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## Transforming teacher-family relationships: Shifting roles and perceptions of home visits through the Funds of Knowledge approach

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Transforming teacher-family relationships: Shifting roles and perceptions of home visits through the Funds of Knowledge approach

Abstract

Education has embraced the idea of an asset approach to working with families and children, creating a focus on developing collaborative relationships with families by building on what they bring to the table. In an effort to enact this idea, we draw attention to using ethnographic home visits to construct reciprocal relationships by teaching teachers to recognize families' culturally developed bodies of knowledge and weave them into their classroom practices. In this paper we explore what happened when early childhood teachers entered homes to learn from families and identify their funds of knowledge. The findings show how power and perception in teachers' roles surfaced when they attempted to shift their roles from that of a teacher to a learner during ethnographic home visits. In analyzing teachers' experience before, during and after ethnographic home visits we saw their general desire to adopt an asset-based mentality. However, the hegemonic structure of schooling, previous experiences, and traditional teachers roles and power shaped their experience with the FoK framework. We end with recommendations for teachers and teacher educators who are interested in using home visits to develop an asset-approach to their work with families.

*Key words:* Home-School Relationships, Home Visits, Funds of Knowledge, Early Childhood, Family Engagement

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### **Introduction**

Nowhere do we foster inquiry into who our students really are or encourage teachers to develop links to the often rich home lives of students, yet teachers cannot hope to begin to understand who sits before them unless they can connect with the families and communities from which their students come (Delpit, 1995, p.179)

So where does this leave educators? Two decades later, calls for teachers to connect with families, attention to policies and practices aimed to bridge home and school have swelled. The most common ways schools take action on this desire is to provide school involvement opportunities for families, such as attending conferences, family nights at school, and home visitation (Hill & Taylor, 2004). Across these events the resounding message is to generate partnerships between home and school. Early education scholars have argued that in order to better support learning for young children, teachers must work collaboratively with families. Believing that families are children's first and best teachers, teachers are encouraged to adopt an asset view of families (Bennett & Taylor, 2006). Extending this notion further, scholars suggest teachers establish relationships of reciprocity and mutual trust (*confianza*) with families as a basis to transform understandings of cultural resources (Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg, 1991; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005a).

Despite a willingness to take up this perspective, for teachers working with minority and/or under resourced children and families, a disconnect remains between home and school relationships. As student populations become increasingly more diverse, disparities exist in teachers' perceptions of students' academic capabilities and families' educational involvement (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). In response, teachers are encouraged to reshape their perceptions of students and families by recognizing and honoring home resources and cultural ways of knowing. Based on this notion, the *Funds of Knowledge* (FoK) approach was developed to provide a framework to connect with and respect the lived experiences and practices at home through reshaping classroom pedagogy to build on diverse cultural ways of knowing (González, et al., 2005a). The FoK approach merges qualitative and ethnographic methods for teachers to learn about students' rich cultural, social and intellectual resources present in the household (González, et al., 2005a).

FoK shifts the traditional understanding of home-school relations for teachers and families by reconceptualizing the notion of home visits. Teachers enter homes to learn and gather information from the families rather than going to share information about student academics, behavior, or as a means of outreach to teach families about activities to do at home to support schooling. Through home visits and conversational interviews teachers pose tiered and topical inquiry-based questions to build mutual trust and a relationship with families (Moll, Amanti, Neff & González, 1992; Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg, 1992). Teachers reflect on this gained information and use children's FoK to inform pedagogy and curriculum for diverse communities (Moll, et al., 1992).

Recognizing that transforming the family-teacher relationship involves multiple people, perspectives, and social influences, we wanted know what happened when teachers try to step out of traditional teacher/family roles to learn from families. In an attempt to deconstruct the traditional teacher/family relationships in which parents are expected to defer to teachers' expertise knowledge (Lareau, 2000), we worked with teachers enrolled in professional development (PD) focused on culturally responsive teaching using the FoK approach. In an effort to learn from what happens when teachers try to learn from families we address the question: How do teachers take up the idea of conducting ethnographic home visits to learn about children's funds of knowledge?

