

Seeing Past the Fences: Finding Funds of Knowledge for Ethical Teaching

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The urban school context is rife with descriptors that frame children's lives in deficit ways: "under-prepared," "below grade level," "limited English proficient." In this study, I reframe my perception of the life of one child in my second-grade class to better understand the funds of knowledge he brings to school each day. The data include neighborhood and home visits and interviews and conversations with the student and his parents. Collaborative analysis of these data led me to view this student in the context of his strengths, including his technological skills, his emerging biliteracy, and his parents' investment in education.

INTRODUCTION

Today's educational climate is suffused with deficit-laden descriptors of students, families, and urban communities. Students are "limited English proficient," "under-prepared," or "below grade level," families are "overwhelmed," "checked out," or "confrontational," urban neighborhoods are "resource deprived," "drug infested," or "crime ridden." As a second-grade teacher in a school where 95 percent of students receive free or reduced lunch and 90 percent are learning English as a second language, I hear such descriptors on a daily basis. This language contributes to a view of students, families, and communities as predominantly lacking in assets,

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comprised of problems which must be addressed and gaps which must be filled. Under this paradigm, power resides mainly with educators; students and families are at best partners in carrying out the school's agenda, and at worst passive recipients of knowledge and skills.

What is missing from such a framework is the understanding that students, families, and communities are comprised not only of struggles, but also of strengths. In other words, students and families possess funds of knowledge, or bodies of knowledge and skills derived from household and community life, that when incorporated into the classroom may support and enhance students' educational experiences (Gonzales et al., 1995). Educators who perceive "homes and communities, as their defining pedagogical characteristic, in terms of the strengths and resources that they possess," can shift the power dynamics of educational institutions by supporting an exchange of knowledge and skills between educators, students, and families (p. 5). In order to fight the deficit view and perceive families in this way, teachers must intentionally learn about the strengths and resources that students bring from home. Put simply, "the educational process can be greatly enhanced when teachers learn about their students' everyday lives" (p. 6).

When I met my current second-grade class, I found myself, more than ever in my teaching career, tempted to use deficit descriptors when discussing and thinking about them. They presented a particularly difficult mixture of social, emotional, and academic needs that threatened on a daily basis to overwhelm me. I frequently felt incapable of addressing all the "problems" and filling in all the "gaps" that these "limited English proficient," "under-prepared," and "below grade level" students possessed. One student in particular caused my deficit thinking to surface numerous times each day. Therefore, with him and his family's consent, I decided to conduct an inquiry into his funds of knowledge, not only to discover how to teach him better, but also to train myself to control my deficit thinking and to heighten my ability to incorporate my students' funds of knowledge into the life of our classroom.

Ricky

Ricky¹ entered our school in the middle of last year, when he was in the first grade. His first-grade teacher told me that when he arrived he had no concepts of print whatsoever and could not point to the words "no, no, no" on a page. During our first parent-teacher conference in September, his mother confided to me that Ricky did not follow her directions at home, that he played videogames on his PlayStation or watched television until after midnight each night, and that he rarely did his homework. As she described the situation, she repeated several times, "it is hard. It is just us. It is very hard." When she stopped speaking, her eyes filled with tears.

¹ Names have been changed.

My observations of Ricky in class supported her claims. He regularly came to school without his homework, frequently resisted following directions, and by the afternoon, he could barely keep his eyes open. He had difficulty in controlling his body during class, often leaping, sliding, or rolling on the floor, and sometimes kicking or hitting other students. He also struggled to attend to instruction, instead playing with other students or acting out a superhero fantasy. While his reading had improved, it was still more than a year below grade level.

My knowledge of Ricky and his family in the early months of the year was comprised almost exclusively of “lacks.” Ricky lacked sufficient reading skills; he lacked discipline at home; he lacked self-control and attentiveness; his mother lacked support. At that point, it was primarily these “deficits” that characterized my understanding of him as a learner and determined my relationship with him as his teacher. What I lacked at this time was knowledge of his assets. I lacked an understanding of what he and his family *were* doing and what they *had*. I was not yet able to view his home and community, “as their defining pedagogical characteristic, in terms of the strengths and resources that they possess” (Gonzales et al., 1995, p. 5). In order to fulfill my moral obligation to teach Ricky to the best of my ability I needed to know: what were his and his family’s strengths? What funds of knowledge could contribute to his social and academic success? Furthermore, his mother’s tears during our conference had moved me. I wondered if our dialog about her family’s resources could prove to be an “emancipatory” educational process, not only by teaching me about her funds of knowledge, but by revealing them to her as well (p. 2).

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

To collect data for this study, I arranged to spend time with Ricky and his parents, Amelia and Eugenio. I documented my experiences with the family in several ways: photographs, audio tape, notes during the visits, and reflective notes immediately after the visits. To begin the research, I took a walk around the neighborhood where Ricky lives. Upon the suggestion of a colleague I asked Ricky to come with me. I met him and his stepfather, Eugenio, at his house after the school, and Ricky and I set off for a half-hour walk in the blocks around his home. I brought a digital camera with me and asked him to stop and take a picture any time he wanted to show me something interesting or important about his neighborhood. I also took pictures of my own. After the walk, I wrote in narrative form everything I could remember, including what we saw and what Ricky and I talked about (Appendix A).

Nearly one week later, on a Saturday morning, I met with Ricky’s mother, Amelia, to conduct a formal interview. With Amelia’s consent, I asked Victoria, my school’s acting principal, who is bilingual, to participate in the interview to compensate for my less than perfect Spanish. Upon Amelia’s suggestion, the four



Views from the neighborhood around Ricky's home

of us, including Ricky, drove to a nearby cafe. I had prepared a list of questions that focused on Amelia's childhood and family, immigration history, work and other skills, thoughts on parenting, education, and her relationship with Ricky. Victoria and I both listened and responded with follow-up questions throughout the 35-minute interview, which I tape recorded and later, with Victoria's help and the help of another bilingual friend, translated into English and transcribed (Appendix B).

