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## Funds of Knowledge and Global Competence in Urban Middle Schools

Jalene Tamerat, *Charles Sposato Graduate School of Education*

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### Abstract

Global competence—a necessary attribute in an increasingly interconnected world—describes having the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to act creatively and collaboratively on important global issues. In urban settings comprised of racial, ethnic, and/or linguistic-minority students, especially, a logical but seemingly underutilized facilitator of global competence would be instruction that draws from students' funds of knowledge—the home-based practices central to a household's functioning and well-being. In this study, 30 Boston-area teachers were interviewed using a semi-structured protocol to draw out their understandings of students' funds of knowledge and their awareness of how these funds of knowledge might be used to further the development of global competence. Data produced in this study were analyzed through a multi-phase thematic coding process. A conceptual framework built upon existing definitions of global competence and funds of knowledge was developed and used as a guide for viewing and understanding the produced data. The two major findings of this study were that: (1) middle school teachers, while seemingly able and willing to talk about global competence and funds of knowledge in relation to their students, did not seem to synthesize (or speak about their synthesis of) these concepts in practice, and, (2) in teacher interviews, potential global competence-supporting funds of knowledge were most often recognized in immigrant and/or economically privileged White middle school students. The potential global competence-supporting funds of knowledge possessed by non-immigrant, BIPOC, and presumably, low-income students were not routinely recognized or accessed.

### Introduction

A globally competent individual possesses the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to act creatively and collaboratively on important issues that impact the globe (Boix-Mansilla & Jackson, 2011). The case for global competence education grows out of the necessity for students to be prepared for what Thomas Friedman calls the *flat world* (2005). As the real and virtual distances between individuals have decreased, our global interconnections are more easily realized. For example, the 2020 murder of George Floyd sparked an ongoing global movement against police brutality enabled by the communicative and organizing capacities of social media. We currently exist in a world where, despite recent infusions of nationalistic and xenophobic sentiments into our political and social discourse, persistent global challenges such as climate change, cross-border human trafficking, and deadly pandemics serve as evidence to show how our fates are inextricably linked. The practice of educating for global competence is a response to the demands of globalization. As the world becomes more interconnected, students' success will hinge on their ability to understand and act upon issues that are complex in nature and global in scope

(Boix-Mansilla & Jackson; NEA, 2010; Reimers, 2010).

Like all youth, urban students in the middle grades have access to unique knowledge and practices that stem from their home and community environments. They bring to their real and virtual places of learning valuable funds of knowledge—culture-informed practices that are essential to their household's well-being—that can be upheld as official classroom knowledge to scaffold or extend instruction. One might assume that urban students in particular, as a result of their proximity to and involvement with diverse populations, would be primed for lessons that effectively leverage funds of knowledge in pursuit of global competence. To test this assumption, this qualitative study was conducted to investigate the extent to which teachers in urban schools consider and draw from their students' funds of knowledge in the development of global competence within the confines of a conceptual third space.

### Theoretical Framework

This study focused exclusively on the potential for global competence instruction within urban middle school settings for at least two reasons. First, urban students, and particularly those

from racial minority groups, are often marginalized within our society. This marginalization frequently manifests in disenfranchisement, economic insecurity, and unrecognized/unaffirmed personal and collective agency, which leaves this group most vulnerable to the negative impacts of significant global challenges. Second, because urban teachers often work with diverse students who bring various intercultural connections to the classroom, one might assume that they would be well positioned to teach in ways that promote global competence. In urban middle schools comprised of racial, ethnic, and/or linguistic-minority students, especially, a logical but seemingly underutilized facilitator of global competence would be instruction that draws from students' funds of knowledge and then leverages them within a conceptual third space where transformative learning occurs.

### **Global Competence**

Distinguishable from concepts like *global citizenship* or *multicultural education*, *global competence* draws from an assemblage of developed proficiencies, knowledge, and dispositions that enable one to collaboratively engage with issues that impact the global community. Boix-Mansilla and Jackson (2011) define global competence as having the “capacity and disposition to understand and act on issues of global significance” (p. xiii). Hunter (2006) depicts global competence as “having an open mind while actively seeking to understand cultural norms and expectations of others, leveraging this gained knowledge to interact, communicate, and work effectively outside one’s environment” (p. 17). Other scholars, Morais and Ogden (2010), for example, have advocated for the inclusion of social responsibility and civic engagement norms in global competence conceptualizations. A synthesis of these conceptualizations could yield the following four themes to assist in building a framework for understanding global competence: (1) substantive knowledge building around global topics; (2) the cultivation of particular dispositions; (3) skill/proficiency development; and (4) orientation toward individual and collaborative action.