## Literature

### Conducting Home Visits

Traditionally in the United States, home visits were used as a strategy to address the needs of the children, their families, and their communities. The primarily unidirectional aim of home visits has historically centered on sharing school perspectives on healthy development along with school practices and academic goals to families (Bhavnagri & Krolikowski, 2000). Such home visits often resemble parent-teacher conferences that take place in a home instead of a school setting. Hedges and Gibbs (2005) caution this approach, suggesting, "if parents are viewed as being recipients of education, the underlying assumption of this approach may perhaps not foster a shared, respectful partnership" (p.3). When teachers enter home visits with a school agenda they have a difficult time seeing the knowledge and benefits of home practices that are unfamiliar to them.

Changing the aim of home visits can provide teachers better insight into the social and cultural ways of knowing that are present in the home and help teachers build positive, trusting relationships with families (Lin & Bates, 2010; Meyer & Mann, 2006). As with Velez-Ibanez and Greenberg (1992), Moll and his colleagues (1992) concluded that building reciprocal relationships relies on forming a respectful and symmetrical social relationship with families. This involves teachers conducting home visits not to teach, but to learn from families. Shifting to this style can contribute to the construction of trusting relationships, however it must be done thoughtfully (Tenery, 2005).

In a FoK approach, teachers and researchers work to deconstruct narrow notions of family involvement. Engaging in this work, teacher-researchers make the pivotal shift to transform their relationships with families by respecting the rich cultural resources that are present in daily home practices (Gonzalez, et al., 2005a). Through understanding families' experiences, teachers are exposed to various ways that families are involved in their child's education. In addition to widening the space of involvement, there is potential for a lasting shift in teachers' attitudes and beliefs of children and their families that can disrupt deficit model discourses (Oughton, 2010). To accomplish this, Moll and his colleagues (1992) encouraged teachers to conduct ethnographic home visits in a tiered fashion that first established mutual trust and respect then pose open-ended questions about daily practices, labor history, genealogy, and education background of the family members.

In a recount of conducting home visits and family interviews for a FoK project, Tenery (2005) described how her disposition changed over time. At first, she was

concerned with families' perceptions of the visit and her imposition on their time. Her anxiety and apprehension of the first home visit subsided as she gained confidence and a deeper relationship with families. Tenery concluded that throughout the FoK project, the role of the teacher is to act as a mediator in multiple contexts – “Teachers are perceived as active agents of mediation from the conception of involving teachers in conducting household visits, to the theoretical assertion that knowledge is socially constructed and ethnographic methodology transformational” (p.127). Throughout this process, teachers mediate the roles of teacher and researcher in an attempt to not abandon one for the other, rather to act mutually as an insider and an outsider, as a learner and a teacher.

This can be difficult to actualize when teachers “have limited knowledge or experience with children and parents who are different from him/her linguistically, culturally, and racially” (Lin & Bates, 2010, p. 180). Lightfoot (2003) provided a sage piece of advice for teachers who want to take on this task – that teachers need to figure out how to be inquisitive without being intrusive and voyeuristic. Unfortunately, teachers tend to not know they have crossed that line until after they have done it. Thinking about what they choose *not* to ask can help teachers figure out how to navigate these interviews (Lightfoot, 2003). Further, teachers enter homes with their own value-based FoK, which influences what they observe and interpret as a cultural resource. Though well intentioned, a teacher as ethnographer may unconsciously frame questions in a way that reflects a *culture of power* and the hegemonic structures of schooling (Zipin, 2009).

### **Power & Perception in Family/Teacher Relationships**

To explore what happened when teachers conducted ethnographic home visits to learn from families we examined literature on teachers' perceptions of home-school relationships and the lived experiences of families (Lightfoot, 2003) and how power operates in teacher/family relationships (Rodriquez, 2013; Lareau, 2000). Despite teachers' genuine desire to build strong partnerships with families, actual enacting of home-school relationships is complex and demonstrates how power and perception can cloud the best of intentions. Lightfoot (2003) saw how, “both parents and teachers have a sense of territoriality that shape their encounters, a map in their minds whose lines define their appropriate roles and range of their authority” (p. 50). Regardless of what the lines are teachers should recognize that they “are both bridge builders and gatekeepers. They are engaged in the dialectic of forging connections and maintaining boundaries with parents” (Lightfoot, 2003, p.72).

