

Gathering Funds of Knowledge: An Elementary Social Studies Unit Plan for Bilingual Settings

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At the intersection of social studies and world language curricula are opportunities to explore students' prior learning with vocabulary-rich content designed to support language acquisition goals. "Funds of knowledge" is defined as socio-cultural, economic, and historical knowledge from home and community settings.¹ The instructional strategies presented in this inquiry-based unit were sequenced by two Spanish-speaking teachers in two-way bilingual classrooms to provide space for students' families to contribute "funds of knowledge" to learning activities in early childhood and elementary classrooms. In contrast with an additive approach to multicultural education, a funds of knowledge approach invites educators to craft a curriculum organically, drawing from their students' home experiences and cultural knowledge. An additive approach to multicultural education has been criticized for its superficial ethnic representation in curriculum.² In contrast, the funds of knowledge approach represented in the unit requires the teacher to invite students and families to co-create content in the instructional sequence.

The unit plan was designed for pre-K to first grade classrooms under a National Professional Development grant from the U.S. Department of Education as part of a two-way dual language immersion program with a focus on asset-based perspectives such as funds of knowledge.³ In the program, students who speak Spanish at home and students who speak English at home receive about 60 percent of their instruction in Spanish. For the rest of the day, instruction is in English. In addition to the development of oral proficiency and literacy in both languages, students learn math, science, and social studies. Therefore, we built into the unit various student-centered activities that might be adapted to other two-way dual immersion elementary classrooms. As the instructional sequence unfolds, students gather and share funds of knowledge from their family about foodways, music and dance, and folk-art traditions practiced at home to create a uniquely relevant and authentic learning experience.

The social studies content in the unit was framed with the Compelling Question: "How do family traditions uphold culture?" The instructional sequence is aligned to the social studies curriculum themes: ❶ **CULTURE**, ❷ **TIME, CONTINUITY, AND CHANGE**, and ❸ **PEOPLE, PLACES, AND ENVIRONMENTS**.⁴ In Louisiana, where the unit was developed and then taught, lessons are aligned with



Louisiana Department of Education standards.⁵ The LA DOE early childhood social studies standards aligned with the unit call for students to learn to:

- Distinguish between events, people, and symbols in the past and present. (Standard 2)

- Demonstrate an understanding of the connections between their physical and cultural environments through the use of globes, maps, and other visual representations. (Standard 3)

The sequence is also aligned with the Five C standards from the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), which dovetail well with the NCSS Themes and include: Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, Communities.⁶ The Louisiana state standards for modern language integrated into the unit require students to:

- Interact with others in informal, one-on-one, or small-group conversations using culturally appropriate language and gestures. (Standard 1)
- Demonstrate an understanding of words and concepts presented in the target language and in authentic materials using listening, reading, and viewing strategies. (Standard 2)
- Present information, concepts and ideas to an audience orally or through writing. (Standard 3)

To integrate the three NCSS Themes listed above with the ACTFL standards of language learning and state standards, students are required to communicate and listen in Spanish by sharing information, reactions, feelings, and opinions. Therefore, the instructional strategies in the unit plan encourage students to communicate how language and culture connect with social studies content in their homes and in the larger community. For example, students examine and compare language and cultural practices. Students connect geography to history and culture when they discuss traditions from their home and heritage region or country. Students also share and compare diverse historical facts and cultural activities such as food traditions, music and dance, artwork, and historical figures. Finally, the unit implores students to invite their families and community to interact and collaborate while speaking their home language as they explore numerous cultural practices.⁷ All of these activities are connected with the concept of funds of knowledge because the instructional sequence heavily relies on knowledge gleaned from students' families and communities.

Dynamic Experiences and Home Knowledge

The funds of knowledge approach was developed out of a concern for how the concept of culture has been used in education to perpetuate deficit-laden stereotypes about students and families. Furthermore, White educators, and students as well, may believe that "culture" is something only people of color and immigrants possess.⁸ As opposed to an overly deterministic view of culture, the funds of knowledge approach builds curriculum based on the dynamic experiences and home knowledge of students to deepen learning in the content area.⁹ The

National Center on Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness identifies five highlights from research on funds of knowledge¹⁰ that educators can use to inform effective pedagogies to stimulate family and community engagement:

1. Families have abundant knowledge that schools can learn and use to engage families in the school and classroom.
2. Students bring knowledge from their homes and communities that can be used for concept and skill development.
3. Classroom practices sometimes underestimate and constrain what children are able to display intellectually.
4. Teachers should focus on helping students find meaning in activities, rather than learn rules and facts.
5. Group discussions around race and class should promote trust and encourage dialogue.

