

Like a Jazz Song: Designing for Community Engagement in Museums



by Suzanne Seriff

The current exhibition in the Gallery of Conscience at the Museum of International Folk Art in Santa Fe, NM, is tentatively titled *Under Pressure: Choices Folk Artists Make in Today's Global Marketplace*, April 2016-January 2018. The first iteration for prototyping started with photos, quotes, and questions on butcher paper along the walls. Photo courtesy of the author.

Improvisation in jazz begins with a melodic phrase, invites a response, and builds on a theme. Sometimes melodic, sometimes cacophonous, the result is rooted in the magic of call and response, history in action. In 2012, the Museum of International Folk Art in Santa Fe, New Mexico, incubated an improvisatory approach to exhibit development in its newly created Gallery of Conscience (GoC). Led by a team of folklorists, folk art educators, and design innovators, the results have been hailed “a model of museum practice for the 21st century.”¹

Improvisation fits both the mission and the method of the GoC, which draws on the words and works of living traditional artists to catalyze dialogue, connect with communities, share stories across generations, and promote personal reflection, communication, and action around pressing issues of conscience important to us all. Like a jazz song, the exhibit development process begins with a single

For an expanded version of this article, see two forthcoming book chapters from which this article was largely excerpted: “Immigration, Empathy, and Engagement: Incubating a New Approach to Immigration in the Museum of International Folk Art’s Gallery of Conscience,” in *Interpreting Immigration; Connecting Past and Present at Museums*, ed. Sarah Pharaon. Forthcoming 2017. Nashville: AASLH Press. And “Like a Jazz Song: A New Model for Social Justice Work in a Museum Setting: The Case of the Gallery of Conscience at the Museum of International Folk Art,” by Suzanne Seriff and Marsha Bol in *Folklife and Museums: 21st Century Perspectives*, eds. Charlie Seemann, Patricia Hall, and C. Kurt Dewhurst. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield. Forthcoming 2016.

The Gallery of Conscience at the Museum of International Folk Art is specifically designed to:

~**Catalyze dialogue**

~**Attract new and previously underserved audiences**

~**Meet the needs of a changing, transnational population of artists**

~**Respond more directly to human rights and social justice issues through the words and works of folk artists at home and abroad**

For these reasons, both the process and the products explored in this space are fundamentally participatory, responsive, and interactive.



Menina con Gallo/ Young Girl with Rooster, by Cenia Gutiérrez Alfonso. Cienfuegos, Cuba, 2014.

Photo by Blair Clark.
Courtesy of Museum of International Folk Art, museum purchase with funds from the Barbara Lidral Bequest, A.2013.61.2.

idea, explored through a limited set of artworks, like a melodic line in music. The first year of this new improvisatory approach in the gallery, the idea was HIV/AIDS and the ways folk artists use their art for education, advocacy, and awareness. On World AIDS Day 2012, a dozen or so works of art began the conversation in the gallery about folk artists' responses to HIV/AIDS: a tower of 600 beaded dolls represented the children orphaned by AIDS in one South African village; an AIDS Memorial Quilt block commemorated eight New Mexicans who died at the height of the pandemic in the U.S; a carved wooden sculpture of an AIDS protest march in Mozambique's capital challenged visitors to remain active against a pandemic that still affects more than 30 million men, women, and children worldwide.

Responding to the call over the coming days and months, community members, visitors, schoolchildren, families, and museum patrons added miniature protest signs, memorials to loved ones lost, radio pieces weaving artist stories with personal life stories, slogans to educate and enjoin, and squares sewn into a community quilt. Their improvisatory responses spoke of grief, resilience, activism, and hope. They created an opening, an invitation to reflect upon, add their voices to, and discuss a topic too often hidden by silence, stigma, and misinformation. The result was sometimes beautiful, sometimes challenging, but always rooted in the community's call to respond.

Folk art proved to be a compelling catalyst for this kind of honest conversation about a global health pandemic spanning generations, cultures, geographies, and histories. As folklorists, we know the value of traditional, familiar, hence readily understandable forms of storytelling to reach people, and how these stories effectively transcend the barriers of language, taboo, religion, or race. Meaningful, heartfelt, and sometimes controversial conversations were effectively sparked by the artworks themselves, the words and passions of their creators, and the participatory environment we created in the space.