Established, hegemonic roles of families and teachers help define and navigate home-school relationships and concurrently create boundaries between families and teachers. Often, educators conflate these boundary lines of teacher/family relationships for collaborative relationships. In Lareau's (2000) study of home-school relationships she noted, “a partnership implies a relationship between equals where power and control is evenly distributed...Instead, [teachers] wanted parents to defer to them and to their decisions in the classroom” (p.35). Power issues can run rampant in these professional/client relationships masquerading as collaborative partnerships. That said, boundaries or norms of roles are dynamic and unspoken. There are socially constructed rules for participating in power (Depit, 1995) and teachers often do not want to explicitly express their power. Instead of confronting power issues families and teachers hide in the ritual of routines such as parent-teacher conferences, which often leave families

feeling frustrated and uniformed (Lightfoot, 2003). Building reciprocal and trusting relationships can help, but this needs to be done through “freedom of expression and truth telling” (Lightfoot, 2003, p.79).

Power also plays a particular role when enacting the FoK approach. The framework attempts to reconceptualize relationships between home and school by having teachers recognize the knowledge children are developing from outside of school contexts (Gonzalez, et al., 2005b). In a sense, if teachers are capable of learning about children’s multiple resources and bringing these resources into school there is potential for a power shift as schools recognize more diverse forms knowledge (Rodriguez, 2013). At the same time, teachers are still positioned as the ones who are in control of what type of knowledge is allowed in and kept out of classrooms (Zipin, 2009). Rodriguez’s (2013) examination of FoK draws attention to how power could affect teachers pursuing a FoK approach.

[T]here are often contradictions and complexities involved in “giving voice” to the forms of knowledge and multiple ways of knowing that marginalized communities represent. That is, we may not be able to assume that scholars and educators who embrace a FoK approach in their work are not influenced significantly by the surrounding context and power structures to use their positions (and associated privilege) to reproduce some of the same power relations that led to FoK research endeavors in the first place. (p. 103)

Rodriguez’s discussion of giving voice speaks to the power of teacher/family roles in more traditional home-school relationships and their ability to be a part of reproducing current inequitable systems in education.

Teachers shifting from their traditional and social role to that of a learner in families’ homes is an important aspect of the FoK framework. Transforming roles while conducting home visits is difficult because observation is in itself a means of control (Foucault, 1977) and teachers tend to have more power than families. Additionally, teachers potentially experience professional disempowerment when they relinquish power in an ethnographic home visit (Hedges, 2012). Learning how to learn from families, however, is not only a worthy task, it is a necessary one if teachers are to better understand the children they are responsible for teaching. In this paper, we examine what happened when teachers conducted ethnographic home visits to learn about children’s FoK.

### **Methods**

To explore what happened when teachers tried to learn about the families during ethnographic home visits, we studied a group of public prekindergarten teachers in the United States of America (USA) enrolled in a PD program focused on developmentally and culturally responsive mathematics teaching. The PD program was part of a four-year research project funded collaboratively by the National Science Foundation (NSF)<sup>1</sup>, a university, and a local school district. At the time of the research, 40 states across the USA adopted universal prekindergarten policies that allowed local school districts to choose to enroll in public-funded prekindergarten programs (Barnett, Carolan, Fitzgerald, & Squires, 2012). Beginning in fall of 2011, the Ravenswood school district, a midsized city in a Midwest state, implemented a new 4-year-old kindergarten (4K). The

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Ravenswood 4K program offered a voluntary, half-day, play-based approach to learning across community childcare sites and elementary schools in Ravenswood.