These highlights provided a rationale for our creation of this social studies unit plan for early childhood and elementary students, including those in two-way dual language immersion programs. The carefully sequenced instructional strategies (a) introduce the geographic setting, (b) gather funds of knowledge, (c) support second language acquisition, (d) expose students to exemplary children's literature in Spanish, and (e) foster metalinguistic awareness¹¹ within the social studies content area.

Since students' funds of knowledge drive the direction of the content, the curriculum can be modified, differentiated, or adapted for any educational setting. Students and families possess funds of knowledge regardless of their background. For example, students from a typical white and middle-class backgrounds would benefit from the unit because it may expose them to a more nuanced understanding of how their home knowledge differs from that of their peers. Regardless of the context where the unit may be taught, a strength of the funds of knowledge approach is its focus on the experiences, knowledge, and assets students bring from home into the school environment.

Language, which is an essential aspect of students' fund of knowledge, is at the forefront of the unit plan because it is how children communicate and share their understanding of the world. Their first language is the language spoken to them by their family. As such, the language students bring to school represents their funds of knowledge in its most personal form. In the unit, students' home language (English or Spanish) and the language of instruction (Spanish) are crucial elements that guide students' interactions with their teacher, family, and peers. The content unfolds through its co-creation. In this manner, when students share aspects of funds of knowledge through use of their home language, they are using language to create



relevant learning experiences.

As students introduce words throughout the unit, there are opportunities to explore and discuss cognates (similar words in English and Spanish) and language variation (differences in pronunciation of a word within one language). Researchers who have discussed the importance of cross-linguistic analysis within immersion settings also caution teachers that concurrent language learning in bilingual settings (e.g., a teacher switches back and forth, quickly and often, between speaking English and Spanish) has not been shown to benefit linguistic proficiency.¹² Thus, in the activities we describe here, the teacher is mostly speaking Spanish, while also striving to integrate all students' experiences into the classroom discussions.

Language-Learning Strategies

The unit was designed to be taught during the 60 percent of classroom time that instruction is in Spanish. For that reason, instructional strategies for teaching social studies were integrated with language learning strategies to scaffold all stu-

dents' comprehension of Spanish. This includes strategies to teach appropriate functions of language, meaning how the language is used, such as seeking information, informing others, and expressing wants, needs, ideas, and feeling. A noteworthy resource for strategies for teaching functions of language can be found on the "Colorín Colorado" website, www.colorincolorado.org/sites/default/files/Academic-Language-Function.pdf.

In two-way dual language immersion settings, students need to master content-obligatory and content-compatible language. Content-obligatory language is needed to understand the social studies content in both languages of instruction. Content-compatible language can enrich the students' language acquisition; it is not vocabulary required to master social studies content, but often transfers to other content areas or language that is useful in daily situations.¹³ These distinctions are not a rigid binary, but they are useful to think about as we plan lessons and list vocabulary to be learned. Strategies for

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teaching content-obligatory and content-compatible language are woven into the instructional strategies in the unit with the use of (1) anchor charts to pre-teach vocabulary and introduce vocabulary, (2) conversations that arise in which students share their funds of knowledge, and (3) read-alouds with children's literature in Spanish.

Consequently, content-obligatory language in the unit includes words in Spanish that students will need as they talk about people, events, symbols, ideas, and family and community. Content-obligatory language would also include verbs, pronouns, and adjectives commonly used when talking about the social studies content. For example, in this lesson, content-obligatory verbs include to do (*hacer*), to cook (*cocinar*), and to dance (*bailar*). In the unit plan, teachers cover content-compatible language when they address common language errors students tend to make, such as mistakes with grammatical gender, capitalization, and punctuation. Those linguistic features are not part of the social studies content, but they are needed for language and cultural competence.

