



# Funds of Knowledge

Building on Students' Assets to Ensure an Excellent Education for All



Trailblazers of Tomorrow

# Session Outcomes

1. Develop a common understanding of how building on students' **funds of knowledge** supports learning for all students.
2. Consider the role of funds of knowledge as a **strategic lever** for equitable, inclusive learning.
3. Reflect on how your district might **consider and honor** students' funds of knowledge in your own school system.

## OPENING REFLECTION

*"What did you learn growing up—from your family, your community, or your cultural background—that still shapes how you approach problems or see the world today?"*



Take a moment to reflect on your own funds of knowledge.

Consider sharing with a neighbor.

# The Power of "I Believe" Scenarios

**Student A:** Student A: Javier is a bright, curious student who struggles with reading comprehension. He often gets frustrated and gives up when a text is too difficult. His parents are very involved and want to help, but are unsure how to support him.

**Student B:** Maria is a quiet student who rarely participates in class discussions. She is a meticulous note-taker but her test scores don't reflect her understanding. She seems to lack confidence in her own abilities.

**Student C:** Sam is a student with a history of behavioral issues. He is often disruptive and has difficulty staying on task. He is a talented artist, but rarely applies himself to other subjects.

# The Power of "I Believe" Discussion

1. What are your initial thoughts or assumptions about this student's potential?
2. What specific challenges do you anticipate this student may face in class?
3. How might a teacher's beliefs about this student's potential influence their educational experience?

***“Effective instruction starts with the belief that students are inherently competent. Funds of knowledge are the ideas and skills we each develop through our lived experiences, essential for managing daily life and personal well-being” (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992).***

**Key Message:** Funds of Knowledge bridges the gap between students’ lived experiences and school, promoting equity, trust, and academic success. When students see their background reflected and valued, they are more likely to engage deeply and grow.

[Unbound Ed](#) (2025)

# What Are "Funds of Knowledge"?

**Old View (Deficit Thinking):** Students from diverse backgrounds often faced low expectations because their home cultures and languages were seen as barriers or deficits that needed to be overcome.

**New View (Funds of Knowledge):** The vast collection of historically-accumulated, culturally-developed knowledge, skills, and experiences within a student's household and community should be treated as intellectual assets that teachers can strategically connect to the classroom curriculum to improve learning and student engagement.

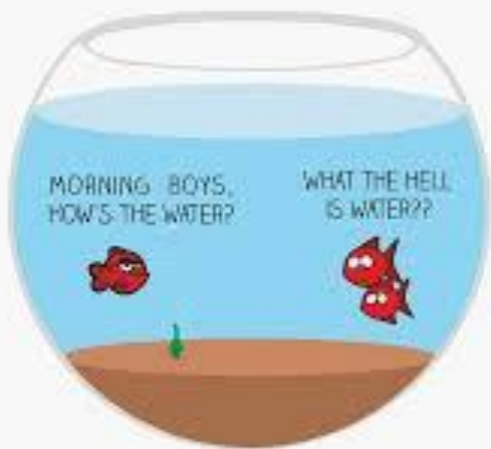
**Core principle:** Students are inherently competent—our job is to connect their knowledge to academic learning.



*To grow students who are curious,  
globally aware, courageous,  
growth-oriented, and prepared, we  
must teach in ways that honor who our  
students are and what they bring.*