Two weeks after the interview, on another Saturday, I visited Ricky's home and stayed for another conversation with Amelia and Ricky. For this home visit, I did not prepare any formal questions or agenda. As taking notes during the visit would have been awkward, I waited until I got back to my car and wrote down everything I could remember. Later, I turned the notes into a narrative describing the home and the visit (Appendix C).

Data Analysis

Much of the data analysis for this research occurred collaboratively with my teacher colleagues at Mills College, which supported the research. Each week I brought data to our group meetings where we helped one another with the analysis. The data that I brought included the photographs and narrative from the neighborhood walk, the transcript of the interview with Amelia, and my notes and narrative from

the home visit. Using elements of Grounded Theory and beginning with the neighborhood walk, we identified themes emerging from the data, including Ricky's interests and abilities, his parents' interests, skills, and values, notable aspects of their family history, and the family's relationship to their community. I explored these themes further during the parent interview and the home visit. Between each stage of data collection, I either confirmed or revised my initial hypotheses about the family's funds of knowledge, developing my understanding of Ricky's family's assets. Participating in these collegial discussions over time helped me to articulate the assets of Ricky's home and community with a perspective I could not have achieved alone.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

During our neighborhood walk, Ricky and I shared the digital camera. The pictures he chose to take ranged from silver spinners on the wheel of a car to a neighbor's pet cat, a homemade birdhouse, his old school, and his pet dog. I added pictures of three churches, three corner stores, a beauty salon, a small strip mall, many carefully landscaped gardens, a taco stand, a family-style restaurant, and several houses decorated for Halloween. I also took note of some larger businesses on the main street near which he lives, including a Honda dealership and a Food Maxx. As we walked, we passed one man mowing his lawn, three boys playing on a porch, and nine or ten people hanging out in their cars or on their steps. We talked the whole time about what we were seeing, and every couple of blocks Ricky showed me how fast he could run, dashing ahead and stopping at the corner.

As we walked, I felt my impressions of the area changing. Until that day, my knowledge of the neighborhood was comprised mostly of the images I saw through my car windshield when driving to and from work: broken glass in the gutters, chain-link fences around the yards, abandoned houses with boarded up windows. From the familiar bubble of my car, it was easy to notice these deficits. Walking with Ricky, however, and inspired by his excitement, I was able—both literally and figuratively—to see past the fences. The beautifully manicured gardens revealed the care and attention many people devoted to their homes, and the Halloween decorations suggested a spirit of community and the promise of trick-or-treaters. The numerous small businesses, such as the beauty salon, taco stand, and corner stores, pointed to some measure of economic opportunity, and the three churches within a few block radius indicated an active spiritual life. The presence of people working in their yards and hanging out near the street created a feeling of liveliness and community.

It was with this more nuanced understanding of the neighborhood that I arrived for the home visit on the following Saturday morning. Ricky's home, in the basement level of a modest two-story house, has three small rooms: a kitchen, bathroom, and bedroom. The bedroom has a double bed for Ricky's parents and a child-sized bed

for him at his foot. When I arrived Ricky was lying on his parents' bed watching television. His mother asked him to turn it off, which he did. We all sat on the bed (the only place to sit other than the small kitchen table) and I showed Ricky a calendar I had brought him made by the Oakland Public Library, which has pictures of parents reading with their children and family literacy tips in English and Spanish. On my recommendation, we put his birthday on the calendar, then his mother's, his stepfather's, and (at his request) mine. Ricky was excited when I showed him the hole in the calendar so it could be hung on the wall. After that, we continued to sit on his parents' bed and talk. We discussed the books they had in the room, Ricky's DVDs and video games, Amelia's music tastes, and Ricky's stuffed animals. They also showed me a family photo album with pictures of Ricky as a baby and their extended family in Mexico. For a little while Ricky played a video game while his mother and I talked. When she asked him to turn it off he said "okay" six or seven times, turning it off a few minutes later when he reached the end of the level.

At the outset of this project, especially after reading published articles about model funds of knowledge research (Campano, 2007; Gonzales, et al., 1995; Browning-Aiken, 2005; Tenery, 2005), I thought that Ricky's funds of knowledge would be immediately apparent in my data. Other researchers seemed to find a rich labor history, an extensive community support system, or religious customs that served as the basis for their students' funds of knowledge. Tenery (2005) asserts, for example, that "immigrant households typically contain transnational domains of knowledge" from "frequent trips across the border," that they "depend on their social networks" and "are willing to invest considerable energy and resources in maintaining good relations with their members," that "religion plays an eminent role in the families by helping them cope" (pp. 124–126). In addition, Campano (2007) describes meeting one of his student's fathers and learning about his migrant labor history and experience with agricultural worker strikes. Browning-Aiken (2005) describes developing a curriculum module around the mining industry in Arizona in which many of her students' families work.

In the initial analyses of my data, however, I found no obvious assets such as these. Ricky and his family did not seem to align, in many ways, to the patterns that characterized the immigrant households studied by Tenery et al. Instead of learning about a dependable social network of family and friends, I learned that Amelia is no longer close with her siblings, one of whom she lived with when she first moved to the Bay Area from Mexico. She explained that

with my siblings, because we have lots of family problems—they do live here in Oakland but we do not visit each other. Nothing more than when we run into each other on the street. My mom lives in Mexico. Now it is nothing in our house more than working, going to the store, and going to the theater to see a movie, but with the family visiting—never.

Similarly, rather than learning about domains of “transnational knowledge” from “frequent trips across the border,” I learned that Amelia has not been back to Mexico since she moved here seven years ago. She misses her mother a lot, she told me during the home visit, but she only speaks with her on the phone, and her mother has never been to visit the United States. In place of finding a rich labor history or connection to larger labor movements, I learned that Amelia moved here when she was eighteen years old and pregnant with Ricky after her first husband had left her, and started working at Jack in the Box where she still works now. Though she mentioned helping her mother in “*el campo*” (the fields) as a child, the work was necessary due to her father’s alcoholism which kept him from working at all. Instead of hobbies or leisure activities I heard over and over that they “do not go out,” that she “never takes him out,” and when they are at home together, they watch movies. Overall, I felt that my project was threatening to backfire. My initial analysis of the data seemed to be turning up more vulnerabilities than strengths. The last thing I wanted was to have found more “deficits” about the household to add to my already deficit-laden view of Ricky as a student.