A Unit to Discover Families' Funds of Knowledge

This inquiry-based unit includes inclusive student-centered strategies to facilitate exploration of social studies content including geography, music and dance, folk-art, and foodways--the cultural, social, and economic practices relating to the production and consumption of food. Families' funds of knowledge are gathered in the home and shape the content of the classroom activities to provide an organic and culturally responsive learning experience. In this way, the social studies content is explored through students' use and exploration of the Spanish language.¹⁴ Since the unit was created for a two-way dual language immersion program with a significant Latinx population, examples from this setting will be described. However, as previously noted, the instructional strategies are malleable to any student population, regardless of the language used in instruction. The unit plan can be taught in its entirety or in an abbreviated form, depending on curriculum time constraints. It may take up to three or four weeks if it is taught in full, or approximately one week per lesson, given that a school has dedicated time for the teaching of social studies on a daily basis.

To introduce the geographic setting, the instructional sequence begins with an analysis of thematic maps of the Americas. Teachers may choose to use political, climate, language, and historical maps. Introducing a south-up map at some point in the lessons can be fun.¹⁵ After students share geographical locations of importance for their families, the students create a puzzle map of the Americas (using light-weight cardboard and scissors) that includes important locations such as countries, towns, and cities. Once the teacher is equipped with knowledge of the heritage regions of students' families, they can guide students to identify and discuss the importance

of significant landmarks such as major rivers, seats of government, national parks, major cities and ports, and the homes of historical figures.

Take-Home Handouts

The four-page **Pullout** in this issue of *SSYL* is devoted to handouts that accompany these classroom activities. After the geographical setting of the unit is developed (through map analysis, map-making, and comparing and contrasting the purpose of monuments in countries of interest), the teacher and students turn their focus to cultural aspects of the region(s) such as: stories, foodways, music, dance, and folk art. Twice during the course of the unit, students take home a graphic organizer (**Pullout** pages P1 and P2), based on the funds of knowledge approach, to facilitate discussion and complete with their parents. Students and parents can complete these handouts in Spanish or English. They were specifically adapted for this instructional sequence from the National Center on Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness.¹⁶ The handouts frame social studies content in a question format, with the questions appearing in both English and Spanish.

After identifying and exploring the geographic setting, the next topic students explore is foodways. The teacher offers a vocabulary lesson related to foodways. Then students bring **Handout P1** (in the Pullout) home to spark conversation with their family. The focused questions guide students through a discussion about traditions related to foodways, including stories about family recipes, and food-related habits or economic activities. Back in school, students will share this knowledge with the class, allowing the teacher to select relevant children's literature to integrate into future learning activities.

To teach obligatory language, students brainstorm common foods and types of cooking from their family's culture, such as *maíz* (corn). The teacher writes this vocabulary and draws corresponding images on an anchor chart. After students have completed the foodways graphic organizer with their families, they share and discuss what they learned about family recipes and relate stories about food. The teacher can record any new vocabulary that arises in these discussions on the anchor chart and discussed. Finally, to enrich this experience, the teacher selects children's literature (in Spanish) to support family and community connections with foodways and related cultural traditions. We recommend Colorín Colorado (www.colorincolorado.org/), a bilingual website for educators and families of English language learners, as a resource for finding appropriate and high-quality children's literature in Spanish.¹⁷ The **Sidebar** on page 18 provides a list of books and resources we recommend for the unit plan. Although teachers can use our suggested reading selections, we encourage them to curate children's literature to complement their students' funds of knowledge.

As the unit progresses, students continue to gather funds of knowledge from their family. **Handout P2** (in the Pullout) focuses questions about music and dance that a student's family

members may enjoy as audience members or as performers, and if the latter, as an avocation or a vocation. After students have discussed that completed handout, the teacher aligns and integrates audio and video clips of music and dance with children's literature based on the funds of knowledge students have shared on these topics. Students' development of vocabulary deepens and is recorded on an anchor chart, along with a visual and auditory descriptions of dances such as Salsa, Mambo, Merengue, and the instruments used to produce music for these dances. Students can also discuss similarities and differences between these different forms of Latin American music and dance. As with the topic of foodways described above, the teacher will teach vocabulary and integrate into the activities content-obligatory language, including nouns, verbs, and features and functions of language. To wrap up the topic of music and dance, students create instruments in class, such as maracas, to produce music for a dance party at which families and music teachers are invited to participate.