The authors worked closely with the principal investigators and the broader research team to design, facilitate, and study a PD program for 3 cohorts of prekindergarten teachers. Over two years, each cohort enrolled in courses that were a hybrid of traditional PD and graduate coursework. The PD program met weekly for 2.5 hours. In classes, they read, reflected, and discussed issues related to early childhood, mathematics, and home-school connections. The authors facilitated the class sessions and coursework of the participants.

The research team recruited prekindergarten teachers with early childhood certification in Ravenswood to participate in the PD. The data for this paper comes from the third cohort. The 15<sup>2</sup> participants included prekindergarten teachers in public schools, Head Start<sup>3</sup> programs, and community, parent co-op, and university lab childcare centers. In the third cohort were 2 center directors and 3 bilingual (Spanish) support teachers. One of the participants, a German native, worked as a bilingual Spanish 4K teacher. With the exception of a teacher who was a white male, all our participants were white women. See Table 1 for further description of the participating teachers. Participants engaged in a four-course sequence that wove together foundational early childhood theories, early mathematics and FoK through readings, group activities and written reflections that connected to their practice.

(insert Table 1 about here)

A key focus of the PD was to deepen the ways teachers knew their students by having teachers recognize and utilize children's FoK through ethnographic home visits. To help the participants accomplish this, we asked them to work with a focal child that was different from themselves on two dimensions (race, class, language, or gender). The teachers developed home visit interview questions that focused on family life, including information about household members, occupations, kinship, location of birth, and daily household practices. Following the ethnographic home visits, participants individually wrote about their experiences in Home Visit Reflections (HVR). In accordance with the original FoK work (Gonzalez et al. 2005a), the PD program provided teachers a space to co-construct meaning and interpretation of their home visit experiences with colleagues and facilitators. Based on individual reflections and group conversations, the participants translated what they found out about their focal child into educational activities (Moll et al. 1992).

We audiotaped whole and small group discussions from 50 class sessions across the classes and collected assignments artifacts produced by the participants. These data serve as a foundation for our analysis. Just as the data collection was multi-stepped and recursive, so was the analysis (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). We began the analysis for this paper by reading through the data. Each author took at least one month of data and one teacher and read through those data carefully, coding segments that exemplified the core elements of the project: early childhood education, early mathematics, and

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<sup>2</sup> Over the span of 2 years, participants left the PD group due to personal and/or professional conflicts. We ended the 4th course (action research project) with 5 participants.

<sup>3</sup> Head Start is a federal early childhood program for children and families living in poverty.

FoK. We open coded in NVivo to reflect the context of the data and incorporate theoretical elements informed by our research questions (Charmaz, 2005). Through a project journal and collaborative writing, we identified developing themes. Because the unit of analysis is the cohort as a whole, we focused on categorizing the teachers' experiences. In addition, we used writing as a method of inquiry (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2008) to flesh out ideas and discuss our preliminary findings.

## Findings

### Learning to Learn from Families

Upon learning part of the PD involved conducting home visits, teachers reacted with a mixture of nervousness and excitement. Ann often talked about these contradictory feelings, "What a lucky opportunity! I'm excited about this assignment...and slightly terrified" (Ann, HVR 1). The teachers were uncomfortable when thinking about what it was going to be like when they first stepped into a family's home. Their anxiety over conducting home visits often came up while forming potential interview questions.

Mietzi: How do you make a living? I don't know. I think that sounds weird. Doesn't it sound extremely intrusive in a way?

Daisy: What if you're not employed?

Mietzi: Right.

Daisy: What if you're undocumented and expressing this to someone else puts your employment in danger. I found with families that some of those areas are very guarded. (Class discussion, 10/2012)

Teachers worried that families would be offended with the content of their questions and many pointed out, "You don't want to be invasive to their private space" (Marie, class discussion, 10/2012). Their attention to not wanting families to think they were prying demonstrates how they understood their roles as teachers and implies that families shared these understandings (Lightfoot, 2003). The teachers' apprehension stemmed from challenging their typical role in which they would not ask families to share personal information.