### ***Substantive Knowledge Building Around Global Topics***

In the middle school classroom setting, globally competent students are prepared to engage in

deep exploration, critical analysis, synthesis, and communication (often in multi-languages) relating to issues of global significance. In model situations, educating for global competence presents content that is not only globally focused, but encourages understanding that is nuanced, flexible, and rich (Boix-Mansilla & Jackson, 2011), and that will allow students to “better understand the world and its complexities” (UNESCO, 2015, p. 22). One criticism of global education practice that involves the accumulation of substantive knowledge is that in many classroom settings, the building of substantive global knowledge is superficial at best (Case, 1993). A characteristic focus on the five F’s of international culture—food, festivals, famous people, fashion and flags (Walker, 2001)—does little to provide students with a deep understanding of the issues and connectivity of individuals and societies across the globe. Ideally, a deep understanding of global issues would first be facilitated through a foundational grasp of the issues impacting one’s local environment, and then the use of that knowledge to connect to and contextualize more distant global events (Tichnor-Wagner et al., 2019).

### ***Cultivation of Particular Dispositions***

A major goal of global competence education is the cultivation of particular dispositions that would enable students to collaboratively engage with issues that impact the global community (OECD, 2018; Tichnor-Wagner et al., 2019). The specific attributes and distinctions that would be representative of an ideal disposition include perspective consciousness (Hanvey, 1982; Merryfield, 1997; Pike & Selby, 1994), as well as: (1) open-mindedness, (2) anticipation of complexity, (3) resistance to stereotyping, (4) inclination to empathize, and (5) non-chauvinism (Case, 1993).

The global competence classroom is one that must maintain an explicit agenda for values development, since values and dispositions are inextricably linked. Although some may take issue with the idea that schools—public schools especially—should be engaging in the work of teaching values, Case (1993) brings up an important point that values promotion is implicit in all forms of education: “Global education, like education generally, cannot and should not be value-free. Every educational goal is an implied commitment to promote certain values over others [e.g., literacy is preferred to

illiteracy, democratic ideals are superior to authoritarian values, and honesty is prized while deceit is condemned]" (p. 320). Regardless of teachers' personal values and orientation towards the global system, however, global competence educators must steer clear of imposing judgments and beliefs upon students, understanding that "the underlying value of the perceptual dimension is essentially that a broad-minded perspective is preferred over a parochial perspective" (Case, p. 320).

### ***Skill/Proficiency Development***

In much of the global competence literature, the discussion of skills development has a distinct focus on language proficiency, both in the student's mother tongue as well as second language ability (Boix-Mansilla & Jackson, 2011; NEA, 2010; Reimers, 2009). However, learning how to *use* language effectively is an important consideration in the building of skills in globally competent students, as well. Students need to be able to recognize and express how diverse audiences may perceive different meanings, listen to and communicate effectively with diverse people, and reflect on how effective communication impacts understanding and collaboration in an interdependent world (Boix-Mansilla & Jackson, p. 39).

Other requisite skills that lend to the building of global competence include competitive skills (NEA, 2010), media/technological skills (Boix-Mansilla & Jackson, 2011), citizenship skills (Pike & Selby, 1994), and the ability to evaluate information and formulate arguments (OECD, 2018). Competitive skills are described as the "high-level thinking skills that enhance creativity and innovation" (NEA, 2010, p. 1). Meanwhile, technological and media proficiency enable the globally competent student to participate in the transfer of information by electronic means, a hallmark feature of life in the global era that enables people separated by geography and culture to rapidly communicate with each other. Lastly, Pike and Selby emphasize citizenship skills, recommending that students "develop the social and political action skills necessary for becoming effective participants in democratic decision-making at a variety of levels, grassroots to global" (p. 35).

### ***Orientation Toward Individual and Collaborative Action***

Globally competent students have significant concerns about the state of the planet in future years while retaining an action-oriented mindset that is focused on what they are able to accomplish in the present moment (Boix-Mansilla & Jackson, 2011; UNESCO, 2015). Through investigation, planning, and engagement in action, globally competent students begin to realize their capacity as change agents.

### ***Funds of Knowledge***

In the urban middle school setting, teacher awareness and use of student funds of knowledge can be a facilitator of global competence instructional goals. First coined by Luis Moll and his team of researchers along the Mexican-American border in the 1990's, the term, *funds of knowledge*, "refers to those historically developed and accumulated strategies (skills, abilities, ideas, practices) or bodies of knowledge that are essential to a household's functioning and well-being" (González et al., 2005, p. 92). In their lives outside of the classroom, students routinely assume active roles and ways of being in their respective households and communities that warrant specific knowledge and skills. For students in urban settings in particular, these funds of knowledge often derive from or are mediated by their situation within the urban space and the "globalizing effects of information, communication, and transportation technologies" (Moje et al., 2004, p.66). If leveraged effectively, these funds of knowledge have the potential for building greater connectivity between home and school worlds and can be used as a scaffold to extend what students already know (Marshall & Toohey, 2010).

