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Charteris, J., Thomas, E., & Masters, Y. (2018). Funds of Identity in Education: Acknowledging the Life Experiences of First Year Tertiary Students. *The Teacher Educator*, 53(1), 6-20. <http://doi.org/10.1080/08878730.2017.1367057>

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Funds of Identity in Education: Acknowledging the life experiences of first year tertiary students

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Abstract

Teacher education students bring diverse funds of knowledge to formal education. These funds of knowledge are particularly important for the successful transition of first year tertiary students into higher education. In pre-service teacher education contexts, students draw knowledge from varied life contexts and their *funds of knowledge* become *funds of identity* when experiences associated with onto-epistemologies are used in the service of identity formation. This descriptive case study draws data from an online first year pre-service teacher education unit (subject) to consider examples of funds of identity that can inform the work of practitioners in developing significant and contextualised learning experiences. Students' prior schooling experiences give meaning to their teacher education coursework and project potential teacher identities.

Key words

Funds of knowledge, funds of identity, higher education, first year experience

Literature overview

First year tertiary students bring a wealth of resources with them to their education. In this article we deploy a *funds of identity* lens (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014a; Esteban-Guitart, 2016; Subero, Vujasinović, & Esteban-Guitart, 2017) to explore how students use their prior knowledge, in conjunction with their university studies, to forge new knowledges and associated identities. This is significant because the experiences which students bring to educational settings from their lifeworlds are viewed here not as being isolated and discreet from their current studies, but as being inherently connected. As Esteban-Guitart & Moll (2014a), state, “identity is made up of cultural factors such as sociodemographic conditions, social institutions, artifacts, significant others, practices, and activities” (p. 31).

This article makes a contribution to the conceptualisation and utilisation of these factors within teacher education courses by providing examples of how students draw from existing funds of identity, within a higher education context, to begin developing their teacher identities. These teacher identities are embedded in sociocultural contexts: socially constructed in education settings and linked with the creation of “personal histories of becoming in the context of...communities” (Wenger, 1998, p. 5). Specifically, funds of identity can be conceptualized as “historically accumulated, culturally developed, and socially distributed resources that are essential for people’s self-definition, self-expression, and self-understanding... [and can denote] a set of resources or box of tools and signs” (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014a, p. 37). Therefore, funds of identity are the enactments of the funds of knowledge that people use to define who they are in sociocultural contexts (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014a). This definition, as used in our higher education first year pre-service teacher research context, indicates that identities are fluid, open to multiple interpretations by others (Sfard & Prusak, 2005) and relationally constituted (Drewery, 2005). As Jovés, Siqués and Esteban-Guitart (2015) observe, “identity is embedded in culture [and thus] ... it is always mediated, distributed among people, artefacts, activities and contexts” (p. 70).

A funds of knowledge approach supports learners to exchange learning experiences within school contexts and beyond (Subero et al., 2017). It is “based on a simple premise that people are competent and have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge” (Gonzalez & Moll, 2002, p. 625). This allows educators and researchers potential avenues to connect these life based funds with school based teaching and learning strategies to enhance school learning for all, and particularly marginalized and vulnerable groups of students. Funds of identity go further to acknowledge that people are also active in creating their own knowledges and identities and, therefore, a funds of identity approach enables us to engage with enactments of social and personal histories. This is because, as Esteban-Guitart & Moll (2014b) argue, funds of identity are a product/result of the meanings people make from their “life practices and social interactions.... [In turn, these funds of identity can act as] potential educational resources, mediational devices or ‘acts of thought’ which can underpin the development of school aims...” (p. 71). Funds of identity can be revealed by practitioners through the recognition and use of “artefacts, interests, and practices” that make aspects of identity more salient and tangible in education spaces (Subero et al., 2017, p. 247).

Esteban-Guitart and Moll (2014b) highlight how pertinent it is to cultural psychology that researchers theorize culture and subjectivity as *both* sociocultural (public and interpersonal) and embodied and experiential (private and intrapersonal). This article contributes to the fields of teaching and teacher education by extending Esteban-Guitart’s and Moll’s (2014b) proposition for further research that scopes “identity texts” to gauge the impact of mediating tasks and activities (in this case, assessment) where learner identities are central to the learning activity (p. 78). This aligns with a key methodological difference between the ethnographic techniques used to determine funds of knowledge (Jovés et al., 2015), that teachers can engage with, and the use of student-constructed artefacts to examine funds of identity (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014a).