In working with my colleagues, however, to analyze the parent interview and then in following up with additional discussion with Amelia during the home visit, the assets and resources that do surround Ricky began to emerge. Looking at several other data sets belonging to my colleagues illuminated my own analysis as together, we looked deeper to uncover the strengths buried within these families’ struggles. As a result of this collective effort, I began to view both Ricky’s and my colleagues’ families as “strategizing,” rather than struggling, households. A strategizing household responds to difficulty by developing “coping and survival skills” which can be “rich resources for learning” (Tenery, 2005, p. 129). In Ricky’s family, these skills and resources fell into three primary categories: a tenacious belief in the importance of education, the funds of knowledge of Ricky’s parents, and the funds of knowledge of Ricky himself.

First and foremost among the assets surrounding Ricky is Amelia’s deep and genuine belief in the importance of education. She herself, she told me during the interview, was only able to go to school regularly until about the second grade, after which she had to go sporadically because her father’s alcoholism forced her to help her mother to support the family. She did get her diploma, she said, but she had an inconsistent education. Nevertheless, she clearly loves to read with her son, and during the home visit, I saw the dozens of books she has bought for him, mostly in English, on many different subjects including pirates, the moon, and Disney fairytales. Though she described how Ricky does not always want to read with her—reading in Spanish is frustrating for him, and in English he gets annoyed by her mistakes—she persists in wanting to read with him and sending clear messages to him about the value of his education. She explained,

I really want him to study, not like there in Mexico. I already have money saved up for college. I always tell him, do not ask for anything,

just study, go to school. He is always asking me, “Mommy, what does this mean? Mommy, what is that?” I tell him for a lot of things, “I do not know. If you want to know you need to read. If you do not read you are not going to know.”... When we see [homeless] people on the street and he says, “Look, Mom,” I say, “If you do not study, that is what you are going to be doing.”... Sometimes he says “You did not finish school, Mom, because look, it is really hard. I just cannot.” I tell him, “Yes, but you will finish school, because you like it, and so you will not get distracted.” I ask him, “What do you prefer? *A peñar o que te a peñar?* [colloq.: Do you want to have control? Or do you want them to have control?] You need to study. I do not want you to end up like me.”

This unyielding belief in the necessity of education, along with her investment in a college fund, is a powerful asset that will help Ricky to achieve success in school. Amelia’s early lack of education, furthermore, has not compromised her ambitions for herself. She recently applied and was accepted through a low-income assistance program to the College of Alameda, where she wants to study to be a nurse. Unfortunately, her schedule at Jack in the Box conflicts with the class schedule, so she was not able to enroll in the program. She is waiting, she said, to have enough seniority to be able to change her schedule at work and pursue the nursing program. Meanwhile, she is taking English classes two or three times a week.

Amelia’s new husband, Eugenio, whom she married about a year ago, contributes to the family’s insistence on studying and acquiring a serious education. He is frequently the one who helps Ricky with his homework, setting clear boundaries that restrict Ricky’s time with the PlayStation or watching TV until after his homework is done. He also picks Ricky up from school several days a week. Eugenio plays a crucial part in surrounding Ricky with positive messages about the value of academic success and the support to help him achieve it.

A belief in the value of education is not the only asset supporting Ricky. His second major asset is the group of skills and knowledge—the funds of knowledge—belonging to his mother and stepfather. Eugenio, for instance, works as a carpenter. The day I arrived for the neighborhood walk, the front porch of the house was being remodeled, and Ricky told me that Eugenio and the man who lives in the floor above them are working on it together. In addition, Eugenio’s hobby is car maintenance, and when I arrived for the home visit he was busy in the driveway working on a car. Amelia related that Ricky shares his stepfather’s interest in cars, and that they wash cars or simply look at them together and learn about different makes and models. I noticed Ricky’s knowledge of and interest in cars during our neighborhood walk, as he chose to take pictures of various cars’ components and pointed out different vehicles according to their makes and characteristics. In Ricky’s family, carpentry and car maintenance are “bodies of knowledge that underlie household activities” (Moll, 2000, p. 258) requiring both literacy and numeracy practices such as

comparison, categorization, geometry, and number sense that can support Ricky's success in school.

Ricky's household is also rich in musical knowledge. When we returned to his house from the neighborhood walk, Eugenio was just turning off the microphone and stereo through which he had been singing along to music, karaoke-style, reading the lyrics on the TV screen. During the home visit I commented on the machine, and Amelia said that they listen to a lot of music at home. We discussed our musical preferences, and she shared that she likes both Mexican music from certain areas of Mexico and contemporary rock music from the United States. I noticed stacks of cassettes and CDs next to the stereo, along with the TV and karaoke machine. Through music, they not only engages in literacy practices such as lyric reading and learning songs in two languages, but they also develop connections between themselves and the contemporary musical culture in both Mexico and the United States. These musical practices in Ricky's home comprise another fund of knowledge with the potential to support him in achieving academic success.

A critical fund of knowledge belonging to Amelia—one that highlights the coping skills she has developed as a member of a strategizing household—is her ability to navigate bureaucracies to secure resources for herself and her son. This skill first became apparent during our interview when Amelia described Ricky's educational history. She told me that Ricky was separated from her for two years as an infant and then a toddler because she could not afford to pay for childcare in the Bay Area, and she sent him instead to live with her mother in Mexico. When he returned, she said,

he did not want to be with me. That was really hard for me. He did not want to be with me. But look at us now—it is better. At his other school, he had lots of problems because he did not want to be here. That is why I brought him to this school.

The “problems,” she said, were difficulties relating to other children and a lack of academic progress. He was retained once at the end of preschool, and after kindergarten his teachers said he might need to be retained again. Aware of these problems and responding to them, Amelia succeeded in getting him enrolled at our school, a high-performing public charter school with over 500 students on the waiting list. Though I did not ask for the details of this maneuver, I assume it required research, assertion, and persistence on Amelia's part to successfully move Ricky to an educational environment with the resources and flexibility to adapt to his needs.