The act of gathering, theorizing, and finally, leveraging student funds of knowledge in the classroom requires the application of a particular methodology that finds its roots in participatory ethnography and anthropological theory and presumes a dynamic where reciprocity and mutual trust are valued and upheld by all parties (González et al., 2005; Moll et al., 1992). Teachers who undertake a funds of knowledge approach to instruction assume the role of ethnographer-researchers who are tasked with investigating, understanding and theorizing

the ways in which students (and their families) make sense of their everyday lives (González et al., 2005).

As it relates to this study, a non-exhaustive list of potential funds of knowledge that specifically contribute to global competence could include:

- Knowledge of what life is like in another country through having lived or visited there
- Proficiency in another language/ability to translate for others
- Owning, managing a YouTube channel or social media profile to spread a message or explain a process or concept
- Mediation-negotiation-diplomacy skills through navigating parental divorce or other difficult family relationships

### Third Space

Leveraging students' funds of knowledge as a vehicle through which global competence instruction becomes operationalized presupposes a conceptual locus where the merging of these concepts occurs. The third space (Gutierrez, 2008) in particular, illumines a site for possible connection between funds of knowledge and action-oriented global competence pedagogy. As an extension of Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, the third space describes a conceptual bridge where curriculum and pedagogy drawing from students' lived experiences activate visions of, and an orientation toward, an improved world. In this collective third space, "...students begin to reconceive who they are and what they might be able to accomplish academically and beyond" (Gutierrez, p. 148). A foundation in funds of knowledge is crucial to the prospect of teaching for global competence as it allows students to: (1) realize the inherent value of skills and dispositions that were garnered through their experiences outside of the classroom, (2) understand their positioning in the world, (3) examine how their plight connects to that of others, and (4) realize their agency as catalysts for global change. At the core of third space is a philosophy that is "oriented toward a form of 'cosmopolitanism' characterized by the ideals

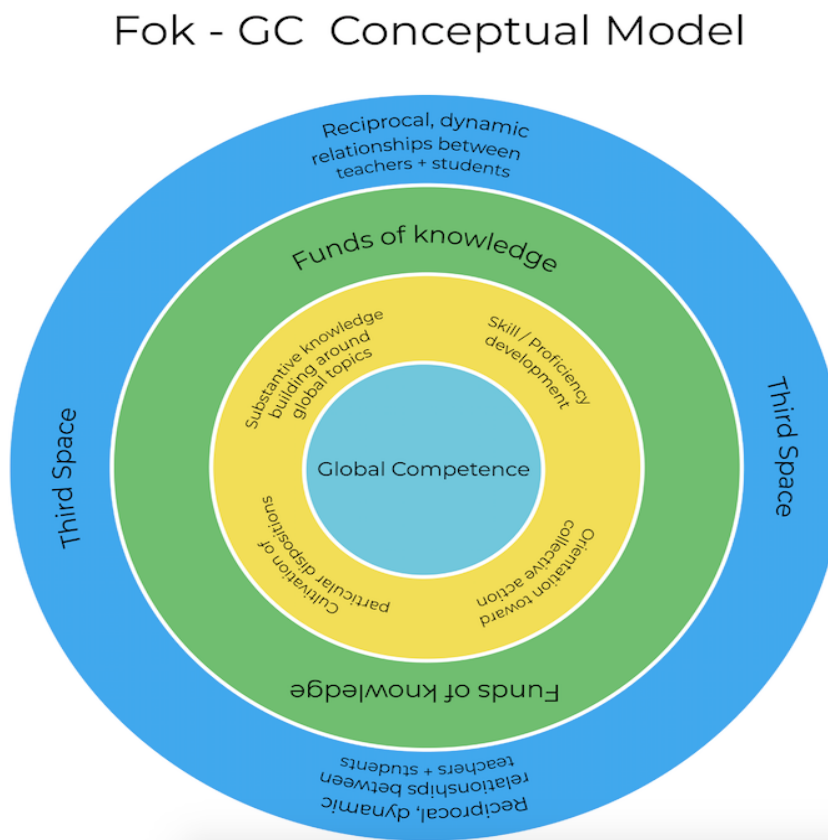
and practices of a shared humanity, a profound obligation to others, boundary crossing, and intercultural exchange in which difference is celebrated without being romanticized" (Gutierrez, p. 149).

### Method

In this study, interviews were utilized to explore teachers' engagement in activities that identify and access students' funds of knowledge when global competence is an intended curricular and/or developmental goal. One purpose of the study was to validate an assumption that the integration of these two concepts, global competence and funds of knowledge, is something that would be best undertaken in an urban setting, given the greater likelihood of students' exposure to diverse cultures and home practices that do not derive from the dominant (White American) culture.

