

Article

Engaging Methods for Exploring ‘Funds of Identity’ in Early Childhood Contexts

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Abstract: Globalisation has contributed to increasing diversity with children and families, bringing multiple languages and cultures into early childhood settings around the world. While this has enhanced our settings, research suggests that educators are struggling to find ways to support children’s learning and development in super diverse contexts. Standardised curriculum and pedagogy have complicated matters by suggesting that all children can achieve the same outcome if given the same program. Failing to recognize and acknowledge the complexity of teaching and learning in diverse settings leads to practices that position children and their families as deficient, viewing children and families based on what they lack rather than building from their strengths. In this manuscript we look through the theoretical lenses of funds of knowledge and funds of identity. The two constructs are brought together to explore how innovative, creative arts-based methods from two different research projects in ECE settings across Australia and Chile made children and families’ funds of knowledge and funds of identity visible and potentially impacted learning, participants’ perspectives, and community engagement in these diverse settings. We offer evidence of the ways arts-based methods promoted creativity and agency for all participants in and across both early learning contexts.

Keywords: funds of knowledge; language; identity; community engagement



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1. Introduction

In the last decades, children and families from different economic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds have continued to enrich educational settings. Global technological developments have also precipitated a paradigm shift in all aspects of life and in educational practice, influencing the ways very young children learn and make meaning. This has prompted governments around the world to realize the importance of the early period of their citizens’ lives and, correspondingly, the significance of early years education. The vibrancy and dynamism of early childhood settings requires new ways of thinking, and a move towards curriculum and pedagogy that recognizes and acknowledges the complexity of teaching, learning and assessment in our globally diverse settings. This begins with recognizing what children and families bring to the classroom, and building on their strengths rather than starting with what they might lack. Failing to recognize young peoples’ evolving capacities and identities and the diverse ways of knowing being and doing they bring to classrooms leads to practices that position children and their families as deficient.

Scholars and educators across contexts agree that Early Childhood Education (ECE) is a critical time for children’s social, emotional, cognitive, and linguistic learning and development [1,2]. Recent research reveals that approaches that consider and incorporate the strengths of communities are of critical importance in early learning and raise critical questions about the role of language and identity in nurturing children’s holistic development in early childhood contexts. Correspondingly, curriculum and teaching that affirms and builds on young peoples’ linguistic and cultural backgrounds and identities

have shown to have a positive impact on learning and teaching (see for example, [3–8]). A well-established tradition of play-based pedagogies underpins teaching and learning in many early childhood settings; this has contributed to the emergence of a growing body of research that centres on using arts-based methods to harness young peoples' knowledges. Arts-based approaches involve young people in making meaning in different ways, and these new and innovative pedagogies are transforming learning experiences across the curriculum [9,10].

In this paper, we draw on the theoretical perspectives of "Funds of Knowledge" [11] and "Funds of Identity" [12] to revisit research undertaken in different ECE settings, in Australia and Chile. In the Australian early years school-based research, communities were super diverse, where between 70–99% of the school population were speakers of languages other than English. In Chile, the research was conducted in early learning centres, located in communities experiencing high levels of poverty and where families were not engaged in their children's learning. While the constituent communities for each of the studies were different, our aim in this paper is to explore the ways creative arts-based methods were mobilised across these key transitional educational phases. We analyse the ways arts-based methods made funds of knowledge and funds of identity visible across these diverse contexts. We are influenced by Freire's [13] notion of learners as knowledge generators, rather than knowledge receptacles, and the contention that education is broader than schooling. Mindful of the different characteristics of participants in each context, "Funds of Knowledge" and "Funds of Identity" [12] are brought together to analyse the potential of arts-based methods to affect learning and classroom participation in each context, despite these differences, we consider how arts-based methods promoted creativity and agency for all participants across contexts.