# The "Water" We Swim In



*"What is  
water?"*

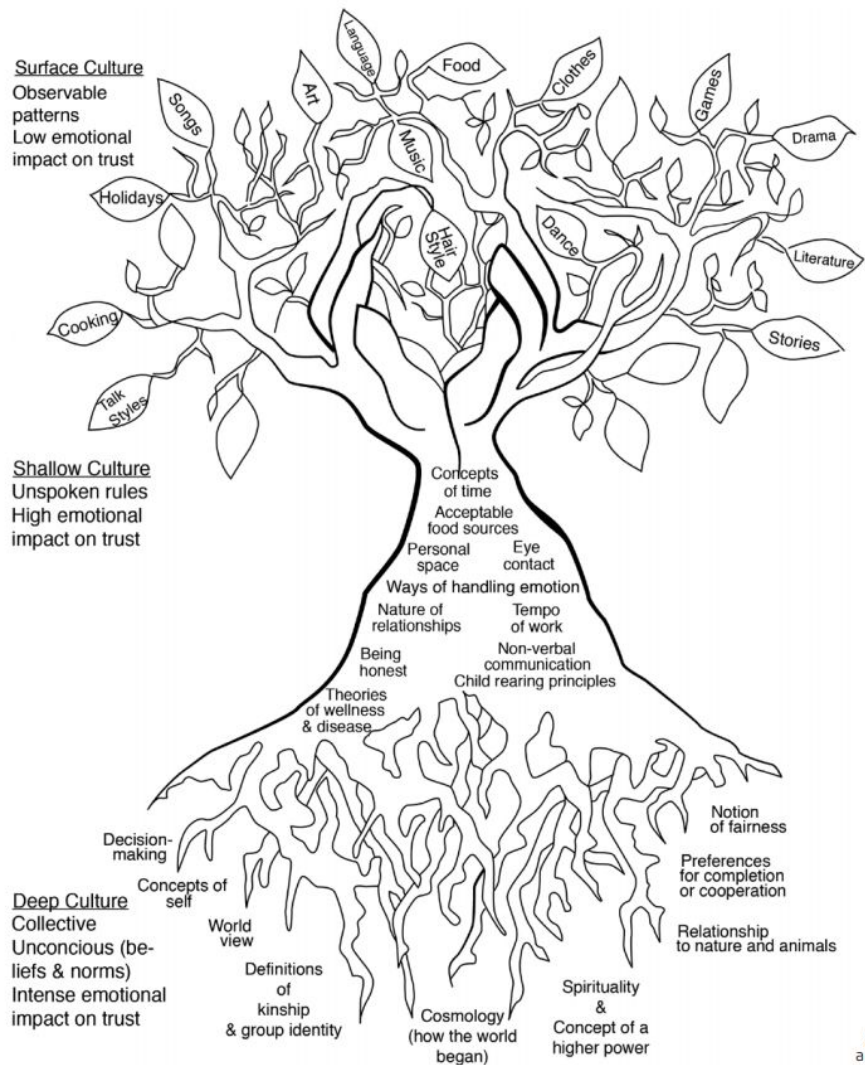
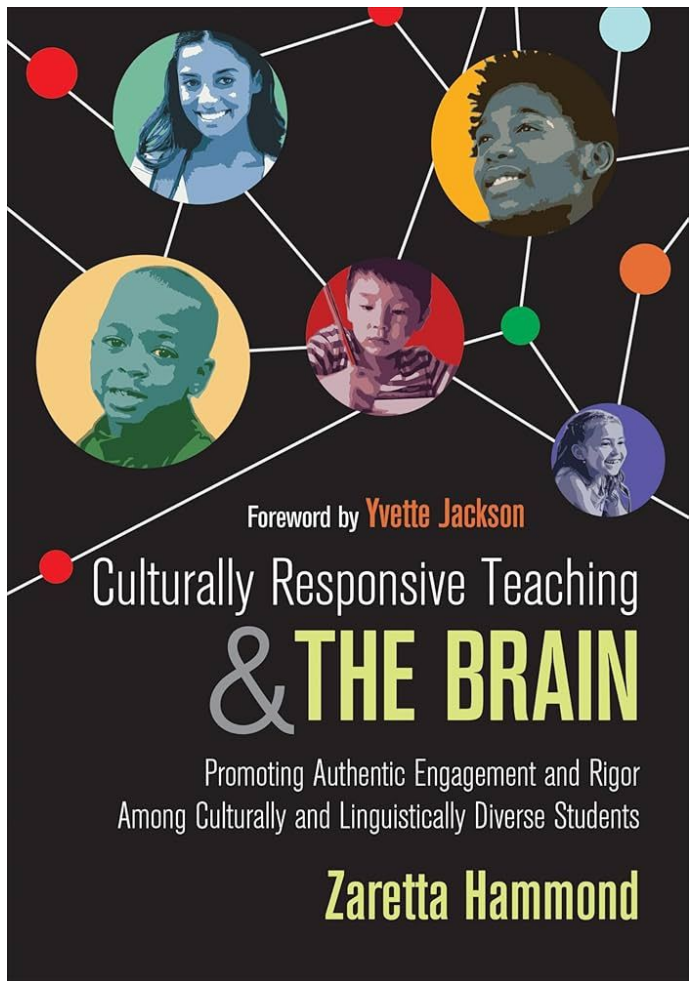
— Young fish to older fish