The second exhibition in the newly refocused GoC centered on the topic of immigration and the overarching issues of living between two worlds and struggling to belong in a place that is not always welcoming. The exhibit opened in the winter of 2014, when national

news headlines featured stories of tens of thousands of women and children—most seeking asylum from conditions of life-threatening violence in their home countries—who had crossed the border into the U.S. and were being held in newly opened, privately run detention centers in New Mexico and Texas. Several of the artworks uncannily mirrored the very current events in the national news, even though they had been created years before.



Refugiados/Refugees, by Camurdino Mustafa Jetha. Santo Domasio, Mozambique, 2014.

Photo by Blair Clark.

Courtesy of Museum of International Folk Art, museum purchase with funds from the Barbara Lidral Bequest, A.2013.61.2.

Two of the most evocative artworks included a painting by Cuban artist Cenia Gutiérrez Alfonso depicting an unaccompanied young girl crossing the Atlantic Ocean on her journey to a new land, and a three-part sculpture by Peruvian American *retablo* maker Nicario Jiménez (provocatively titled *Immigration: The American Dream*), which illustrates the differential receptions of three groups of undocumented Latino families

arriving on our nation's shores—Cubans, Haitians, and Mexicans—by refugee assistance agencies, detention centers, and border police, respectively. Also, putting the immigration crisis in global perspective, a painted wood sculpture by Mozambican folk artist Camurdino Mustafa Jetha depicted a group of *refugiados*—refugees from the decades-long civil war in his country—marching single file toward asylum with their barest necessities balanced on their heads.

Artworks addressed four main themes, based on input from community members and advisors: Deciding to Leave, Dangerous Journeys, Who Belongs?, and Where Is My Home? Each was highlighted by a first-person quote from community members taped on the gallery walls:²

There's the home that you have made and there's the home you come from—that's always your instinctive home—where you understand it without words.

What is the story of those who don't make it?

You need to distinguish between feeling unwelcome and being unwelcome.

When I die, throw my ashes in the Rio Grande. The ashes will decide where I belong: Mexico or the United States.

And the participatory exercises set up throughout the gallery intentionally encouraged visitors—especially young visitors—to put themselves in newcomers' shoes:

If you had to leave your home and could only bring what you could carry, what would it be?

Describe a time when you felt that you didn't belong. Use the Post-its or tweet your response at @galleryofconscience.

Even the exhibition title, *Between Two Worlds: Folk Artists Reflect on the Immigrant Experience*, was the result of a crowd-sourced contest to pick the title that best reflected the questions “Who Belongs?” and “Who Can Be an American?” These are the questions that have always been at the heart of the immigration debate in our nation—and are with us in the national and international news today.

What Is Prototyping in Museums?

Prototyping is an incremental, inquiry-based mode of exhibition design that allows for an institution to experiment with new ideas—keeping those that work and tossing out or modifying those that don’t—in a way that is relatively low risk, low cost, and low maintenance. As internationally recognized exhibit design innovator, Kathleen McLean writes, a prototype, drawn from the Greek word meaning “original form,” is “a mock-up or a quick and dirty version of an idea; something flexible and changeable; a tool for learning something about the effects of an idea or object on the end-user (and in the case of museums, the relevance of an exhibit or experience on a museum visitor).”

For the GoC, prototyping involves an ongoing series of conversations—with each other, with our visitors, with our artists, and our community partners. Through those conversations, we discover what works and what needs tweaking or refiguring for greater impact in a subsequent exhibition iteration. We also fold these conversations back into the exhibition itself by continuously adding new pieces of art, new community projects, new quotes on the wall, and new responses to our participatory exercises. Once you get the hang of it, as McLean teaches, prototyping “is not just about the object or the exhibit or the experience itself—it is actually a way of working, a philosophy and set of values, a process of inquiry.”

See “[Museum Exhibit Prototyping as a Method of Community Conversation and Participation](#),” by Kathleen McLean.

Community Engagement and the Museum Exhibition Design Process

For the Gallery of Conscience, the motivation to incubate an entirely new design process was to create a “medium” that fundamentally mirrored the “message.” Like social justice work itself, we wanted a process that was responsive, responsible, collaborative, engaged, equitable, impactful, and ethically motivated. From our first exhibition in 2012, to the third exhibition prototyped in the GoC in the spring of 2016, this museum space builds and expands on our commitment to exploring social justice themes and issues through the lens of folk art.