The case study research focuses on how a group of first year pre-service teachers make explicit connections with, and construct new funds of identity within an online unit in an Australian university context. This online funds of identity approach, aligns with the work of Poole (2017a, 2017b) who explores students' digital identities. The research highlights the importance of understanding and embracing the cultural contexts and knowledges that higher education students bring with them. This is supported by Gale and Parker's (2014) "transition as becoming" (p. 734) which argues that many of the students' multiple lived realities are currently excluded by higher education institutions. Recognition of this plurality shifts the emphasis from an essentialised view of culture to an organic, inquiry-based perspective. We concur with Ball (2013) that pedagogically embracing plurality can be challenging in the face of massification of higher education, where universities are charged with the dispensation of education on a grand scale and learning can be conceived of as a commodified transaction

To explore funds of identity in the transitional period of first year higher education, we firstly contextualize the study in an Australian university milieu. We then discuss first year transition approaches, southern theory, funds of knowledge and funds of identity. Drawing from student assignment data from one online unit, we explore how first year students forge connections between their lived experiences and unit content to construct new funds of identity.

Theoretical background

In our Australian context, there is a strong impetus towards increased participation and massification in higher education (Arvanitakis, 2014; Gale, 2012). This has resulted in more diverse student populations, particularly in teacher education. At the University of New England, a regional university, 85% of the students study off-campus (externally) by distance education (UNE Corporate Intelligence, 2013) and therefore quality e-pedagogy is a high priority. Furthermore, there is a diverse student cohort with many students returning to studies for a career change and/or juggling families and other responsibilities. These factors and a range of others place pressure on

students, and this can, for some groups of students, lead to withdrawal from courses. We premise this study on the belief that an engagement with social and personal histories as funds of identity can enhance first year students' transition into university studies.

First year transition and southern theory. Gale and Parker (2014) identify that many universities are currently employing transition approaches that focus on making diverse students fit existing university norms and practices. Rather than seeing the first year experience as a transitional process of induction or development, where there is a linear process of integration, Gale and Parker consider how students can navigate multiple narratives and subjectivities throughout their time at university. Taking up their point that “transition as becoming” supports a “curriculum that reflects and affirms marginalized student histories and subjectivities (Gale & Parker, 2014, p. 738), we identify and examine students' funds of identity. We also recognise that we are part of a process where we relationally construct (Drewery, 2005) and co-produce student subjectivities through the digital tools that we use in our units.

Gale and Parker (2014) make links between transition approaches and Connell's (2007) southern theory. Southern theory is a theoretical framework that values different knowledge practices and seeks to destabilize the geopolitics of power. It challenges us to consider how thinking at the level of practices can help us with the problem of developing different knowledge practices to address diversity in higher education (Connell, 2007). It therefore behoves us in the academy to learn in new ways, and through new relationships (particularly in teacher education where we want the recognition and valuing of different knowledges to translate into practice in school classrooms). Therefore learner perspectives and understandings can inform co-constituted teacher-student educational relationships. This implies a responsiveness that destabilises higher education practices which do not recognise, acknowledge and build on the epistemologies that students bring with them to higher education. The concept of destabilisation from the periphery has been taken up by many educators in higher

education (Hickling-Hudson, 2011; Gale, 2010; Gale & Parker, 2014). In particular, Gale (2010) calls for a southern theory of higher education where room is made for:

different ways of thinking about, and different ways of engaging with knowledge, and indeed including different kinds of understandings that perhaps have not been part of Australian higher education before. It is about how we structure the student learning experience in ways that open it up and make it possible for students to contribute from whom they are and what they know... It entails the creation of space in higher education not just for new kinds of student bodies but also for their embodied knowledges and ways of knowing. (p. 2)