**Culture is like water.** We often don't notice the cultural assumptions, values, and ways of being that shape our own perspectives.

**The challenge:** When we assume everyone swims in the same water, we miss the rich diversity of knowledge and experience students bring.

**The opportunity:** Recognizing different "waters" helps us see and honor the assets all students bring.

To truly support student learning, we need to look **beyond what's easily seen**—like language, clothing, or food—and consider the **deeper cultural beliefs, values, and experiences that shape how students think, learn, and interact.**



# Beyond Surface Culture

Culture operates at multiple levels—and the **deepest levels** are what most influence how students think, learn, and engage.

## **SURFACE CULTURE**

Observable practices—important but not the whole picture

## **SHALLOW CULTURE**


Unspoken rules about politeness, space, social interaction

## **DEEP CULTURE**

Core beliefs about knowledge, relationships, and how the world works—**the funds of knowledge**

# Why Does This Matter?

The research is clear: honoring students' identities accelerates learning



*When students see their backgrounds as assets rather than barriers, they develop stronger academic identities and achieve at higher levels.*



# Funds of Knowledge in Action



This class quilt was created by our 2nd grade family! These designs share our stories, honor our families and cultures, and imagine our futures. Each square is unique, but together they form one beautiful quilt: a reminder that our classroom is strongest, brightest, and most beautiful when every person is included.

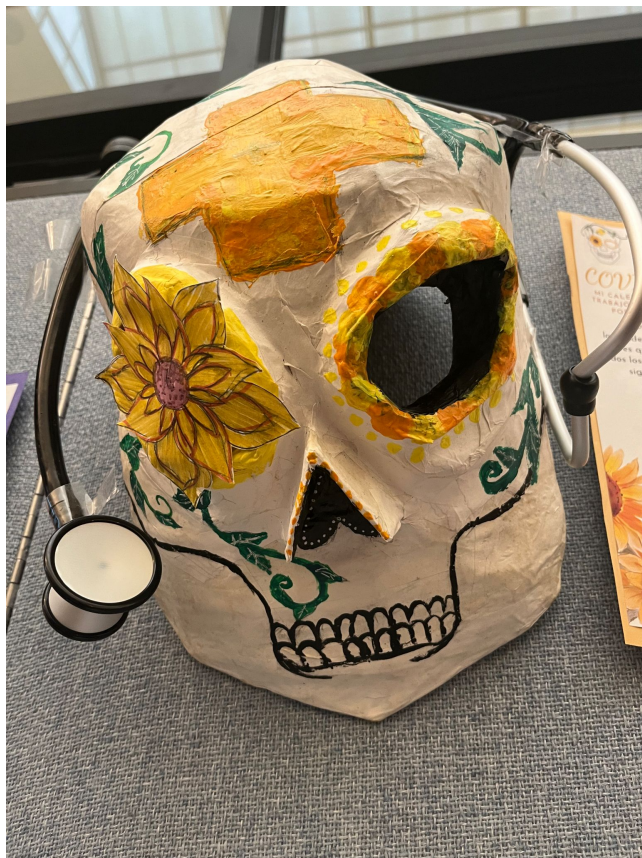
¡Esta colcha fue creada por nuestra familia de 2.º grado! Estos diseños comparten nuestras historias, honran a nuestras familias y culturas, e imaginan nuestros futuros. Cada cuadro es único, pero juntos forman una colcha hermosa: un recordatorio de que nuestra aula es más fuerte, más brillante y más bella cuando cada persona está incluida.