This ability to navigate bureaucracy became apparent again in Amelia's description of her own efforts to secure more education. She said during the interview,

my plan is to go back to school. I am just waiting to get a more set schedule at work where I do not have to work nights. I have already

tried. I applied at the College of Alameda for a program for low-income people. I applied but I did not go, because if I do not have my [work] schedule I knew that I would not be able to handle it. I want to go to school to be a nurse.

Once again, I did not ask for details of the application process, but I assume that Amelia had to research available programs for low-income adults, contact the right people, provide the necessary documentation, and complete the application. The fact that she feels she must work another year at Jack in the Box before they will let her change her schedule is unfortunate, but it does not erase her ability to work within educational and economic systems to secure resources for herself and her family. This ability is a powerful form of cultural and economic literacy that will support Ricky both directly and indirectly as he moves through primary and secondary education, college, and beyond.

The knowledge and skills of his parents are not the only funds of knowledge with the potential to contribute to Ricky's success. The final group of funds is comprised of those skills and bodies of knowledge belonging to Ricky himself. The first of these became clear during my visit to Ricky's home. Noticing the stack of movies and video games near the TV, I asked which were Ricky's and Amelia's favorites. Ricky showed me three PlayStation games and two animated *Curious George* movies. When he asked if I wanted to see one, I said I would. When Ricky put in the disc, he navigated at lightening speed through the opening menu, selecting scenes from the middle of the movie that he wanted to show me and asking which language I wanted to hear. I chose Spanish. He navigated to the language selection page and within seconds had started the movie in Spanish at the scenes he had chosen. He displayed his technological skill again a little while later when I asked what he liked about PlayStation and he offered to show me a game. He chose *Spiderman* (whom he once told me he wants to be when he grows up), and just as quickly as with the movie had it up and running. I was not surprised by his skill with the game, knowing how much he plays it each day, but watching him, I realized that his competence and comfort with using digital technology are powerful forms of literacy that could have many applications for his learning.

While we were watching *Curious George*, I asked about some Spanish vocabulary I did not understand, and Ricky began to narrate the story to me in English as it unfolded in Spanish on the screen. His ability to do so highlighted another of his critical funds of knowledge: his bilingualism. With the help of his mother and stepfather, this bilingualism (the ability to speak in two languages) is developing into biliteracy (the ability to read and write in two languages). As Luis C. Moll (2000) points out, "biliteracy is a phenomenon... that takes place in the United States primarily, but not exclusively, among working-class language minority students" (p. 265). Ricky's developing biliteracy, in other words, is relatively unique to learners like himself, who are the children of working-class immigrants. It offers them unique opportunities to access intellectual and cultural

resources through two languages, “mediat[ing] and amplify[ing] the cultural experiences of learners in ways not possible in one language alone” (p. 266). Notably, though Ricky is completely bilingual, his mother reports that he is struggling to develop biliteracy. She told me,

He does not like to read at home. When I try to read with him at home, he gets upset when I correct his reading in Spanish, but then, when I try to read in English, he laughs and says that I am wrong or he will just get frustrated. He says, “mommy, you do not know!”

Ricky’s struggle is understandable and perhaps common. However, Amelia does not appear to be giving up reading with her son in both languages. As he continues to develop literacy skills in Spanish as well as English, his biliteracy has enormous potential to support his academic and social success.

IMPLICATIONS

The implications of my findings about Ricky’s assets are two fold. First, there are implications for my teaching of Ricky in particular, and second, for my practice in general. Like the work of the Philadelphia Teachers’ Learning Cooperative described by Abu El-Haj (2003), the implications of this study are “grounded in the particular,” in this case one student’s funds of knowledge, but “it is through an analysis of the particular that the conditions that produce inequality are revealed and that practices aimed at social change are developed” (p. 819). The implications of my findings do not stop, in other words, at instructional strategies that benefit Ricky. They also include my new ability to turn deficit thinking into a focus on assets, an ability that will enable me to develop a more ethical teaching practice in general.

Beginning with the particular, my findings suggest numerous implications for my work with Ricky as a learner and with his family as supporters of that learning. His interest in and knowledge of cars and car maintenance, for instance, can support his success in both literacy and math. Nonfiction texts, diagrams, and manuals about cars or other machines will provide valuable experiences in reading, while imaginative writing prompts around the same themes will tap into both his knowledge and his creativity. Explicitly drawing on his numeracy skills of categorization, comparison, geometry, and number sense, which he has developed through his interest in cars, will support both his computation and his problem solving.

His skill with digital technology can also benefit him greatly in both literacy and math through the use of software programs on our classroom computers, including opportunities for extra time given his high level of competence and interest. At home, a high-quality learning game such as a Leap Frog will provide an alternative to the PlayStation, making use of his technological skills as he practices phonics, spelling, reading comprehension, and computation. Linking his and his mother’s interest in watching movies to literacy will also support his

learning, starting with lending them several books from the *Curious George* series to accompany their watching of the movies. The family's musical knowledge can support his learning through song writing, singing, poems, chants, rhymes, and the sharing of music from many countries, especially Mexico. Given his current ambivalence about becoming biliterate, activities in class that support the development of biliteracy, such as the use of Spanish-English books, opportunities to discuss academic content in Spanish, explicit discussions of the value of reading and writing in two languages, and support for reading and writing in Spanish will support his ability to access content knowledge from the perspective of both linguistic cultures. Finally, given his mother's skill at navigating bureaucratic systems, information about programs at local institutions such as the public library, community colleges, child development centers, and parks and recreation facilities could have far-reaching benefits for herself and her family.