For such a conceptual overhaul to be successful and embraced, we knew the audience and local communities needed to gain a sense of ownership through active involvement, not passive lectures. Everyone has something to offer. If we wanted to tap that collaborative vein, we had to clean our own house by shaking up the conventional museum decision-making structure. So we began by throwing out the curator/ designer/educator model of exhibit expertise in favor of a team approach that was fundamentally collaborative, improvisational, and flexible. Focusing on audience engagement rather than specialized knowledge, this team-based approach represented, for us, a more innovative structure designed for visitors to learn through doing. Rather than dividing ourselves into distinct roles within the team, we all worked together within the gallery to design the spaces, engage the visitors, create the interactives, write the labels, conduct visitor evaluations, and change and adjust the prototyped space for increased clarity and depth of response, after each iteration. Our goal was to be as nimble and responsive with each other as we hoped to be with our visitor and community input.

While our core team of folklorists and museum professionals was experienced in community-based collaborations, we had little collective experience in a truly bottom-up, participatory and dialogic model of exhibit development. This is where Kathy McLean’s experience and expertise came in as our resident

“prototyping guru.” McLean explains her idea of prototyping—drawn from the Greek word meaning “first impressions”—as “a mock-up or a quick and dirty version of an idea; something flexible and changeable; a tool for learning something about the effects of an idea or object on the end-user...and in the case of museums, the relevance of an exhibit or experience on the museum visitor.”³

The result has been both exhilarating and exasperating.

Challenges have arisen in defining exactly what we mean by community involvement and what we mean by “art”; managing workflow expectations and responsibilities; communicating the value of work-in-progress to patrons, who expect finished products; ceding the conventional authority of curator and designer; and redefining success in new terms—based more on reaching new audiences than on pleasing old patrons, and on starting conversations, rather than on creating polished exhibits.

While initially skeptical of such an improvisatory, inclusive model of museum engagement, we are all beginning to recognize the revolutionary potential of this kind of “crowd-sourcing” approach to engaging local and global audiences in the co-creation of their learning, sharing, marketing, and advocating experiences around issues of real relevance, yet distinct differences, in each of their communities and lives. And responses from visitors, community participants, and participating artists reinforce our enthusiasm:

~I saw myself here for the first time. Thank you for that...
~I love that the gallery is always changing, and is changed by the people who have responded....
~This is a brave thing to do....
~This is a beautiful exhibit—accessible in ways museums haven’t felt before.
~There should be a place in every museum where you have to commit your own opinions. More museums should get a hold of people emotionally, not just intellectually.
~This is an excellent and timely exhibit. It brings awareness and helps people empathize by putting them in others’ shoes.

Together, museums and communities have the potential to create an entirely new and replicable model for civic engagement that finds its way back to what community-based artists and storytellers have known all along. In the words of master bead worker Lulama Sihlabeni of South Africa, “Folk art must speak to people—that is part of what puts the ‘folk’ in folk arts!”

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Endnotes

1. Gretchen Jennings. 2015. “Critique of Between Two Worlds.” Exhibition Critique Section of AAM’s *Exhibitionist Journal*, Spring: 71.
2. Quotes in order of their presentation (left to right, top to bottom) by: Helga Ancona, Brazilian, KSFR radio program host, Santa Fe; National Dialogues on Immigration participant; Kamajou Tadfor, Cameroonian, artistic director, Afreeka Santa Fe and producer, Fiesta Fela; Catalina Delgado Trunk, *papel picado* artist, Albuquerque.
3. McLean, Katheen. “Museum Exhibit Prototyping as a Method of Community Conversation and Participation.” Professional Development Report of the American Folklore Society. www.afsnet.org/?page=ConsProfDev.

URL http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.afsnet.org/resource/resmgr/Best_Practices_Reports/McLean_and_Seriff_Museum_Exh.pdf



Between Two Worlds: A Collaborative Curriculum Addressing Immigration through Folk Art, Media Literacy, and Digital Storytelling

by Laura Marcus Green with
Katy Gross and Tara Trudell

Traveler, there is no path. The path is made in walking.

—Antonio Machado, 20th-century Spanish poet

Building Community through Collaboration

At the heart of all Gallery of Conscience (GoC) exhibitions are community-based collaborations that take place within and beyond museum walls. Through its community engagement process, the GoC develops ongoing partnerships that grow organically from exhibition themes. GoC collaborations vary in scope and nature, ranging from journals and story cloths created by English language (ESL) students, to a spoken word poetry residency with at-risk youth, a dialogue and moderated panel focused on transgender issues, and a peace quilt created by Palestinian, Jewish Israeli, and American young women with instruction from a Nigerian/Yoruba indigo resist-dye master. During the life of an exhibition, multiple partnerships take place concurrently, always drawing from and often contributing back to exhibit content and programming. In this article, as a folklorist and former GoC Community Engagement Coordinator, I present one such collaboration, based on the exhibition *Between Two Worlds: Folk Artists Reflect on the Immigrant Experience* (2014-16).