### Conceptual Model

The conceptual model developed for this study presents a logical way to explain how in the classroom setting, funds of knowledge might be leveraged in pursuit of global competence within the conceptual third space. In this model, the third space, sustained by reciprocal, dynamic relationships, is a foundational element that comprises the outermost circle and represents the conditions under which the operationalization of pedagogies that draw from student funds of knowledge and contribute to global competence are likely to occur. Next, student funds of knowledge relevant to the prospect of global competence—identified and accessed by the teacher—comprise the second largest circle. Finally, by utilizing these funds of knowledge to provide instructional scaffolding, we are led to the attainment of one or more of the four global competence domains positioned within the third circle: (1) skill/proficiency development; (2) substantive knowledge building around global topics; (3) orientation toward collective action; and (4) cultivation of particular dispositions. Finally, global competence, the model's intended outcome, is placed at the center.

**Figure 1***Fok – GC Conceptual Model*

### Participants and Recruitment

The participants in this study were recruited through snowball sampling from the researcher's professional network of Boston-area teachers and their referrals. In order to maintain purposeful selection, priority was placed on the 30 teachers who: (1) were currently teaching full-time, (2) had been teaching in an urban school for at least the past three years, and (3) either expressed an interest in or claimed to have experience with funds of knowledge and/or global competence pedagogies, as it was assumed that teachers who fit these qualifications would be best able to provide insight into the questions being explored. Extra care was taken to put together a diverse group of participants with respect to age, years of experience, gender, race, discipline, and school type; and proportional groups of elementary, middle, and high school teachers were sought to identify distinctions in practice.

The city of Boston is a diverse metropolis that is home to sizeable immigrant (28%) and non-white (56%) populations (Irons, 2019). In this study, participants included teachers working in racially diverse, if not majority BIPOC school settings. The total participant sample included 30 teachers whose self-reported demographic breakdown is as follows: There were 26 females and 4 males. Eleven identified as White, 7 were Black, 4 Asians, 2 of mixed race, and 6 identified as other. Regardless of racial background, 8 reported Hispanic ethnic identity. Eighteen teachers fell within the 30-39 age range, 5 were 40-49, 4 were 20-29, and 3 were 50+. Six teachers taught primarily at the elementary level, 13 at middle school, and 11 at high school. Finally, 6 taught English/language arts; 5 humanities; 4 elementary; 3 ESL/SLIFE; 3 history/social studies/civics/geography; 3 art/theatre/music; 2 mathematics; 2 taught multiple subjects; 1 world language; and 1 science. For purposes of this report, the data

from the 13 middle school teacher participants have been extracted and reflected upon.

### **Data Collection**

A semi-structured interview protocol guided one-on-one discussions where teachers were asked probing questions that prompted them to describe, among other things, their students' funds of knowledge and their classroom practices. The interviews, scheduled to last no more than 60-90 minutes, were typically conducted in a relaxed atmosphere that was conducive to the open sharing of ideas.

### **Research Findings**

The two major findings to emerge from this study were that: (1) Teachers, while seemingly able and willing to talk about global competence and funds of knowledge in relation to their students, did not seem to synthesize (or speak about their synthesis of) these concepts in practice. Few teachers, if any, explicitly reported on their own use of student funds of knowledge to scaffold learning for global competence in their classrooms; and (2) In teacher interviews, potential global competence-supporting funds of knowledge were most often recognized in immigrant and/or economically privileged White students. The potential global competence-supporting funds of knowledge possessed by non-immigrant, minority, and presumably, low-income students were not routinely recognized or accessed.

#### **Discussion of Finding #1**

##### ***Teachers' Discussions of Global Competence and Funds of Knowledge Did Not Portray a Synthesis of These Concepts In Practice***

While in their interviews, teachers reflected on their classroom experiences with funds of knowledge and global competence instruction, they did so in ways that did not reflect a synthesis of these ideas in practice. One potential reason for this is that the bringing together of these concepts is not something that has been spelled out in clear ways by scholarly research or by practitioner-oriented sources of knowledge, and as a result, teachers in this study may have lacked the requisite know-how to carry out this endeavor. Another potential reason might be that teachers' contextual (classroom) environments for one reason or another were

not conducive to the work of drawing from students' funds of knowledge to scaffold instruction that supports global competence. As the conceptual model denotes clear links between specific funds of knowledge and global competence attributes—which conceivably, teachers would need to take an active role in initiating—teacher knowledge and contextual support would be of primary importance.

