need of improvement due to the significant achievement gap that existed in the district between white students and students of color (PTPS, 2011b). In the introduction to the district's strategic framework, the new superintendent cited Prairie Town's "culture of autonomy" as one of the factors contributing to this gap, explaining that it had "made it difficult to guarantee access for all students to a challenging curriculum" (PTPS, 2013, p. 1). The rest of the strategic framework lists a number of strategies that the district would implement in order to improve the educational outcomes of students from non-dominant groups, including an effort to encourage teachers to use culturally and linguistically relevant teaching practices. However, there is clearly an emphasis on standardization of the curriculum and standards-based teaching. Indeed, the first of the five priority areas for the district that were identified in the strategic framework is "coherent instruction" (p. 9). Additionally, the first high leverage action associated with that particular priority area is to "[d]evelop and implement a common curriculum and assessment system in all content areas starting with literacy and mathematics that is aligned to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS)" (ibid.).

Another significant aspect of the context in which study participants worked was the multiplicity of instructional strategies or approaches that teachers were expected to implement. As one participant, Ainsley, put it: "… [it] always seems like there's something new … you're always learning something new on top of everything else." Indeed, as I listened to teachers describe the practices they employed in their classrooms, I was struck by the sheer number of initiatives that were currently being implemented by the district. These included standards-based teaching; Guided Language Acquisition Design (GLAD), a set of strategies meant to address the

linguistic needs of ELLs; two new reading programs, the *Bookshop Literacy Program,* published by Mondo Publishing, and *Calle de la Lectura* (Escamilla, Fierro, & Huerta, 2011); *Units of Study for Primary Writing* (Calkins & Neville, 2003), a writing curriculum; the use of academic language, based on the work of Jeff Zwiers (Zwiers & Crawford, 2011); a behavior management program called *Responsive Classroom*; and a focus on close reading and on exposing student to informational texts, two literacy activities emphasized by the CCSS. Participants reported that, in addition to implementing many initiatives at the same time, the district tended to abandon instructional approaches after a few years and adopt new ones.[23] Participants themselves did not explicitly complain about the number of initiatives they were being asked to implement. However, as an outsider listening to the descriptions participants offered of their classroom practice, it seemed that the constant need to learn and implement new instructional approaches must have required a significant investment of time and energy on the part of teachers in the district.

Impact of General Context on Teacher Use of Students' Out-of-School Experiences. A common refrain I heard when I asked study participants to provide examples of how they built on students' out-of-school experiences in the classroom was that it was something they wished they could do more of, or it was something they had done more of in the past. This sentiment reflects the fact that the district-level changes described above had, in some respects, made it harder for teachers to make connections to their students' out-of-school worlds in the classroom. This is evident in the following exchange from my interview with Tara, which took place after

[23] One initiative that appeared to have recently fallen out of favor was the use of culturally and linguistically relevant teaching practices (CLRP), which teachers reported had been a focus for the district, but was no longer being emphasized in the same way it had been in past years despite being part of the district's strategic framework. While this particular initiative would appear to be closely linked to the topic of this dissertation, I have chosen not to explore it in depth because, as it was explained to me by study participants, the professional development involving CLRP provided by the district focused primarily on teaching strategies, like using specific engagement protocols, rather than on building on students' out-of-school worlds in the classroom.

Tara had finished describing some ways she drew on her students' out-of-school experiences. (Note, in the exchange below, "T" refers to Tara, while "I" refers to me, the interviewer.)

> T: This makes me realize how little I've done in the last two years with all this, [laughs].
>
> I: Do you feel like it's changed, like, in the last two years?
>
> T: I do. And I think it – like I said, I feel like there's a lot of things being pushed on us. And so, the personality is kind of being lost, [chuckles].

Tara's description of district mandates as "things being pushed on us" captures how some teachers experienced these initiatives and the loss of autonomy they felt as the result of them. Her quote also highlights the constraints these mandates put on teachers' implementation of instructional activities that were seen as being outside the purview of the new requirements, such as making connections with students' out-of-school worlds. In the rest of this section, I will explore the ways study participants gave voice to this loss of autonomy. I will also consider how this loss of control, and the limitations teachers faced as the result of this loss, shaped the decisions teachers made about drawing on students' out-of-school worlds in the classroom.

Less freedom, less time: How district initiatives made it harder for teachers to build on students' out-of-school experiences. Study participants talked about the loss of autonomy they were experiencing and the impact it had on their ability to draw on students' out-of-school worlds in several ways. First, teachers expressed that they didn't feel they had the freedom to carry out instructional activities that were not directly related to the state standards or the district-sanctioned curriculums. Participants believed that the primary focus of their instruction had to be on the topics and skills they were required to teach by the state standards and the district-mandated curriculums. As a result, they felt they lacked the flexibility to plan lessons or units that were based primarily on students' out-of-school experiences or areas of expertise, as

originally proposed by funds of knowledge theorists (González et al., 2005; Moll, 1992a). This was evident when I asked Justin and Lily if they ever designed lessons around their students' out-of-school experiences. They both responded that they didn't see this as being possible to do, explaining,

> J: I think that would be great and I know I did that long, long ago when I worked in the Open Classroom program. But, everything's kind of laid out of, we're going to learn fractions and the constitution and this and, yeah. Like …
>
> L: Yeah.
>
> J: I don't know. It's …
>
> L: It's kind of, with, like, the core standards […] a lot of it is that we start with, um, what we need to teach and what we need to cover in that grade and then we try and connect that content to their experiences. So, often it doesn't go the other way, just because we are, kind of, um, tied down by, like, what we have to cover. So, there's a lot of that.

The idea of being "tied down" by the material they were required to cover was a sentiment that I heard expressed in nearly all the interviews I did for this study. Like Lily, almost every teacher I interviewed started their planning process with the standards or subject material they were required to teach and then looked for ways to make connections between those topics and students' interests and areas of expertise.

The other, closely related way in which teachers described the impact that district mandates and the resulting loss of autonomy had on them was in terms of time. Given the number of programs they were expected to implement and the large amount of content material they were expected to cover, participating teachers did not feel they had the time to draw on students' out-of-school worlds as extensively as they might have wanted to. As with the lack of

freedom, described above, this perceived lack of time meant that teachers did not feel like they were able to design units based on students' experiences and areas of expertise, like those envisioned by the proponents of funds of knowledge teaching. Lena, a first-grade teacher who had a cluster of ELL students assigned to her class, acknowledged that this type of planning was something she used to do, but no longer saw as being possible due to the compartmentalization of the school day. As she explained,

> I mean, I feel like there was a point when it was a lot easier to say, oh, yeah, let's just, you know, really spin out on, you know, karate because I know that he's really into karate. We can do a whole unit around karate or whatever. And we're, we're not quite that free anymore, 'cause of – you know, the way our day is kind of broken up.

Because of the changes that had taken place in the district over the past few years and the impact those changes had had on her daily schedule, Lena did not feel that there was time in the school day for teachers to pursue longer projects based on students' interests or areas of expertise.

Similarly, Andrea credited the "time crunch" she felt for not being able to draw on students' out-of-school experiences as much as she would have liked. When I asked Andrea if she was able to plan the types of units described by funds of knowledge theorists, she mentioned that she surveyed her students' family members at the beginning of the year and planned some activities that were based on the areas of expertise that she uncovered. However, Andrea noted that she didn't have the luxury of planning a whole unit around those topics. As she explained,

> But we wouldn't plan a unit specific – it's, like, there's not open – I mean, like, there's open space to do what we want within a certain framework. And I'd say that the framework to, like, just totally open create – like, when I was in [community-based pre-school program], that was all we did. […] It was, like, real Reggio Emilia, like student-

> based interests. Like, completely, that's what drove curriculum, and the rest just fell into place. I'd say that that's not at all where we're at in terms of thematic planning.

Andrea went on to explain that one reason for this was the lack of time she felt she had to pursue this type of teaching. As she explained,

> And I think – and I think that this is a place where, like, we would love to continue to, like, grow. But it's, like, the time crunch of it feels so, I – and I don't want to say it feels impossible, because it's so not. But, like, I never thought it would be as challenging as it is to figure out how to do it that kind of a way.

Of the teachers I interviewed for this study, Andrea was one of the most committed to building on students' out-of-school lives in meaningful ways. She was also one of the participants who drew on students' out-of-school experiences most extensively. It is notable, therefore, that even Andrea felt that the context in which she worked made it harder to achieve this goal than she had ever anticipated it would be.

"You just fit it in": How teachers' loss of autonomy shaped the ways in which they built on students' out-of-school experiences. The fact that participants did not see it as being possible for them build on students' out-of-school lives in extensive ways, like designing entire units around students' out-of-school experiences, was borne out by the types of examples they shared when asked how they drew on students' out-of-school experiences in the classroom. Teachers built on students' out-of-school worlds primarily in small-scale ways and the larger-scale connections they did make were typically related directly to the content material they were required to cover. I will discuss both the small-scale and the large-scale connections that teachers made below.

Small-scale connections. The most common method teachers used to build on their students' out-of-school worlds was to make brief connections, or to provide students with opportunities to make connections, between classroom content material and students' out-of-school worlds. At times, these small-scale connections were the result of intentional planning on the part of teachers. For example, some teachers chose instructional materials, like books and songs, that were reflective of their students' out-of-school experiences or interests. Some also employed specific instructional practices that were intended to give students opportunities to share their experiences or areas of expertise with others (e.g. sharing time, activities that encouraged peer collaboration, etc.). Lily described how she tapped into students' out-of-school experiences when introducing books to them, explaining,

> I mean, it's in, like, little things. I know for me, I usually, before we start a book, I, like, ask them to think about, […] to try to make a connection to it. Or, to think about, like, what's going on. And, just to help them, like, make a connection and to better understand what they're reading.

In many cases, however, the small-scale connections teachers made to students' experiences were not planned out in advance. As noted in the previous chapter, teachers often made incidental, or in-the-moment, connections between students' lives and the lesson they were teaching. In the quote below, Kasey describes what this type of connection looked like.

> It's not well planned always. […] Like, if they're telling me about a soccer game that they played in and then all of a sudden, we're giving a lesson and somehow, "Okay, imagine you're playing that soccer game." And, it's a real quick reference to connect them and bring them in. And, I feel like, um, those are more of the typical experiences of funds of knowledge.

Anna talked about making similar types of in-the-moment connections when describing how she tried to teach in a culturally relevant way. As she explained,

> … there's not like a specific recipe for being culturally relevant and I think as our school's been learning about that this year, I think everybody wants, like, "I want to be culturally relevant in my classroom. Tell me how." But, you have to examine, you know, the kids and, um, I think it's just something that fits. It's not, like, a separate thing. You just fit it in. So, if you're studying nutrition, you fit in those Mexican foods, you know, and then, you know, all of a sudden everybody's like, "Ohhh, carne asada!", [laughing], you know, or whatever and, you know, then they're all off on that. And so, they're so excited about something that they identify with and, um, I like to share that. […] You know, so it's just, like, those little incidental ways of making connections.

Teachers felt they could "fit in" these small-scale, incidental connections, even given the time constraints they faced.

I would argue that teachers were also willing to make these small-scale types of connections because they saw it as a way of helping students access the academic content material they were charged with teaching. As noted in the previous chapter, participants believed that these types of connections scaffolded student learning by making the material more engaging or relevant to students and making it easier for them to comprehend. For that reason, teachers may have made time for these types of connections because they saw it as helping them accomplish something that was valued in the context in which they taught – namely helping students master grade-level content material. Furthermore, making these incidental connections, while not planned in advance by teachers, did appear to be a part of the teaching repertoire of many study participants, particularly those who had ESL training. As is evident in the quotes

shared above, teachers were attuned to students' level of comprehension and/or engagement in a lesson and made brief connections to students' lives as needed.

Larger-scale connections. The other principal way in which participating teachers drew on their students' out-of-school worlds in the classroom was to provide students with opportunities to share their experiences or areas of expertise in a more in-depth, open-ended way, typically as part of a project. At times, teachers also invited family or community members to share their experiences with the class. While these examples were not on the scale envisioned by funds of knowledge theorists, they did provide students with chances to draw on their out-of-school worlds in more sustained ways than the small-scale connections described above. One example of this type of activity would be the immigration project described by Justin and Lily in the previous chapter. However, district mandates and the associated loss of autonomy also had an impact on the larger-scale examples participants offered of building on students' out-of-school worlds. In particular, as I'll discuss below, teachers built on students' out-of-school experiences in these more extensive ways almost exclusively when it was connected to subject matter they were required to teach.