With their etymologies in sociocultural discourse (González, Moll & Amanti, 2005), we see that the concepts of funds of knowledge and identity can be linked productively with both the *Transition as Becoming* of Gale and Parker (2014) and *Southern Theory* (Connell, 2007). Our research presented here can be said to have a southern theoretical basis on two levels. Firstly the concept funds of knowledge was originally coined by Wolf (1966) and was adopted by academics in Tucson Arizona (Velez-Ibanez, 1988; Moll & Greenberg, 1990; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Moll, Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg, 1989) to reframe deficit discourses around marginalised cultures. On a practical level, the notion of engaging with learners' funds of knowledge and identity in higher education settings destabilises the transmission paradigm (Gale & Parker, 2014) that is so expedient and cost efficient in higher education. As Rios-Agular, Marquez Kiyama, Gravitt, and Moll (2011) argue in their study of Latina(o) students' transition to higher education, a funds of knowledge approach can enable tertiary educators to engage meaningfully with ethnically and socially diverse student populations. Similarly, funds of identity approaches uses student-created artefacts to draw out meanings that learners make of who they are in their worlds. As a southern theory, funds of identity invite diverse perspectives to be brought into the academy and the classroom.

‘Funds of knowledge’. We firstly background funds of knowledge to lay a foundation for our use of funds of identity as a theoretical framework in this research. Funds of knowledge essentially is an approach that shifts from a deficit discourse of blame, in an attempt to engage practitioners in inquiry about the resources that students bring with them into formal education settings. Funds of knowledge resources are sociohistorical in origin (Poole, 2017a) and therefore differ from other forms of disciplinary knowledge (McCrory, 2017) that can be drawn upon in classrooms. It has been well established that pedagogical approaches that activate funds of knowledge can assist learners to engage with the knowledge production that takes place within schooling settings (González et al, 2005; Moll et al., 1989; Rodriguez, 2013). While the first studies of funds of knowledge were originally undertaken in relation to household functioning and wellbeing, there has been recognition that historically formal education has not acknowledged the “expertise, knowledge, and artifacts” of communities or utilised these in any systematic way to enhance learning (Kumpulainen & Lipponen, 2012, p. 112). Thus an initial focus on the “historically accumulated and culturally-developed bodies of knowledge and skills” within households soon migrated to teaching settings (Moll et al., 1992, p. 133), enabling educators to become conscious of “their deficit thinking about minority students who in fact possess ample amounts of skills and out-of-school knowledge that possess exchange value within the mainstream classroom” (Poole, 2017a, p. 51).

From a funds of knowledge perspective, sociohistorical resources are derived from “personal, family and community history that are the result of ...participation in certain sociocultural practices” (Jovés et al., 2015, p.70). As Hogg (2011) points out in her review of funds of knowledge literature, there are divergent views that are centred on conceptualising it as both *sources* of knowledge and *areas* of knowledge. For instance González et al (2005, p. 72) construct a definition that funds of knowledge are “the historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being”; funds of knowledge are located squarely in the areas of household and individual domains. Moje and

colleagues (2004) however shift to a *source* approach and describe “family, community, peer, and popular cultural funds of knowledge” (p. 50). Families and communities can therefore be seen as valuable educational resources. González and Moll (2002) place value on these as being local and situated knowledges that people bring to education settings. They argue that “instruction must be linked to students’ lives and that the details of effective pedagogy should be linked to local histories and community contexts” (González & Moll, 2002, p. 623).

Students therefore have accumulated knowledges or forms of capital that can serve them in educational environments (González et al, 2005). We take the stance, in line with Moje et al (2004) and González et al (2005), that funds of knowledge, as accumulated knowledges or forms of capital, should be explicitly engaged with in schooling activities. Funds of knowledge can be said to have dynamic and fluid properties, embodied in sociocultural contexts, rather than being something innate and transferred at will.

Much of the literature pertains to the recognition of funds of knowledge that reside in families which children bring to primary and secondary schooling settings (Chesworth, 2016; Hogg, 2016). However, there has been growing interest in the sociohistorical resources tertiary students bring with them (Andrews, Yee, Greenhough, Hughes, & Winter, 2005). We endorse Gale and Parker’s (2014) argument that it is time for universities to acknowledge and build on “*diverse knowledges and ways of knowing*...not simply [providing] institutional spaces for different kinds of students” (Gale & Parker, 2014, p. 741, our italics added). Consideration has also been given to implications for pre-service teacher education with “teachers’ funds of knowledge form[ing] the bodies of knowledge (including information, skills and strategies) that underlie the functioning, development and well-being of teachers in curriculum decision-making and interactions with young children in educational settings” (Hedges, 2012, p. 13).