As I draw on Ricky's funds of knowledge in the classroom to support his academic development, together we will participate in "the creation of new knowledge," a knowledge that is comprised not solely of Ricky's home knowledge nor solely of academic content knowledge, but is a combination of "the themes and language of [his life]" and my own goals for his learning (Tenery, 2005, p. 128). My awareness of the potential for this new knowledge creation is the essence of the broader implications of this study, which will help me from now on to be a more ethical teacher. Freire (1998) asserts that "the experience of comprehension will be all the deeper if we can bring together, rather than dichotomizing, the concepts emerging from the school experience and those resulting from the day-to-day world" (p. 19). There are two kinds of reading, he explains, "reading of the word," and "reading of the world," which relate in an ongoing dialectic. The "reading of the world" through sensory experience precedes the "reading of the word" through text. When we learn to read the word it enables us to reread our previous reading of the world, bringing new perspectives and fresh understandings to our lived experiences. These new perspectives and understandings "[bring us] closer to [our lives] as a text being read," linking our comprehension of the word to our comprehension of the world (p. 21). If my primary ethical obligation as a teacher is to deepen my students' comprehension, in the broadest sense of the term, of academic content, then I must learn how to lessen the dichotomy between my students' reading of the world and their reading of the word. To accomplish such a task, I must first assess *what* they read when they "read the world" in their day-to-day lives. Central to this assessment is an exploration of their funds of knowledge.

Freire's thesis suggests a resolution to the dilemma posed by Abu El-Haj (2003):

Teachers practice for equity between two obligations they see: an obligation to teach children "what we need to have them do"—to help them succeed in relation to dominant academic practices—and an obligation to value what each child "bring[s] to school that they can

do”—to recognize the child. These obligations are ethical in nature. They call on the teacher, as a moral actor, to make choices (p. 839).

If Freire’s thesis is correct, then as an ethical teacher I do not always have to choose between teaching my students “what I need to have them do” and valuing “what they bring to school that they can do.” Instead, as with Ricky, I can use “what they can do”—what they have learned from reading the world—to support “what I need to have them do”—what they need to do to read the word. Moreover, if I do it well, these two readings will support each other in a continuous cycle, as reading the word brings new insight to their previous readings of the world, making them want to keep reading the word to continue to achieve new insights into their worlds. While the distance between the two readings is perhaps impossible to fully eliminate—especially given the sheer number of individuals I teach, each of whom is engaged in reading his or her own world differently—still, drawing upon even one student’s funds of knowledge to support his academic success is the first step in narrowing the gap. As Moll (2000) asserts, “teachers cannot conduct household analysis with all their students, but deliberate inquiry into funds of knowledge helps define how a community is imagined and how it will be imagined in the future, with new generations of students” (p. 264). My work with Ricky and his family, in other words, will support my ability to control my deficit thinking about all of my students, and to focus my attention on how I can incorporate their funds of knowledge into the life of our classroom.

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APPENDIX A: NEIGHBORHOOD WALK

I chose to walk with Ricky around his neighborhood yesterday. I met him and his stepfather at his house after school at around 4:15 (his mother was at work.) He showed me the inside of his house and then we set off for about a half-hour walk in a five- or six-block radius. I had a digital camera with me and I told him that we could stop and take a picture any time he wanted to show me something interesting or important about his neighborhood. The pictures he chose to take ranged from fancy spinners on the wheel of a car and a fancy motorcycle; to someone's pet cat, a pretty rosebush, a homemade birdhouse, and a painted adornment on a fence to his old school, his house, and his pet dog. I added some pictures, of my own, of three churches, three corner stores, a beauty salon, a small strip mall, countless beautifully landscaped gardens, a taco stand, a family style restaurant, and several houses decorated for Halloween. I also took note of some larger businesses on International Boulevard—the main street off which he lives—including a Honda dealership and a Food Maxx. While we walked, we passed one man mowing his lawn, three boys playing on a porch, and nine or ten people hanging out in their cars or on their steps.

The most important part for me of this neighborhood visit was the shift that occurred in my perception of the neighborhood. As we walked, I felt myself adjusting from noticing the flaws to noticing the assets. One of the primary causes for this shift was the number of beautiful gardens we kept finding. From roses to pansies to hydrangeas to cacti to lush lawns to many more plants I did not know the names of, the gardens made it clear that the majority of people in this neighborhood spend a lot of time caring for their homes and making their yards nice places. We also passed people just watching the world go by, from the boys playing on the porch to an older woman standing in her yard to a teenager and her little brother sitting on the hood of their car near my student's old school. All gave the comfortable feeling of "eyes on the street," of a community watching out for each other in the late afternoon. My student's comments as we walked also illuminated some of the resources around him. For instance, his upstairs neighbor is remodeling the porch of the house in which he lives, along with his dad teaches him some aspects of that work. He also pointed out an apartment building where his father's friend lives, and he was the first to point out the Halloween decorations and jack-o-lanterns on several houses, where he might go trick or treating. These comments hinted to me at the networks that exist between my student and other members of his neighborhood.

Interestingly, at three different times he pointed out more negative aspects of his neighborhood. When we passed by a broken glass on the sidewalk he said, "see, there's some bad people here who do that." Later, when he wanted to take a picture of a dog behind a fence, the dog started barking and leaping up at us. He decided not to take the picture and as we walked away asked why the dog was doing that. I said maybe to protect the family that lives there, and again he referenced "bad people,"

saying, “but we are not bad people.” Near a Mexican grocery and liquor store, I made a comment that he was lucky to have a store so close to his house. He answered, “sometimes people who rob stuff go there.” I took note at each of these times when he pointed out these flaws in his neighborhood to me. Was it to warn me that I should be careful? Was he sad? ashamed? angry? scared? I wonder what emotions or thoughts were behind these comments.

Nevertheless, the predominant feeling on our walk was one of appreciation for the beautiful aspects of his neighborhood: the gardens and the care they imply, the connections with other people, the pets, the “eyes on the street.” I myself now have a sense of the community that surrounds him when he goes home, and it seems like a more familiar, comfortable place even after only a 25-minute walk.

APPENDIX B: PARENT INTERVIEW

(translated from Spanish)

I have always worked. I only went up to primary school, and I finished the secondary but I did not go to it every day. I have my diploma but I did not finish it normally because my father was an alcoholic. He did not work, my mother was the one who took care of us. I left school to work, I worked in cleaning houses. Since I was seven, I worked in the fields, I helped my dad to plant the seeds and all that. He did not pay us, like here. I always worked and my father was violent. He was an alcoholic, if you understand me.