2. Literature Review

A substantial body of research has demonstrated the important role families and communities' everyday experiences play in the creation of authentic learning opportunities. For example, ground-breaking work by Rogoff and colleagues [14], has described how young people learn by observing, listening, and collaborating in shared tasks. Sociocultural theory contends that children learn through informal, everyday interactions and these experiences are the reservoir from which children draw to develop more complex conceptual knowledge for later learning [15]. Funds of Knowledge [16], a key framing for this research is defined as the bodies of knowledge which underpin everyday life. These encompass multiple dimensions, cognitive and applied knowledges, beliefs, skills, and understandings and practices. While much ethnographic research has revealed these rich reservoirs, particularly in non-dominant communities, they can frequently go unacknowledged in educational contexts. Yet, curriculum and learning experiences that build on and extend the existing knowledges of diverse children, families, and communities continues to evolve in ECE settings. This work is underpinned by social justice concerns, and a desire to understand how children's and families' funds of knowledge and understandings can position learners at the core of educational practice, and thereby enhance educational equity for all students and communities.

Creativity and play are at the heart of global early years learning, this is an established concept, particularly in contexts before formal schooling settings, where fostering children's curiosity, imagination, and creativities [17] take centre stage. In these contexts, play offers children a way to explore, represent, and express themselves, and the world that they inhabit, using diverse avenues of expression and representation, this often includes the application of innovative arts-based approaches. Two distinct types of play commonly appear in the literature, free or child-directed play and teacher-directed play; these are fundamental tenets of early learning practice. Research highlights the important role of the educator in play, educators consolidate and extend learning through micro interactions that scaffold children's exploration, stimulates their thinking, and enriches their learning [18]. This proves most effective when educators are familiar with children's family contexts and

practices, and learning is connected to scenarios about which children have knowledge. It also facilitates connections between the children's learning and their families, as families see their knowledges being used as resources for learning [19,20]. Play based pedagogies have also grown in popularity across school contexts, garnering interest from educators across grades. Brice Heath [21] however, notes that play, and in particular play for learning, has gradually been influenced by the proliferation of technology. Brice Heath contends that technology has had a significant influence on changing the nature of play, particularly for mainstream middle class children, by taking the emphasis off face to face and social and imaginative play, and towards technological engagement. In this regard, it is crucial to recognize the interdependence of play, social class, and economic access, as evidence suggests disadvantaged and marginalized families often having less access to these resources.

Yet multimodal communication holds a central place in free play or child directed play, especially in the early years. Young children demonstrate wide ranging capacities that include accompanying language with creating, drawing, imagining and embodied practices, such as for example, movement and dance. These enacted and embodied practices enable children to "play at being and doing" [21]. Building on this notion, arts-based pedagogies have been shown to illuminate children's ways of being, knowing and doing while enhancing their learning and development across contexts. Ewing [22] contends that the arts are fundamental to the learning of all young people and argues that engagement in the arts shapes thought and activity. Evidence suggests, emerging methodologies and pedagogical approaches are assisting educators in supporting children's communication, confidence, participation, inclusion, and identity [4,22]. Over the last decades much empirical sociocultural and ethnographic research has focused on understanding more about the contexts of children's everyday lives. Recent research has focused on capturing children's own perspectives on their lives, particularly in high poverty and culturally and linguistically diverse contexts [23–25].

The sustained move away from conducting research on children, to researching with children in social science has positioned young people in both early years settings and formal school settings as legitimate knowers and experts in their own lives. Danby and Farrell [26] argue that very young children are "competent interpreters of their everyday worlds"(p. 35), expressing themselves with insight and nuanced meaning. These evolving approaches are supporting educators to connect to and develop rich relationships with families and communities. Researching with children continues to incorporate a wide range of embodied practices such as those discussed above, and more recently includes technology and the production of multimodal artefacts, including but not limited to, video diaries, photography and mapping exercises [27,28]. These methods are facilitating didactic teaching approaches for engaging with the funds of knowledge of students, their families and the wider community in increasingly, innovative and creative ways.