‘Funds of identity’. While the funds of knowledge concept focuses on collective family and community capital, funds of identity recognises the importance of “the interests, knowledge and skills of the learners themselves” (Jovés et al., 2015, p. 68). Essentially these are based on a wide range of accumulated sociohistorical tools that can be utilized as sources for personal identity construction (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014). We specifically utilise the funds of identity approach here in recognition of the complex experience, knowledge, skills, and identities that our often mature age students bring with them to their studies, in conjunction with the collective capital of their families and communities. Having said this, what we believe, and how we think and act, is always shaped by cultural, historical, and social structures that are reflected through the mediational tools we use (Lasky, 2005). Therefore, tools mediated in cultural contexts influence the development of human beliefs, values, and ways of acting. For example, new technologies and networks offer “new environments for learning, for forming relationships and identities” (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014b, p. 78). In this article we refer to the mediated tools of prior schooling experiences and first year Education unit content that students refer to in an assignment submission to frame identity.

Esteban-Guitart and Moll (2014b) connect “funds of identity” with “lived experience”, arguing that “cognition/thinking/meaning are inextricable from feeling/emotion/sense and that learning and experience are intrinsically situated in a matrix of life trajectories and ecological-transactional aspects throughout one’s life” (p. 70). Therefore, the lived experiences and funds of identity of students cannot be separated from particular intellectual pursuits such as university studies. Indeed, rather than seeing emotions as separate from cognitive function, Esteban-Guitart and Moll (2014b) describe how lived experience can encompass an interrelationship between

all psychological functions and the mutual constitution of emotional acts and intellectual acts. Indeed, consciousness must be understood as the interrelation of all psychological functions (Vygotsky, 1962) and human development

consists of changes in the interfunctional relationships between psychological abilities (p. 74).

An issue with some of the funds of knowledge literature is that it has tended to emphasise particular types of positive experiences. This has led to Zipin (2009) posing the question: “can only ‘positives’ in learners’ lifeworlds constitute positive learning assets?” (p. 322). He examines problematic tendencies within funds of knowledge approaches to build curriculum around light (i.e. positive) but not dark knowledge from learners’ lifeworlds. If learners only have the lighter aspects of their experience acknowledged in the academy and in classrooms, significant lifeworld experiences may be ignored. Although Zipin (2009) refers exclusively to funds of knowledge, as we later discuss, dark experiences and knowledge are also relevant to personal identity construction and contribute to the funds of identity literature. Moreover, as we will demonstrate, dark funds of identity can assist pre-service teachers to project potential teacher identities.

Methods

We use a case study approach to investigate how first year online students who study off campus draw formatively from their funds of identity in a pre-service teacher education unit. Gaining university ethics approval, we instigated a small study where we gathered students’ assignments as data. For Miles and Huberman (1994) a case is a phenomenon that occurs in a bounded context. In particular, descriptive case studies offer “rich and revealing insights into the social world of a particular case” (Yin, 2012, p. 49). In this instance it comprises a group of students within a first year unit of pre-service teacher education that has teacher pedagogy as its focus. The first year unit has 179 students, 40 on-campus and 139 who study off-campus. Twenty-eight of these students agreed to be part of the study. For the purposes of this article, we discuss selected comments from four students’ submissions for the first required assessment. These four provide rich descriptive data with which we frame our case. The data were selected for inclusion on the basis that they provide the most insightful representations

of funds of identity and were illustrative of different elements of funds of identity that we wanted to foreground.

Entitled *Learners and Teaching*, the unit promotes dialogic pedagogy where online students are invited to relate their own developmental experiences (funds of identity) to the unit readings. A co-constructivist approach to e-pedagogy is fostered. In the first and second assignments the pre-service teachers are required to relate the unit material to their own experiences growing up, as pupils in school classrooms, or, for the more mature age students, in the workplace and parenting. We draw data from submitted assignments to see how a small group of first year students construct new knowledge in their unit using and adding to their funds of identity. The pre-service teachers were firstly asked to use academic literature to discuss how emotional intelligence relates to learning and teaching processes (Part A). They were then required to articulate how the ideas raised in the Part A discussion related to their pedagogical beliefs. This reflection required critical interpretations and analysis of personal experience supported by references to academic literature.