Concluding with Art Projects and a Big Book

Last, students explore folk art produced in Latin America. For the final lesson in the unit, the teachers chose to introduce symbolism in Latin American art, including indigenous art. Since the teachers who created the unit plan are from Mexico and Colombia, the lesson in this part of the unit provided them with an opportunity to share their funds of knowledge with students. Students were introduced to symbols in artwork produced by Frida Khalo and Diego Rivera (Mexico), and Fernando Botero (Colombia). To demonstrate understanding,

students created self-portraits in the style of these artists and integrated their own symbols, featured around the margins, to represent themselves.

To reinforce the concept of symbolism in artwork, the teachers showed examples of forms of popular folk art in Latin America, such as *Ojo de Dios* from Mexico and *Molas* from Panama, a country that borders Colombia. *Ojo de Dios* ("A God's eye" in English) is a spiritual and votive object made by weaving a design out of yarn upon a wooden cross.

Mola, which originally meant "bird plumage," is the Kuna word for clothing, specifically blouse. The word "*mola*" has come to mean the elaborate embroidered panels that make up the front and back of a Kuna woman's traditional blouse. (**Handout P3 in the Pullout**). Teachers should also be aware that, in colloquial Spanish, to say something is "*mola*" is akin to saying that it's "cool" or "trendy." For example, "*Mola la foto!*" could be translated as, "That photo rocks!"¹⁸

Teachers often use an art project to conclude a lesson or unit, and we also followed this useful convention. Children usually find an art project to be emotionally rewarding and memorable, and they get doubly rewarded when they bring their creation home. To conclude the unit, each student created a colorful "*faux mola*" featuring a wild animal or perhaps a pet. Directions for making a *faux mola* are on **Handout P4 in the Pullout**. Finally, the teacher assembled the students' panels to create a large class mosaic, a "quilt" of many energetic colors and shapes.

As a summative assessment for the unit, students accumulated "artifacts" that revealed funds of knowledge, as well

Suggested Resources

Read-Alouds for the Classroom

- Argueta, J. *Tamalitos: Un Poema Para Cocinar/A Cooking Poem*. Toronto: Groundwood Books, 2017.
- Brown, M. *Frida Kahlo and Her Animalitos*. New York: NorthSouth Books, 2017.
- Brown, M. *Tito Puente, Mambo King*. New York: Harper Collins, 2013.
- Tonatiuh, D. *Danza! Amalia Hernández and el Ballet Folklórico de México*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2013.

Online Resources for Teachers and Parents

- Colorín Colorado, www.colorincolorado.org. "Colorín Colorado is a national multimedia project that offers a wealth of bilingual, research-based information, activities, and advice for educators and families of English language learners (ELLs)." It's an educational service of WETA, with funding from the American Federation of Teachers and National Education Association.
- Dual Language Education of New Mexico, www.dlenm.org. "DLeNM is a grass-roots educational nonprofit organization serving the professional and informational needs of New Mexican communities that wish to implement dual language education."
- Center for Applied Linguistics (Two-way Immersion), www.cal.org/twi. "CAL is a nonprofit organization promoting access, equity, and mutual understanding for linguistically and culturally diverse people around the world. CAL has information and related to Bilingual and Dual Language Education."
- Center for Advanced Research in Language Acquisition (Immersion Resources), carla.umn.edu/immersion/resources.html. Fourteen national professional organizations are listed on this CARLA webpage. "CARLA is a research and resource center devoted to improving language teaching and learning" and is part of the University of Minnesota.



as evidence of acquired language skills, in a “big book” of family and community-based knowledge. The whole class created this book over many weeks. It emerged organically as the instructional strategies in the curriculum progressed. Artifacts in such a “big book” can include, but are not limited to, maps that highlight locations and monuments from students’ heritage regions, recipes and accompanying stories from families, images of dancers and musicians with brief descriptions, and a collection of portraits and folk art created by the students. In each section of the “big book,” students can include content-obligatory and content-compatible vocabulary, which reinforces the features and functions of language they’ve learned throughout the entire unit.