Cummins' Identity texts, [29] for example, encompass an acknowledgement and exploration of students' linguistic lives through creative work or performances. Similarly, work by Martin [30] engaged young children aged 6–7 and older, in creating coloured silhouettes as ways to represent their languages in settings where over 19 nationalities were represented. Digital cameras have been used with young people as young as three years old to explore their life- worlds—at home and in the community [18,31]. In this research, the use of cameras had wide ranging effects including establishing and strengthening relationships with families and communities and offering tangible prompts for a range of language learning experiences. Research by Kervin and Mantei [32] undertaken with 4–5-year-olds, captured children's understandings of their prior to school community, and themselves as part of that community. Researchers found children's choice of images and annotations provided insight into their perspectives of rules, routines and home experiences within the centre setting. In this research, digital story telling, became a powerful means of self-expression, enabling students to express themselves, their understandings of the world and their sense of belonging. Arts-based methodologies offer the possibility of revealing emerging understandings of children's social worlds beyond the social worlds of adults.

We next turn to the theoretical framing that underpins this research and directs our thinking and analysis of the research findings.

3. Theoretical Framework

Funds of Knowledge has proved a powerful concept for mobilising distinctive pedagogical approaches for teaching in non-dominant communities, for example in contexts where community languages are widely evident, where families have migrated from other countries and where children and families experience economic and social adversity. These resultant pedagogies are based on recognition of the knowledge and capacities that children have learned in their homes and communities. Ground-breaking research conducted by Moll et al. [15] in Latino communities in which researchers observed and recorded family knowledges and then worked with educators to realise a curriculum that acknowledged the cultural assets in children's homes, is well documented. Moll et al. [15] use the term 'funds of knowledge' to refer to those 'historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being' (p. 133), pertaining to 'social, economic, and productive activities of people' (p. 139) in local communities. Adaptations of this approach in schools has ensured many educators know of the concept [33], although the theoretical underpinnings and deeper implications are less well understood across the education community. In Australia, the concept has mostly been taken up in research collaborations in secondary schools [33], although there are examples of its use in teacher education programs [11,34] and in early childhood contexts [35]. More recently the concept of 'funds of knowledge' has been elaborated and a new related concept 'funds of identities' promoted. The conceptualisation of funds of identity is underpinned by a recognition that not all identity work is undertaken in the family and that young people find other locations.

The overall aim of the Funds of knowledge project, in general, is to disrupt the deficit discourses that prevail which typically attribute educational underachievement to the cultural, economic and linguistic context of the children's lives. Adopting a funds of knowledge approach turns the focus to the knowledge, skills and languages and experiences that children have had as assets and rich resources for creating contextually relevant learning encounters. In this way, children see their lives out of school as having value. The intellectual and educational resources that they possess, potentially rendered invisible by mainstream curriculum and universalised educational practices, is explicitly linked to educational practices and fields of power, social class and ideology, and made more visible. This disruption of established hierarchies of codified knowledge can be viewed as opportunities to democratize knowledge through the public recognition of things families do and how they do them.

The concept of Funds of Identity is a more recent development that contributes to and expands the scope of theorising about the knowledge and skills that children possess that are potentially important resources for developing 'pedagogies of transformation' aimed at achieving educational justice for non-dominant children. The concept expands the scope of Funds of knowledge by recognising the lived experience of children beyond the home and family where they are exposed to and 'take-up' knowledges and resources that contribute to their developing unique-to-them 'funds of identity'. Esteban-Guitart and Moll describe how funds of identity are 'inscribed into artefacts—drawings, documents, images, tasks, etc., and transported throughout the different sites connected to a person's life trajectory [36]. The pedagogical implications are that educators and schools must look beyond families and homes for resources rich with potential for meaningful connection between young peoples' emerging identity and their learning.

In this paper, we use these theoretical frames to guide our analysis of the possible ways young peoples' funds of knowledge and funds of identity were revealed in school and centre based research. We consider the production of artefacts created by young people, and discuss the ways these methods mobilised learning, participation, and family engagement.

4. Materials and Methods

4.1. Study Context

In this paper, we revisit data from two larger studies conducted in Early Childhood Settings in Chile and Australia. In Australia, more than 21% of the population speak a language other than English at home [37]. In 2019, 51.3% of preschool students in New South Wales Government sites were from a Language Backgrounds Other than English (LBOTE) background. Australian data emerges from an 18-month ethnographic study conducted in schools located in Western Sydney, a socioeconomically, linguistically and culturally diverse region in New South Wales, Australia. This study combined ethnography with design research [38] to engage teachers as co-researchers and students as linguistic ethnographers of their own practices [39]. The study was funded by a state government education grant.