#### ***Teacher Knowledge and Know-How***

The knowledge and discrete skills that would enable teachers to correctly identify students' funds of knowledge and then link them to specific global competence goals is not something that participants in this study seemed to be familiar with. This is perhaps unsurprising, as one would only need to consider the paucity of scholarly writings that address a merging of these concepts to assume its lack of presence in professional development and teacher education programs. Presumably, identification of the links between a particular fund of knowledge, such as *knowing how to work within community and family networks*, and its related global competence attribute, *orientation toward collective action*, requires a certain degree of knowledge and direct guidance. While teachers in this study did not often mention their personal lack of understanding or know-how when it came to the synthesis of funds of knowledge and global competence in practice, neither did they speak in specific, detailed ways about how this synthesis could happen in theory. Furthermore, as the distinct bodies of literature that address funds of knowledge and global competence point to their inherent complexities, we can assume that a practical merging of these concepts would not be intuitively derived.

The literature tells us that global education is a concept lacking in definitional clarity (Kirkwood, 2001; Le Roux, 2001; Pike, 2000). Fittingly, this study revealed that teachers' understandings of global competence, what it entails, and how it might relate to funds of knowledge, were incomplete or misinformed. In interviews, when describing a globally competent student, teachers' interpretations of what global competence entails and what qualities a globally competent student should exhibit seemed to be constructed through a process that included the weighing of dissonant concepts involving multiple definitions of global education. As there are many ways to interpret global education (which surely, many of the teachers had already

been exposed to), it was not difficult to imagine that the example produced by each participant was an outcome of choosing elements that were most personally relevant and compatible with his/her understanding—even when presented with a singular definition of one term). While it was not wholly possible to extract the specific reasons why some teachers seemed challenged by the prospect of relaying how global competence and funds of knowledge might relate, or why teachers sometimes interchanged concepts like global competence and cultural competence in discourse, presumptive thought points toward a general lack of understanding of global competence/global education in concrete terms and inexperience in using global competence and funds of knowledge in conversation and practice.

### ***Contextual Challenges***

For the teachers in this study, context was an important mitigating factor in the delivery of global competence-fostering content through students' funds of knowledge. Teachers pointed to two contextually-based preventative factors affecting their ability to synthesize funds of knowledge and global competence pedagogies. Those factors were: (1) prospective backlash from the community in response to teachers' engagement with students around contentious topics; and (2) pressures or expectations emanating from school, district, or state administrators relating to mandatory assessments, curriculum standards, and pacing.

For some, it seemed that teachers' curricular-instructional decisions relating to global competence were impacted by their perceptions of how the larger community would react. Oftentimes, teachers reported being much less likely to introduce topics that might build global competence when those topics were contentious in nature, or when family/community perspectives on a particular issue were divided. This finding is compatible with Steiner (1992), who, in a sample of 200 teachers, found that most tended to incorporate into their curriculum global education topics relating to the environment or other cultures, while steering clear of more complex, politically or otherwise charged ideas. Similarly, the present study, which looked at teachers' understandings and uses of students' funds of knowledge in the development of global competence, found that some teachers refrained from approaching certain topics in the classroom because they

were politically contentious and had the potential to rouse the ire of parents or school administrators. Other teachers abandoned difficult topics mid-course due to parental/administrative backlash. In one interview in particular, Rosa, a visual arts teacher, spoke about the controversy stemming from her unit on the International Day of Peace, which eventually drew attention from the media, mayor, and superintendent of schools. In this case and others, teachers grappled with making a choice between addressing the perceived needs of students who may have felt victimized and/or vulnerable (i.e., by the Trump election and/or police brutality), and families who supported an opposing view. And, typically, this battle was won by the families.

Global issues are oftentimes political in nature. For example, many people refute the implications of climate change; individuals have divergent views on how (or if) we should solve global poverty; and social movements invariably have political implications. These issues are all bound up in politics and values, and understandably, navigating a potential minefield is not something that all teachers would be able or willing to do. The finding here, that teachers in the throes of curricular decision-making will often choose a course of less resistance, falls in line with the assertions of Robbins et al. (2003), and others who have similarly found this to be true.

In this study, teachers also identified standardized curricula, pacing, and assessments as limiting factors on their ability to teach for global competence. For example, several teachers noted that their classroom activities were largely guided by standardized curriculum frameworks and pacing guides; in short, they were teaching what they were teaching because there was an expectation that certain topics would be covered and assessed. While Rapoport (2010) points out the necessity of straightforward curricular guidance when it comes to teaching for global perspective (cultivation of particular dispositions), an application of this study's conceptual model highlights two additional global competence domains that would be strengthened by inclusion in curriculum frameworks and assessments: skill and proficiency development, and substantive knowledge building around global topics. As global competence is not typically tested or included in curriculum frameworks, it would be easily relegated to



marginal status without a clear directive that communicates its importance. And, while curriculum standards and assessments generally place limits on teacher curricular autonomy, they do provide structure and direction to teachers who may need or desire it. Frameworks and assessments are often a motivating force in teachers' curricular decisions, and presumably, a shift toward curriculum frameworks that include topics promoting global competence would enact a shift in teacher activities in favor of teaching for global competence.