The opportunities that teachers provided their students to share their experiences in more open-ended ways were typically more intentional than the incidental connections described above. That did not mean, however, that teachers planned these activities principally as a way of providing students with avenues for sharing their experiences and areas of expertise. Rather, these sharing opportunities typically stemmed from instructional practices teachers were required to employ or from grade-level topics they were expected to cover. They included the mandated writing curriculum that was based on students writing personal narratives about "small moments" from their lives; a new focus, as a result of the adoption of the CCSS, on

informational writing, like "how-to" essays; and social studies standards that encouraged the exploration of students' own experiences related to self, family, community, and immigration. It also included the district-sanctioned practice of starting the day with an opening circle, which typically included sharing time.

In that sense, the larger-scale examples shared by teachers were also shaped by the context in which teachers worked, and specifically by the constraints teachers felt in terms of not having the time or freedom to cover topics not included in the curriculum. As Lena, who is cited above, noted, while she was no longer able to build on students' out-of-school experiences as extensively as she once had, she did find ways to do it that were connected to the curriculum. She explained, "… I think […] in the kinds of writing exercises that we – activities that we can do, the way we can structure social studies, especially, I think, you know, to base it around things that my kids are into. It might not be karate, you know. But … [chuckles]." While Lena didn't feel she could design a whole unit around karate as she once had, she did look for ways to make connections to students' lives that were related to the subject matter she was required to teach, like writing and social studies.

As is evident from the examples shared above, there were certain aspects of the context in which participants taught that constrained the extent to which they drew on students' out-of-school lives in the classroom. In particular, new initiatives limited the amount of time and freedom that teachers felt they had to address topics that were not explicitly covered in the district-sanctioned curriculums or were not related to the CCSS. However, it would be too simple to say that district mandates only made it harder. The fact that teachers were still able to find ways to draw on students' out-of-school lives suggests that there were elements of the context in which they taught that encouraged this practice. Indeed, based on the examples that

participants shared of the larger-scale ways in which they were able to build on students' out-of-school experiences, it appeared that some district mandates may have promoted these types of connections. Below, I will consider why some aspects of the district-level context encouraged participants to draw on students' out-of-school lives, while others discouraged them from doing so.

Differing messages: How district initiatives mediated classroom instructional activities and shaped teacher use of students' out-of-school experiences. One way to understand the phenomenon described above, using cultural historical theory as a lens, is that the various instructional programs and strategies mandated by the district shaped the ways in which classroom activities were organized, or mediated (Cole & Griffin, 1983; Moll, 1992a). As discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, cultural historical theory is based in the belief, originally proposed by Vygotsky, that humans don't experience the world directly. Rather human experience, including intellectual activity, is mediated by external tools, or artifacts, that are created by humans and, as such, are cultural and historical in nature (Cole, 1996; Cole & Griffin, 1983; Moll, 2000). Mediational objects include concrete tools, like books or computers (Pacheco & Gutiérrez, 2009); sign systems, like spoken and written language (Cole & Griffin, 1983; Moll, 1992a); and "ideational artifacts - such as theories, ideologies, belief systems, and the like" (Pacheco & Gutiérrez, 2009, p. 62). Because human activity is regulated by the use of these culturally constructed tools, it can be characterized as being culturally mediated (Cole, 1996; Moll, 2000). This is also true of classroom spaces, where intellectual activities are mediated by a range of cultural tools. According to Moll (1992a), "classrooms (or households) are always socially and culturally organized settings, artificial creations, whose specific practices mediate the intellectual work children accomplish" (p. 21).

The district-mandated instructional programs and approaches that participants were expected to implement were cultural tools that mediated the teaching and learning activities that took place in participants' classrooms. These initiatives, which included the CCSS and the focus on standards-based teaching, as well as commercially-produced reading and writing curriculums, determined the topics that were to be taught, the types of materials to be used, and the instructional strategies that teachers were supposed to employ. The district-mandated programs and approaches also functioned as "ideational artifacts" (Pacheco & Gutiérrez, 2009, p. 62), in that they reflected specific theories of academic learning – both in terms of what children should learn and how they should learn it. As such, the district's instructional initiatives mediated the ways in which teachers and students engaged with the subject matter being presented in classrooms. In some cases, the impact that initiatives had on the way classroom activities were organized led to the creation of classroom spaces where children's out-of-school experiences were treated as valuable resources for learning and, in other cases, did not.

When children's out-of-school experiences are treated as resource for learning, it contributes to the creation of what cultural historical theorists call "re-mediated" learning spaces. Re-mediation involves "a *shift in the way that mediating devices regulate coordination with the environment*" (Cole & Griffin, 1983, p. 70, emphasis in original). In these re-mediated, or expanded, learning spaces, the cultural and linguistic resources of ELL students are seen as strengths rather than as obstacles and the focus is on building on students' knowledge and experiences rather than on remediating their supposed deficiencies (González, et al., 2005; Gutiérrez et al., 2003; Moll, 1992a; Pacheco & Gutiérrez, 2009). More specifically, these theorists argue that instructional activities should be organized in a way that takes advantage of all of the sociocultural resources available in the classroom space, including the resources that

ELL students and their families bring to the classroom with them (Moll, 1992a; Gutiérrez et al., 2003; Pacheco & Gutiérrez, 2009).

Another important aspect of these re-mediated learning spaces, cultural historical theorists argue, is that they are organized in a way that promotes an understanding of learning for ELLs that is not reductionist in nature and does not focus on remediating the supposed deficiencies of these students (Cole & Griffin, 1983; Martínez et al., 2008; Moll, 1992a; Moll, 1992b; Pacheco & Gutiérrez, 2009). Instead, these theorists argue, teachers should engage ELL students in activities that go beyond the skills-based instruction to which ELL students are often subjected. For example, in the case of literacy, this would mean seeing reading and writing as meaning-making activities (Cole & Griffin, 1983; Moll, 1992a; Moll, 1992b) and would involve literacy activities that help students see reading and writing as tools for making sense of their experiences and for acting on the world in ways that are meaningful to them (Martínez et al., 2008; Pacheco & Gutiérrez, 2009).

The conditions described above existed in participants' classrooms to varying degrees. The teachers interviewed for this study did try to implement instructional activities that gave ELL students opportunities to build on their out-of-school experiences and that went beyond rote learning, but they were not able to accomplish this during all of the instructional activities that they carried out. This fact was undoubtedly shaped by teachers' own beliefs about teaching and about ELL students, as was discussed in the previous chapter. However, as noted above, it was also the result of the context in which teachers worked and, specifically, the district mandates they were expected to follow. Some of the mandated instructional programs positioned the knowledge and skills that students had developed in out-of-school spaces as important resources for learning. Other programs required the use of instructional activities and resources that served

to limit the extent to which students were able to draw on their out-of-school experiences. Similarly, some district initiatives consisted of instructional activities that gave students opportunities to use what they were learning to make sense of their worlds, while others did not.

One area of the curriculum where the differential impact of district mandates was particularly evident was literacy instruction. The district's writing-related mandates encouraged teachers to build on students' out-of-school worlds. On the other hand, the new reading-related initiatives adopted by the district had made it less likely that teachers would build on students' out-of-school lives during reading activities. Moreover, the district's literacy initiatives reflected different understandings of the ultimate purpose of literacy learning. The writing curriculum's focus on personal narrative writing and explanatory essays encouraged teachers and students to see writing as a meaning-making activity and as a tool for making sense of one's own experiences. However, the reading-related initiatives limited the opportunities that students were given to use reading to make sense of their own worlds. In effect, the district's reading and writing initiatives acted as tools that mediated the literacy-related teaching and learning activities that took place in in participants' classrooms. Below, I will examine what the district's writing and reading-related mandates communicated to teachers about the importance of making connections to the out-of-school experiences of their ELL students during classroom instruction and I will consider that impact those messages had on teachers' use of funds of knowledge-related strategies in the classroom.

Literacy-Related Context and its Impact on Teacher Practice

District-level approach to literacy instruction. The general approach to teaching literacy that was espoused by Prairie Town Public Schools reflected the belief that children should be taught to read and write using authentic reading and writing activities (PTPS, 2011a).

Currently, there are two main schools of thought related to literacy teaching in the United States (Castles, Rastle, & Nation, 2018). One is based on the belief that providing children with instruction in phonics is the key to teaching them to read. Proponents of phonics-based literacy teaching argue that the focus of reading instruction should be on teaching students to decode words using only their knowledge of letters and sounds (Castles et al., 2018). This often involves using beginning readers that mainly contain words that can be sounded out by students. The second school of thought, sometimes referred to as balanced literacy, centers on the idea that it is important to engage children in meaningful reading and writing activities from the very beginning of their literacy-learning journey (Fitzgerald, 1999; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). While proponents of this approach believe it is important to teach students how letters and words work, they argue that it is more effective to do this within the context of authentic reading and writing activities, like reading books with interesting storylines or writing their own stories. This approach reflects the belief that successful readers use context cues and syntax cues, in addition to visual cues like letters, when reading a text (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).

Prairie Town Public Schools had long used a balanced approach to teaching literacy (PTPS, 2011a). However, the way literacy was taught in the district had been impacted by several district-level initiatives related to reading and writing that had been implemented over the previous two years. This included the effort to standardize literacy instruction via the implementation of packaged reading and writing curricula. It also included the adoption of the CCSS for English Language Arts (ELA) and a push to align literacy instruction to those standards. Although the district's general philosophy of teaching literacy had not changed - indeed the recently adopted reading and writing curricula were aligned with a balanced literacy approach - the ways in which teachers were expected to enact that philosophy had changed.

Reading-related initiatives. As was discussed previously, Prairie Town Public Schools had recently made two significant changes to the way in which reading instruction was structured. The first was the adoption of two commercially-produced reading programs for use in elementary school classrooms. The second, which stemmed from the adoption of the CCSS, was a focus on close reading. Close reading is a comprehension strategy that involves students looking for evidence that supports their understanding of a text in the text itself (Fisher & Frey, 2012). These two reading-related initiatives appeared to communicate to teachers that building on students' out-of-school worlds was not something they should prioritize during reading time, as the focus was on the text itself, and not connections to the text. Indeed, both were cited by teachers as reasons why they made connections to students out-of-school experiences during reading activities less frequently than they once did.

Commercially-produced reading programs. The district had adopted two commercially-produced reading programs for use in elementary school classrooms, one for English-language reading instruction and one for Spanish-language instruction. Teachers providing reading instruction in English were required to use Mondo Publishing's *Bookshop Literacy Program* (n.d.), which participants referred to as "Mondo." Bilingual teachers providing reading instruction in Spanish were expected to use the *Calle de la Lectura* reading program (Escamilla, Fierro, & Huerta, 2011), also known as *Reading Street* in English. The interviews for this study took place at the end of the second school year in which Mondo had been implemented and the first year that *Calle de la Lectura* had been implemented. The adoption of these programs appeared to be a topic that was uppermost in participants' minds and was referred to repeatedly throughout participant interviews.

Another possible reason that the adoption of the new reading programs was a central theme in participant interviews is that the implementation of these programs represented a change in how reading was taught in the district. Although the curricula shared the same underlying philosophy as balanced literacy, having a set curriculum to follow, with a teachers' manual and prescribed texts to use with students, was quite different than what district teachers were used to. As originally conceived, a balanced literacy approach is not a set curriculum per se. Rather, it involves teachers implementing certain kinds of reading and writing activities in their classrooms, such as guided reading, shared reading, interactive read alouds, and writers workshop (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). It provides wide latitude to teachers in terms of choosing which materials to use when carrying out those activities. It also assumes that teachers have the expertise needed to make decisions related to the specific literacy skills they should teach and the order they should teach them in based on their knowledge of their students' needs.

Both of the reading programs the district adopted used many of the same elements of a balanced literacy approach, such as guided reading and shared reading. However, teachers were expected to use the materials that came with the grade-level kits they were provided rather than choosing their own. Teachers were also supposed to follow the general scope and sequence laid out by the programs. Additionally, in the case of the Mondo curriculum, there were scripted lessons that teachers could use, if they wished. The implementation of these programs limited the amount of control teachers had over the design of their classroom reading instruction and, for that reason, felt like a significant shift to study participants. Here's how Ainsley, a second-grade bilingual teacher using the *Calle de la Lectura* curriculum described the change: "It's a very set kind of curriculum, which is different for [Prairie Town], similar to the program that I used when I was teaching in Guatemala. Which was my first experience with working with, like, a

curriculum, I guess, of sort of, like – almost like basal readers. Even though it's, like, balanced literacy-focused."

Reactions to mandated reading programs. The reactions of participating teachers to these new reading programs were mixed. Some, like Jenna, Ainsley, and Tara, reported being grateful for the guidance the curriculums provided, particularly in terms of the types of skills they should teach and the general order in which they should be taught. As Ainsley explained,

> … I've found there to be, like, a lot of positive things about it being adopted by the district, and also, I mean, there's challenges. Like with anything that's adopted or – it needs to be modified. It needs to be, you know, built upon. It's just a framework. Whereas before, we had no framework. Now it's, like, oh, we have all these resources and all this stuff.