The teachers often assumed ethnographic home visits started from an uncomfortable place and it was going to take intentional effort to build mutual trust. This assumption came up while Ana and Rose were deciding on wordings for their home visit questions. As they debating questions Ana said, "I want to make it as least as uncomfortable as it can be. (class discussion, 10/2012)." Teachers often talked about how they would feel if someone approached them with a similar question and discussed what they could do to ease a family's potential discomfort. In addition to discussing strategies derived from lessons being taught about ethnographic interviewing, they brought up the idea that they should share something about their lives if they were to expect families to divulge similar information. Here Mietzi described how she might approach her focal child's family by sharing parts of her own life:

Having learned from my focal child that her mother works at a local car wash, I was suspecting that my focal child's parents are possibly intimidated by me for the amount of education I was privileged to obtain as a teacher. I was planning on sharing a little more about my life and my struggle of moving to this country at the



age of fifteen...I thought that sharing something about me that they can relate to in terms of acculturation would help create some closeness...However, I do realize I have a great privilege coming from a home of two parents with Ph.D.s...The latter part about me, I was not planning on sharing, as I felt that it would only create distance in the early stages of our relationship. Moreover, there is little relevance to sharing that with my focal child's family for the purposes of learning more about them. (Mietzi, HVR 3)

Mietzi anticipated her presence in the home might be intimidating for the family and that forming a connection through shared experience could help lessen this feeling. Her plan to withhold information that could create more space between her and the family shows she recognized both her profession and upbringing put her into a power position.

Although some teachers were at ease or quickly put at ease once the home visits were underway, for many their anxiety was not alleviated upon entering the home. Teachers often reported the home visits were a success, but there was still an air of nervousness about them upon completion. Even when teachers were apprehensive about conducting home visits, they remained enthusiastic about what they might learn from families. Often what they wanted to learn reflected how they conceptualized culture. Although the PD courses reinforced a dynamic notion of culture as embodied in the FoK approach, a strong allure of culture as an exotic entity and stereotypes persisted (Rodriguez, 2013).

I nervously approached the door, uncertain of what I might see. I'm not sure what I expected. Maybe lots of indigenous artifacts, bear skins on the wall, and the smell of deer meat drying....again, I scolded myself. I was certainly out of my comfort zone. I rang the doorbell, wondering if the neighbors were watching me...an unknown white lady walking around, curiously smiling at them...(Ann, HVR 3)

Ann provided both the most blatant and sincere example of wondering aloud about assumptions she has about the families she works with. She knows her perceptions of the family are grounded in stereotypes about Native American ways of life, acknowledging these ideas are present even though she knows they are unfounded.

Unsurprisingly, teachers who were the most comfortable tended to be those with prior home visit experience or who regularly talked to families. Notably, these teachers were from Head Start<sup>4</sup> and a parent co-op childcare center in which parents are required to volunteer in the classroom. Rose, from the parent co-op, shared her ethnographic home visit, "Mine was easy. It was like a conversation with a friend...But I think a lot of that comes from the relationship I get to have with the parents at my school because I see them all the time" (class discussion, 11/2013). Rose tied her comfort with the home visit to the frequency she talks with parents. Rose's description shows that she sees the family as being comfortable with her being there and asking questions.

The Head Start teachers, on the other hand, describe their comfort alongside the families' discomfort. Samantha, a veteran Head Start teacher, linked the families' uneasiness with their expectations of home visit routines.

Although I gained more information about Martin and his family, I felt like his parents were a little unwilling to or uncomfortable with sharing personal

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<sup>4</sup> Head Start teachers are required to complete a minimum of 2 home visits per family each year along with a variety of other involvement activities.

information. I wondered if it was because they were used to how I conducted home visits in the past or if they didn't want to share a lot of information about their family with me. To most families it is a novel idea to share in-depth information and details about family life and daily activities with your child's teacher. (Samantha, HVR 3)

Even though Head Start teachers have frequent contact with families, they all described families not feeling very comfortable with their presence. We wonder, how much did this discomfort have to do with the families' perceptions of teachers' roles in home-school relationships?

