ON MARCH 13, 2020 PRESIDENT TRUMP ANNOUNCED A COVID-19 NATIONAL EMERGENCY, and within days, many of us had begun our distance learning adventures. As districts struggled to move to distance learning with no advance notice, no additional funding, and no useful precedents, many students lacked adequate internet access and requisite hardware. Meanwhile, communities were still facing the threat of COVID-19 and its effects on their daily lives. As the closures extended from weeks to months to the end of the school year, teachers, parents, and students heard an ever louder chorus: “Our students are falling behind!”

Entering the new school year, be it in person or online, I worry that concerns about “catching up” to some arbitrary goal for student achievement will get in the way of seeing the very real assets that students bring to school each day. A great way to begin this “seeing” is by explicitly acknowledging the Funds of Knowledge our students’ families possess, knowledge that lives in our students as well.

As you use this move—Recognize Student and Family Expertise—students will talk with parents, caregivers, and those they consider family (shared blood is not a requirement). Creating a map of expertise and intersections, students eventually share their findings with classmates and teacher. Whether you use this lesson in a physical classroom or an online classroom, the goal is for students and their families to build a deeper awareness of the wealth of expertise their family members possess and then share and celebrate that knowledge with the classroom community. Let’s begin this year by discarding the damaging, antiquated deficit model and instead start measuring students and their families by the multitudinous strengths they bring to our classrooms!

All my best,

Nancy
**MOVÉ> Recognize Student and Family Expertise**

**Immediate Result:** Students consider the different funds of knowledge that people in their lives hold and enjoy a new method for connecting with classmates.

**Long-Term Result:** Students see themselves and their classmates as having something worthy to contribute. As topics arise throughout the school year, student and family experts can be consulted and recognized for their unique expertise, reconnecting the classroom to the social networks and resources of the community.

In the article “Funds of Knowledge for Teaching: Using a Qualitative Approach to Connect Homes and Classrooms,” Luis Moll, professor of language, reading, and culture at the University of Arizona, and his colleagues observe that the knowledge, intelligence, and experience of minoritized children and their families were often underestimated (Moll et al. 1992). As Moll and his colleagues explain:

> Our analysis of funds of knowledge represents a positive (and, we argue, realistic) view of households as containing ample cultural and cognitive resources with great potential utility for classroom instruction. This view of households, we should mention, contrasts sharply with prevailing and accepted perceptions of working-class families as somehow disorganized socially and deficient intellectually; perceptions that are well accepted and rarely challenged in the field of education and elsewhere.

Their research revealed that giving students’ and families’ abundant knowledge public light creates a richer classroom, an appreciation of culture and diversity, and an opportunity for teachers to use this knowledge for improved student learning.

In response, Moll and his colleagues developed a simple webbing activity that enables students to inventory and celebrate the far-reaching talents of their family
members as well offering a way for other students and teachers to gain awareness and
tap into this tremendous wealth of expertise.

To start, pass out blank pieces of paper and have students put their own name in
the center. Next, have students add the names of those they consider family surround-
ing their name, spreading out the family names so that words can be added. Emphasize
to students that family is whomever they consider family. Family can be related by
blood—or not. If you consider your next-door neighbor family, then they are family.
Period. Once students have listed their family members, they can start jotting down
words and phrases that describe the knowledge and expertise each possesses. Em-
phasize that knowledge doesn’t come from just school and books, and it isn’t limited
to academics. People learn much through living, working, and raising families. It is
helpful if you quickly demonstrate your own thinking about family talents or prepare
an example ahead of time to show the kids. Your examples will help your students see
what you mean by “knowledge,” so be sure to highlight a range of knowledge. Sure, you
can mention your aunt who’s a doctor or your friend who’s a lawyer, but don’t overlook
your cousin who knows every backroad shortcut in your state, your uncle who can fix
anything, or your neighbors who can speak three languages.

Encourage students to just think
about what their family members
know about and what they’re good at.
Sometimes it’s helpful if they think
about some different categories of how
people learn—not only in school, but
also from others they know, through
life experiences, and through tradi-
tions or customs.

The bottom line is that there is
no wrong answer. The more students
think about the knowledge that sur-
rounds them, the more they will add
to their web (see Figures 4.11 and 4.12).
Once students have explored these

Figure 4.11 Once students begin to think about those around them, creating a Funds of Knowledge map is an engaging experience.
funds, the final step is for students to begin connecting knowledge between their own family members. Who else in their family plays an instrument? Bakes a great cake? Knows how to haggle at a flea market or garage sale? After completing the map in class, encourage students to take it home overnight and share it with their family members to see if they missed anything.

The following day, begin showing students how to use their Funds of Knowledge maps for a series of partner interviews following these steps:

1. Everyone stands up and finds a partner.
2. Partners trade maps and pick out something interesting. Then each partner in turn conducts a brief interview based on a family member’s talents (see Figure 4.13).
3. When both partners have completed interviewing each other, they thank each other, return maps to their owners, and find a new partner.
While the interviewing commences, your job is to move from pair to pair, listening and learning. Also, if you find the interviewing timing too uneven (one pair is done in a minute, another is still talking 5 minutes later), it’s fine to coordinate the timing of the pair changes by announcing how many minutes pairs have left to talk and then announcing when it’s time to switch partners. And once the interviewing is concluded, post the maps publicly so that as topics in class arise, you and your students can refer to the expertise of those on the maps and, perhaps, invite those experts into the classroom to share what they know.

Figure 4.13 Once the Funds of Knowledge maps are completed, students can’t wait to share, compare, and interview each other about each other’s family talents.