Although these teachers generally agreed with the principles of balanced literacy, they also appreciated the structure the new programs provided. Additionally, some study participants liked the instructional materials that came with the programs, such as the large pictures the Mondo curriculum provided for use during oral language lessons or phonics worksheets that came with the *Calle de la Lectura* program. A few teachers, like Tara, also believed that some elements of the new programs, like the oral language component of the Mondo program, were particularly helpful to ELL students.

Other teachers, however, resented the fact the district had adopted packaged reading programs and were offended by what that decision seemed to imply about their professional knowledge and expertise. As Quinn, who used the Mondo curriculum, explained …

> … those scripted lessons, like, you literally get word for word what you're supposed to say. [pause] That's silly. Like, that's absolutely silly. It's, actually it's insulting. Like, do

> you honestly think five years of teaching [training], like, was for nothing because I need a script? Honestly?

One teacher using the *Calle de la Lectura* program, Andrea, was also taken aback by the fact that the curriculum used basal readers, a format she saw as being contrary to what she had learned about balanced literacy and the importance of using leveled books for guided reading. Andrea explained her reaction this way:

> So we have six units and six basal readers per unit that we have to use. […] All [the two-way bilingual program] has basal readers. And […] the district's definitely, like, use supplemental texts, use other text from book rooms. But I'm like, we went back to basal readers for the language learners? [laughs]

In both of the examples highlighted above, teachers were reacting to the fact that reading was now more prescribed than it used to be and they were no longer allowed to use their own professional judgement to plan reading lessons and/or choose materials that aligned with their personal philosophy of teaching reading.

Impact of mandated reading programs on teacher practice related to building on students' out-of-school experiences. One way that study participants reported making connections to students' out-of-school worlds was by choosing texts to read with students that reflected their lives and/or areas of interests. However, it appeared that this had gotten harder for teachers to do since the adoption of the new reading programs. Teachers pointed to the lack of freedom to choose texts for classroom instruction, in particular, as one reason they could not build on students' out-of-school experiences during reading time as much as they had previously. Teachers saw this as being particularly problematic for ELL students because they did not consider the texts that came with the required programs to be reflective of those students' lives.

Indeed, one of the main critiques that teachers offered of the Mondo program, in particular, was that the texts provided were not culturally relevant or did not touch on topics that were of interest to students.

A number of teachers mentioned that lack of cultural relevance was an issue particularly with regard to the reading assessments that were part of the Mondo curriculum. These teachers reported that the books they were required to use when doing running records to determine students' reading levels were difficult for their ELL students because they were about unfamiliar topics or used unfamiliar language patterns. Teachers felt ELL students were being assessed on their background knowledge, rather than their reading skills. Justin recounted that he and another study participant, Christy, a Bilingual Education Specialist (BES) at the school where he worked, had uncovered an issue with one of the books used to assess students' reading level. As Justin explained, "… Christy and I found a giant hole in the very first book you're tested on. You have to use the pictures to identify, 'build a snowman;' 'swim in the ocean;' 'writing letters to pen pals.'" According to Justin, this was problematic because, "… if you've been in a refugee camp in Malaysia all your life, you've never cleaned the garage. You've never built a snowman. I'm sorry, that's not testing your reading, that's testing something totally different."

However, because they were expected to use the materials provided by the reading programs, participants did not necessarily feel like they had the freedom to choose other texts that were more reflective of their students' experiences and/or areas of interest. For example, Tara reported that she used to choose guided reading texts that had characters from similar cultural or ethnic backgrounds to her students, but was now not able to do that. Tara explained,

> … before, it was more, like, definitely it has to be something that the kids relate to and blah, blah, blah. But now I try to, um, find a subject that relates to them more than there

> being a Hmong character in the story. So, oh, remember we went on the field trip, and we saw the butterflies? I got a book today about butterflies. And so, I try to relate it that way instead of that they're reflective [of students' cultural backgrounds] – because there just aren't books.

Whereas, in the past, Tara might have looked for books that had characters that came from similar backgrounds to her students, as her quote indicates, the Mondo books she was required to use were not relevant to her ELL students' cultural backgrounds. As a result, she now had to find other ways to make the books she used interesting or relevant to her students.

For Andrea, having to use the texts that came with the reading program she was required to implement, *Calle de la Lectura*, meant not being able to choose books for students that were about topics that they cared about or that mattered to them. In the quote below, Andrea describes what she felt was lost when teachers no longer had the freedom to choose the books they used for classroom instruction.

> Like, picking books that matter. And, like, picking books that people care about. Or don't. But, like, at least then we can engage in the conversation at a really appropriate level. And, like, make it, that part of the learning. Like, oh, you think this book sucks? Let's talk about why. Like, why does this book suck? And what do you do when you have to read a book that you think really sucks? Versus, like, a book that we know sucks, [laughs]. Like, is not at all culturally relevant.

From Andrea's perspective, not being able to use books that were about topics that mattered to students minimized the importance of encouraging students to connect on a personal level with the texts they were reading. It also limited the deeper conversations teachers could have with students that encouraged them to think critically about what they were reading and why a certain

text might or might not resonate with them personally. Andrea and Tara had different understandings of what it meant to build on students' out-of-school experiences during reading time. Andrea saw it as choosing books about topics that mattered to students, whereas Tara primarily thought of it as finding books with characters of similar backgrounds to students. However, as the quotes above illustrate, both teachers believed that it was getting harder for teachers to build on students' out-of-school experiences during reading time.

Resistance to scripted reading programs. Teachers resisted the loss of freedom they had experienced as the result of the adoption of the reading programs to varying degrees. For example, Tara explained that she had accepted reading as "learn to read time" and tried to compensate in other ways. For Tara this meant making connections to students' lives at other times of the day, like during social studies, or finding other ways to help students connect to the books they were reading, such as referring to experiences they'd had at school, as she did when reading a book about butterflies. Others were more willing to disregard district mandates so that they could continue to use books they thought were more relevant to their students' lives.

Despite the constraints placed on them by the new reading programs, teachers did still have a certain amount of leeway when it came to choosing books for guided reading lessons. For example, all of the teachers reported that the district encouraged them to supplement when necessary with books that came from the collection of leveled readers their schools had developed when using a more traditional approach to balanced literacy. This was something they did if a student, or group of students, had read all of the books that the program provided at a particular reading level and they needed additional books at that level. It was also something participants did if they had students who were reading below grade level in their class. Since teachers were only provided with the instructional materials for their particular grade, they had to

seek other books to use with students who were not reading on grade level. These appeared to be the district-sanctioned ways of supplementing the scripted reading programs.

Some participating teachers felt they could only use supplemental books with students under the limited conditions described above. These teachers, including Tara, Kasey, and Lena, believed they had to adhere closely to the reading curriculum and primarily use the texts that accompanied that curriculum. However, other study participants appeared to feel less tied to using the books that were a required part of the reading programs. This included Jenna, Justin, Lily, Quinn, and the three bilingual teachers, Ainsley, Andrea, and Rachel. These teachers resisted the new programs in more substantial ways. For example, in response to the fact the texts that were part of the Mondo reading assessment were not culturally relevant for ELL students, Justin engaged students in pre-assessment activities that were meant to build the background knowledge they would need to correctly answer the required comprehension questions and move to the next reading level. As Justin explained, “We now have a whole bunch of different card games with: ‘Build a snowman!’ ‘Clean the garage!’ ‘Raking the leaves.’ You can’t pass the first reading level without knowing those things.”

For other teachers, resistance consisted of not using the required texts as extensively as they were expected to. For example, Andrea had refused to give up the practice of choosing leveled readers from her school’s book room to use during guided reading lessons. When asked if she used the required *Calle de la Lectura* basal reader for guided reading lessons, Andrea responded:

> … I can honestly say I didn’t use a basal reader once. I mean, I have never [laughs] sat and taught from a basal reader in small guided groups. And so, I’ve used stories from

> them in large group – like, projected it, done different – I've used some. But I am not ready to do guided reading out of basal readers.

Although Andrea did use the required texts, she did so only for shared reading activities and not guided reading, as was expected. Other participants, like Quinn, used the required texts selectively, rejecting books they felt were not reflective of their students' experiences. Quinn described her decision-making process this way:

> But, like, oh my gosh, like Mondo, they want you to teach about sailing. Like, none of my kids have gone sailing. I'm not going to teach that. I'm just throwing it out. So, okay, so, I'm supposed to teach cause-and-effect. All right, let's do that in a different way.

Although Quinn was willing to use some of the books provided by the Mondo program, her belief in the importance of making connections with students' experiences led her to search for more relevant reading materials.

The differences in how teachers responded to the requirements of the new reading programs may reflect, at least in part, how this mandate was enforced at different schools or for different groups of teachers. Tara reported that the expectation of district administration was that everyone implement the mandated reading curriculum, explaining, "… you have to at least be on board or – you know, with the new administration, you have to at least try it. It's expected that you do Mondo." However, Andrea, and the other teachers who worked in the two-way bilingual (TWB) program, had been told that, for the first year of implementation, they were only expected to try out the *Calle de la Lectura* curriculum. As Ainsley explained, "… last year we just sort of played around with it. Tried to see if it fit, if it worked. A lot of times, we needed to supplement it." These teachers may have felt like they had more freedom to choose materials that were relevant to their students than other study participants.

It also appeared that some participating teachers worked in schools where the staff, as a whole, regularly supplemented the required reading curriculum. Quinn, when describing her practice of using books that were not a required part of the Mondo curriculum, noted that many of the other teachers at her school did the same, something which may have led her to her feel it was permissible. Quinn explained,

> So, you just take, like, there's a little tiny box that says, like, what you're supposed to teach. Like, today we'll be working on, uh, cause-and-effect. You take that, and then do your own lesson, [laughs]. That's what I did every single time, and all the other teachers I talked to did that as well. Like, we would just take the little box that says, "Okay, teach this," and take that.

Justin, Lily, Christy, and Anna taught at the same school as Quinn and two of them - Lily and Justin - also talked openly about compensating for what they saw as the limitations of the Mondo curriculum, particularly with regard to the lack of cultural relevance of the required texts.

Despite the fact that some participants disregarded parts of the mandated reading programs they were expected to implement, these teachers also recognized the tenuousness of this practice. For example, Quinn, Justin, and Lily all acknowledged that they were taking a risk by challenging the required reading curriculum, and it was not something they felt like they could do openly. Indeed, before describing the ways she challenged the Mondo curriculum, Quinn stated, "… I think administration would hate this if they heard this, but it doesn't matter right now." This feeling is also evident in the following exchange taken from Justin and Lily's interview.

> L: … Mondo is the curriculum that we're using at [Sycamore Elementary] …
>
> J: In the district.

L: … most of the [time], in the district [laughs]. But um …

J: Yeah, most of the time.

L: Like, we …

J: If anyone asks, all the time.

L: [laughs] Yes.

Although the bilingual teachers, Andrea, Ainsley and Rachel, had been given permission to pick and choose the pieces of the curriculum they wanted to use during the first year of its implementation, they also recognized that this flexibility might be fleeting. Ainsley explained, "I think there's, like, rumors going around that maybe next year people are going to be, like, now you have to do it." Andrea expressed a similar sentiment. When asked if she used the basal readers that came with the *Calle de la Lectura* curriculum for guided reading lessons she responded: "We're supposed to. I wouldn't say we're there yet. I mean, like, we will have to be, but we're not quite there yet, [chuckles]. Like, that's the push."

As is evident from the examples provided above, some teachers challenged the constraints placed on them by the required reading programs and continued to find ways to build on students' out-of-school experiences as much as they could. However, not all participants felt equally able to do this and, in general, it appeared that the adoption of the new reading programs had made it less likely that teachers would draw on students' out-of-school lives during reading time as extensively as they had in the past.

The texts provided by the programs, which were not reflective of students' lives, as well as the accompanying lessons, which focused primarily on the technical aspects of learning to read, communicated to teachers that making connections to students' out-of-school lives was not a priority during reading instruction. These components of the reading curricula also

deemphasized the importance of reading as a vehicle for making sense of the world. In other words, both the texts and the lessons functioned as mediational tools that shaped the way reading instruction was organized in the classrooms of participating teachers. The impact of these tools on the way that reading-related activities were organized meant that students' experiences were not treated as important resources for learning and that there were fewer opportunities for students to make connections with their out-of-school worlds. As I'll discuss below, the district's other main reading-related initiative, the focus on close reading, communicated a similar vision of reading and reading instruction and had a similar impact on the extent to which teachers made connections to students' out-of-school experiences during reading time.

The CCSS and close reading. Another reading-related initiative mentioned by a small number of participants also appeared to have had an impact on teachers' decisions related to building on their students' out-of-school experiences during reading time - the district's focus on "close reading." Close reading is a comprehension strategy that is associated with the CCSS and involves teaching students to read complex texts multiple times in order to uncover the meaning of the text and the intent of its author (Fisher & Frey, 2012). One study participant, Jenna, described close reading this way:

> So, close reading is basically just, like, reading – re-reading a text and […] just basically doing a different teaching point each time. So, like, the first time you read it, you want to learn, like, what was the main idea. I want you to be able to tell me that. The second time, you might look at, like, vocabulary. The third time, you might look at inferences. Um, but each time, you just gain a little bit more knowledge about the text.

