

Observing, recognising and responding to children's funds of knowledge and interests

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What are funds of knowledge-based interests?

Young children's interests develop in the context of their relationships with the people, places and experiences they encounter in their daily lives. Through these relationships, children build funds of knowledge (González, Moll and Amanti, 2005) that enable them to play an active role in the lives of their families and communities. Using a funds of knowledge approach within the observe-assess-plan cycle recognises that children's home lives are central to their learning. This can facilitate deeper interpretations of children's interests, inquires and intentions (Hedges, 2020). Practitioners can use this information to plan meaningful learning experiences that connect with children's everyday lives.

For example, funds of knowledge-based interests can relate to household practices, including domestic tasks (such as food preparation, baking or contributing to the care of younger siblings); holidays, celebrations, religious and community experiences; and the influence of family members' occupations and leisure activities (Hedges, Cullen and Jordan, 2011). Children also develop and build funds of knowledge-based interests from popular culture and engaging with digital technologies such as apps, websites and games. The social and cultural contexts in which children live and learn shape the forms of knowledge that are valued by families and communities (such as knowledge of cultural and religious practices, shared family stories and memories), all of which contribute to children's identities and sense of belonging.

How can practitioners use funds of knowledge in the observe-assess-plan cycle?

Practitioners and parents can work in partnership to interpret what children are doing and saying in relation to family funds of knowledge. Respectful relationships and dialogue lead to deeper understandings of children's interests. Practitioners can use this process to plan inclusive learning experiences that support a sense of belonging and wellbeing.

Children's interests can be the springboard for exploration and playful inquiry, which can be sustained over time and that can become shared collectively among children with support from practitioners. In this way, funds of knowledge-based interests can be the basis of

meaningful learning that is co-constructed by children and adults through the process of connecting information and experiences as they investigate, explore and inquire together.

Case study: The car wash

A practitioner observed four-year old Faizah using brushes and water to wash the nursery cars and trikes. The practitioner shared her observations with Faizah's mum and found out that Faizah's dad had recently set up a car valeting business. Careful listening to the family enabled the practitioners to understand that Faizah's interest was closely connected to her relationship with her dad. In response, the practitioners supported Faizah in setting up a car wash in the nursery garden. They introduced new resources such as sponges, cloths and brushes to enable Faizah to explore, extend and share her interest with other children. The practitioners also responded to Faizah's interest through planned, adult-led activities to stimulate sustained interaction and inquiry. For example, children were encouraged to predict, observe and talk about the effect of different cleaning materials and washing solutions (for example, soapy, warm and cold water). On another occasion Faizah brought in a valeting menu from her dad's business and requested that a practitioner assisted her in producing a price list for the nursery car wash. The car wash remained part of the outdoor provision for several weeks, enabling Faizah's interest to create a meaningful context for collaboration, problem-solving and investigation.

Funds of Knowledge in the Observe-Assess-Plan cycle: Summary

- ▶ Observing: recognise and tune into the modes children use to communicate and making meaning of funds of knowledge and associated interests
- ▶ Assessing: identify funds of knowledge-based interests through reflection and dialogue, in partnership with children and their families
- ▶ Planning: co-construct experiences that connect with children's experiences at home in order to extend children's knowledge and understanding in new contexts.

References

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Further reading

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