It is also important to note that funds of knowledge would be difficult if not impossible to address in the curriculum standards due to their genesis in the experience of the individual. However, if funds of knowledge are conceived of as the potential vehicle through which global competence (the ultimate goal) might be attained, an important first step in carrying out the work of using funds of knowledge to develop global competence would be clear identification and commitment to the end goal. As such, the findings from this study suggest that a prioritization of funds of knowledge/global competence pedagogy would be more likely if curriculum standards and related assessments were more clearly aligned with global competence goals.

## **Discussion of Finding #2**

### ***Teachers did not Routinely Recognize or Access the Potential Global Competence-Supporting Funds of Knowledge Possessed by Non-Immigrant, Minority Students***

This study's conceptual model details the procedures and conditions necessary for utilizing student funds of knowledge to scaffold global competence instruction. The second, and perhaps more significant finding of this study, that teachers in their interviews did not routinely recognize or access the potential global competence-supporting funds of knowledge possessed by non-immigrant, minority students, highlights one specific way that the practical integration of these concepts—mapped out by the conceptual model—was impeded. While teachers in this study were able to elaborate on the global competence-supporting funds of knowledge that they believed their immigrant and economically privileged students possessed—for example, those stemming from international travel experiences and exposure to

varied cultural practices—they omitted any references to students who did not fit into either of these categories.

Three specific themes emanating from the data offer insight into the factors that may have contributed to this phenomenon. First, teachers in this study often reported feeling more successful with making connections to families when they shared similar racial, ethnic, linguistic, or experiential backgrounds. Second, teachers described funds of knowledge as group-specific, rarely recognizing students' individual attributes. And, lastly, teachers made assumptions about the inherent usefulness of particular funds of knowledge vis-a-vis global competence and prioritized some funds of knowledge over others. The implications of each of these themes with regard to the conceptual model are explained in detail in the section below.

### ***Limited Student and Family Connections***

Teachers in this study often reported feeling more successful with making student and family connections when they shared similar racial, ethnic, or linguistic backgrounds, or had common experiences, like immigration to the US. For example, in the interviews, discussions of shared language, country of origin, or experience as an émigré from respective countries of origin seemed to be an important way that teacher and student/family relationships were forged. As it was clear from the data that teachers did not routinely comment on their relationships with students and families who were not economically privileged or from immigrant backgrounds, an assumption can be made that if teachers lacked a common identity or experience with certain families, then authentic relationships failed to develop. This would have a negative impact on a necessary condition for integrating funds of knowledge and global competence as detailed by the conceptual model: reciprocal, dynamic relationships between a classroom teacher and *each* of his or her students.

*Confianza*, according to Velez-Ibanez (1983), and Gonzalez et al. (2005), is the most important mediator in social relationships, and is a prerequisite for engaging in the ethnographic study that comprises funds of knowledge pedagogy. According to the literature, reciprocity is a key component of *confianza*. According to Velez-Ibanez, reciprocity

represents an “attempt to establish a social relationship on an enduring basis... Whether symmetrical or asymmetrical, the exchange expresses and symbolizes human social interdependence” (p. 134). A possible interpretation of this particular finding, that teachers were unlikely to establish reciprocal, dynamic relationships with certain groups of students—and which would challenge the notion of reciprocity as being particularly salient in the establishment of *confianza*—is that *confianza* (or the construction of reciprocal, dynamic relationships) is actually the result of a partnership in which mutuality has been established. Mutuality, as a concept, implies an exchange in which one recognizes not what can be done for another or what can be reciprocated, but the ability to see something of one’s self in the other. This does not have to be a reflection of race, language, or ethnic background, necessarily (although one might assume that it would help), but it could be, for instance, the common experience of being an immigrant.

In the interviews, shared experience and identity was brought up most often when referring to immigrant students or students whose family hailed from a country other than the US. This leaves one to ask, then: *How would reciprocal, dynamic relationships be developed with students who do not have explicit international connections?* Data from the interviews reveal that additional contributors to *confianza* would be certain teacher dispositions like openness and being non-judgmental. This aligns with the assertion of Norma Gonzalez et al. (2005), who states: “...when there is sincere interest in both learning about and learning from a household, relationships and *confianza* can flourish” (p. 6).