Rather than encouraging students to make connections with their own background knowledge in order to understand a text, close reading involves students looking to the text itself when

interpreting its meaning (Fisher & Frey, 2012). In other words, students are taught to search for evidence in the texts they are reading to support the claims they are making about that text.

Close reading did not generate the same strong reactions from participating teachers that the new reading programs did. It was mentioned by far fewer participants and only two teachers, Lily and Jenna, specifically mentioned the introduction of close reading as having had an impact how they taught reading. Nevertheless, the district's focus on close reading did represent a shift in how teachers were expected to support the development of their students' reading comprehension strategies. In the past, Prairie Town teachers were encouraged to teach students to make connections between their background knowledge and texts in order to comprehend what they were reading. Teaching students to make connections to texts is a comprehension strategy that was developed by proponents of a balanced literacy approach and is based on the belief that good readers draw on their knowledge of the world in order to make sense of the texts they are reading (Keene & Zimmerman, 1997). In particular, advocates of this strategy stress the importance of explicitly teaching children to make text-to-self connections, text-to-world connections, and text-to-text connections.

The idea that it was important for children to make connections to the texts they were reading communicated to teachers that it was important to learn about and build on students' out-of-school experiences in order to facilitate those connections. This is evident in Kasey's description of learning about the concept of funds of knowledge in the reading methods course she took as a part of her initial teacher certification program, which she completed at a large university located in a western state. When asked about any training she had related to funds of knowledge, or building on students' out-of-school experiences, Kasey explained,

> I think, my reading methods course, literacy methods course, where we were just talking about, because a big thing ten years ago was making connections. If you made a connection as a reader, you were golden. You're a good reader. And so, talking about how to connect this to our students' lives and we were really focused on Latino culture and community because that was the main culture of a lot of the surrounding communities around [city where university was located]. And so, we talked a lot about funds of knowledge and what students as Mexican Americans were bringing to school.

The practice of explicitly teaching students to make connections between texts and their own lives communicated to teachers that the experiences that students brought to the classroom with them could contribute to academic learning and should be incorporated into classroom activities. I would argue that this practice also provided students with opportunities to draw on their out-of-school lives in the classroom and positioned those experiences as valuable resources for learning.

However, for at least one of the teachers I interviewed, Lily, the district's new focus on close reading sent the message that it was more important for students to concentrate on what was in the text than on making the kinds of personal connections described above. I asked Lily to describe any training she had received related to funds of knowledge or other educational approaches that involved building on students' out-of-school experiences. In response, she explained that, while she had not had any specific training related to the concept of funds of knowledge, her teacher education courses, including the ones she was taking to become ESL-certified, had emphasized the importance of building on students' background knowledge. However, Lily noted that, with the advent of close reading, tapping into students' background knowledge was becoming less of a focus in the district. As she explained,

> … the district has kind of been leaning towards the focus of close reading now, so then, it's more, like, okay, well, it doesn't matter what you have as background knowledge. Now, it's, you know, where in the text does it say that? Where did you get that, [laughing], information?

Although, elsewhere in her interview, Lily reported that she did try to make connections between instructional texts and students' out-of-school worlds as a means of supporting their reading comprehension, the quote above demonstrates that district's focus on close reading led her to believe that this practice was no longer a priority. In that sense, it appears that the adoption of this initiative made it less likely that teachers would look for ways to build on their students' out-of-school experiences as part of classroom reading activities.

Reading-related initiatives: Analysis. As the above examples illustrate, the way in which reading instruction in the district was structured had changed over the course of the previous two years. Prairie Town's reading-related initiatives required teachers to use materials, like the texts that came with the mandated reading programs, and teach comprehension strategies, like close reading, that deemphasized the importance of making connections with students' out-of-school worlds. Due to these changes, classroom reading activities were not organized in a way that positioned students' out-of-school experiences as important resources for learning. Furthermore, the understanding of reading that was promoted by both of these initiatives was not based on the idea that reading was a tool that students could use to make sense of their lives or the world around them. In other words, the way that reading was being taught did not provide students with opportunities to "read the world" (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Instead, reading was presented as an end, in and of itself – a primarily technical process that was not connected to students' larger worlds. As Tara noted, reading was now "learn-to-read time."

The end result of these curricular decisions was that it was harder for teachers to build on students' out-of-school lives during classroom reading activities, and less likely that they would do so. However, as I'll explore below, the district's writing-related initiatives appeared to have had the opposite effect.

Writing-related initiatives. Unlike the district's reading-related mandates, the writing-related initiatives being implemented in the district, including the adoption of a writing curriculum that focused on personal narrative writing and a focus on writing informational texts that stemmed from the adoption of the CCSS, had encouraged teachers to build on students' out-of-school experiences as a part of classroom writing activities. Indeed, when asked how they built on students' out-of-school worlds in the classroom, a large number of teachers mentioned writing instruction. Writing activities were seen by study participants both as an opportunity for students to draw on their out-of-school experiences and as an opportunity for teachers to learn about their students' lives and develop personal relationships with them. As Tara explained, "I love writing because that's when kids get to talk about their lives. And so, I've tried to, like, respond to them so that they know I'm interested."

Units of Study for Primary Writing. Several years prior to the time when these interviews took place, Prairie Town Public Schools had adopted a writing curriculum called *Units of Study for Primary Writing: A Yearlong Curriculum* (2003) authored by Lucy Calkins, Beth Neville and their colleagues at the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project (TCRWP). The *Units of Study* program follows a writing workshop model to teaching writing, which is one of the components of a balanced literacy approach. Writing workshop involves engaging students in authentic writing experiences and allowing them to primarily write about topics of their choosing that are personally meaningful to them (Calkins, 1994). In the writing

workshop model students are encouraged to think like writers and are given opportunities to participate in the entire writing process, including drafting a text, getting feedback from their peers, revising their writing, and publishing a final version of their text (Calkins, 1994). Although the curriculum consists of a series of units for teachers to use throughout the year, the one mentioned most frequently by participants was called “Small Moments,” which involves students learning to write personal narratives that describe “small moments” from their lives (Calkins & Neville, 2003).

The district mandate that teachers implement the *Units of Study for Primary Writing* curriculum did not appear to be as fraught for study participants as the adoptions of the scripted reading curriculums had been. According to a literacy methods handbook produced in 2006 by the district for classrooms teachers, elementary school teachers in Prairie Town were expected to use a writing workshop approach in the classroom prior to the implementation of the *Units of Study* writing program. This meant that the introduction of this curriculum did not represent a big change in the way writing was taught in the district. Like the scripted reading programs adopted by the district, *Units of Study* may have taken away some of teachers’ freedom to make decisions related to their writing instruction that were based on their knowledge of their students’ literacy learning needs. However, teachers did not appear to have the negative feelings about it that they did about Mondo and *Calle de la Lectura*. This may have been due to the structure of the program itself, which was less prescriptive than the reading programs. Additionally, at the time of this study, the writing curriculum had been in place for several years, which may have meant that teachers were accustomed to using it, or, in the case of the newer teachers, had not experienced what it was like to teach without a prescribed writing program.

The fact that personal narrative writing was a central focus of the writing curriculum, together with the fact that students were allowed to choose writing topics that interested them, meant writing instruction was a time of day when students were encouraged to draw on their out-of-school lives. In choosing to adopt the *Units of Study* curriculum, the district communicated to teachers the importance of giving children opportunities to write about their everyday lived experiences and areas of interest. This is evident in Andrea's description of the writing activities that took place in her classroom. Andrea explained,

> So, I'd say writing is all based on Lucy Calkins, which is really based on, let's tell stories. Let's talk about what goes on in your life, and let's figure out what's important and what's fun, and let's write about it. Or, what's ordinary and not fun, but let's write about it, [chuckles]. Let's write about what goes on in your life. And, um, let's figure out how to really tell that story, whatever that story is. The good, the bad, the in-between.

As Andrea's quote illustrates, during writing time, students had the freedom to explore a wide range of experiences, from ones that were "important" and "fun" to ones that were "ordinary and not fun." This opened the classroom space to a more diverse array of topics than those typically included in the academic curriculum, including "[t]he good, the bad, and the in-between" parts of children's lives.

The focus on personal narrative writing also encouraged teachers to use what they knew about students' lives when facilitating writing lessons. The writers workshop model, on which the *Units of Study* curriculum was based, typically begins with a teacher-led mini-lesson that is intended to model the writing process for students. Due to the emphasis on having students write personal narratives, some teachers were prompted to use examples that were accessible to

students and reflective of students' lives during these mini-lessons. Elisa, in particular, was conscious of drawing on what she knew about her students' lives to ensure that the examples she shared when modelling writing strategies were relevant to their lives and would encourage them to see their experiences as worthy of inclusion in the classroom space.

Elisa described this practice when asked how learning about culturally relevant approaches to teaching, like funds of knowledge, had impacted her as a teacher. Elisa explained:

> Well, I would say the most, the place that it impacts me a lot is in writing. Because, to think about writing about your own life [pause] and putting it out there in a way that is not really classist. […] If I'm writing about these fancy trips and, you know, going to all these different places that cost a lot of money and I know that my students aren't necessarily going to those places, is that going to enrich their writing experience and motivate them or is that just going to, kind of, isolate me from them?

In order to ensure that examples she shared resonated with students, Elisa made use of what she knew about their lives. As she explained,

> And so, that is where I really have tried to think about my, about what the students are doing outside of school. What is their life like? You know, they talk about going to the park a lot and riding bikes and swimming. So, I try to incorporate things like that, that they can more relate to, so they'll, [pause], engage in the writing lesson. Like, writing a biography of your life? I went on this great trip. I went to this this fancy school. I mean, the kids are like, I went to [name of city in neighboring state], and that was exciting. You know? And so, you have to find a way to honor their experiences.

Having her students write personal narratives had encouraged Elisa to make connections to their experiences, even if they were different from her own or were ones that were not typically valued in classroom settings. In that sense, it had led her to re-value the experiences that students brought to the classroom with them and to position those experiences as valuable resources for learning.

However, providing students with opportunities to write about their lives didn't always lead teachers to re-value students' out-of-school lives. Although, as noted above, Tara appreciated the fact that the writing program allowed students to share their experiences with her and provided her with opportunities to connect with them on a personal level, she also struggled with the fact that some students claimed they didn't have anything to write about. As Tara explained, "I really like the writing program. It's just hard. Like I said, I have some kids who are, like, 'I don't do anything.'" The fact that some students found it difficult to identify writing topics reinforced Tara's belief that it was important for families and children to engage in certain types of activities outside of school, ones that are typically associated with white, middle class families. In response to a question about the kinds of out-of-school experiences that she thought contributed to school success, Tara responded, "I think, like, cultural experiences, like going to the library and going, you know, to community events like plays or, um, farmers market, um, family gatherings, holiday[s], [pause] uh, time outside, gardening, camping." When asked why those things were important, she explained,

> I think because it's an experience that you can reflect on and, and – like, for example, in our writing program, we have them write small moments. And so, they have something that they've done, and they have something to write about. Whereas, a lot of, um, kids will say, well, I don't do anything. I just stay home.

> So, it's harder to be successful as a writer if you have nothing to say that you did. So then with kids who say that you have – you create an experience within school so that – remember the time there was a spider, and, yeah, and so you create that idea. That was something that happened to all of us. You can write about that.

Tara's quote suggests that, in some cases, the writing program may have strengthened the deficit perspective of some teachers with regards to students from non-dominant groups, like ELLs, especially when students had a difficult time identifying topics about which to write. Of course, there are a variety of reasons why students may struggle to find things to write about. They may not enjoy writing; they may not feel comfortable sharing their experiences with the rest of the class; or, they may simply find this kind of personal narrative writing boring. However, students' reluctance to write about their lives may be seen by teachers as an indication that students don't possess rich and varied out-of-school experiences.

Despite the risk that engaging students in personal narrative writing might reinforce teachers' deficit views of ELL students, I believe the *Units of Study* curriculum did communicate something significant to teachers about the importance of building on students' out-of-school experiences in the classroom. The program's focus on personal narratives and on allowing students to choose writing topics encouraged both students and teachers to see students' out-of-school experiences as worthy of inclusion in the classroom space and worthy of academic attention. In some cases, as Elisa's example demonstrated, it may have helped teachers re-value the experiences that students brought to the classroom with them, even if they were different from their own lived experiences. Taken together, these factors had the potential to create expanded learning spaces, where students' out-of-school experiences were treated as important

resources for learning. Additionally, because it was centered on having students write about their lives, the writing program promoted the view that writing was a way of making sense of the world. In other words, it communicated to teachers and students that writing should give people opportunities to make sense of their experiences and share those experiences with others. This message stood in contrast with the one being sent by the district's reading-related initiatives.