While in progress, this collaboration often seemed like a braid. The three “strands” of the braid included the Museum of International Folk Art’s Gallery of Conscience, Youth Media Project (YMP), and ¡YouthWorks!—three local community-based organizations with kindred missions and programs. The first partner was the GoC itself. Founded in 1953, the Museum of International Folk Art (MOIFA) seeks “to enrich the human spirit by connecting people with the arts, traditions and cultures of the world.” In 2010, former MOIFA Director Marsha Bol established the GoC, explaining, “As the largest folk art museum in the world, there is a responsibility to create a forum to discuss current issues that folk artists are facing around the world.” Folklorist Suzanne Seriff curated the first two exhibitions in the GoC, which focused on social justice issues related to women’s empowerment

About the photo: Gallery of Conscience, Museum of International Folk Art exhibition *Between Two Worlds: Folk Artists Reflect on the Immigrant Experience*, 2014.

Photo by Blair Clark. Courtesy of the Museum of International Folk Art.

and natural disasters, respectively. In the third year, she conducted a strategic plan to research models for creating a more participatory, community-driven approach to exhibition design and process, which resulted in the prototyping model described in her article above. The newly formulated GoC team consisted of three MOIFA staff—a curator, preparator, and museum educator—and three outside members, including the director, prototyping consultant Kathy McLean, and myself as Community Engagement Coordinator.

Youth Media Project was the second critical player in the *Between Two Worlds* partnership. This Santa Fe-based organization teaches “the craft of digital storytelling and the art of listening for a socially responsible world.” YMP develops projects through collaborative relationships with community partners such as schools and youth-focused organizations, which provide access to participants. Over the years, YMP has developed a framework for engaging with young people, establishing their trust, and equipping them with tools to explore contemporary issues through the lens of media literacy and digital storytelling. Many of their collaborations result in public listening events and radio broadcasts that are subsequently posted on YMP’s website, as well as the national Public Radio Exchange, www.prx.org.¹

As the GoC embarked on its more participatory process, YMP emerged as a natural community partner. Folklorists and journalists are professional listeners by trade, using recorded interviews, writing, and photography to document and interpret their subjects. Differences in how folklorists and journalists conduct their work emerged as the project evolved—more on that below. In developing the *Between Two Worlds* collaboration, I worked closely with YMP’s Education Director Katy Gross and Media Arts Intern and poet Tara Trudell. Suzanne Seriff and former YMP Director Mi’Jan Celie Tho-Biaz provided ongoing input and oversight.

The *Between Two Worlds* project was the second partnership between the GoC and YMP. During our pilot collaboration, based on the GoC’s previous exhibition *Let’s Talk About This: Folk Artists Respond to HIV/AIDS*, we established criteria for selecting a third community partner. The key ingredients for a third community partner include the capacity to provide consistent access to youth participants and the resonance of an organization’s mission with YMP’s programmatic focus and with the GoC’s exhibition theme at the time of collaboration. Both the GoC and YMP seek to cultivate enduring collaborative relationships through their work, so a prior track record with an organization is also a factor in choosing the third community partner.

Another project component established during the pilot collaboration was the understanding that the workshop’s thematic focus would generate content for the GoC’s exhibition and public programs. Having a “readymade” theme for students to explore represented a shift from YMP’s usual way of doing things. Generally YMP workshops give students more agency in determining the topic for a given workshop. Nonetheless, within the theme of immigration, workshop participants found ways to personalize the topic and their experience with it.

The third partner in the *Between Two Worlds* project was ¡YouthWorks!, a nonprofit organization that creates opportunities for disconnected youth and families in Northern New Mexico to become engaged and valued members of their communities. Through their programs, job training and placement, life skills counseling, and education and leadership development, they inspire youth to realize their full potential. ¡YouthWorks! recruits a new cohort of approximately 30 students each fall. Students apply based on their interest and their determination to forge a path toward a productive and satisfying life. ¡YouthWorks! students spend two days a week in the classroom and two on a jobsite where they develop vocational and professional skills. Students typically graduate in the summer. For *Between Two Worlds*, GoC and YMP staff worked closely with ¡YouthWorks!