The data presented here emerges from two schools and three classrooms, a K-2 classroom and two Year 1 classes, gathered during 2 years of dedicated fieldwork in each site comprising twice-weekly classroom visits over 2–3 terms each year. Data included observations, field notes, student work samples, and audio-recorded lesson segments, and ongoing informal and informal student, teacher and community interviews. School 1, Urban School (all names are pseudonyms) is situated in a language-rich community, 99% of the students are speakers of languages other than English; over 35 languages are spoken by the school community. The participating K-2 class comprised students aged 5 and 6 and was designated as a reception or new-arrivals classes, created to offer a transitioning of students newly arrived in Australia to mainstream classrooms, the 29 students were classified as English as an additional language/dialect learners, (EAL/D). At school 2 Barra East 83% of the school population came from LBOTE backgrounds, the two, participating Year 1 classes, comprised of 56 students aged 6–7 who together spoke 29 languages and dialects other than English.

Inequity in education has been a persistent issue in Chile despite the increasing wealth of the country due to its rich mineral resources. A new era of resolve to address widespread poverty through enhanced provision of accessible, low cost and high quality early education was a significant element of the government strategy and provided the context in which the Chile based research was first undertaken. The research study wrapped around a 6 year project aimed at strengthening the quality of early childhood education and enhancing educational success for children living in circumstances of economic adversity. The research sites were early childhood education centres and preschools attended by children aged between 6 weeks and 5 years of age. The number of children enrolled at each site varied between 75 and 120. Developing resources and pedagogies that would increase family connection and involvement in their children's learning emerged as a priority. Led by an Australian university in a partnership involving the Chilean government, funding was provided through a private sector foundation.

This study included 20 early childhood centres across a wide geographical area of northern Chile involving more than 180 educators in professional learning and pedagogical support provided by the Australian university. The educators participated in a bespoke learning program of which Funds of Knowledge was a key conceptual element, together with play-based learning, literacy as a social practice, and practitioner research. Educators were encouraged to explore visual and creative methods as they developed pedagogies designed to address the program goals. Data was collected during fieldwork visits at the beginning, midpoint and conclusion of the action research cycles and comprised focus groups (families and educators), interviews (centre directors, centre mentors and supervisors), photographic methods and collection of artefacts. In this paper, we draw on data from 2 focus groups with families taken midway through the project, 3 director interviews also at the midpoint and 2 interviews with supervisors at the project completion. A key focus of the study was engaging families in their children's learning.

4.2. Analysis

In this paper, we have revisited the research data above guided by the following research questions: How were children and communities' funds of knowledge and identity made visible in these projects? How and in what ways did this impact learning, participants' perspectives, and community engagement? Applying contrastive, thematic analysis [40] we looked through the lens of funds of knowledge and funds of identity, to answer the the research questions detailed above. We began by identifying key approaches/methods employed in these studies and applied further analysis to these methods/approaches to identify those that elucidated student and community knowledges. We identified 6 arts-based methods across the studies corpus and examined the ways these arts-based methods took up and used these knowledges. In the remainder of the paper, we present the findings of this analysis, we detail the identified methods with attention to the ways these methods began to facilitate learning, and community engagement and worked to change participants' perspectives.

5. Results

Making funds of knowledge and identity visible and impacting learning.

5.1. Children as Researchers

Engaging students as researchers in the Australian research was an approach that aimed to support teachers in learning from and with their students. This began with teachers and students studying themselves and the ways they were talking, listening, reading, writing and viewing, in one or more languages inside and outside of school. In groups of three to seven, children used audio recorders to interview each other, and collect information about their language and literacies practices, when, where, and with whom they were speaking, learning and translating, across settings, in online environments, and while participating in embodied, cultural practices. Support from multilingual others, advanced same language partners, community language teachers, parent volunteers and bilingual teacher's aides enabled this to be undertaken in children's first languages if required. In a series of highly scaffolded lessons, children, compiled their data using simple graphs, tables and wordles on class electronic boards.