CCSS and informational texts. Another district-mandated writing task that allowed students to share aspects of their out-of-school lives was the explanatory essay, which participants referred to as a "how-to." As noted previously, the CCSS emphasize the importance of exposing students to non-fiction texts – both as readers and writers. The focus on writing informational texts, like the explanatory essay, probably reflected, in part, the district's new push for aligning instruction to the state standards. However, this type of writing task is also one that is commonly required of students on statewide standardized writing tests. For that reason, it is likely that teachers were accustomed to engaging students in non-fiction writing activities, like explanatory essays, prior to the adoption of the CCSS. Additionally, the district's mandated writing curriculum, *Units of Study*, includes units at each of the grade levels dedicated to teaching non-fiction genres, like explanatory and persuasive essays.

Several teachers interviewed for this study mentioned having students write "how-to" essays as an example of how they drew on students' out-of-school experiences in the classroom. Teachers pointed to this assignment, which requires students to explain how to perform a certain task, as one that allowed students to share their personal areas of expertise with others. The primary intent of the activity was not to have students share their out-of-school lives with the class, but rather to teach students a skill that was mandated by the standards and was tested on the statewide assessment. However, the nature of the assignment meant that it lent itself to

students using their out-of-school experiences as a resource for completing the assignment and it created a space for students to make an important connection to their out-of-school worlds. The way in which teachers in this study who referenced the "how-to" essay approached this activity also increased the extent to which it became an opportunity for students' to share their own experiences and areas of expertise. Importantly, these teachers gave students wide latitude in terms of choosing what to write about. As Quinn explained:

> I guess one way I did the funds of knowledge was, um, the "how-to" essays we did, I left it totally open to them. Anything you know how to do, show us. I had anything from break dancing to – and he, like, did break dancing for us, which was really neat – um, to how to make chocolate ice cream, to how to hit a ball, to how draw a comic.

In leaving the assignment open-ended and allowing students to choose the topics of their essays, teachers encouraged students to draw on their out-of-school lives and, as a result, opened the classroom space to subject matter that is not typically valued in school settings, like break dancing.

Allowing students to share something that was important to them and that positioned them as experts appeared to have been a positive experience for students. For example, Quinn noted that her students were eager to share their expertise with the class and did not have difficulty identifying the skill they wanted to showcase. She explained: "…the kids seemed genuinely interested in showing everyone their skill. And, they didn't have trouble coming up with it. […] They weren't, like, searching, like, 'Oh, what am I good at?' They know." Kasey also noted the positive impact this type of assignment had on the ELL students she worked with.

In the quote below, Kasey describes how a project that involved making a "how-to" video affected her ELL students:

> Well, I think, for the second graders, with the "how-to" projects that we just finished, they spoke more loudly and more clearly and more confidently about what they were doing than I've ever seen them doing during this year. We have a couple of, um, students that are shy in nature and then add on learning English to that layer and their voices aren't heard very often in class. And so, to see them shine and smile in front of the class as they showed their kind of video, or Educreation, um, it was pretty powerful. And, that, you know, they tested themselves. They spoke into it and then listen[ed], "Oh, I have to talk louder." And then they did it.

As Kasey's quotes illustrates, giving students the opportunity to create a video that showcased an area of expertise they possessed had a variety of positive effects on ELL students. It encouraged them to engage in activities that promoted their language and literacy development, such as repeatedly reading their essays out loud in order to ensure others could understand them. It also empowered them to express themselves in the classroom in ways they hadn't felt comfortable doing in the past. In that sense, the project opened the classroom to voices, and experiences, that weren't always highlighted in the classroom, namely those of ELLs.

In addition to providing students with an avenue for making their voices heard, writing and/or recording "how-to" essays also appeared to communicate to ELL students that their experiences were both valued and valuable in the classroom space. Because this type of essay involves students explaining how to do something, it provides them with the opportunity to share their expertise with others and positions them as experts. It also re-casts that area of expertise as

something worthy of inclusion in a classroom space and a valuable resource for academic learning. Furthermore, this project can also lead other students to see ELLs as resources on which to draw. This is evident in Kasey's description of what happened after one of her ELL students created a "how-to" video about drawing mermaids. Kasey explained,

> And the other, the other cool thing about it, and, and this I saw, actually, on the last day of school, which was kind of awesome. One of the girls did "How to Draw a Mermaid" and that was her "how-to," [laughing] that she was an expert on, right? So, one of the other kids in the class, they were just drawing on the last day. […] And, so they were drawing pictures and one of the other girls came up to her and said, "Hey, you know how to draw mermaids. I really want a mermaid […] on my paper. Can you draw it for me?" And she was like, "Sure!" You know? And so, it was like, it suddenly transferred over into, like some other girl approached her who's not normally friends with her, doesn't associate with her and, like, asked her to be the expert. … And so, in that sense it was super powerful for the ELL students.

The "how-to" assignment had positioned this particular student as an expert in relation to other students in the class. As a result, her classmates came to see her as a someone who possessed an area of expertise, drawing mermaids, that was valuable to them and someone whom they could ask for help.

Writing-related initiatives: Analysis. Unlike the district's reading-related mandates, in the case of writing, the initiatives being implemented by Prairie Town Public Schools opened up important spaces in the curriculum for students to build on their out-of-school experiences. Both the required writing curriculum, *Units of Study*, and the emphasis placed on writing explanatory

texts by the CCSS encouraged teachers to provide students with opportunities to write about topics of their choosing, rather than ones that were assigned to them, and, more importantly, to write about subjects that were related to their personal experiences, interests, and/or areas of expertise. The way in which classroom writing activities were organized, or mediated, as the result of the district's writing-related initiatives meant that during writing time, students' out-of-school experiences were positioned as valuable resources for academic learning. These assignments also communicated to both teachers and students an understanding of writing as a tool that could be used to make sense of one's own experiences and/or to communicate something important to others. In that sense, these activities encouraged students to "write" the world, or to see writing as a meaning-making activity, rather than just as a technical process that involved transcribing words on a page.

The differential impact of the district's reading and writing mandates: Analysis. The descriptions presented in this section of study participants' responses to the district's reading and writing-related initiatives illustrate that various aspects of the context in which these teachers worked impacted their practice in different ways. While it appeared that the district's efforts to standardize the curriculum, which included the adoption of commercially-produced reading and writing programs and the CCSS for ELA, had limited the extent to which teachers were able to build on students' out-of-school worlds, this was not the case across the board. Indeed, the impact of district mandates on teacher practice was more nuanced than that. More specifically, while some district initiatives made it harder to draw on students' out-of-school lives, others appeared to support this practice.

The differential impact of district initiatives on the decisions teachers made about building on students' out-of-school worlds was particularly evident with regard to the district's

literacy-related mandates. This difference was due, in part, to the nature of the initiatives themselves and the messages these mandates sent to teachers about the role that students' out-of-school experiences should play in the process of learning to read and write. From a cultural historical activity theory view, the tools that teachers and students were expected to use as a part of classroom literacy activities, such as required reading texts, scripted lesson plans, and specific writing genres, as well as "ideational artifacts," like the philosophy of literacy-learning promoted by the mandated programs and standards, impacted whether or not these activities were organized to build on students out-of-school experiences. In particular, the tools used during classroom reading instruction mediated reading-related activities in such a way that students' out-of-school experiences were no longer positioned as important resources for learning. However, the writing-related tools teachers were expected to employ mediated classroom writing activities in a way that did treat students' personal experiences as valuable resources on which to draw.

In the previous sections of this chapter, I have highlighted the patterns I identified in the data related to how teachers responded to district initiatives and theorized why teachers may have reacted as they did. However, there were also important differences in the ways that individual teachers responded to district mandates, particularly with regard to the reading-related initiatives. While some teachers challenged the requirements placed on them by the new reading programs and continued to prioritize building on students' out-of-school experiences during classroom reading activities, others felt less able to do so. Although I touched on this issue briefly above, in the following section I will explore it more in depth.

Jenna and Kasey: Two Responses to District Mandates

In the final section of this chapter, I will present the two stories of two teachers, Jenna

and Kasey, that illustrate how different study participants responded to the district's reading-related initiatives, including the mandated use of commercially-produced reading curriculums and the adoption of the CCSS for ELA and its accompanying focus on close reading.[24] As discussed above, both of the district's reading-related initiatives were focused primarily on the technical aspects of learning to read, rather than on helping students see reading as a tool for making sense of the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987). More specifically, both the mandated reading curricula and the strategy of close reading encouraged teachers to focus their attention, and that of their students, on the information contained in the texts they were reading, rather than on making connections between texts and students' own lives, as had been emphasized in the past. As the stories below will demonstrate, not all of the teachers interviewed for this study reacted to these mandates in the same way. Some, like Jenna, felt a certain level of agency in implementing district initiatives and continued to build on students' out-of-school experiences in significant ways during classroom reading activities. Others, like Kasey, did not feel they had the freedom to challenge district mandates and limited the extent to which they made connections to students' out-of-school worlds during reading-related instructional activities.

I am using the term "story" to describe the two overviews that will be presented below. I have chosen to use that term because, in crafting these particular profiles, I have tried to capture how these two teachers narrated their personal experiences of the changes that had taken place in the district. Both Jenna and Kasey spoke eloquently about the district's reading-related initiatives and both told compelling stories of themselves in relation to those mandates. In order to retell their stories here, I have decided to draw extensively on the two participants' own words. As such, this section will consist primarily of extended excerpts from their interviews.

[24] Both of the teachers described in the section provided reading instruction in English and were using Mondo, the English-language reading program the district had adopted.

Doing this allows me to present a narrative account of their encounters with the district's reading-related initiatives and their responses to those initiatives. In order to preserve the narrative flow of their stories, I have elected not to provide commentary between the excerpted quotes. Instead, I will introduce each story and provide context necessary for understanding the stories in that introduction. The quotes are organized into paragraphs and arranged in the general order in which they appeared in the interviews. However, some intervening text, including my questions, was removed. The start of a new paragraph indicates that some text was removed, as does the use of ellipses in the body of the paragraphs themselves.

I have decided to focus on the experiences of Jenna and Kasey in this section for a number of reasons. First, as noted above, these two teachers reacted differently to the reading-related initiatives they were tasked with implementing and their stories illustrate the range of reactions that study participants had to the changes taking place to their work context. Additionally, the district's reading-related initiatives and their reactions to those mandates were significant themes in both Jenna's and Kasey's interviews. In Jenna's interview, the subject was an important part of the story that she told of herself as an early career teacher who made extensive connections to her students' out-of-school worlds, both in and out of the classroom. For Kasey, a more experienced teacher, the topic was part of a story of loss she told and included her personal loss of control as a teacher over the ways in which she engaged students in reading activities; her students' loss of the opportunity to have a voice in classroom activities; and Kasey and her students' loss of the ability to read about issues that were of importance to students. Presenting the stories of these two teachers will allow me to explore important themes related to the district's reading-related initiatives and the impact they had on teacher practice related to building on students' out-of-school experiences.

There are a variety of factors that may have contributed to the differences in Jenna's and Kasey's responses to the reading program, including personality, personal teaching philosophy, years of experience, and job role. Jenna was outgoing and supremely self-assured. Kasey was measured and thoughtful. Jenna was a relatively new teacher, whereas Kasey had been teaching for ten years. Jenna was a classroom teacher, which gave her a measure of control over the reading activities she carried out with her class. Kasey was a Bilingual Education Specialist, which meant that she visited many different classrooms over the course of a day and did not have a say in how teaching and learning were organized in those spaces. The specific context of the different schools where the teachers worked may also have had an impact. It's possible district initiatives may have been enforced differently at their schools and/or the culture of the school may have encouraged teachers to either comply with district mandates or to feel they had the freedom to pick and choose the parts of the initiatives they would implement.

Jenna's story: "I always bring it back to my kids." Jenna, who was profiled in Chapter 5, was a white woman and a native English speaker. She was mainstream classroom teacher and had just finished her third year of teaching. During the school year that had just ended, Jenna had taught a fourth-grade class with a group of ELL students assigned to it. Jenna had done part of her student teaching in a large city in a neighboring state and had observed a level of standardization in teaching there that had not existed in the Prairie Town Public Schools at the time. However, over the three years she had spent teaching in Prairie Town, Jenna had seen changes that led her to believe that the district was moving in the direction of the type of standardization that she had experienced during her student teaching placement. She specifically pointed to the adoption of instructional programs like Mondo as an example of this. For Jenna, this change was not entirely unwelcome. As a new teacher, she appreciated the structure that the

Mondo curriculum and the focus on the CCSS provided. However, Jenna was also able to maintain a sense of agency in the face of those mandates. Building on her students' out-of-school experiences was very important to Jenna and, as the quotes below illustrate, it was something that she continued to do despite the new district mandates.