These student assignments are co-constructed artefacts. They are a response to a lecturer posed question and are reflective of the pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 2006) within the unit. These particular artefacts reveal student funds of identity in the knowledge, skills and experiences that these people have accumulated through their lived interactions with schooling systems over time. The artefacts highlight what is important to the students, enabling them to explain the meanings and connections that they make in a similar way to those identified by and utilized within Esteban-Guitart and Moll's work (2014b).

Participants. There are four students in the case. This sample comprises responses from some of the students who responded to our invitation to participate in the study at the outset of the unit and who were able to provide rich and sufficient information. There was an ethical requirement stipulated by the university that student permission was sought from the outset of the unit and the data was gathered on

completion after all assessment was finished to mitigate lecturer/student power relations. This was to ensure that students did not feel coerced into participating in the project, with lecturer judgments about their assessment linked with their willingness to engage in the research. The student names - Saskia, Cara, Kate and Sara - are pseudonyms we use to provide confidentiality. The data included here have been scrutinised to ensure that information that may profile the participants too closely, making them easily identifiable, has not been included. In the assignment the pre-service teachers were asked to talk about their beliefs in relation to the unit material and also to make links with their own autobiographies. They were required to explore their own narratives and relate their own lived experiences to their developing theories of education. The data are reflective of the types of comments made across the assignments.

Analysis. Using thematic analysis to identify aspects of funds of identity, we provide a detailed and nuanced account of these in the dataset. Thematic analysis, emanating from a social constructionist epistemology, can be described as an analytical approach for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Our deductive analysis was specifically driven by our theoretical interest in funds of identity and therefore was explicitly focused on exploring these themes in the data. Braun and Clarke (2006) observe that theoretically driven analysis provides a less rich description of the data and a more focused and detailed engagement with the targeted aspect of the data.

We also acknowledge the instability of voices and identities that are portrayed within the data samples. It is well established that the “crisis of representation” in academic research calls into question whether qualitative researchers can use text to authentically represent the experience of the “other” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). Turning away from the promise of truth, Guba and Lincoln (2005) argue that objectivity can be seen as “a chimera, a mythological creature that never existed, save in the imaginations of those who believe that knowing can be separated from the knower” (p.

208). Rather than taking an essentialist perspective to conceptualize the pre-service teacher voices as stable and coherent, we frame the co-construction of selves in this research as relational subjectivities (Drewery, 2005). Thus the voices are embedded within the context of the situated moment of writing, the framework of the assignment and the marker/student power relations.

Findings

The following excerpts are taken from four student assignments. These data samples were chosen on the basis that they reveal rich sociohistorical sources of identity construction.

Saskia's *virtual schoolbags*. Saskia lives in Melbourne. Before undertaking teacher education Saskia ran a video production company. She is a mother with two children under 5. In this extract Saskia re-stories her experience of schooling in light of the literature on the value of making links with students' prior knowledge.

One of the principle beliefs I hold in relation to teaching and learning in primary schools is that every child is unique, and deserves access to the educational and social opportunities required to realize their potential. I am particularly drawn to the concept of Pat Thomson's "virtual schoolbags" (2002, p. 1) that illustrate[s] this idea beautifully. In contrast to my belief, my own experience of primary school was rather like being in a metaphorical sausage factory, where conformity was celebrated and learning was mostly rote, with little or no connection to our lives outside school. Granted, my primary school years were completed approximately twenty-seven years ago, and many changes have taken place in the interim.

At the time, I didn't particularly dislike primary school, but I believe my own "virtual schoolbag" remained closed from Kindergarten all the way through to Year 6. I imagine that if my classmates and I travelled forward in time to participate in a 2014 Year 6 class with a teacher that looked into our schoolbags

and acted accordingly, then many of us would have benefited from increased Emotional Intelligence, greater resilience and better learning and teaching processes. (Saskia)

Saskia's anecdote frames funds of identity. She re-stories her own childhood schooling experience as a "sausage factory" in accordance with the education psychology discourse taught in the unit. Embracing Thomson's (2002) virtual school bag concept, she suggests that the resources (funds of knowledge [collective] and funds of identity [personal]) that she brought with her to school as a pupil were not acknowledged. Through taking up the psychology discourse of Emotional Intelligence (Cherniss, Extein, Goleman & Weissberg, 2006) that is covered in the unit, she provides an account of her primary school learning experiences. Deploying funds of identity, she locates herself as a student who did not have an opportunity to contribute or build on the sociocultural experiences (funds of knowledge) afforded by her background. It is clear from Saskia's response that her own experiences and embodied knowledge of schooling are interacting with educational theories taught in the unit and helping to inform her preferences for her own future pedagogical values and practices.