### **The Strength of Traditional Teacher Roles**

To varying degrees, the teachers generally were able to take on the role of "learner." However, what turned out to be more difficult was being a learner of things that were tied closer to home pedagogies than to school practices. Teachers and families are typically engaged in conversations about children within a school-learning context (Bhavnagri & Krolkowski, 2000). Thus, when teachers walked in the doors of their students' homes they often had to actively attend to not falling into their typical teachers roles.

I made the mistake of asking directly about math a little too soon. I asked what kinds of activities they have seen River do at home that relates to math. They both froze and I was regretting asking it that way...Later Mom talked about how she often asks River to help her cook and do chores around the house and how she thought that was a form of math. And then she and her husband looked at each other, kind of embarrassed, and her husband said, "I think we should do more." Oh, I certainly didn't want them to feel like they are not doing something right. Maybe I sounded like I was quizzing and grading them on their parenting. I quickly explained that what they are doing is exactly what they should be doing with their children, spending time together, talking and sharing their busy lives with the kids. I complimented them on many activities they had mentioned. I gave them examples of how cooking and basketball, for example, were great ways of doing math together. Then I thought I was sounding too much like a teacher and got back to the questions. (Ann, HVR 3)

Although Ann had prepared for the home visit with readings about and discussions of how to learn about math embedded in daily practices she easily slipped into typical teacher language, asking explicitly about math. In addition to speaking to the power of teacher roles, the power dynamics in this relationship are also subtly present when Ann compliments them on their parenting. Similar to Ann, other teachers reported complimenting families; however, not once did a teacher report the opposite, a family complimenting the teacher on their excellent teaching skills.

The teachers who struggled to embrace entering homes as ethnographers tended to work for Head Start, an agency with prescribed ways of conducting home visits that takes a compensatory approach to working with families (Beatty, 2012). The Head Start teachers were trained to conduct home visits and felt comfortable entering their focal children's homes, but seemed to be bound by more traditional teacher and family roles. Samantha recognized this when she thought about going into her focal child's home for her first ethnographic home visit.

And through all the interactions, conversations, home visits, and conferences I still don't know his family well and what the family is like outside of the school environment. When I conducted the home visits, I only focused on Martin and his achievements and development in the classroom; I was there as a teacher, not as a learner. (Samantha, HVR 1)

Samantha acknowledged the typical approach for her home visits focused on working with families to talk with them about school practices, showing how the school's goals are placed at the forefront of these conversations. Though he began the home visit with ethnographic practices, Brad, a Head Start director, involved a great deal of teaching families how to mathematize their home practices during one of his home visits. "We went on to talk about the routines that the family follows. They have a set meal, homework, and bedtime for the children. Again, we talked about how to incorporate some basic math into each (Brad, HVR 3)." While this can be a worthwhile teacher practice, Brad's focus on teaching the family impeded his ability to learn the in depth knowledge his focal child is gaining from the families' already established home practices.

Regardless of teachers' desire to be learners, families still have expectations for what teachers want to know. Teachers reported the families would ask questions about their children's school performance, which makes sense because it reflects hegemonic perspectives of teacher and family roles. In her home visit reflection involving a Spanish speaking family and a translator, Lilac described the family's assumption of her presence in the home. "When I first began talking they thought we were meeting because of something at school, not because of this course... maybe because we speak different languages it caused a misunderstanding of the home visit and why we were there" (Lilac, HVR 2). Lilac brought this experience up in class as well and she shared that the family had a lot of questions about school. She laughed as she said it made sense they would have questions – because of the translator, it was the first time they were able to have a conversation other than waving hello and goodbye each day. The earlier lack of communication between Lilac and her focal child's parents intensified the parents' need for a more traditional parent-teacher conference format – there were things they wanted to know about preschool and they did not have anyway to get this information until now. Further, their expectation that the home visit was like a conference<sup>5</sup> provides insight into their already established understandings of family/teacher roles.