[In the large urban district where she did her student teaching] And, like, all the objectives had to be written on the board. […] So, in the back of my mind, you know, I have all this in the back of my mind because I know that that's where we're heading [in Prairie Town]. […] I mean, we already feel it a little bit after this year and throughout this year. Um, like, getting a specific curriculum that we have to use.

[…] My first year, nothing was different. But I had no idea what to do. And the people that I taught with didn't have time to give me anything. I mean, I was, like, literally just grabbing and, like, trying to do the best I could. Whereas, like, when I went into [name of current school], we started with the Mondo materials. And that just gave me, like, materials and a base to use. And so then, you know, I had that experience. So, then this year was even easier 'cause it was the Mondo materials again – different grade, but, um, I think it's just been a little bit easier for me as a new teacher to have materials versus, I'm sure it's really difficult for teachers who have been teaching a long time. So that kind of works both ways.

[…] I am a, probably, like, an anomaly, but I really enjoy Common Core. Because it just gives me, like, really specific teaching points. And so like, if you look at, like, reading, they have to be able to cite specific evidence. Well, you can do that within anything. I mean, you could do that within the social studies textbook or a science article.

[…] I've really been thinking about guided reading because I don't love the Mondo books. Um, I mean, they're fine. Some of them, my kids love. But the lessons are, like – you, like,

read a couple pages, do a lesson, read a couple pages, do a lesson. And then you're done. The kids don't even get to finish the book. And the kids are, like, what? Like, I don't understand. So, I've really been thinking about different ways to do [guided] reading. And I've been thinking about, do they need to be grouped by ability? Like, what can I do differently? Um, and so this year, in the beginning I tried Mondo. Didn't really love it. So, then I'm, like, all right, let's try something new. And so, I did, like, book groups […] for all the kids, more by interest.

[…] So, then we did, like, reading groups like that, more by interest. And then, um, the actual instruction that I would do, I would check in with those groups, but I tried to get them to, like, run them kind of on their own. And then I did close reading with, like, just tons of different things. I did different articles. I did, like, parts of books. I did songs. I did poetry.

[…] We did a lot of, like, experimenting on, like, what would happen if it wasn't quite leveled groups? […] And especially, um, one of my ELL students just, like, exploded. And I had him in a group that was reading about John F. Kennedy, and he became obsessed with John F. Kennedy and read every book he could find. And, like, improved, like, 20 points on his MAP test. He went up, like, six reading levels in a year. I mean, it was insane.

[…] I just think that, if it comes from an experience – like, or it comes from a place of interest, it's going to be – the kids are going to be more engaged. It's all about engagement, I think. I mean, we're competing with so much. And, I mean, video, [sighs], video games, you know, going home and being able to watch TV or go on the computer. We're competing with a lot. So, if I can, like, get them interested in something, where they go home, and instead of playing a video game or instead of, like, going on the computer and doing some nonsense, them going on the computer and looking up JFK, like, that's worth it to me.

[…] I try to tap into youth culture. Because youth culture is, like, universal to me. Um,

and so, I do a lot with music. I love music. I love dance. I'm a dancer. So, um, like, an example from this year, I did – we did a close read of the song "Hey Mama" by Kanye West. Never in my life have I had students that engaged. And then also we did [a] close read and we learned about, like, similes, metaphors, figurative language, with, um, "Stereo Hearts" by Maroon 5. And, like, just the, like, level of engagement with the kids, it was just – and anytime then after that, when I'd be, like, what's a simile? Remember back to – and they'd know it right away. And so that was, like, really powerful to me.

[…] In fourth grade, part of our curriculum is, um, immigrants coming to [state]. And so, I had a Hmong girl this year. I had two boys from Mexico. I had a boy from Puerto Rico. So, it was really interesting because, like, I went to all their houses, and I wrote down their families' stories of immigrating. […] And so that was a huge learning experience for me. […] I just put it out there to all the families, like, if you have a family story, like, I'd love to hear it. You know, I'd love to come over and sit down with you and talk about it.

[…] I always bring it back to, like, my kids. And, if, like, they're interested in something, I'm going to go with it. Like, if it really ties to who they are as a person and their background, their family's background, I'm going to go with it. […] Um, and so, that's why, like, the immigrant [project] – I wish we would have done it in the beginning of the school year because I would have done more with it, and I would have went more in-depth.

[…] And so, like, one of my student's families, they immigrated from Mexico. Um, and just understanding, like, how hard they worked to get here. So basically, like, I wrote down their story, and the dad was really cool and came in – like, he came into the classroom and basically, like, told the story that I wrote. Um, and so that was, like, a great way to transfer it. That's a real-life experience. It's right here, like, in front of you. Um, and the kids really connected. And

my Hmong student, they let me use all of their, like, artifacts. They let me use their story cloths. They let me use all the pictures from the internment camp. Um, now, they didn't want to come in the room. […] They were like we're not – we don't speak very good English. Like, we don't – we're not comfortable coming in. But they gave me more than enough, and they also gave me their story.

[…] So, I typed up each story, and then the kids, like, close read it, basically and pulled out the information that – because we had, like, a big, um, inquiry chart, it's called. And they had to, like – and so, for the German experience, like, what were some typical things that they did when they came over? Or, were they refugees? Were they migrant workers? Were they, um, actual immigrants? […] And then, from me being able to sit down and listen to the stories, like, I wrote an easier version and a harder version so that the kids who needed the harder version could do that. Yeah. Um, but if I wouldn't have done that, we literally would have just had the stories in the book. And there just would have been that missing connection. I feel like the kids were so much more connected to, like, the whole unit of study because there were actual stories from their peers, parents, or grandparents.

[…] I think, also, like, for the students who … were language learners and brought in their stories, I feel like it just gave them, like, a little more confidence or just – I don't even know how to really say it. But, like, you could see when they were – like, when I was sharing their stories and when their – like, a couple of their parents came in, and the grandparent came in – like, they just felt pride in themselves. And, um, yeah, especially for, like, one of my kiddos who didn't speak a lot of English. You know, it was a way for him to, like, connect with the class. And he didn't even really – I mean, it was just who he was. […] I think part of it, too, is there's kids validating who they are and where they come from. And there's so much power within that. Um,

yeah. That was pretty special.

Kasey's story: "They have no say in what they're reading." Kasey, who was featured in Chapter 5, was an experienced teacher who worked as a Bilingual Education Specialist (BES) at a K-5 elementary school. She was a white woman and a native English speaker and had spent time living and teaching in a Chile, where she had learned to speak Spanish fluently. Unlike Jenna, Kasey's feelings about the district's reading-related initiatives, particularly the adoption of Mondo, the scripted reading program she was required to use, were primarily negative. In Kasey's experience these mandates had limited her autonomy as a teacher and she described them at different points during our interview as "top down" and "robotic." When asked about the scripted nature of the lessons that came with the Mondo program, she explained, "You could just read it, if you wanted to."

For Kasey, who had been teaching for ten years, implementing Mondo represented a significant shift in the way she taught reading. Although she acknowledged that the basic philosophy of the program was similar to a balanced approach to literacy, which she had used previously, Kasey described the Mondo curriculum as being a definite departure from how she had taught reading in the past. The most profound change for Kasey appeared to be the loss of the ability to choose the instructional materials she used and the focus of her reading lessons. Kasey did not feel the same sense of agency that Jenna did in terms of picking and choosing the parts of the Mondo curriculum she would implement. She did not make any references to challenging or changing the program in any way and, when I asked her if she could only use Mondo materials for reading instruction, she answered, "… yeah, yeah, basically." In the quotes below, Kasey describes how she taught reading using the Mondo curriculum and compares it to the way she approached reading instruction in the past. She also highlights the fact that it had

gotten harder for her to build on students' out-of-school experiences, something she directly attributed to efforts to standardize the curriculum, and she discusses how she compensated for that by looking for small-scale ways to draw on her students' out-of-school lives.

[…] I spend most of my day, um, working in literacy. And some of my day in math. Um, I spend very little time, unfortunately, in science and social studies, um, because [pause] teachers want support and principals want support in the literacy and math areas, 'cause that's what's tested. So […] I kind of bounce in and out of classrooms because I support so many classrooms.

[…] We've been really focusing on implementing the Mondo curriculum. So, using that as a resource and trying to figure that out. […] I've done all things Mondo: oral language, phonics, guided reading. Shared reading has been a big focus, so, in the upper grades, we've been trying to really narrow in on a focus of the lesson and what we're trying to have the students understand. And, that's been hard because, [sighs], I think one of the things that we're finding is that teachers are doing a lot of the talking. And, we want to try and limit our focus lesson, you know, to just ten minutes, fifteen minutes and then, you know, use the gradual release of responsibility framework for that. […] It's a framework for good teaching that came from Fisher and Frey. […] [W]e're trying to use Mondo within the framework of [good teaching] […] You state your objectives; you give the focus lesson; there's [pause] some collaboration time; guided re-teaching where you need it; and independent time. And that's the idea.

[…] [In the past] we were using, especially with fourth and fifth graders and maybe with third graders, well-written, good literature for kids. Young adult literature. And now we're using books about, told from the perspective of parrots, which are … mmm.[25]*[…] And, some of*

[25] Kasey's mention of a book told from the perspective of a parrot refers back to an example that she shared with me earlier in the interview of a lesson she did with students using a text that came with the Mondo curriculum that was

the books are really interesting. Some of them, there's a lot more non-fiction that is brought into the Mondo curriculum and that's another focus of the district, is that we need to be able to read non-fiction and, obviously, from a variety of genres, but that we need to be reading about fifty percent informational text and fifty percent literature.

[…] So, it's more just the materials, [laughs]. Which, [laughs], you know, I don't know, there's a lot of good literature out there for kids to connect to and that are on topics that are interesting to them and, [pause], choice, I think that's, [sucks in breath], that's one [thing] that I feel like is such a travesty for our ELLs, is that they have no say in what they're reading. [pause] We just pick it. […] [Prior to the adoption of Mondo] I would bring out, for our guided reading, I would bring out, you know, three or four or five different titles and we'd vote, [pause], on what we wanted to read. I mean, some kids would say, "I really want to read this. I'm going to work on this during independent time." And I would say, "Okay, then we'll go check in on it and see how you're doing with it."

[…] I feel like there's a lot of books that are written about the, maybe not a lot, probably not enough, but I feel like there are good titles that are written about the ELL experience. Coming to the United States and being a student that speaks another language at home and feeling, [pause], different. And feeling, um, like, "Great, I have this great family and why are kids behaving like this?" And, I just, I feel like there's a lot of good literature that they can connect to and, uh, gain not only literature skills, or reading skills, but also a connection to a book that will make them fall in love with reading, which is the whole idea anyway. At least in

narrated by a parrot. Kasey made several references to this book at different points during the interview, particularly when she wanted to highlight how disconnected many of the Mondo books were from her students' experiences or areas of interest.

my mind. [little laugh] I mean, I know they need to read at the, these standards and whatever. And that that's important, um, but, um …

[…] The biggest thing that I feel like I can notice, and I struggle with if this is just my teacher perspective or if the kids actually, I think the kids actually feel it. And [here's] an example. I had this mixed group of guided reading kids of boys, girls, black, white, Hispanic, Asian, ELL, non-ELL, group. […] And we had this great book. It was non-fiction, um, [an] endangered species animal book. […] And, I mean, it's beautiful. It's a beautiful book. Colored, captions everywhere. It's a great non-fiction read and the kids were so excited about reading it. And what I was supposed to talk to them about how the captions and the headings helped them understand what they were reading. Not about, "Cool! Look at this bobcat! It lives here! And they eat this! And they eat that!" "Okay, that's such a good idea, but, but how did that caption help you understand what you're reading?" You know? And so, it's like there's, I feel like there's this disconnect between, we're supposed to be teaching kids to be thoughtful readers – which is excellent – [pause] but, it misses letting them enjoy the book. And talking about the actual content of the book. And that's where, you know, a parrot book, well, they don't really want to talk about the content anyway, it doesn't matter. But, some of the books, there's really great content but we're not supposed to talk about what's in the book. We're supposed to talk about how we, [pause], read that book and how we understand it.

[…] I think having, [pause], literature that connects to students, of any type, that students can connect to and enjoy and have a similar experience with a, a fictional character is pretty powerful. And I think that's missing now. […] I had these great guided reading groups with Star Girl and Esperanza Rising and Maniac Magee and, [sighs], Touching Spirit Bear, Walk Two Moons. And, you know, just all these great, yeah, like kids that are struggling with real stuff, as

a lot of our kids are, trying to figure themselves out. You know, [to] give them a sense of identity.