### ***Group-based Depictions of Students’ Funds of Knowledge***

In teacher interviews, students’ funds of knowledge were depicted in ways that reflected generalized assumptions or understandings about groups of students, what they do, and what they know. For instance, across the data, students who shared SES status or cultural identity were similarly characterized. One example is the way in which many teachers reported that their Latinx students had an advantage with regard to one particular global competence domain, *orientation toward collective action*, due to these students’ experiences working within community and family networks and their experiences with

communal living. Teachers’ common descriptions of the presumed funds of knowledge of students belonging to particular groups (i.e., Asian, Haitian, Latinx, White affluent) raises an implication that these teachers may be missing out on opportunities to realize their students’ individual attributes as they construct generalizations about who they are and what they bring to the classroom. This study’s conceptual framework would be thereby impacted because, by failing to recognize individual attributes, some students may be overlooked in the construction of reciprocal, dynamic relationships between teachers and students.

Another important implication that this finding raises is that, in describing students as members of group entities, and typifying them as such, teachers neglect the preponderances of intersectionality and cultural fluidity which mark the identities of individuals in a pluralistic society (Paris, 2012). While in these interviews, culture was less of an explicit focus in teachers’ descriptions than perhaps race, ethnicity, or economic status, we are still reminded of Gonzalez et al.’s (2005) admonitions against depicting groups as monolithic entities, as this erroneously “presumes coherence within groups, which may not exist” (p. 10). Additionally, Zipin (2009) reminds us that cultures are dynamic and ever changing.

The potential for more nuanced depictions of funds of knowledge would not be discounted here, as teachers in this study spoke more to the activities of students (sports, church, hanging out with family, etc.) than they did their cultures. At the same time, however, teachers’ depictions of these activities were typically generalizable by race, class, and/or ethnicity. For instance, Asian students were often characterized as ‘latchkey kids’, known for spending excessive amounts of time at home alone; Latinx students were characterized as being engaged in multiple family activities/interactions; and White students, according to teachers, often went skiing and took part in structured activities in their out-of-school time. Overall, a more individuated approach to gathering funds of knowledge that deliberately eschews generalizations would be useful here and might potentially open a gateway for better accessing the funds of knowledge of low-SES, non-White, non-immigrant students.

### ***Prioritization of Particular Funds of Knowledge***

In this study, interviews revealed that only certain funds of knowledge were deemed particularly relevant to the prospect of developing global competence. When asked to reflect on the specific funds of knowledge that might optimally position students for global competence, many teachers focused on the international travel experiences of immigrant and/or economically privileged students. Those who had visited other countries or lived overseas, teachers presumed, would be primed for global competence instruction due to the amassed funds of knowledge that were a direct result of these experiences. The specific sources of these funds of knowledge included: international travel experience, exposure to varied cultural practices, awareness of state of the planet, and knowledge of global systems. After identifying these funds of knowledge, teachers were then able to connect, if not practically, then in theory, each to a specific global competence domain which would lead to the development of global competence.

While the overseas experience was not exclusively brought up as a source of global competence-worthy fund of knowledge, it was, however, mentioned with extraordinary frequency. The implications of this phenomenon are such that, as teachers prioritized—whether consciously or otherwise—specific types of funds of knowledge (or funds of knowledge from specific groups), they axiomatically deprioritized, and/or discouraged others. Through the conceptual model, we realize that beyond the initial identification of student assets, teachers must draw connections between funds of knowledge and a relatable global competence domain. Teachers' failure to recognize and/or prioritize particular funds of knowledge (presumably those of low-SES, non-immigrant, minority students) inevitably discounts some of the potential links between funds of knowledge and global competence that would enable a synthesis of these concepts in practice.

In interviews, when steered away from their focus on immigrant and economically privileged students and asked to elaborate

on other funds of knowledge that may be present in their classrooms, teachers remarked on some students' resilience in the face of conditions like neighborhood crime, parental illness/death, and drug addiction. Those less desirable funds of knowledge, referred to in the literature as *dark funds of knowledge*, often manifest as the “complex knowledges and expertise [that] emerge in family and community resistances, resiliencies and other creative copings with difficult material and cultural conditions of poverty and ‘otherness’” (Zipin, 2009, p. 322). Unsurprisingly, teachers in this study did not mention resilience or other dark funds of knowledge as potential assets in the global competence classroom. Grant & Sleeter (2007), and Hogg (2010), however, caution against this positionality, as the recognition and utilization of these “dark” funds of knowledge have the potential to invigorate lessons. Classroom discussions that draw from dark funds of knowledge can: “generate high student participation, support relevant connections with other knowledge, and allow conversation about [students'] concerns and questions” (Hogg, p. 671).