I am from Guanajuato, Mexico. I came here when I was pregnant at about three months, I was 18 years old. I decided to come here because Ricky’s father left us in Mexico. We were married in the courthouse, but we had family problems and we separated and I came to live here. It is not what I thought it would be. I could not be there because of my father. You understand how the people are over there, do not you? After I separated from my partner, I went back home and it was not great. When I got pregnant, my siblings who were here said I should come here because there were so many problems there. I came here at three months. It was not my intention. My siblings were here in Oakland and then right away my sister got me started in a job. I have always worked, my first job was at a dry cleaners, ironing clothes. I did that for about one year, and I had two jobs, the other at the restaurant where I am now, Jack in the Box. For one or two years, I have only been at the restaurant. I got married again about a year ago. Now when I work, my husband cares for Ricky or sometimes my other sister, Jennifer’s mother, cares for him too.

Every day I work, clean the house, and cook. I never take him out, to go do things, just work and cook. On the days I take off, I go to get the extras, like the food, clean the house, go to do the laundry. Every day is the same. I sent him to Mexico for a time of about two years.

Since I moved here, I always have lived with my brothers and I did not work. But after Ricky was exactly forty days old, I started working again. But I had problems with the woman I left him with, and when Ricky was six months old and I went to go pick him up, I found that there is something wrong with his leg. I never figured out what happened. He could not stretch it out. They said they did not know what had happened. I was upset with the woman for a few weeks, but I realized that no one was going to take care of my son well. My family said no one is going to take care of him as well as you are, and because you are a single mother we will help you out. You do all the cooking and cleaning in the kitchen, all the household work, and we will pay the rent. I did that but there were problems in Mexico so they went home. I did not have time, money, I did not have work. From what has happened to us I do not have confidence in anyone to take care of him. My brother said you do not have money, you do not have a job, why do not you leave him here and I will take care of him. He was like his father. He said I am just going to take him and keep him in Mexico. Because we have the same last name and because I am a single mother, I just put my last name for Ricky, so he took him. I did not have work and the house that we were living in, they were going to take it back. It took me two months to find work. Then when the situation was better, my brother came back with him. When he was in Mexico, he lived with my mom. He lived with them for two years. When he came back, he did not want to be with me. That was really hard for me. But look at us now, it is better. At his other school, he had lots of problems because he did not want to be here. That is why I brought him to this school.

I would like to go to school now, but I cannot. I did not like school because I was working. I had to work, I was tired, I had to take care of the house. No one in my house knew how to read, only my father, but he did not help us.

I think my relationship with Ricky is good now. He is only living with me. I trust him and I think he trusts me. He has lied a few times, but I think it is good. He is a good kid. I just do not take him out not to the park or anything because I do not have time.

I do not regret anything about becoming a mom. I like when he is learning, when he does nice things, when he is doing well in school. At home, we play outside with the ball, and we read. I really like to read with him but he does not like to do that. We go out to the street and buy movies and cartoons. That is what we do more than going out to play.

Ricky tells me that he does not get along with his friends, that things are not going well with some of them. Sometimes he tells me that he does not like the black kids, because of a few bad things that have happened with people like that, so he thinks that. He says, "Look mom, look what the teacher taught me, look at the planets." He is always telling me what you are doing. When he is an adult, I think he will be... [talks to Ricky]... a police officer? He likes cars a lot. I really want him to study, not like there in Mexico. I already have money saved up for college. I always tell him do not ask for anything, just study, and go to school. He is always asking

me, “Mommy, what does this mean? Mommy, what is that?” I tell him about a lot of things, “I do not know. If you want to know you need to read. If you do not read you are not going to know.” He says, “It is boring.” Everything that he wants to know, I tell him he needs to study. When we see people in the street and he says, “Look mom.” I say, “If you do not study, that is what you are going to be doing.” He likes to learn, but the bad part is that he has to study. He does not like to read at home. At home, he just wants to watch TV. That is his life. I tell him, “You have to read, listen to your teacher, do what she says. Do not play around, do not mess with your friends. Do not hit, never fight, because it is just going to give you problems. You are going to make problems for yourself, and that is going to make problems for me.” Sometimes he says “You did not finish school, Mom, because, look, it is really hard. I just cannot.” I tell him, “Yes, but you will finish school because you like it, and so you will not get distracted.” I ask him, “what do you prefer? *A peñar o que te a peñan?* [colloq: Do you want to have control? Or do you want to be controlled?] you need to study. I do not want you to end up like me.” We read in Spanish at home, and when we try to read in English, he does not want to.

My boyfriend, he loves us a lot. Everything is going well with them. They both like cars a lot, they go out and wash the cars. When he is going to play PlayStation, he says to him—when he punishes him he takes away his PlayStation, but he has not done that in 3 months. He likes to live more with him than with me, because I do not like PlayStation. I think that with me he does not like it as much. I think that because I did not go to grade school, I do not know how to play.

The important people in my life are the two of them and my mom, no one else. Concerning my siblings, because we have lots of family problems they do live here in Oakland but we do not visit each other. Nothing more than when we meet each other in the street. My mom lives in Mexico. Now it is nothing more in our house than working, going to the store, going to the theater to see a movie. But with the family, we never visit each other. We neither spend time with the kids, nor with anybody. Sometimes when I am not feeling well I will leave Ricky with them, but really it is just us all the time. The time when he sees other children is at school. In the house, the people who live upstairs do not have kids, only us. He does not have friends. It is only him. Ricky’s friends do not come over, and he does not go to see them. They do not come over after school.

I do not know how things are going at school, what is his level at school. Because at home he does not study, so I imagine that at school he must be bad, because he never studies, just all the time watching TV or playing his PlayStation. Because when he was at preschool, and then it was time for kindergarten, he had to go back to preschool, as he did not get along with other children, and he had a lot of problems. He only wanted to play and play, and then in kindergarten when it was time to go to first grade it was the same, that he was not at the right level to go to first grade. Because at home he was not studying.