The Audio Project—Listen here!

The pilot Gallery of Conscience-Youth Media Project collaboration focused on the exhibition *Let's Talk About This: Folk Artists Respond to HIV/AIDS*. YMP intern and poet Tara Trudell wove together South African bead artist and HIV/AIDS activist [Lulama Sihlabeni's story](#) with her own narrative to create an audio segment that served as a template for workshop participants to emulate.



South African beadworker and HIV/AIDS activist Lulama Sihlabeni and beaded skeletons in the GoC, during the exhibition, *Let's Talk About This: Folk Artists Respond to HIV/AIDS*, 2013. The skeletons were made by members of eKhaya eKasi (Home in the Hood) as a tool for HIV/AIDS awareness. Photo by Bob Smith.

Listen to the Audio Revolution broadcasts here:

Let's Talk About This

<http://www.youthmediaproject.org/2013/12/lets-talk-about-this>

Sample an individual segment from *Let's Talk About This* here

<http://www.youthmediaproject.org/2014/02/retablos-a-message-of-hope>

Between Two Worlds

<http://www.youthmediaproject.org/2015/05/audio-revolution-between-two-worlds>

leadership and classroom instructors to ensure that the project meshed with participants' schedules, activities, and goals.

Growing from the work and missions of the three partner organizations, the collaboration unfolded symbiotically. GoC and YMP staff crafted a curriculum focusing on immigration, filtered through the lens of the *Between Two Worlds* exhibition. The exhibition featured textiles, woodcarvings, beadwork, *papel picado* (cut paper), paintings, and poetry by Cuban, Mozambican, Hmong, Mexican, New Mexican, Brazilian, Lakota, Polish, Nigerian, Tibetan, Navajo, and Peruvian artists. These artists drew upon their art forms to express their experiences and feelings about immigration from the perspectives of those leaving home, those left behind, and those receiving newcomers into their midst. In tandem with the artworks on display, interactive components invited visitors to respond, and thereby contribute to, the exhibition. The exhibit's thematic focus was developed through a series of dialogues with local immigrant artists and community members. Thus, the interrelated ideas of home and belonging, displacement, and living between worlds informed the selection of artworks as well as the development of collaborations and public programs throughout the life of the exhibit.

Through the prototyping process, GoC exhibitions evolve over time, based on visitor input and community engagement. In the case of *Between Two Worlds*, as in all GoC exhibitions, prototyping drew upon and responded to community-based dialogues, visitor feedback, and collaborative projects with community partners, as well as with local, national, and international folk artists. Over the exhibition's two-year run, there were at least four iterations, as some artworks were removed and others added, interactives were tweaked, and thematic sections were reconfigured. By its final iteration, the exhibition encompassed a significant number of pieces that came in through the GoC's community engagement process, including a listening station where visitors could hear the audio pieces created through the GoC-YMP-;YouthWorks! collaboration and a related chapbook of student poetry.



Immigration is a topic that can divide community members of diverse cultures or those who view the issues from different perspectives. This collaboration, however, built community at various levels. The *Between Two Worlds* curriculum encouraged workshop participants to interpret their immediate communities and the world beyond through the twin lenses of media literacy and folk art, using the tools of journalism and ethnography. Reflecting the community where they live, YouthWorks! cohorts are composed of Hispanic, Latino, Native American, and Euro-American students.² Endemic to this social landscape and its complex history is a tension that can arise among members of these cultural communities. During planning meetings, YouthWorks! staff related that students often come into a new cohort with preexisting biases toward classmates from other cultural communities, a microcosm of the larger social context. Often, however, they quickly develop a sense of solidarity, recognizing that their shared experiences and goals are more compelling than their differences. The thematic focus of the *Between Two Worlds* workshop helped students navigate their sense of identity and develop empathy for those who differ from them. Further, although not all participants were immigrants, as “disconnected youth,” they readily related to the themes of belonging, home, displacement, and living between worlds.



Ultimately, the collaboration benefited all three partners. The project generated content and public programming for the *Between Two Worlds* exhibition. It resulted in an edition of the YMP program *Audio Revolution!*, which airs on local public and community radio stations. The partnership also supported YouthWorks! goals by providing students opportunities for academic and professional development, while helping to integrate the young people and their families more solidly and productively into the social fabric of northern New Mexico.



