


Chapter 33

Where Our Paths Crossed: Latina Teachers, Professional Development, and Funds of Identity

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents the case of two Latina teachers who worked with Latinx and emerging bilingual students. Their funds of identity are analyzed, and the professional development program is described, including ways it influenced the teachers' ideological clarity and sense of agency. While their experiences were different in many ways, Summer and Ximena's paths crossed through their shared experiences in the professional development program, and they became vocal advocates for language as resource and language as right perspectives in education. This chapter demonstrates the potential in professional development for teachers working with emerging bilinguals and immigrants, how teachers can move towards advocacy work and leadership by examining their own journeys and funds of identity.

INTRODUCTION

That the school has been locked away and walled in as if by a tall fence from life itself has been its greatest failing. Education is just as meaningless outside the real world as is a fire without oxygen, or as is breathing in a vacuum. The teacher's education work, therefore, must be inevitably connected with his (or her) creative, social, and life work (Vygotsky, 1926/1997, p. 345).

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This chapter has three aims: to explore and explain the burgeoning “funds of identity” (Esteban-Guitart, & Moll, 2014, p.35) of two Latina educators working in a large suburban school district in the southwest United States; to use this as an opportunity for professional development and take down the fence that separates schools from the lived experiences of the larger communities in which they do their work; and to illustrate how pedagogy and language education can be transformed when educators are engaged in this kind of professional development. By understanding ourselves as teachers in relation to the communities in which we teach, we are able to develop ideological clarity (Bartolomé & Balderrama, 2001) in order to better serve our emerging bilingual students.

Specifically, we discuss how two Latina teachers in a literacy graduate program were guided through professional development focused on language and literacy instruction centered in their classrooms and communities utilizing a funds of identity approach. First, we provide an overview of the professional development graduate program, with examples of the curriculum, readings, and assignments. We incorporated team building, scaffolded group interactions, readings, assignments, and teacher reflection that were all designed to uncover funds of identities and to connect teachers to their communities. Then we exemplify the professional development program through two teachers: Ximena and Summer. We make visible their funds of identity and follow their journeys through the two-year program through a case study approach. We provide examples of what they experienced in their respective classrooms and schools and ways they sought to problem-solve or amend their pedagogical practices in order to better serve their multilingual students. We discuss how both teachers engaged in shared leadership and advocacy for their students, emerging bilinguals, and the Latinx community. Finally, we conclude with recommendations for professional development for educators working with multilingual and immigrant communities.

BACKGROUND

“Funds of Identity”

Funds of identity are characterized as a “box of tools people use to define themselves” (Esteban-Guitart, & Moll, 2014, p. 74) that are both internal and external. Moreover, funds of identity are temporal, a process of becoming, created at various times in our lives through a vast range of life experiences, including our funds of knowledge, our lived experiences, and other historically created, accumulated, disseminated, and situated resources. Funds of identity can be made visible in artifacts, in chosen activities and academic pursuits, and in a repertoire of behaviors.

“Funds of identity” (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014) was articulated as a means to overcome various limitations in funds of knowledge, including the centrality of families for the individual as well as an overreliance on interviews in students’ homes. Funds of identity seek to expand into various social networks and lived experiences of participants. These additional experiences and technologies form relationships and identities in individuals that may differ from that of their family of origin. In other words, participants may embrace, reject or cobble together their own lives and identities with funds of knowledge derived from their families and cultural histories but they also add their own interests, activities, and experiences.

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