[…] You need to get, know who your students are, know your audience, to build on what they already know in, in order for real learning to take place. And, using out-of-school experiences, they spend tons of time outside of school. They have tons of experiences in different things over the summer. […] And as it gets harder and harder, as we get more standardized and we get more standardized curriculum and, um, less choice, I think it's going to be harder, but more important, perhaps, to use those small examples to allow them to shine, to use them as examples. Especially our ELLs, to spotlight, like, what cool things they have going on and, um, make those small connections for them and, [pause], help them, you know, use native language where appropriate and, just to like, as texts become […] less and less relevant to their lives, we're going to need to use that more and more, I feel like.

Jenna and Kasey: Analysis. The two stories shared above clearly highlight that teachers responded to district mandates in different ways. As noted previously, there are a number of reasons why this might have been the case. As a relatively inexperienced teacher, Jenna appreciated the structure provided by the two reading-related initiatives the district had adopted. However, she also felt free to challenge those mandates. As a result, she retained a significant amount of control over the instructional choices she made in her classroom and continued to build on her students' out-of-school experiences in extensive ways. This included using texts that were reflective of students' personal interests, alternative forms of texts, like popular songs, and texts that were based on students' own histories. One factor that may have shaped how Jenna responded to this particular district mandate is that forming caring relationships with her students was a central part of her teaching philosophy. Learning about students' out-of-school

worlds and finding ways to acknowledge their experiences in the classroom was a way for her to build the relationships she desired. Given the importance she placed on building on her students' out-of-school experiences, it makes sense that Jenna was willing to deviate from district mandates and do what she thought was best for her students.

Kasey, on the other hand, appeared to feel less of a sense of agency as a teacher than Jenna. In particular, it did not appear that Kasey believed she could ignore district mandates in the same way Jenna did and the extent to which she built on students' out-of-school experiences had decreased. Like Jenna, Kasey was committed to making connections with her students and their families, but as a BES, she saw herself primarily as an advocate for them – someone who looked for ways to help ELL and their families navigate the school system and access the support they needed. She could not be as focused as classroom teachers like Jenna were on getting to know individual students and building relationships with them, a fact that she lamented elsewhere in her interview. Additionally, in her role, Kasey visited classroom across the school to support ELL students. For that reason, she did not have the level of control over classroom instruction that classroom teachers did.[26] It is possible that this lack of agency that Kasey felt as a BES also meant that she did not feel like she could pick and choose which elements of the reading curriculum she would use. To some degree, Kasey's instructional approach had to align with that of the classroom teachers with whom she was working.

Conclusion

This chapter explored what it is like for teachers to enact educational theories, like funds of knowledge, in real-world contexts. In particular, it examined what happens when teachers

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[26] This lack of control was a common theme in many of the interviews I did with teachers who were BESs, including Elisa, Anna, and Kristy. These teachers mentioned that collaborating with classroom teachers was one of the most difficult aspects of their jobs. The role that they played was determined by the classroom teacher and varied from classroom to classroom.

attempt to implement an approach to teaching that involves building on students' out-of-school worlds in a context that prioritizes standards-based teaching, promotes the standardization of teaching practices and limits the autonomy teachers have to make instructional decisions. My goal, as in the previous two data chapters, was to highlight the voices of teachers and to position them as knowledgeable actors. Whereas the previous two data chapters focused on the impact of participants' understanding of their role as teachers on their use of strategies that built on students' funds of knowledge, this chapter focused specifically on the effect that the participants' work context had on their implementation of these practices. To that end, I have tried to present their implementation of these strategies as a reflection of their deep understanding of the context in which they worked and what they saw as the possibilities of carrying out this type of work given that context.

This chapter's focus on the effect of context on participants' use of students' out-of-school experiences reflects my belief that teachers possess important knowledge that is rooted in their everyday lived experiences as educators working in a particular school and/or district, or what Clandinin and Connelly call teachers' "personal practical knowledge." Connelly et al. (1997) explain that "personal practical knowledge" is:

> … a term designed to capture the idea of experience in a way that allows us to talk about teachers as knowledgeable and knowing persons. Personal practical knowledge is in the teacher's past experience, in the teacher's present mind and body, and in the future plans and actions (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 25, as cited in Connelly et al., 1997, p. 666).

The emphasis placed on context in this chapter also stems from my desire to explore how participants' understanding of what was or was not possible for them to accomplish as teachers

was shaped by specific aspects of the environment in which these teachers worked, or what Clandinin and Connelly (1996) refer to as the "professional knowledge context" or "professional knowledge landscape" (p. 24). Clandinin and Connelly (1996) posit that "[t]he professional knowledge context shapes effective teaching, what teachers know, what knowledge is seen as essential for teaching, and who is warranted to produce knowledge about teaching" (p. 24). Taking into consideration both participants' personal practical knowledge and the professional knowledge context in which that knowledge was formed has allowed me to develop a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which participating teachers enacted culturally relevant teaching approaches like funds of knowledge.

The professional knowledge context in which the educators interviewed for this study worked was undergoing significant changes. Whereas, in the past, the teachers themselves had been treated as having the knowledge necessary to make instructional decisions tailored to meet the needs of their students, new district mandates took that authority away from teachers and placed it in the hands of administrators, the developers of required curricula, and the authors of the CCSS. These contextual changes had important effects on teachers and teacher practice. Among other things, they influenced whether or not teachers felt empowered to build on students' out-of-school lives. When mandated programs or instructional strategies sanctioned the use of students' out-of-school experiences, as was the case with the district's writing-related initiatives, teachers were more likely to make these types of connections. Instructional programs and approaches that downplayed the importance of drawing on students' out-of-school lives, like the district's reading-related initiatives, appeared to make it less likely that teachers would engage in that type of practice. For the teachers interviewed for this study, their personal practical knowledge, or the knowledge that they had developed as a result of their experiences

teaching in the district, informed their understanding of what was expected of them as teachers, which mandates they could or couldn't ignore, and where space existed in the curriculum for them to build on students' out-of-school experiences. This understanding of the context in which they worked, in turn, shaped the extent to which they made connections to students' out-of-school worlds.

Teachers' knowledge of the context in which they worked and the decisions they made based on that knowledge also had important implications for their ELL students. In particular, the personal practical knowledge teachers had developed in their specific professional knowledge context affected how students' out-of-school experiences were positioned in the classroom. In some cases, required district initiatives led teachers to organize classroom activities in such a way that students' out-of-school experiences were treated as important resources for academic learning, giving students opportunities to access the full range of their cultural and linguistic repertoires (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003). In other cases, district mandates meant that teachers did not position the knowledge and experiences ELL students brought to the classroom as valuable resources for learning.

Paying attention to the knowledge that teachers develop as the result of their lived experiences working in particular contexts, as I've done in this chapter, is important for educational researchers and teacher educators, particularly those committed to politically engaged and culturally relevant approaches to teaching, like funds of knowledge. Doing this can help outsiders, like educational researchers, understand why teachers take up theories in the ways they do and, in that sense, can point to ways of creating bridges between theory and practice. It can also help teacher educators understand how to prepare prospective teachers to carry out politically engaged work in contexts that may not be supportive of that project. If educational

researchers and teacher educators believe it is important for teachers to implement politically committed approaches to teaching, like funds of knowledge, they must take seriously the contexts in which teachers will be working and give them opportunities to consider how they will be able to prioritize this work even in contexts where they are expected to conform to districtwide mandates and have limited control over the subject matter they cover and the instructional practices they employ. In the concluding chapter of this dissertation, I will discuss the implications of the findings presented in this chapter and the previous data chapters for educational researchers and teacher educators more in depth. I will also explore how the types of strategies employed by the teachers interviewed for this study could serve as examples of ways that teachers can build on students' out-of-school experiences, even in less than ideal circumstances.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Most of the existing research on funds of knowledge has involved university-based researchers taking the lead in developing and applying the concept in school-based and non-school-based settings. Very little, if any, of the literature has explored what happens when teachers take up strengths-based approaches to teaching ELLs, like funds of knowledge, on their own, without the support of researchers. Additionally, with the notable exception of the work done by Moll, González and their colleagues (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Moll, 1992a, 1997; Moll et al., 1992), few studies on funds of knowledge have explored the experiences of teachers who are attempting to implement funds of knowledge-related strategies from the point of view of the teachers themselves. This means that the voices of teachers have largely been absent from funds of knowledge research, except when they themselves are the researchers.

The qualitative interview study described in this dissertation addressed this gap in the literature. In particular, the study explored the following overarching question: *How do teachers understand what it means to build on students' funds of knowledge, or cultural and linguistic resources?* In addition, the investigation examined several related sub-questions, including why teachers might believe it is important to build on students' funds of knowledge; why teachers might limit the extent to which they build on students' funds of knowledge; how teachers learn about and build on students' funds of knowledge; and how they define what counts as relevant out-of-school experiences. In this chapter, I will summarize the study's finding related to these questions. I will also consider the theoretical and practical implications of these findings and suggest directions for further research.

Summary of Key Findings

I found that teachers' reasons for learning about and building on their students' out-of-school knowledge and experiences were intertwined with the ways in which they want about accomplishing those tasks. In describing how they made connections to students' out-of-school worlds, teachers also communicated what they believed they were accomplishing and provided examples of the types of out-of-school experiences that they valued. For that reason, the three data chapters in this dissertation include findings related to all of the sub-questions listed above. However, each chapter examines the data from a different perspective. In the first data chapter, I considered how the individual stories of five participants illuminated larger themes about the ways in which teachers understood and enacted funds of knowledge-related approaches to teaching. In the second data chapter, I explored how participants' larger understanding of their roles and responsibilities as teachers, or their professional discourses, shaped the decisions they made about implementing funds of knowledge-related strategies in their classrooms. In the third data chapter, I analyzed how participants' enactment of funds of knowledge-related strategies was impacted by the context in which they worked. I will discuss the specific findings related to each of these three areas below.

Stories of "good" teaching. For many of the teachers interviewed for this study, including the five who were profiled in Chapter 4, making connections to students' out-of-school worlds was a central part of what they believed it meant to be a "good" teacher, particularly for ELL students. In the stories they told of themselves, participants drew on shared notions of "good" teaching for ELLs which were informed by a variety of influences, including educational theories like funds of knowledge, as well as other strengths-based teaching approaches like culturally responsive teaching, multicultural teaching, teaching for social justice, and ESL

pedagogy. Strengths-based educational approaches recommend that teachers adopt certain dispositions and/or practices in order to better meet the needs of ELL students and other students from non-dominant groups, many of which were mentioned by teachers in this study. These included building meaningful relationships with students and families; recognizing that schools and classrooms traditionally privilege certain ways of knowing and being; and acting to expand "what counts" as valuable knowledge and skills in the classroom setting. In referring to these dispositions and practices, participants signaled that they were a certain kind of teacher, one who was engaged in work that made school a more equitable place for ELL students and their families.

The ways in which the practices and dispositions highlighted above were embodied in the stories of participating teachers serve as examples of what happens when teachers make sense of and enact complex educational theories like funds of knowledge and culturally responsive teaching in their classrooms. As such, their stories highlight the possibilities that exist for carrying out these kinds of teaching approaches in real world contexts. However, participants' stories also demonstrated that it can be difficult for teachers to fully accept and/or enact the dispositions and practices associated with strengths-based approaches to teaching ELLs. In particular, the stories told by participants illustrated that deficit discourses about students and families from non-dominant groups often persist, even when teachers are committed to making connections to students' out-of-school worlds. Additionally, their stories highlight how difficult it is for teachers to truly question their own privileging of school-based forms of knowledge, as well as the barriers that teachers face when implementing these types of educational theories in school contexts that are increasingly accountability-driven and standards-focused.

Impact of larger professional discourses. Participating teachers' reasons for making connections to students' out-of-school lives, and the extent to which they did so, reflected larger professional discourses about what it means to be a teacher. Three professional concerns in particular - caring for students, facilitating student learning, and addressing equity-related issues in the classroom – both encouraged teachers to make connections to students' out-of-school worlds and limited the extent to which they did so. In each of these three areas, the decisions teachers made regarding whether and how to draw on students' out-of-school lives reflected their own perceptions of the particular needs of ELL students. At times, teachers believed those needs could be addressed by building on students' out-of-school experiences. At other times, they believed that meeting those needs meant limiting the extent to which they built on students' out-of-school experiences.

Participants' understanding of the needs of their ELL students and their use of students' out-of-school experiences to address those needs sometimes aligned with the tenets of funds of knowledge theory and sometimes diverged from it. For example, both study participants and funds of knowledge theorists see drawing on the out-of-school lives of students as a means of supporting student learning (Moll, 1992a). However, the teachers in this study primarily saw this practice as a way of increasing student engagement in, or comprehension of, content material. Funds of knowledge theorists, meanwhile, believe that it supports student achievement because it recasts those experiences as important resources for academic learning and positions students as the possessors of valuable sources of knowledge and skills that can be applied in classroom settings (Moll, 1992a). Similarly, both funds of knowledge theorists and study participants believe that it is important for teachers to learn about students' out-of-school worlds. Study participants primarily framed this practice as a way of building caring relationships with

students and families. While funds of knowledge theorists do believe that learning about students' out-of-school worlds is a way of transforming teachers' relationships with students and their families (González et al., 2011), they also see it as an essential way for teachers to develop a more positive assessment of the knowledge and skills possessed by students and families from non-dominant groups (González et al., 2005; Moll, 1992a, 1997; Moll at al., 1992).