Guest Visitors

Throughout all stages of the unit, families should be welcomed into the classroom to share their funds of knowledge through cooking, music, dance, or art demonstrations. However, given time and transportation constraints, or constraints many schools place on parents’ access to the classroom, this may not be feasible. As an alternative to in-class visits, family members might use digital technologies to record brief cooking, music, dance, or art demonstrations, or even join a live, classroom discussion using Skype, Zoom, or Facetime.

Conclusion

The instructional strategies in this social studies unit provided early childhood and elementary teachers with abundant opportunities to learn about and apply students’ funds of knowledge, and to support second language acquisition. Second language content is scaffolded and reinforced through the use of anchor charts, conversations, and applications of students’ funds of knowledge, as well as children’s literature read aloud in Spanish. Informal, formative assessments based on conversations with students while creating the anchor charts and during read-alouds can help teachers assess students’ social studies knowledge and Spanish proficiency. The “big book” summative assessment allows students to demonstrate the social studies

content and language skills they learned while they engaged in a relevant exploration of the compelling question asked at the start, “How do family traditions uphold culture?”

Notes

1. N. González, L. C. Moll, and C. Amanti, *Funds of Knowledge: Theorizing Practices in Households, Communities, and Classrooms* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2005).
2. J. E. Banks, “Approaches to Multicultural Curriculum Reform,” in *Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives*, J. E. Banks and C. M. Banks, eds. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 233–254.
3. The completed “funds of knowledge unit plan” is slated to be published free online by the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette; This work was supported by a 2017 NPD OELA grant from the U. S. Department of Education, T365Z170762.
4. NCSS, *National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies Standards* (Silver Spring, MD: NCSS, 2010); *College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards* (Silver Spring, MD: NCSS, 2013).
5. Louisiana Department of Education, “Academic Standards” (Louisiana Department of Education, n.d.), www.louisianabelieves.com/resources/library/academic-standards.
6. American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, “Standards Summary (Washington, DC: ACTFL, n.d.), www.actfl.org/publications/all/world-readiness-standards-learning-languages/standards-summary.
7. National Standards Collaborative Board, “World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages 4th ed.” (Alexandria, VA: NSCB, 2015), www.actfl.org/resources/world-readiness-standards-learning-languages.
8. G. J. Ladson-Billings, “It’s Not the Culture of Poverty, It’s the Poverty of Culture: The Problem with Teacher Education,” *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 37, no. 2 (2006), 104–109.
9. Gonzalez and Amanti.
10. National Center on Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness, “Exploring Cultural Concepts: Funds of Knowledge” (Washington, CD: NCCLR, 2019), <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/spring2spring-funds-of-knowledge-eng.pdf>.
11. R. Lyster, *Content-Based Language Teaching* (New York: Routledge, 2018).
12. S. Ballinger, R. Lyster, A. Sterzuk, and F. Genesee, “Context-Appropriate Crosslinguistic Pedagogy,” *Journal of Immersion and Content-Based Language Education* 5, no. 1 (2017), 30–57; T. W. Fortune and D. J. Tedick, “Context Matters: Translanguaging and Language Immersion Education in the U.S. and Canada,” in *Perspectives on Language as Action: Festschrift in Honor of Merrill Swain*, M. Haneda and H. Nassaji, eds. (Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters, 2019), 27–44.
13. A. Snow, M. Met, F. Genesee, “A Conceptual Framework for the Integration of Language and Content in Second/Foreign Language Programs,” *TESOL Quarterly* 23, no. 2 (1989), 201–217.
14. B. Cruz and S. Thornton, “Social Studies for English Language Learners: Teaching Social Studies that Matters,” *Social Education* 73, no.6, (2009), 271–274.
15. Examples of South-Up maps can be found at manywaystoseetheworld.org.
16. NCCLR (see note 10).
17. Colorín Colorado: A Bilingual Site for Educators and Families of English Language Learners, www.colorincolorado.org.
18. “Odd Spanish Expressions: Mola,” www.citylifemadrid.com/odd-spanish-expressions-mola.

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