Using this arts-based practice, young peoples' full linguistic repertoires were made visible, and these funds of knowledge and evolving funds of identity became the catalyst for a series of contextually relevant learning encounters that involved community others. Conceptual and linguistic knowledges were taken up and extended in instruction across subject areas, this included for example, using the information they collected to generate data displays in math, and to develop vocabulary and comprehension by creating multilingual word walls and bilingual texts. The creation of these bilingual resources involved ongoing community participation and young people continued to reveal to themselves and to their teachers what they knew and could do. This method enabled student knowledges to not only be visible, but centred them in everyday instruction, in this way showcasing some of the resources that students used to construct their identities and define themselves [41].

5.2. Language Mapping

A second identified arts-based method developed in this context was language mapping [39]. This involved students in creating visual representations of their practices and experiences. Using A4 paper and a range of colouring materials or drawing apps, children visually represented their linguistic and communicative life worlds. This offered and alternative form of expression particularly for English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) learners who could communicate and present to themselves, to each other, and to their teachers, a vast range of complex cultural and linguistic knowledges not easily revealed within school. Analysis revealed the method supported students in illuminating the important funds of knowledge in their lives, for example they included their families, community networks and transnational experiences in maps. Funds of iden-

tity were highlighted in the inclusion of symbols that represented community affiliations and cultural practices such as for example, the inclusion of flags and places of worship, music notes and dance poses. Animals and symbols linked to Aboriginal culture appeared in some maps along with symbols used to represent broader interests, membership and networks, this included for example, sports equipment, technology, friends and family and others in the school community. Illustrations showcased connections between funds of knowledge and developing identities, maps offered creative opportunities for students to define themselves. As Esteban-Guitart and Moll suggest funds of identity are 'inscribed into artefacts—drawings, documents, images, tasks, etc., and transported throughout the different sites connected to a person's life trajectory [41]. Maps helped to reveal the lived experience of children beyond the home and family knowledges and also highlighted resources that contributed to young peoples' developing and unique 'funds of identity'.

Here, too, authentic learning experiences were facilitated, maps prompted engagement in role play, for example roleplaying translating experiences which prompted discussion of communicating and translating for others. Children used iPads to audio record themselves discussing their maps. Teachers used these recordings, as language assessment tasks, recordings in home languages were reviewed with support from bilingual others and used as a prompt for writing tasks. Students revealed information previously unknown to teachers, maps detailed for example, enhanced linguistic capacity, Aboriginality, and high stakes translation experiences. Individual maps and recordings were shared with peers and family members, which led to the addition of more information and the display of maps across each school. Placing linguistic funds of knowledge and identity at the centre of teaching and learning, generated engagement for all participants, as one parent expressed: 'we are excited about this, our children are talking about our language and want to learn more'.

5.3. Bilingual Storytelling

Analysis revealed this method continued to make the complex, cultural, and linguistic knowledges of families and communities visible. Parents and/or grandparents, teachers, students, and principals, engaged in dual language book reading [42] in multiple languages (including for example, Italian, Arabic, Hindi, Mandarin, Dari, Farsi, and Russian). This included simultaneously reading page by page, with the teacher reading in English and guest reader in another language. Many parents were willing guest readers, but those unable or reluctant to read in home languages, enlisted older siblings, other family members, community leaders and friends, revealing a strong desire for their funds of knowledge and subsequently identity to be revealed. Parent participation went beyond story reading to include for example learning encounters in history, calligraphy, bread making, dance, music, video production, zoology and gardening. Families co-constructed learning encounters with teachers, validating and integrating their knowledge and experience and building relationships.

Authentic learning experiences continued to evolve, as all participants created bilingual books in several languages that became resources for language learning. Multilingual fairy tales were audio recorded and used to support reading comprehension. Multilingual books and resources were purchased for weekly bilingual reading sessions. Classrooms became sites for negotiation of learning, particularly important in contexts where many families are adjusting to new places and interacting in new spaces. While teachers cannot be expected to master all their students' languages to engage in meaningful learning, this arts-based methods enabled them to identify and draw on the linguistic and social funds of knowledge and identities of students and families and this facilitated affective learning and engagement for all participants.