In general, study participants did not engage with the critical or social justice-oriented aspects of funds of knowledge theory. Although a few teachers, like Andrea and Rachel, were explicitly committed to teaching for social justice, none of the participants had as their ultimate goal the destabilization of the underlying power structures of schools and classrooms. Teachers strove to make their classroom activities more reflective of the out-of-school experiences and areas of expertise of their ELL students. However, they did not question the inherent value of the types of knowledge and experiences that are typically privileged in school-based settings. Furthermore, they continued to believe that it was important to ensure that students acquired school-based forms of knowledge and language. Indeed, teachers' understanding of what constituted "real" academic learning often limited their enactment of funds of knowledge-related strategies.

It is possible to interpret the differences between the funds of knowledge approach as conceptualized in the original literature and the ways in which participants implemented that approach as an example of teachers misunderstanding, or having an incomplete understanding of, a complex educational theory. These differences can also be seen as an indication that teachers struggle to take up the more difficult aspects of theories like funds of knowledge, particularly the ones that require them to question their own biases and expand their understanding of "what counts" as valuable knowledge in a classroom setting. While those things may be true, it is also

possible to view the decisions teachers made regarding the implementation of funds of knowledge-related strategies as an implicit critique of this approach to teaching. In particular, the ways in which teachers chose to enact funds of knowledge-related strategies highlight several areas of tension that existed between their desire to make connections to students' out-of-school worlds and their larger understanding of their roles and responsibilities vis-à-vis their ELL student. These areas of concern included asking students to publicly share things they might not feel safe sharing and not having the time or freedom to address topics that were not standards-based or part of the sanctioned curricula.

Impact of context. The context in which participants worked, or what Clandinin and Connelly (1996) call the "professional knowledge landscape" (p. 24), also affected their implementation of funds of knowledge-related practices. The personal practical knowledge (Connelly et al., 1997, p. 666) that participants had developed as result of working in their particular teaching context shaped their understanding of what was and wasn't possible for them to accomplish in terms of building on students' out-of-school experiences. As a result of their everyday lived experiences teaching in the district, participants had developed a deep understanding of what the expectations were of them as teachers, the mandates with which they were expected to comply, and the spaces that existed for them build on students' out-of-school lives in the classroom.

The professional knowledge context in which participants worked had become increasingly focused on accountability and standards-based teaching. New district mandates took the authority to make instructional decisions away from teachers and placed it in the hands of administrators, curriculum developers, and the authors of the CCSS. The district-mandated standards and instructional programs functioned as cultural tools that mediated the teaching and

learning activities that took place in participants' classrooms (Cole & Griffin, 1983; Moll, 1992a). In some cases, the required instructional topics and approaches led teachers to organize classroom activities in a way that treated students' out-of-school experiences as important resources for academic learning and that allowed students to draw on the full range of their cultural and linguistic repertoires (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003). In other cases, district initiatives minimized the importance of making connections to students' out-of-school lives. As a result, teachers were less likely to treat the knowledge and experiences ELL students brought to the classroom as valuable resources for learning.

The impact of contextual factors on participants' enactment of funds of knowledge-related strategies was particularly evident in the scope and focus of the strategies and activities teachers used to build on students' out-of-school experiences. Participating teachers primarily built on students' funds of knowledge in small-scale ways, like making in-the-moment connections between content material and students' personal interests or areas of expertise. They drew on students' experiences in larger-scale ways when the curriculum encouraged those types of connections. However, even the limited ways in which teachers made connections to students' out-of-school lives were threatened by district mandates, particularly in the area of reading. Both the new reading program and the focus on the CCSS appeared to have made it less likely that participants would build on students' out-of-school experiences as a part of reading-related instructional activities.

Study Implications

The findings described above have important implications both for teacher educators interested in encouraging practitioners to take up strengths-based approaches to teaching, like funds of knowledge, and for teachers who are trying to enact these approaches in real world

contexts. In this section, I will outline recommendations that I have developed for both groups. I recognize that the beliefs and experiences that teachers bring to their work, as well as the contexts in which they teach, vary a great deal. For that reason, I see these recommendations as a list of issues that teacher educators and practitioners might consider as they explore complex educational theories, like funds of knowledge, rather than as a set of practices to follow.

Recommendations for teacher educators. The findings described above suggest that teacher educators who are committed to strengths-based approaches to teaching for ELLs, such as funds of knowledge, must take seriously the professional beliefs and experiences of the pre-service and practicing teachers with whom they work. This means giving practitioners opportunities to reflect on how funds of knowledge-related strategies connect to their larger understanding of their roles and responsibilities as teachers. It also means encouraging practitioners to consider how they will prioritize this work even in contexts where they are expected to conform to districtwide mandates and have limited control over subject matter and instructional practices. Rather than suppressing, or dismissing, the tensions that teachers experience when attempting to understand and enact complex theories like funds of knowledge in real world classrooms, by engaging teachers in these types of conversations teacher educators could help practitioners articulate and examine their concerns. This, in turn, might help teachers to resolve their concerns, or find strategies for addressing them. It could also lead practitioners to discover ways of making funds of knowledge-related strategies workable in their particular teaching contexts.

Teacher educators can also take advantage of the connections that teachers make between funds of knowledge theory and their larger professional discourses, using them as points of leverage (Martínez et al., 2008, p. 424). Much in the same way that cultural historical theorists

suggest leveraging students' out-of-school experiences and areas of expertise for academic learning, teacher educators can leverage practitioners' existing beliefs about teaching as a means of helping them make sense of theories like funds of knowledge and incorporate new practices into their teaching repertoires. Highlighting for teachers how funds of knowledge-related practices align with their larger professional beliefs – such as the importance of caring for students, facilitating student learning, and working for social justice – may help them see these strategies as a central part of their teaching repertoires. This, in turn, might lead them to continue prioritizing these practices even in accountability-driven, standards-focused teaching contexts.

Finally, teacher educators should continue to push the educators with whom they work to see funds of knowledge as more than just building on students' background knowledge. Teachers interviewed for this study did not necessarily view the connections they made with students' out-of-school lives as a way of challenging traditional school discourses about the relative importance of school-based and non-school-based forms of knowledge. In order to challenge practitioners to take up the critical pedagogy elements of funds of knowledge theory, teacher educators should encourage practitioners to identify and examine their assumptions about "what counts" as valuable knowledge and skills in a school-based setting and to consider how those assumptions shape their perceptions of the experiences and expertise of their ELL students. This might push teachers to move beyond simply acknowledging that students come to school with a range of knowledge and experiences and to come to see those experiences as resources for academic learning.

Recommendations for teachers. The teachers interviewed for this study were committed to learning about and building on their ELL students' out-of-school experiences and

areas of expertise and found ways to do so, even in a context that was not always supportive of that work. The strategies employed by participants could serve as examples for other teachers interested in making connections to students' out-of-school worlds in their classrooms. Like the educators who participated in this study, teachers might look for spaces in the curriculum that lend themselves to building on students' funds of knowledge and to be intentional about providing students with opportunities to make those types of connections. Another strategy teachers might employ is to approach teaching the standards, as Andrea did, by asking themselves "what matters" about a required topic for students and to draw out those aspects of the topic for students. Teachers could also strive to incorporate multiple points of view into instructional activities and ensure that the experiences of students and families from non-dominant groups are included. Finally, in addition to visiting students' homes and spending time with them outside of school, teachers might consider looking for informal ways to learn about students' out-of-school lives and interests, including talking with them at recess or lunch. They could also implement instructional activities that both give students the opportunity to share their out-of-school experiences and help teachers learn about those experiences.

The stories shared by study participants also illustrate that implementing politically-engaged, strengths-based approaches to teaching, like funds of knowledge, is a complex process. The experiences of participating teachers suggest that educators carrying out these types of teaching approaches should continuously examine their own practices and biases and challenge themselves to take seriously the critical pedagogy elements of a funds of knowledge approach. This might involve finding a group of like-minded peers who will encourage them to question their assumptions about "what counts" as valuable knowledge, as well as the deficit discourses they may have internalized about ELL students and their families. Teachers could also

incorporate this type of reflection into their planning process. In particular, they could ask themselves how their conception of what "real" learning entails might limit the extent to which they build on students' out-of-school worlds and they could challenge themselves to identify ways their students' experiences might be leveraged for academic learning. When choosing what types of student experiences to build on, teachers might also push themselves look beyond cultural traditions and consider the knowledge and areas of expertise that students have developed as a result of their interest in popular culture topics, participation in hobbies, their experiences as members of their households, and their immigration histories. Teachers might also ask themselves how they can draw on the experiences of students and their families as a way of including multiple viewpoints in classroom activities and fostering discussions about equity among students.

Directions for Future Research

The current study illustrates that there is much to be learned from listening to the voices of teachers, particularly for researchers interested in investigating how complex educational theories get put into practice. For that reason, it is important to continue pursuing research on funds of knowledge, and other related pedagogical approaches, that foregrounds the perspectives of the educators implementing those approaches. However, the results of this investigation also point to the existence of a complex set of factors that influence how teachers understand and enact educational theories like funds of knowledge. Although this study explored some of these factors, future investigations could examine in more depth the personal and professional variables that influence how teachers take up these ideas. This could be accomplished by addressing some of the limitations of the current study outlined in the methods chapter. For example, carrying out a study that involves two interviews, rather than one, would allow the

researcher to gather more information related to the personal and professional backgrounds of teachers, as well as the specific school context in which they work. Additionally, observing some study participants their classrooms would further contribute to the researcher's understanding of their teaching context and its impact on their enactment of funds of knowledge-related strategies. Observations would also help the researcher better understand the strategies teachers are employing and, perhaps, identify other practices that weren't mentioned in the interviews. Finally, including teachers who are from the same backgrounds as their students would add an important perspective that was missing from this study and could uncover different motivations and strategies.

Concluding Thoughts

Despite the fact the teachers I interviewed were not, for the most part, implementing the funds of knowledge approach as described in the original literature (e.g., González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Moll, 1992a, 1997; Moll et al., 1992), I believe that the experiences of the educators I interviewed and their descriptions of the ways in which they built on their students' out-of-school worlds are compelling and important. They point to the possibilities that exist for teachers to draw on the resources that children bring to the classroom with them and to the factors that limit the extent to which teachers are willing or able to carry out this type of work. Their stories help illuminate how educational theories get taken up, used, and changed by practitioners. They also illustrate how the professional and personal beliefs, professional contexts, and lived experiences of educators shape the decisions they make when faced with implementing theories about how to best meet the needs of English Language Learners and other students from non-dominant groups. Paying attention to the voices of teachers and treating them as knowledgeable actors provides us with a more nuanced view of the tensions teachers

experience when enacting ideas like funds of knowledge and helps us better understand the feasibility of carrying out complex educational theories in real world classroom contexts.

Appendix A

Teacher Interview Protocol

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself. How long have you been teaching? What grade levels do you teach?
2. How long have you been working with ELL students? In what capacity do you work with ELL students?
3. Describe any training you have that is specifically related to working with ELL students. (If not mentioned, follow up with questions about specific certifications, whether training was at the graduate or undergraduate levels and whether or not training included information on building on students' out-of-school lives.)
4. Why did you decide to work with students who are classified as English Language Learners?
5. What do you believe are some of the unique learning needs of ELL students?
6. Can you describe for me some of the reading and writing activities that occur in your classroom during a typical day?
7. Are you familiar with the term "funds of knowledge"?

[Note: If participant is not familiar with the term "funds of knowledge," I will skip questions 8-10. I will ask the rest of the questions, replacing the term "funds of knowledge" with "out-of-school experiences and forms of knowledge".]

8. If you had to explain the concept of funds of knowledge to someone who had never heard of it, what would you say?
9. How did you first learn about the concept of funds of knowledge?
10. Did learning about the concept of funds of knowledge change the way you thought about ELL students and their families?
11. Why do you believe it's important to build on your ELL students' funds of knowledge?
12. What kinds of out-of-school experiences do you think contribute to school success?
13. How do you learn about ELL students' funds of knowledge?
14. How do you choose what types of funds of knowledge to incorporate into your classroom instruction?
15. What are some of the things you do in your classroom to build on your ELL students' funds of knowledge? Can you give me some specific examples?
16. Do you ever use ELL students' family members or community members as resources during classroom activities?

17. What impact do the funds of knowledge activities you carry out have on the ELL students in your class? How do you know?

18. What impact does learning about and building on students' funds of knowledge have on you as a teacher?

19. Is this something you will continue to do? Why or why not?

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