He does not learn anything from me at home except that there is a woman who has dogs on the street, do not play with the dogs, take out the trash. It is just discipline so he does not like to be with me. From my boyfriend, he learns about cars. Everything goes well with that because he is interested in that, also he learned from him how to play soccer. Sometimes they go off and play soccer together. Because I do not like to play sports or video games, Ricky likes to be with him more than me, he listens to him more than me, and he follows more of his directions than mine. He has a strong character, and he also gives Ricky things when he did well at school. Sometimes he buys him games for his PlayStation, he also tells him that he is going to teach him how to drive. It is like he has got more discipline. With me, Ricky just hears “blah, blah, blah.” Because my boyfriend likes to play more than I do, I think that is why they get along well. He disciplines Ricky more than me, they get along well because they have things in common. Moreover, I think they get along well because he knew me before he was born. We have known each other for a long time. We used to be just friends, and I think also that he just likes to be around men more than women. He says I only like to do girl things. He does not like to read at home. When I try to read with him at home, he gets upset when I correct his reading in Spanish. But then, when I try to read in English, he laughs and says that I am wrong or he will just get frustrated. He says, “mommy, you do not know!”

I told him to help me with my English. I told him about the things that happened to me at work when I do not understand what someone is saying in English. When he is in a good mood, he helps me, but if I make lots of mistakes, he gets really mad.

I like to buy books, but he does not like to read very much. I like to read because when I was at school, I liked reading so much. He always says, “Mommy, you always want to read. That is boring.” When he did his homework, I tried to help him, but his old teacher told me not to do that because when he got help, I was the one that did everything—looked up the words, and told him what to write on his paper. His teacher told me to stop doing that because when he is in class, he cannot do that. She told me that I could read with him. Now, I do not do his work for him, I only help him with his reading and that is it.

While he is doing his homework, I am usually cooking. It is very hard because he does not have a schedule. I have to say, “Ricky, Ricky, Ricky...” Sometimes, it gets to be 9 p.m. and he is still working. The consequence if he did not do his work is that he would not watch TV. I took him away from the TV. That hurts him the most because that is his only distraction since we do not go out. Sometimes, if I am not sitting there with him, he takes two or three hours to write a little bit, but that is because he does lots of things—he is all over the place. I turned the TV off but then he will turned it back on.

Some days, when I work nights, I sleep in the afternoon. I told him to leave the TV while he is doing his homework, but then when I woke up and found the TV on again. He gets distracted and sometimes he leaves things off, like the name of

the author. And I told him that I am not going to sign his homework if he does not do it well. Then he will say, "I cannot do it, it is too hard." I told him not to say that and that he can do anything if he tries. He just does not want to do it. When my boyfriend sits down with him to do his homework, he tells him that he does not want any garbage: "Write your letters nicely." And if he does not do it well, he asks Ricky to do it again until he gets it right. But since he has two jobs, he cannot do that every day. But when he sits down with him, he did his homework quickly.

I have 5 sisters and 3 brothers, I am the youngest girl. After me there is a younger brother. Right now I have a brother who lives in Oakland and his daughter goes to school at Monarch. But since we do not go out, Ricky does not spend much time with her. He is my brother with whom I lived when I first came to Oakland. Ricky has got lots of cousins, but he does not really know them or spend time with them. He never asks about them—his uncles or cousins. The only sister that I really got along with got married. She followed her husband up to Washington and we left each others. They did not visit us, so he said "Mommy, they do not love us." He never talks to me about them. Moreover, he does not ask about his father. He does not ask why he is not here. He knows that my boyfriend is not his father, but he says that he is his daddy. He never says, "Mommy, I want to see my uncles," or anything like that. He does not really get along with his cousin who goes to Monarch. He says that she always wants to do what she wants, and he wants to do what he wants. They play for a little while and then he found himself want to do what he wants. But she is the one that he gets along with the best.

He says he wants brothers, not sisters. He says that they cry too much. I would like to have another child, but not right now. My plan is to go back to school. I am just waiting to get a more set schedule at work, where I do not have to work at night. I have already tried and I applied at College of Alameda for a program for low-income people. I applied but I did not go because if I do not have my schedule I knew that I would not be able to handle it. I want to go to school to be a nurse. Also I want to study, Really, I want to study. I take English classes two or three times a week. I think I have another year before I get a stable schedule because I do not want to work at night, so they do not want to let me change my schedule. When I came from Mexico, I did not know how to do anything else but this. There was not any other option, until I brought him back, I just did whatever I could get.

APPENDIX C: HOME VISIT

I went to Ricky's house after Saturday School, at around 11:30, and stayed for an hour. They live on the bottom floor of a two-story house. To enter their part of the house you walk through a chain-link fence at the sidewalk, up the driveway on the right side of the house, which is wide and bordered with a rose bed on one side and grass on the other. At the back of the driveway is a garage, and behind the house the

yard opens out a little, with a patio and a tree. Two dogs, one Ricky's and one the upstairs neighbors', lay on the small deck of the upper story of the house. As I walked through the gate, Amelia's husband, Eugenio, was working on a car in the driveway. We greeted each other, as we know each other a little from when he picks Ricky up at school. I continued around to the back and Ricky's dog came down the stairs to sniff at my feet. I walked down the stairs under the deck to knock on Ricky and Amelia's door. After a few minutes, Amelia opened it and invited me inside.

Their house has three small rooms. The front door opens onto the kitchen, which includes a small table, sink, stove, and some shelves. Off the kitchen is a bathroom and a bedroom, with a double bed and Ricky's child-size bed at the foot. Across from the beds is a wall of shelving with a TV, DVD player, PlayStation, karaoke machine, some framed photos and photo albums. To the right of the beds is a window with stuffed animals of all sizes lining the window sill. I noticed that near the photo albums were hung two colorful stars from Ricky's first grade teacher on which she had written positive notes about his effort in class.

When I arrived, Ricky was lying on his parents' bed, watching TV. His mother asked him to turn it off, which he did, and she asked if I wanted to go find a cafe so we could talk. I explained I only had a little time and I would rather see their house. We all sat on the bed. I showed Ricky a calendar I had brought him and his mom from the Oakland library, which had pictures of parents reading with children on every page, and simple advice for parents about how to read with their children in both English and Spanish. On my recommendation, we put his birthday on the calendar, then his mom's, his stepdad, and mine. Amelia looked for a pencil, but could only find a red Sharpie marker so we used that. He seemed to enjoy looking at the pictures and was excited when I showed him the hole in the calendar so it could be hung on the wall. Amelia said it would be okay to hang, it but they did not have a tack, so I said I would send one home with Ricky. After that we continued to sit on his parents' bed and talk.