5.4. Chilean Research

In the Chile based research, the initial focus for working with a funds of knowledge approach was on strengthening families' connection to their children's learning in the early learning centres. This reflected strong research evidence showing that when learning is contextualised and draws on and connects to lived realities, children in disadvantaged

circumstances experience improved educational trajectories [43]. All of the research sites were located in disadvantaged communities and safety concerns informed a taken-for-granted practice of locked doors and gates. These practices effectively alienated families from the lived experience of children's learning in the centre, mitigated against an exchange of information between staff and families and resulted in perceptions that parents and families were only welcome/present in the centre 'when there was trouble', as one parent reported in a focus group. Consequently, family knowledges were absent in a curriculum based primarily on the 'authorised knowledges' described in the formal curriculum documentation. Over time, the educators became more confident about their interpretation of what's fundamentally at stake in a funds of knowledge approach and developed innovative pedagogies designed to identify and engage with family and community knowledges, incorporating them in the curriculum. In our analysis, we identified methods that involved technology-enabled travelling media (cameras, recorders and journals), various arts-based technologies for gathering and sharing family information (Families' Literacies Tree) and dialogic community pedagogy such as The Literacy Café.

5.5. Technology-Enabled Travelling Media

Analysis revealed a method that included using travelling kits equipped with digital cameras, voice recorders and a journal enabled children to document family experiences at home and in their communities and allowed these experiences to be shared with educators and peers, using data projection. In this way, families and children became documenters and narrators of family life and the material produced became resources for curriculum. Educators provided suggestions to families about what they might document. These kits engendered enthusiastic responses amongst both families and the educators, with parents reporting them as a 'highly valued activity'. Educator fears of cameras not being returned weren't realised and this engendered increased trust amongst educators.

A reanalysis of focus group data and curriculum artefacts such as family and teacher made posters showed that this contributed to educators having a better understanding of what mattered to families. With family agreement, photo journals were produced and made available to the early learning community. Additionally, journals depicting children's learning in the centre were also made available for 'travelling' to families. Educators noted that these were provocations for families to start asking more questions and 'showing interest and involvement' in their children's learning. The use of technology enabled documentation of funds of knowledge through sharing family produced images and stories generated in home and community settings and this gave recognition and legitimacy to these knowledges and influenced a changed curriculum infused with images and experiences reflecting the lived experience of the children. Through this work, family roles were repositioned as contributors of curriculum knowledge 'in a process of democratic acknowledgment and redistribution of expertise' [18].

5.6. Sharing Family Information—Families' Literacies Tree

An identified method focused on sharing family information involved using creative arts-based activities such as painting, drawing and collage. Educators devised ways for families to contribute to community murals, installations and structures that facilitated the sharing of dreams, aspirations, activities, knowledge, resources, values and commitments of families to their children's education amongst the early learning community irrespective of their language and literacy capabilities. These also became powerful 'message-boards' that opened teachers to alternative views of how families valued education and their previously hidden interest in contributing to that learning. These pedagogical innovations created opportunities for parents to realise and proclaim themselves as contributors to children's learning. Many parents spoke of this in the focus groups, commenting how they had not previously thought they had much to contribute to their children's learning, and had not understood how day to day activities they performed in their home positively

contributed to that learning. This parent empowerment engendered their greater support and involvement in the early learning centres.

5.7. Literacy Café

A family engagement innovation known as the Literacy Café evolved in the project. These typically took the form of formal invitations to have coffee with the teachers and involved informal conversations about the children's interests and family life. The Literacy Café became ubiquitous amongst the participating research sites and remains a popular practice in various formats. Initially they were developed as a way of engaging family members, typically unused to interacting with educators, in conversations with them. The parents responded enthusiastically to these opportunities: 'fancy-me-? having a coffee with a teacher?', remarked one of the parents. Over time these opportunities for small groups of invited parents to join the educator in conversation grew to more substantive conversations where families shared knowledge and challenges, approximating a community of practice. Families commented on how they liked the opportunity of 'learning from each other'. Some centres reported that families advocated for these to be held more frequently. The encounters were often structured through the use of conversation cards with varying topics and themes and other times were open-ended. Carefully made using children's artwork, these conversation cards, provided a scaffold for the teachers to hear what mattered to families, facilitated parent to parent relationships and built trust. In some instances, educators transformed parents' knowledges and skills learned through these encounters into curriculum resources and activities in which some parents also became involved.