### **Additional Considerations**

In the conceptual model, the *establishment of reciprocal, dynamic relationships between teachers and students* and the *third space* are concepts that represent the conditions under which an integration of funds of knowledge and global competence would be most likely to occur. An important idea worthy of deeper consideration here, however, is the relationship of these conditions vis-a-vis teachers' acquisition of students' funds of knowledge. From the discussion in the preceding sections, we can clearly see how these necessary conditions would be diminished by disruptions to the teacher activities embedded in the conceptual model. For example, if teachers neglected to identify and access the individual funds of knowledge possessed by students in their classrooms, they also proved less likely to establish reciprocal, dynamic relationships with them. Additionally, if the funds of knowledge gathered by teachers were not actively linked with one of the four global competence domains, the likelihood of existence for the transformative third space was diminished. And so, we must also ask whether these conceptual relationships would work in the reverse order: *As potential preconditions for the*

*integration of funds of knowledge and global competence, do these concepts actually need to be in place in order for teachers to engage in this work?* In short, the answer is, yes. While reciprocal, dynamic relationships and the third space are necessary preconditions for achieving global competence through an accessing of students' funds of knowledge, these conditions are also developed and strengthened by teachers' activities. In short, third space and reciprocal, dynamic relationships not only enable teachers' attempts to identify and access students' funds of knowledge in the pursuit of global competence, but they can also be directly cultivated through teachers' attempts at learning about, gathering, and utilizing funds of knowledge to build global competence. Thus, as the existence of third space and reciprocal, dynamic relationships impart a host of other student benefits—both academic and socio-emotional—teachers would be wise to consider engagement in the work of gathering funds of knowledge for global competence as a tool for improving student outcomes overall.

On a related note, the findings of this study, and in particular, finding #2, remind us that even in urban districts and schools, there are some students who are privileged over others, and this privileging creates and/or reinforces opportunity gaps that have deleterious consequences for student performance and well-being. For example, students whose funds of knowledge are routinely discounted or overlooked may not be presented with equitable chances to connect with their teachers, students, or the curriculum to reap the benefits of an education that places the student at its center. As we often think of educational disparity as being a comparative difference from school to school, district to district, or state to state, it is important to realize that unequal practices can also be confined within the walls of singular classrooms.

### **Limitations of Study**

Because this study was geographically limited to the Boston area, many of the findings may be specific to this particular region and not easily generalizable to other urban settings. For example, the high immigrant populations found in many Boston-area schools may not be reflective of student populations in other urban centers. Also, because participants in this study were drawn from the researcher's professional network and their referrals, a limitation of this study may be that the participants shared

particular characteristics that are not typical of the general population. Finally, as this study relied exclusively on teachers' articulated reflections of their practice, the researcher was not able to observe participating teachers in their classrooms or examine artifacts that were representative of their work. The ability to witness teachers' activities and products firsthand would have likely verified—or else, negated—what they relayed in interviews, and might have imparted a more nuanced understanding of their activities and challenges with regard to this work.

### **Future Research**

Future related research might include a replication of this study in a city other than Boston, comprised of a demographically distinct population, as looking at the research questions in another urban site would test the ability to generalize this study's findings more broadly. Additionally, research that looks comparatively at the extent to which suburban and/or rural teachers at the middle school level consider and utilize students' funds of knowledge in the pursuit of global competence would be highly informative. Lastly, as none of the teachers in the present study communicated a detailed account of their practical use of funds of knowledge to scaffold global competence instruction, a case study or series of case studies that examine specific accounts of middle school teachers engaging in this work would help to deepen understandings of this topic and the workings of the conceptual model.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

As there does not at present seem to be significant research that specifically looks at the practical or theoretical integration of funds of knowledge and global competence, this study breaks ground for future research on an important and necessary topic. Further, this study's construction of a conceptual model explaining the conditions and practices under which the functional integration of funds of knowledge and global competence might occur paints a lucid image for understanding the phenomenon at hand, and also provides a framework that can be expanded as additional insights are gleaned.

Regarding practical implications, this study shows that without knowing in concrete terms what global competence is, and which specific

funds of knowledge might lead to the development of global competence, applied connections between students' funds of knowledge and global competence instruction are unlikely to take root. Additionally, if the contextual environment of the middle school classroom or the school itself is not conducive to the practice of using funds of knowledge to scaffold for global competence instruction—due to a weakened or ineffective third space, curriculum-narrowing standards, a lack of teacher curricular autonomy, or the potential of backlash from the community—this work is unlikely to occur. Clear guidance showing teachers how to engage in this work in an explicit way, and having clear expectations for instructional activities communicated through curriculum frameworks and standardized assessments, would support the use of funds of knowledge pedagogy to scaffold global competence instruction.

In-service professional development and teacher education program coursework would be opportune sites for developing the knowledge and skills in teachers and prospective teachers to access and utilize various funds of knowledge from diverse students to scaffold global competence instruction in an equitable way. Additionally, revisions of assessments, statewide curriculum frameworks, and perhaps the Common Core, to have a more explicit focus on substantive knowledge of global topics, would send a clear message to educational stakeholders that global competence is a worthy instructional goal.

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