In reflection assignments of their home visits, teachers described interactions with families that demonstrated families' uncertainty of what to expect from teachers on this type of home visit. Teachers shared the purpose of the home visits with their focal children's family, but this was a novice experience for everyone involved. Ann's home visit reflection shows the family did not know what to expect from her during the visit. Ann was surprised to find out at the end of her home visit that her focal child's family had expected that she would walk around to the different rooms in their home.

I explained I wanted to find ways to connect what a child does at home to what we are doing in the classroom. It was interesting to me that they thought I was going to investigate their home. I hoped I hadn't invaded their private space much. (Ann, HVR 3)

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<sup>5</sup> They were given a letter explaining the project in their native language

One thing this moment shows is a more blatant display of power. The family thought Ann was going to be inspecting the physical environment of their home, were uncomfortable with it, and let her in their house anyway. The family's willingness to comply with Ann's unique request demonstrates the power a teacher holds.

### **The Desire to Connect**

The teachers in our study wanted to feel connected to families. The idea of connection repeatedly surfaced in class discussions when teachers talked or wrote about working with families or learning about children's FoK. Teachers wanted to connect home knowledge and cultural resources to school learning. Each desired or attempted connection had a grander, implied goal of improving a child's school experiences through building mutual trust relationships and deeper understanding of families.

"I'm glad that I chose this family because Zoe [focal child] is very reserved and quiet at times. I understand her English a little better each day – visiting her home will grow our connection and help me better meet her needs!" (Lucy HVR 5)

The home visits became a tool for the teachers to connect with families. Teachers expressed a variety of interpretations for the notion of connecting with families. For some, it meant the quantity of interactions to feel comfortable talking with each other whereas others saw it in the quality of these interactions to learn about a child's FoK.

Betsy felt better connected after conducting home visits because of the information the family shared with her about the child's skills and interests. At the same time, she talked both about the importance of drawing connections between what a child does in different contexts and how the act of doing so makes it difficult to focus on learning about a child's home practices.

I see a connection between home and school that she is counting (toys) at home and also practicing counting in school. It was also interesting to hear from Bev's mom that she enjoys drawing, playing pretend, and practicing her ABC's at home. At school she will often choose to draw or go to the house area during free choice time. She also practices her ABC's with an alphabet chart and uses this during writing time...I made sure to keep my questions directed toward my focal child's family and asked about their home life instead of bringing comments or questions back to school. This was hard to do and I found myself thinking of connections to what my focal child's mom was saying to activities at school. (Betsy, HVR 3)

Throughout the home visit, Betsy thoughtfully considered how what she learned could enhance her teaching and knowledge of Bev. This is an important aspect of creating a reciprocal relationship, but Betsy brings up an additional crucial point – that thinking about connections to school can easily lead to a focus on school learning in a way that can impede learning about a child's funds of knowledge.

Overall, teachers spoke about connecting being an important feeling that should be present in their relationships with families. Connecting was not as much a specific experience as it was a warm impression of a new kind of relationship that comes from having deeper, more complex understandings about families.

When I look back at my time at Klara's house and my discussions with her mother, I realize that I do not feel as though I have one specific piece of knowledge that forms a connection between home and school. Instead, I feel like

I have a much deeper understanding of Klara's home life and her family history that I never would have accessed without being welcomed into her home. (Ivy, HVR 3)

We think Ivy does a lovely job of explaining this feeling. And despite the difficulties teachers had with learning about families' FoK, we find the teachers' desire to connect with families hopeful and energizing as we think about the potential for creating new kinds of home-school relationships.

### **Discussion**

We asked the teachers to shift their perceptions of home visits and incorporate ethnographic principles to learn about families' cultural resources. In analyzing teachers' experience before, during and after ethnographic home visits we gleaned a general desire to adopt an asset-based mentality. However, the hegemonic structure of schooling, previous experiences, and traditional teachers roles and power dominated their experience with the FoK framework. When taking on a FoK approach it is important to remember that not all knowledge is accepted as equal. Teachers must possess a sense of agency when using children's FoK to inform pedagogy and learning opportunities in the classroom. We concur with the recommendations made by Gonzalez et al. (2005a) to support teachers in this process of learning to be ethnographers by offering study groups of colleagues to debrief and reflect with throughout the process of being an ethnographer in families' homes. Teachers rely on others to share about their experiences and positionality when engaging in deconstructing power dynamics to recognize FoK across multiple contexts.