# Funds of Knowledge in Action



# Funds of Knowledge in Action





# Funds of Knowledge for Equity

The persistent disparities in U.S. education are fundamentally symptoms of systemic opportunity gaps created by resource inequity, socioeconomic status, and institutionally reinforced **deficit thinking**. The traditional education system, built upon mainstream middle-class norms, often fails to recognize or value the rich intellectual, social, and cultural resources inherent in the lives of culturally and economically diverse students.

*The Funds of Knowledge approach provides a critical, research-backed framework for dismantling this system of educational devaluation and ensuring true equity.*

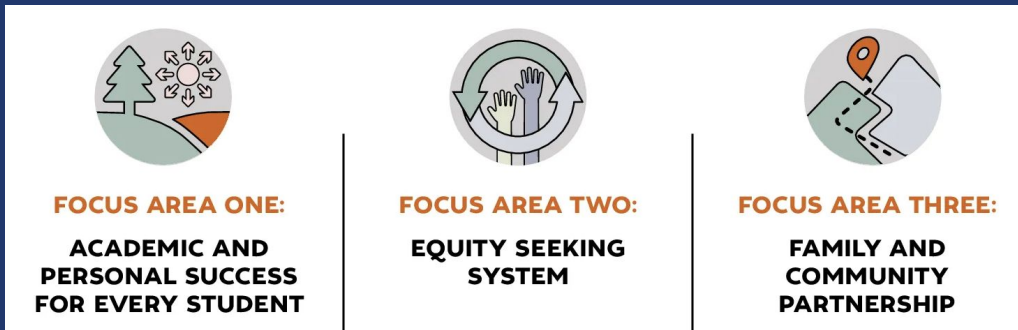
# An Asset-Based Framework

Utilizing students' Funds of Knowledge serves three critical objectives :

1. To **challenge the deficit model** by recognizing families, regardless of income or background, as intellectual resources.
2. To **establish confianza (mutual trust)** between schools and families, building cooperation and diminishing prejudice.
3. To **improve academic performance** by strategically linking school curricula to students' lifestyles, scaffolding complex academic material within their existing competence.

# This Is a Strategic Lever

Funds of Knowledge isn't just a classroom practice—it's a coherence strategy



Funds of Knowledge connects our Graduate Profile, strategic plan, and daily instruction into a coherent whole.

# Systems and Practices to Consider



What systems ensure **every** student's funds of knowledge are recognized and valued?



How might uncovering funds of knowledge shift your approach to **family engagement**?



How do your current **policies and practices** either support or hinder asset-based approaches?

# SSD Learning Focus for Professional Learning

**2026-2027**

## **Standards Based Grading**

Design and implement standards-based assessment and grading practices that accurately measure student mastery of learning targets, provide specific feedback for growth, and support equitable learning outcomes for all students.

Quandary  
14,265'

## **Graduate Profile Launch**

2025-26: Deep focus on Globally Aware and Growth Oriented Grad Profile skills.

2026-27: Deep focus on Curious, Courageous, and Prepared Grad Profile skills.

Peak 10  
13,640'

**WE ARE  
HERE**



## **Funds of Knowledge**

Create an affirming learning environment that increases student engagement by leveraging students' funds of knowledge.

Peak 9  
13,195'

## **Success Criteria & Feedback**

Create and effectively implement clear, student-friendly success criteria that promote student engagement, guide meaningful student feedback, and support self-directed learning.

Peak 8  
12,995'

## **Scaffolding & Discourse**

Design and implement a rigorous, inclusive learning environment that leverages scaffolding, and effective discourse to engage all students in grade-level content and skills.