While Saskia describes a global, systemic focus on conformity and uniformity in her prior experiences, Cara discusses a sense of loneliness and being 'othered' through her disconnect from the taught curriculum that now influence her approach to education.

Cara's dark funds of identity. Cara is a mother with a two year old son who lives in Sydney. She worked in a range of roles, as an insurance agent, with children and with animals, before taking up teacher education. Cara frames the significance of sociocultural factors as her prior experiences of loneliness influence how she sees the importance of community in schools as social environments.

Being quite shy in primary school I wasn't as outgoing or confident as other students. I quite often didn't feel as though I belonged to the small school environment and at times struggled to fit in. In keeping with the sociocultural views I agree with, I believe in maintaining focus on the learning context or

situation to ensure each individual can relate to and identify with the educational environment. This means creating an environment where individuals feel confident, safe and secure in learning and aren't afraid to take risks, feel supported by their peers and a part of their social environment, motivated to be actively involved in learning. "Children can learn to make sense of the world around them. Develop social and cognitive skills, mature emotionally, gain self-confidence" (Dietze & Kashin, 2011, p. 46, Quotation selected by Cara for the assignment.).

Although focusing on a different level of experience, Cara's story demonstrates that first year students can use *dark funds of identity*, that have been derived from their own difficult experiences of schooling to make sense of abstracted concepts and theories taught within a university unit. Kate's experiences, outlined in the following excerpt, also illustrate that these dark funds of identity can influence the approaches and practices that first year students identify they will use as teachers in the future.

Kate's "unrelenting taunts". Kate attended a teacher education course at another university before coming to the University of New England. She grew up in Queensland, north of Brisbane, experiencing adversity through her schooling because she was perceived to be different by her peers. In the following, Kate gives an account of her relationally constituted identity as *the girl with epilepsy*.

I believe that recognising and understanding the meaning of emotions is an important trait to have to ensure the ability to create an inclusive classroom for all. Having grown up with epilepsy, I witnessed firsthand how cruel and unrelenting the taunts of children can be and how that plays on the emotions of others. I was teased and bullied because I was different and when I was at school there wasn't the scope of emotional and social skill teaching available that there is now. Children didn't really understand the effect that teasing etc had on others and how it affected them emotionally. Similarly, I wasn't able to express how these taunts affected me because it was one of those things that just

weren't talked about. For this reason I believe that all students should have the right and ability to express their emotions and not feel that they are wrong to do so. This links to Goleman's theory of emotional intelligence and the ability to know and manage our emotions (Vialle, Lysaght & Verenikina, 2005, p. 202). Teaching students the skills to express their emotions, the way I wish I could have, means that students who are struggling with physical, mental or psychological issues can feel more at ease in the classroom and equal to their peers.

Kate explicitly links her own experiences with the theory that she has been reading in the unit. While her knowledge here is certainly *dark*, she is able to apply these historical personal experiences to a theoretical framework as a new construction of funds of identity. In this way, she also projects what these understandings will mean for her as a teacher.

While Saskia, Cara and Kate discuss their experiences from childhood, Sara brings different funds of knowledge, her experience as a parent, to the notion of emotional intelligence.

Sara's *pedagogy of hope*. Sara lives on the New South Wales central coast and is a mother with three children. She left school over 20 years and has held various positions prior to commencing her teacher education course. She refers to the knowledge and skills she has developed through her parenting experiences.

One of my principal beliefs, in relation to teaching and learning, is that every child holds an ability to learn and I believe that this is also possible for students in regards to learning emotional intelligence. Goleman (as cited in Vialle, Lysaght & Verenikina, 2005) confirms this by stating that the skills required for emotional intelligence can be learned. I feel it is possible for teachers to assist students in learning to deal with difficult situations, to help them to approach an issue calmly and to continue trying. The teacher could help the student to direct their emotions, both positive and negative, and scaffold the learning of self-

motivation. My understanding behind this notion lies with my experiences as a mother, and educator, of my own children. I have witnessed my nine-year-old son struggle -dealing with frustration and resilience in a number of situations, socially and academically. After working with him, in conjunction with his teacher; giving him strategies on how to stop and assess the situation calmly, then helping him to redirect his attitude in ways that assist him in his predicament, he has in time learnt to do this on his own. He is also showing improvement academically, he is more enthusiastic about learning, is more resilient and is showing more positive emotions than previously.