On a pile of blankets on Ricky's bed were some books and two boxes of flashcards, one addition and one subtraction. Ricky said his mom had bought him the cards. Then I noticed the pile of DVDs on the shelf and asked what was his favorite movie. He showed me the pile, among which were two Curious George movies, a Spiderman movie, and a Batman movie. Amelia said her favorites were Curious George, while Ricky said Batman. I asked if they knew that Curious George was also a book, and Ricky said he had seen them in his class. I suggested that they could read the books together and also watch the movie. Ricky asked if I wanted to see one of the movies, so I said yes. He put it in and rapidly navigated through skipping the previews and selecting his favorite scenes from the middle of the movie from the DVD menu. He asked if I wanted to watch it in English or Spanish, and started to switch it to English using the remote control, but I said Spanish since it would help me practice. He knew the movie well and narrated to me in English what was about to happen. He helped explain some of the Spanish vocabulary to me, as did Amelia. Ricky quickly became fully absorbed in the movie, but Amelia

and I watched a little and talked a little. We talked about the Saturday School that we had both come from just then, at which Ricky had played continuously with Juan, another boy in his class who has different, but equally challenging, behavior struggles. I commented that he and Ricky had really seemed to hit it off, and it would be great to pursue that friendship. She said she knew Juan's father and would work on having them play together after school. I noticed the karaoke machine and asked if someone in the house liked to sing. She said her husband really likes music, and asked what kind of music I like. We talked about our music tastes for a while. I asked what her husband does for work, she said he is a carpenter who works for someone else doing building projects. She showed me a toy computer that she had bought for Ricky once, that looked like a laptop. It had electronic games on it that showed up on the screen that she said were for learning reading and math. It looked neat, but she said Ricky did not like to use it. I mentioned the electronic games made by Leap Frog, which look like little video games but are for spelling, phonics, vocabulary, and math. I mentioned that maybe he would be interested in one of those, since it would use his video game skills but would be for learning. She seemed interested so I said I would look into whether the school had one to lend her or she wanted to buy one herself (they are about \$20).

Ricky soon turned off the movie and asked if I wanted to see him play the Spiderman PlayStation game. I said sure, so he put that in. He moved quickly through the game, putting webs around the bad guys and swinging from skyscraper to skyscraper, telling me, "Watch this, Ms. Sarah," every now and then. Sometimes the game would pause to offer helpful tips, but he would skip them and go on because he already knew them. As he became absorbed, Amelia and I talked some more. She asked if I would like to see some photos of her family, so of course I said yes. She brought out two albums and a framed picture, and we looked at pictures of Ricky as a baby, of her mother in Mexico, her siblings, nieces, and nephews. There were lots of pictures of Ricky with his cousin, who is slightly older, from when they lived with Amelia's brother's family when they first moved to the Bay Area. There were also lots of pictures of her mother in Mexico, both with Ricky when he lived there and with other members of the family, including Amelia's grandmother. One picture of Ricky was a posed, formal picture of him in front of a painted landscape, dressed in formal Mexican dress including boots, a cowboy hat, an embroidered shirt and gold medallion. His cousin had a similar one of her dressed in a gown. A couple pictures were of a niece's First Communion. I asked if they go to church, and Amelia said they used to but not regularly anymore because she often works on Sundays.

After a while, we started talking again about reading, and she went to the shelf in the kitchen and brought in a cardboard book box, of the kind that many teachers use for each student, full of books, which she piled on the bed in front of me. She said, "Ricky never reads them." When we started to talk about the books, I asked Ricky a question and he distractedly answered me with one eye on the screen.

Amelia asked Ricky to turn off the PlayStation. He did not do so but kept playing, saying “okay, okay,” quietly, and continuing to play. She repeated her request and he continued to say “okay” but to keep playing. After about six or seven requests, he came to the end of a level, either by “dying” on purpose or by accident, I could not tell, and then he turned it off. We looked at the books together. One was about space, which we are studying in class, another was a Disney collection, a couple were leveled readers from Open Court, and there were 10 or 12 others, all in English. Amelia said again that he never reads them. The text of almost all the books was very advanced, and I suggested that maybe they were still too hard for him. I also suggested that maybe more space books would interest him, including some in Spanish. We talked about whether there was a public library close by. She said there was. I said that Ricky could get his own card and they could find books to read together. I also said that many libraries have programs for children after school. She said maybe on Wednesdays she could take him there. I offered to find the information about the location and programs at the nearby libraries.

I noted the stuffed animals on the window sill and asked whose they were. Ricky said they were all his mom’s. He climbed up on his bed to reach the windowsill and took down a tin half full of coins to show me his money. I asked what he was saving up to buy and he said maybe a birthday present for his mom. He did not want to tell me what it was because he wanted it to be a surprise for her. He turned on another video after a little while and lay down on the bed. I talked with his mom for a few more minutes about how active he is at school, compared to at home, always wanting to run and jump and slide, and that I always thought he would do great on a running team or soccer team. She said she herself really appreciates exercise, and that she got into it when Ricky was living in Mexico with her mom and she herself was very depressed and crying all the time. Her sister bought her a membership at a gym and she started to go a couple times a week. She said now she really enjoys to go when she can find the time.

After about an hour I stood up to leave. Ricky bid me a distracted goodbye from his place on the bed, while Amelia and I said goodbye in the kitchen. She helped me remember the list of things I was going to look into for them—the Leap Frog game, the library information, a tack for the calendar, possibly some more space books. She got Ricky up as I was walking out, and both of them walked with me as far as the fence at the sidewalk. As I walked to my car Ricky called, “Are we going on a walk, Ms. Sarah?” obviously recalling my first visit when we walked around his neighborhood together. I said not that day, but that I could return for another walk with him soon if he wanted. He said okay, and I waved goodbye and got in my car.

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