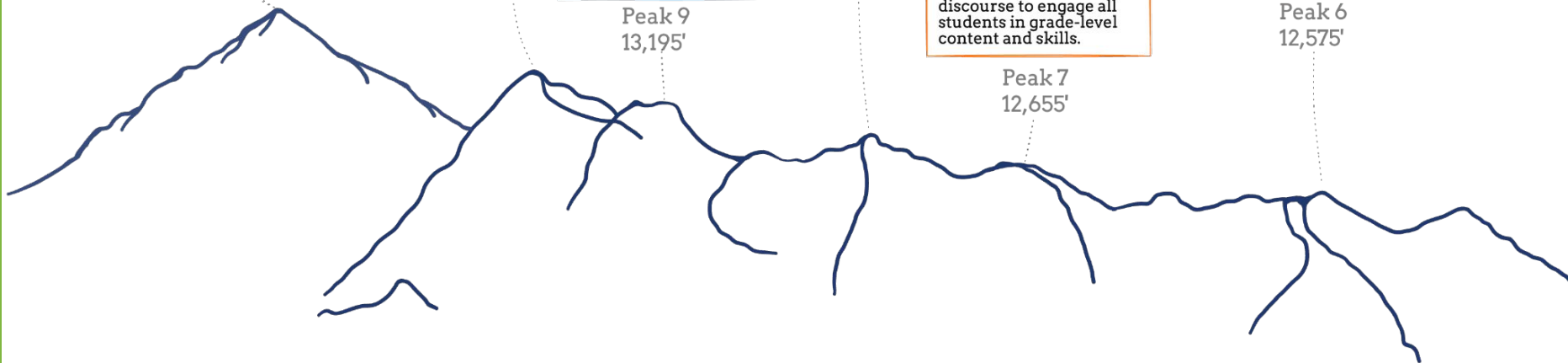
Peak 7  
12,655'

**2023-2024**

## **Standards & DOK**

Deeply understand and practice the process of collectively unpacking standards as an essential element of planning to ensure students are engaging at the Depth of Knowledge (DOK) required within the standard.

Peak 6  
12,575'



# Planning with Funds of Knowledge [UnboundEd](#)

## Step 1: Know Your Students

What opportunities do I have or strategies can I use to learn about my students' lives and experiences outside of the classroom?

## Step 2: Find a Connection

How can I connect my students' strengths, lived experiences, and family expertise to the grade-level content I already teach?

## Step 3: Assess Impact

How did incorporating funds of knowledge impact student engagement, learning, and classroom community? What adjustments can I make to deepen these connections?

**The principle:** Grade-level rigor WITH scaffolding that builds on what students already know. High expectations remain—we change the entry points, not the destination.

# The Board's Role

## POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

- Does curriculum policy allow for culturally responsive materials?
- Do family engagement policies position families as partners?
- Does PD budget support asset-based training?

## QUESTIONS FOR YOUR SUPERINTENDENT

- How are teachers learning about students' home knowledge?
- What evidence shows we're connecting to students' lives?
- How do we measure belonging alongside achievement?

## MONITORING FOR ASSET-BASED APPROACHES

- Student surveys on belonging and voice
- Family partnership indicators
- Walkthrough data on engagement

*"The board's role isn't to implement Funds of Knowledge—it's to ensure the conditions exist for this work to thrive."*

# Key Takeaways



**Every student brings valuable knowledge** from their families and communities—our job is to recognize and build on it.



**Asset framing accelerates learning.** Research shows significant achievement gains when students see their backgrounds as strengths.



**This is a systems issue.** Boards create the conditions for asset-based approaches through policy, professional learning, and monitoring.



**High expectations remain.** Funds of Knowledge changes entry points, not destinations—rigor with smarter scaffolding.



LET'S DISCUSS

# Questions & Discussion

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We'd love to hear your thoughts, questions, and experiences with building coherence  
in your own districts.

TABLE DISCUSSION

# Closing Reflection Activity

What is one thing your district **already does** that honors students' funds of knowledge?

What is one system or practice you might **consider adding** or strengthening?

5 minutes • Share with your table

# Thank You

"Every student brings a world of knowledge  
waiting to be discovered."

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Summit School District

Questions? Let's connect!