Sara's story reflects a pedagogy of hope. This notion, with its origins in critical theory (Freire, 1994), suggests a refusal of debilitating labels and a commitment to a positive pedagogical emphasis on equipping children with knowledge of themselves in order to build persistence and resilience. Sara links her work with her son and his teacher to practices that can potentially enhance learning in her own classroom. The anecdote illustrates how her funds of identity are generated from a diverse range of personal and relational experiences that have been accrued throughout her life.

Discussion

Drawing on a Freirian (Freire, 1970) analogy, none of these pre-service teachers were “empty vessels” just waiting to be filled with the knowledge and wisdom of their lecturers. Esteban-Guitart and Moll (2014b) highlight how “funds of identity are inscribed into artefacts – documents, images, tasks, etc- and transported throughout the different sites connected to a person's life trajectory” (p. 70). The brief excerpts demonstrate that, when provided with the opportunity to do so with the inclusion of mediated assessment tools, these pre-service teachers integrate their lived experiences from other sites of learning with the unit content and thereby construct new funds of identity including, but not limited to projected teacher identities. The data excerpts also illustrate pre-service teacher agency (the power relations of a high stake assessment

considered) in that these pre-service teachers use unit literature and concepts to reflect on significant experiences and memories.

The pre-service teachers reframe their experiences to construct landscapes of their own narratives. They draw from professional literature to address problematic issues that they, or others around them, have faced and so begin to forge pathways forward for their pedagogical practice that suggest a sense of hope. The data suggest that knowledges and experiences were generated through sociohistorical lifeworlds and integrated with the introduced university unit concepts to construct new funds of identity. These accounts confirm that when provided the opportunity to do so through the selection of pedagogical or assessment strategies, students utilise existing funds of identity to forge new funds of identity through personal embodied engagement with social lifeworlds in the past and present (including university studies).

In the context of teacher education, attention to teacher identity development, as a process of strengthening funds of identity, is of importance. Not only do the pre-service teachers' existing funds of identity inform and shape their current studies, but they suggest a clear influence on the direction and shape of their own future pedagogical values. As Mockler (2013) points out teacher learning "at its best is not merely about the acquisition of knowledge and skills, but the formation and mediation of teacher professional identity" (p. 42). Therefore, funds of identity are relevant in both pre-service and in-service teacher learning contexts, developing further as teachers progress from initial education and throughout their careers. Although the accounts presented are re-storied conceptions of previous experiences and, as perception data, cannot be construed as truths in themselves, we envisage that this sort of personal and emotional engagement with their education has the potential to influence future pedagogy.

Although Saskia likens funds of knowledge to Thomson's (2002) metaphor of a *virtual backpack* where pupils come to school with knowledges, experiences and dispositions that they can deploy at will (Thomson & Hall, 2008; Comber & Kamler, 2004), we choose to destabilise a static notion of self and identity. Rather than

conceptualising self as a totalised identity, we view that pupils in classrooms and first year students in higher education have relationally constituted subjectivities that are always in flux. Therefore the school bag cannot be a static concept but is always in a process of sociocultural co-construction and negotiation. This approach enables us to think differently about the processes of knowledge production and knowledge hierarchies in keeping with the ethos of Southern Theory (Connell, 2007), how it is valuable to reconceptualise funds of identity more broadly for adult learners than purely focusing on resources from family life and their community of origin.

This descriptive case study demonstrates that first year students have a diverse range of lived experiences to draw from as they transition into their higher education studies. Because of the breadth of these life experiences that can include parenting, work, and traumatic life events, we have used a range of approaches that included funds of knowledge, funds of identity and a dark funds of knowledge approach to adequately capture and discuss them. The findings suggest that these all serve as important sociohistorical resources that can impact on the formation of practitioner identities. The recognition of funds of identity supports a “curriculum that reflects and affirms marginalised student histories and subjectivities” (Gale & Parker, 2014, p. 738). This framing of funds of identity aligns with Connell’s (2007) argument for an engagement with southern theories that provide space for alternative perspectives that may be dismissed as *other*.

