

# Metaphors of feast and famine: funds, resources and capital

Review of: *Funds of Identity: Connecting Meaningful Learning Experiences in and out of School* by Moisés Esteban-Guitart, Cambridge University Press, 2016. ISBN: 9781107147119

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Scholarship concerned with social justice and equity (usually using that language from the US), new literacies, inclusion, diversity and democratic principles of education draws on a key observation: that human beings engage in learning in all sorts of circumstances but that modern academic schooling only values and validates a very specific proportion of that. There are two simple consequences that follow from this. First, the political struggle for what counts as learning or what learning counts (Green & Luke, 2006) – in other words who gets to define the curriculum and socially valuable forms of knowledge (Young, 1998): and secondly, the progressive tenet of faith, building on work from Vygotski to Bruner, that forms of learning are interconnected and that it is more effective to build on learning in one domain/practice in order to progress in another. The last 30 years have seen intense struggle over this second principle with progressivists seeking to build on children’s social and out-of-school knowledge and experience and a mixture of formalists and traditionalists (a simple noun to embrace all of these positions is far more difficult) advocating the explicit, the generic, and the academic as the best ways to advance children’s learning.

The tension over this balance between decontextualised instruction and experiential reflection is complicated by the new politics of education which appear to offer social mobility and significant rewards to the educated at the expense of a far more precarious social exclusion awaiting those who fail in schools across the global North. It has proven very difficult to offer a disinterested social science focusing on learning that could objectively provide the best solution to these competing interests.

This book attempts to position itself within the “learning sciences” and seeks to offer a theoretical synthesis of the literature broadly speaking in the progressivist camp in order to make the case that finding ways to build on young people’s identity work and that out-of-school experiences can offer a productive way forward for schooling. Its central metaphor is that of a fund – as in the literature around

funds of knowledge. As Esteban-Guitart explains this principle has its origins in an ethnographic account of Latino/Latina communities in the United States and in the work of Luis Moll and colleagues (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Rios-Aguilar, Kiyama, Gravitt, & Moll, 2011), developed a model for school reform building on local teacher and community-centred activities to build understanding and knowledge structures across these communities and formal education processes.

The original work was significant in that it aimed to redress deficit assumptions held by Anglo teachers about Latin American communities and used the term “funds” to suggest that the knowledge and experience held within families in these communities has a kind of wealth and is resource rich as opposed to deficit models which stressed how these young children came to school not knowing what their white middle-class counterparts did. Sociologists use the idea of “capital” particularly in the Bourdieu-ian tradition (Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) developing ideas of “social”, “cultural” as well as “economic” capital; for discussion see (Albright & Luke, 2008; Archer, Dawson, DeWitt, Seakins, & Wong, 2015). This book curiously eschews these more political conceptualisations of resource which may not help its ambition to offer an enlightened model of teaching and learning as a way to intervene in the kind of stand-off or tensions I have outlined above.

The author further extends the resource-based metaphor into the idea of “funds of identity”. Here again there are whole swathes of literature from social constructivism, e.g. Gergen & Shotter, 1989; Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, narrative identity e.g. Andrews, 2010; Wortham, 2005, social psychology e.g. Cote & Levine, 2002, the politics of identity e.g. Fraser, 2013), social practice theory e.g. Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998 – and I could indeed go on - that don’t figure in this book and which approach the mobilisation and construction of identity in different ways that could feed as richly into the authors deployment of identity in classroom pedagogies – as in Moje & Luke, 2009.

The book is rather curiously located in the history of the author’s academic network and rather suffers from a lack of wider historical and theoretical reading. It tends to offer more of a synthesis of concepts jumping from Bronfenbrenner to Vygostki to “Connected Learning” to Moll rather like the path of a mountain goat more than systematically interrogating theoretical or conceptual questions and, as I have already suggested, is rather restricted in terms of its range and scope. It tells an account of successful deployments of funds of knowledge/funds of identity approaches in various educational institutions in Catalonia but these are described more from the deliverers point of view than as a deep or wide-ranging empirical account. Indeed, the book is rather slight both in terms of its length and its contribution to an interesting, generative and important aspect of how we might study learning and education systems within and across young people’s experiences in and out of school.

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