Delpit (1995) suggested that dynamic and unspoken rules exist in relations between teachers and families. Inferred behavioral norms shape the roles teachers and families take when engaging in interactions and collaborative partnerships. Present in all of this is the role of power. We found there were strong boundary lines defining traditional home and school relationships that influenced how teachers took up this perspective. As teachers shift their thinking and attempted to learn about home practices, social networks and cultural resources, they are disrupting these socially agreed upon roles. As we presented above, the teachers in our study were unsettled by these shifts in roles and questioned how families' would respond. Would this be welcomed or cause moments of tension? When teachers attempted to reconceptualize their role, especially for those with years of experience conducting traditional style home visits, the quiet, potent power of their already established practices surfaced. This underlying power dynamic further complicated how teachers and families perceived their relationships as both parties re-learned what family involvement could look like.

Our examination of what when happened teachers tried to learn about families' home practices drew our attention to the idea that building a foundation of trust and respect are imperative to the process of synergistic relationships. Moving ahead, we recommend that teachers and teacher educators:

- Engage in explicit conversations about the traditional teacher and family practices and the unspoken power of teacher roles in home-school relationships.
- Have discussions about teachers' perceptions of the families they work with, with a goal of thinking through what it means to recognize diverse cultural ways of knowing.

- Define and debate what *reciprocal* and *connections* mean in their relationships with families, including what the purposes are in redefining their home-school relationships.
- Be transparent with families and acknowledge the differing agendas that teachers and families have during ethnographic home visits

Despite the strong desire of teachers to transform relationships with families, they are not the only players involved. To disrupt traditional teacher-family relationships, the families must also possess a desire to shatter invisible power boundaries. We acknowledge this study is presented from the teachers' perspective and we argue for further research to explore families' perspectives on ethnographic home visits. We are also curious about how families would take up the idea of the FoK framework and ethnographic home visits.

### **Conclusion**

An explicit purpose of the study was to look at how teachers took up the idea of conducting ethnographic home visits to learn about children's FoK. The teachers' preconceived notions about home-school relationships influenced how they took up this perspective. We found the teachers possessed previously constructed opinions of how families should be involved in their children's schooling. This was present during home visits, constraining the teachers' ability to learn about children's FoK. When the teachers stepped into their focal children's homes and wanted to know about cultural practices from outside of school, the lines that bounded their relationships came into question. Reimagining boundary lines can both confuse what defines relationships and create potential for new kinds of relationships to emerge. There will always be lines defining teachers and families' relationships and it is important to recognize that this process is dynamic (Lightfoot, 2003). Ethnographic home visits can be a part of forming new boundary lines, with a goal of more inclusive schooling. To do so, teachers need to recognize and acknowledge how their power influences what defines home-school relationships and their ability to learn a child's funds of knowledge.

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Table 1. Description of participants

| Location          | Pseudonym | Role   |
|-------------------|-----------|--|
| Child Care Center | Daisy     | Preschool teacher - Parent co-op Center        |
|                   | Lilac     | Preschool teacher - Community Center           |
|                   | Lucy      | Preschool teacher- University childcare center |
|                   | Noble     | Center director                                |
|                   | Rose      | Preschool teacher - Parent co-op Center        |
| Head Start        | Brad      | Center director                                |
|                   | Gloria    | 4K teacher                                     |
|                   | Samantha  | 4K teacher                                     |



|               |         |                           |
|---------------|---------|---------------------------|
| Public School | Ana     | 4K teacher                |
|               | Ann     | Bilingual support teacher |
|               | Betsy   | 4K teacher                |
|               | Drew    | Bilingual support teacher |
|               | Ivy     | 5K teacher                |
|               | Joan    | 4K teacher                |
|               | Mariana | Bilingual support teacher |
|               | Marie   | 4K teacher                |
|               | Mietzi  | Bilingual 4K teacher      |