Limitations

We recognise that much funds of knowledge literature directly relates to ethnic diversity and is based on an ethnographic approach. Because the focus of this article is on funds of identity in a higher education context, we, like Esteban-Guitart and Moll (2014b), used student created artefacts instead of pursuing a community-oriented ethnography. Our selection of assessment strategy, to draw on students’ existing knowledges, has resulted in the development and use of student created artefacts and has allowed us to examine related mediated identity constructions. The question still

remains whether, and to what extent first year pre-service teachers are able to draw on their funds of knowledge or identity without such assessment structuring. We recommend further research in this area.

While we use the findings from this research to suggest that students use funds of identity in their engagement with coursework, there are parameters to this study. The small size of the sample, the emphasis only on female participants and the selectively reported excerpts from assignments as the basis of the research findings, lead us to be cautious in asserting the generalisability of the study or of overstating our conclusions about the nature of funds of knowledge and identity beyond the claims we have already made.

Implications and further research

We suggest that funds of identity is a useful construct that extends the funds of knowledge concept by framing the personal, social and historical resources that first year students bring to Education contexts. As the data demonstrates, students bring identity resources with them as “tool kits” (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014b, p. 73) that enable them to broker both their sociocultural constitution and the personal, embodied selves of their lived experience. Conceptually, funds of identity can assist lecturers to recognize the inter- and intra-personal resources that students bring with them to higher education. In the first year of university, this is immensely important, in particular if students are seen as being in a process of becoming (Gale & Parker, 2014). A focus on funds of identity aligns with Gale and Parker’s (2014) conception for student transition as a process of navigating multiple narratives and subjectivities. Identities framed in this way are ephemeral and fluid.

As an approach that is aligned with counter-hegemonic educational movements, we posit that a funds of identity approach in higher education pedagogy is rich in potential for further research and development. Further studies making links between funds of identity, learning and the production of artefacts as evidence of learning in tertiary contexts is warranted. Also, unanswered in this article is a further question of

how we can better make space for diverse student knowledges and identities in the academy. In particular, there is scope for studies into how teachers can frame curriculum to explicitly evoke and build on light and dark funds of identity, although we suggest that would require careful ethical engagement to ensure the wellbeing of students. Moreover, the recognition of funds of identity can reflect and affirm marginalised student histories and subjectivities, although this too needs to be done sensitively so that students are not *othered* in tertiary contexts where whiteness can be presumed to be universal and normative (Phiri, 2015). There is clear value in further exploration into how educators can work with students to take funds of identity and funds of knowledge into consideration to improve their students' educational experiences and enhance tertiary education transitions.

Conclusion

We argue that the sociohistorical funds of identity that people use to define themselves are very valuable in higher education settings. They provide a focus for educators to work with students to build their understandings as they enact their social and personal histories. An engagement with funds of identity in higher education allows students to work in a temporal fashion (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014b), where there is current and future agency. Although the student examples in this article comprise a small case study, we argue that educators can offer legitimised spaces for pre-service teacher learners to recognise and strengthen funds of identity. Further spaces could be created in tertiary settings for professional practices that support this ethnographic work. However it requires further consideration of what (and in particular whose) funds of knowledge are taught and how funds of identity can be activated.

The pre-service teachers actively sought solutions to address the lifeworld challenges they identified in an attempt to prevent others having to face similar issues in the future. The illustrations of funds of identity in these data demonstrate that students are co-creators of knowledge, not just passive recipients of pre-packaged, commodified learning product and processes. It is clear that what students already know about the

world influences and shapes how they engage with their university studies – including what taught theories and approaches they are drawn to. First year students enter teacher education with existing funds of identity and therefore attention to these sociohistorical elements provide a useful lens on how learners’ develop their understandings as they engage with university coursework.

In the accounts above, there are no clear disconnects between what the students have learned through their lived experiences and what they learn at university. Nevertheless, these different strands can be seen to congeal together (Alheit, 2012) as first year students transition into new identities as pre-service teachers and forge new meanings from the unique combinations and interactions of learning. It is important in teacher education that work done with pre-service teachers to incorporate funds of knowledge is made explicit. This modelling process is valuable as a means to encourage pre-service teachers, as they move into the world of work, to develop deep understandings of the ways in which these funds can be used with their own students to enrich learning.

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