5.8. Community Engagement and Changed Perspectives

We found that in both research settings, these methods facilitated relationships with families to become more expansive, with communication more reciprocal and practices and routines changed to reflect a 'more symmetrical relationship' [15]. Families were repositioned as partners in their children's learning equipped 'with ample resources'. Routines that reflected entrenched hierarchical power relationships were dismantled, with families welcomed to enter the centres rather than remain outside the locked gates, and into classrooms to reimagine what counted as valued knowledge. New friendships groups and school networks emerged, in the Australian research many parents reported that children actively resisted speaking or learning home languages, but this began to change. They expressed their appreciation of these approaches as meaningful and valuable, it meant as one parent reported: 'being part of the school, in a way that really meant something'. Despite the reality of varying degrees of proficiency in one or more languages in classrooms, for example community participation and belonging are lost when everyday practices, skills and understandings are seen by teachers and young people as inferior to the practices and literacies valued in school. As one teacher in this study reported: 'They have learned so much but so have I'.

Analysis of both contexts revealed educators found the concept of funds of knowledge initially hard to imagine, yet they welcomed opportunities to gain more information about the children's families that they could use in the children's learning. Teachers expressed increased respect for families and stronger trust in their relationships. Emerging strategies challenged teachers' previous views of the families as having not much to offer their children and their learning. In both projects we found evidence of educators continuing to apply a critical and inquiring lens to their own ongoing practices. We do note that this required educators to become researchers of themselves, but most importantly, researchers of the community context of their students and collaborators with the children in the design of meaningful and contextually relevant learning. Through rescuing and honoring family knowledge gained through photo-documentation at home and in the community, established hierarchies of power and knowledge and the epistemic relationships families had with the early childhood educators were transformed [30].

Arts-based methods supported the development of different kinds of relationships, with educators describing how funds of knowledge had changed how they viewed parents differently, in a more positive way, in Chile they used the Spanish phrase ‘cambiar la mirada’ (changing how they see things) to express this. The literacy café created a dialogic space where established class boundaries and knowledge hierarchies between teachers and vulnerable families were disrupted, and teachers were able to learn about family and community knowledge and values. In both settings educators reported many ways that information shared in dialogic spaces has been used in planning for children’s learning and mobilized parent participation in the curriculum, in which individual funds of knowledge were made visible. Common across the two studies’ findings were educators changed positioning and perceptions of parents and families as an intellectual resource, as educators came to view them as competent people with social, linguistic, cultural, religious, and economic assets.

In the Australian research, interview data revealed that despite their best intentions, teachers’ understandings of student and community home languages and literacies were limited. Local and national policy contexts generated complexities, and tensions that shaped teachers’ and students’ views of students’ linguistic and cultural resources, especially as measured by standardized English assessment; these combined factors led student and community knowledges to be predominantly viewed through a deficit lens. Correspondingly, the Chilean study revealed that strategies intended to gather family funds of knowledge disrupted educators strongly held deficit views of families and opened pathways for multidirectional knowledge flows. The arts-based methods identified in these studies placed student and community knowledges at the centre of learning, in this way facilitating a coming together of funds of knowledge (family and community aspirations and practices) and evolving funds of identity. Identity constructions were facilitated through experiences, relationships and the production of artifacts that enabled young people, families and communities, opportunities to express, define and understand themselves in creative ways, and also offered teachers valuable insights into the lives and identities of their students and their communities. In both research studies, epistemic relationships were transformed [19] children’s identities as competent knowers were affirmed, and educators and the children themselves, realised their assets and resources and incorporated these in ongoing learning activities.

However, we are aware of the limitations of these studies, these include scale in the Australian study, and the inability to engage with educators beyond the 2-year study period to examine the sustainability of arts-based methods in future practice. We also acknowledge that these are classroom-based studies were conducted in specific contexts and as such may not be wholly generalizable across other contexts. Future research directions include ongoing work with teachers, and a further longitudinal study of arts-based methods, with attention to their contribution to culturally and linguistically sustaining pedagogies taken up by students, teachers, and administrators across the transition between pre-school and early years schooling.

