

Getting to Know Your Learners

Questions to help students play a bigger role in their learning

Choose from (or adapt) the questions¹ below to learn about learners' interests and backgrounds (called *funds of knowledge*) and their thoughts about playful learning to plan for and support learning.

- ▷ **Home language:** What language(s) do you speak with your family and friends?
- ▷ **Cultural background:** Where are you and your family from?
- ▷ **Family traditions and values:** What traditions and values are important to your family? Do you have any special days or celebrations?
- ▷ **Friends and family members:** Who is in your family? Who are your friends?
- ▷ **Family members' occupations or skills:** What does your [parent/grandmother/sister/uncle...] do while you are at school?
- ▷ **Play activities (learner and family):** What do you like to play? What do you like to do when you are by yourself? With your friends? With your family?
- ▷ **Favorite games, sports, play themes, or hobbies:** What are your favorite games? Sports? Hobbies? What do you like to do outside of school?
- ▷ **Favorite music, movies, or TV shows:** What music do you like to listen to or dance to? What movies or TV shows do you like to watch?
- ▷ **Household responsibilities (e.g., caregiving, chores, growing and preparing food):** What do you do at home to help your family? Do you help take care of siblings or other children at home? Clean? Cook? Make repairs?
- ▷ **What else is important for me or others to know about you?**

About playful learning...

- ▷ What was your favorite playful learning experience in school—when you felt joy or wonder about what you were learning about math, language arts, or another subject area? Why?
- ▷ What would your ideal playful learning experience in school look like? Why?
- ▷ When do you experience agency, curiosity, and joy in school? In different subject areas?
- ▷ What suggestions do you have for me or your other teachers for including more agency, curiosity, and joy in your learning?
- ▷ What would you like to learn more about?
- ▷ How can I best support you in learning about _____?
- ▷ What questions do you have for me?



Tips for Using This Tool

- ▶ Use the information you learn to better understand your learners and to make connections between their lives and the curriculum.
- ▶ Create an easily accessible way to record the information, e.g., on a spreadsheet, chart, notecards, or file folders, either online or as hard copies.
- ▶ Possible settings for conversations include:
 - ▽ Talking to learners informally during transition times—before or after class, or during mealtime, breaks, play, or outdoor time
 - ▽ Inviting small groups of children to a “lunch bunch” during mealtime
 - ▽ Facilitating a whole-class conversation
 - ▽ Having more structured interviews with learners (and/or their families), either individually or in small groups (older students might interview each other).
- ▶ Beware of unintended messages in which learners might feel pressure to represent their culture.
- ▶ For conversations with families, ask, “What would you say are the strengths and interests of your child(ren)? What else do you think is important to know about your child? What is important to know about your family?” You might also give them an online or paper questionnaire or survey to fill out.

More Than One Way

- ▶ Offer different ways for learners to share their funds of knowledge, e.g., they might write a poem or song or create an identity web about themselves.
- ▶ Ask learners to create a playful learner autobiography or perhaps a “math” (or other subject area) autobiography about when and how math has come up in their lives. Ask learners to interview family members with similar questions.
- ▶ Invite students to create self-portraits or portraits of their friends (or take photos), along with a brief description of their interests, strengths, or other qualities. Post them in the classroom. Include your own profile!
- ▶ If you are struggling to identify a child’s strengths or interests, try video- or audio-recording children’s work or play during outside or small-group time. Notice what children like to play, read, write, or talk about.

Notes

1. These questions are based on Gonzalez, N., Moll, L.C., and Amanti, C. (Eds.) (2006). *Funds of knowledge: Theorizing practices in households, communities, and classrooms*. Routledge.