6. Conclusions

In each study context, the desire for educators to learn about their students, families and communities and to use what was learned to make meaningful connections that would possibly enhance teaching and learning were common aims. While research settings were also distinctive, with one study focussed on early childhood classrooms and communities of linguistic diversity, and the other more focussed on family engagement, in the high poverty context, we found that many similarities between the two existed in our findings. The impact and outcomes for each were aligned, each contributing to greater equity and recognition of cultural knowledge and assets in the learning environment; in each setting, funds of identity were made visible and continued to evolve and evidence suggests student and teacher learning was enhanced. In both study contexts, the use of visual methods and arts-based pedagogies

elucidated 'epistemic divisions' [19], and constructions of families as potential knowers and repositories of important and useful knowledge were rendered visible.

The implications of these findings for early childhood educators are that arts-based methodologies can facilitate explorations of learners' practices and offer new ways to examine the nature of teaching and learning as an inclusive sociocultural activity that involves teachers, students and family and communities. In both studies, we found opportunities were provided for educators to reflect on how meanings were socially and culturally constructed and how they shaped and are shaped by the learning context. Transcripts from educators revealed changed perceptions and evidence of learning that enriched their practice. Rather than devaluing children's existing practices which Compton-Lily [44] suggests challenges children's identity and sense of belonging; in these studies children's identity and sense of belonging were amplified; knowledges, interests, and funds of identity were acknowledged and continued to evolve. Further implications for early childhood educators are that arts-based methods not only offer innovative ways for the knowledge, values and insights of all participants to be revealed but also, offer students' different ways of learning and talking about learning, thereby creating opportunities for increased equity in learning. Arts-based methodologies can put capabilities and 'authorised' knowledge in the background and allow children, families and educators to elevate and celebrate different knowledge and resources. Importantly, these studies reveal that arts-based methods offered educators the opportunity and challenge to move away from unitary identities as knowers and experts to a more complex and dynamic position as researchers of children, families and communities.

In each setting, learning was enhanced as children and community members began to recognize and value their own strengths, for example, their home languages and call on these in-service of classroom learning. We contend that arts-based methods employed in both settings, engaged teachers, students and community in authentic meaning making and identity exploration, processes that are essential and often forgotten aspects of learning. Across both studies, arts-based methods enabled educators, students and community to learn about and with each other. The resulting pedagogical innovations interrupted knowledge hierarchies related to gender, language, class, and power and led to more ambitious classroom projects either led by parents or in which they were collaborators, building stronger connections to their children's learning as identified above.

The centrality of student and community language and cultures in classroom instruction challenged deficit perspectives and were agentive for all participants. As Gonzalez purports, the early versions of the funds of knowledge approach suffered from a certain 'naiveté regarding the burdens under which teachers work' [11] and a lack of recognition of the ways in which young people create their own funds of knowledge and funds of identity in places independently of their family and outside the cultural boundaries of the home. In this paper, we see the nexus between the theoretical frameworks of funds of knowledge and funds of identity realized in educators employ of didactic teaching approaches for engaging with the funds of knowledge of students, their families, and the wider community. A collaborative space for the co-construction of learning was facilitated through the application of arts-based practices. Practices that offered new and innovative ways to validate student and community experiences and identities and continued to provide opportunities for evolving identities to be developed and revealed. In these studies, these two frameworks come together, as arts-based practices placed funds of knowledge at the centre of children's evolving identity construction and also continued to extend learner identities in each context.

As Moll & Gonzalez [45] suggest, when teachers and schools learn about families and communities change happens, and deficit perspectives can shift. In these studies, relationships were strengthened and the ways of being, belonging, and becoming were facilitated for children and families. We learnt that across the two studies, these multi-dimensional arts-based activities were strong enablers of making hitherto hidden knowledges and cultural assists visible and engendered further innovative educator practices that supported

young learners from diverse backgrounds. In using arts-based methodologies, children's and families capabilities and assets are reified and celebrated, and capacities or their lack in dominant languages and literacies become less obvious and important. This, in turn, contributes to establishing more equitable and democratic learning environments.

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