Photos from top: 1) Mexican *papel picado* artist Catalina Delgado Trunk, left, welcomes YouthWorks! students in her Albuquerque studio. From left: Philip Talachy, Dacien Villa, and Sean Martinez. 2) YouthWorks! student Dacien Villa, left, interviews Tibetan *Thangka* painter Lama Gyurme. 3) YouthWorks! students work on their writing

All photos by Laura Marcus Green. Courtesy of the Museum of International Folk Art.

The Curriculum Framework

Following is an overview of the *Between Two Worlds* collaboration, provided as a roadmap for replicating the project in museums, classrooms, or other settings. This section includes goals, a step-by-step outline of the project, project outcomes, challenges and lessons learned, and a few tips. A lesson plan for the first workshop session provides a taste of the curriculum. The complete curriculum is currently under development and will be available on the Museum of International Folk Art's website upon its completion.

The *Between Two Worlds* themes—home, the struggle to belong, and living between worlds—were originally conceived as an approach to the topic of immigration. However, these themes are broadly applicable, providing an effective framework for exploring a host of other issues. For example, GoC staff drew upon the exhibition as a catalyst for a community-based dialogue and a moderated panel about transgender issues. Beyond immigration, any number of topics can be addressed through this project model.

Curriculum GOALS

~ Participants explore their connection to the topic of immigration through the lens of traditional arts, media literacy, and digital storytelling, specifically relating to the themes of *living between worlds* and *the struggle to belong*.

~ In a safe and supportive environment, students develop academic and professional skills such as listening, writing, interviewing, use of recording equipment, audio production, interpretation and analysis, and public speaking.

~ Students develop tools for self-reflection and self-expression toward an understanding of their lives and cultures, and those of others, through creativity and listening to stories of peers and community members. Awareness of their surroundings and of local and global issues is developed through the tools of ethnography and media literacy.

~ The project builds community by bringing together students, master traditional artists, and other community members to address issues of common concern. Further, sharing the products of their work with friends, family, and the general public expands the project's reach.

~ The project generates content that may be used in exhibition installations, dialogues, radio broadcasts, public programs, and other educational contexts.

~ Often underrepresented community members share their voices and experiences with the general public, putting a personal face on contemporary issues. The project provides an opportunity for participants and the public to learn about an issue from multiple perspectives, with the possible outcome of fostering empathy and understanding.

***Between Two Worlds* Curriculum Project Steps**

Step 1 Develop staffing for collaborative work on folk arts and cultural heritage and media literacy and production. Staff may include a folklorist, art educator, media specialist, or other appropriate personnel with this content area expertise.

Step 2 Identify and recruit project partners. Identify and recruit refugee and/or immigrant traditional artists, or traditional artists who address immigration through their work. Create a timeline that works for all participants.

Step 3 Lay the groundwork with students, including an understanding of the project goals, activities, and timeline; introduce basic concepts in media literacy and traditional arts as a lens for exploring immigration and *Between Two Worlds* themes.

Step 4 Establish and maintain the workshop as a safe space for exploration and learning. Engage students in activities to develop skills and analytical tools for exploring immigration and project themes through media literacy and traditional arts. Activities include listening exercises, discussion, creative writing, and story development exercises, as well as interacting with traditional arts either through a visit to a local museum or another space where immigration-themed folk arts are accessible. In-class use of images or artifacts is an alternative to a fieldtrip. Throughout these sessions, students develop a body of writing in response to artwork, prompts, and exercises. The writing becomes a building block for students' media pieces.

Step 5 Elicit and develop effective questions for interviews with local traditional artists. Train students in the use of audio recording equipment. This includes having students interview one another to gain experience with the recording equipment and build confidence conducting interviews in teams. Students select an artist to interview. Where possible, students research "their" artist and/or their art form in a library or online.

Step 6 Concurrent with Steps 4 and 5, schedule student interviews with local folk artists. Interviews may be held in artists' homes or a space arranged by participant organizations. A partnering media-focused organization may have access to a recording studio, as was the case with YMP.

Step 7 Students conduct interviews with local folk artists. For each interview, one student conducts the interview while another engineers/manages recording equipment. At least one project staff accompanies students to each interview.

Step 8 Students log and edit recordings while mining their writing for content to weave together with excerpts from artist interviews. Students connect their writing and artist interviews by seeking common themes and kindred or parallel experiences. For example, one student in the *Between Two Worlds* project found similarities between his uncle, an artist who spent time in prison, and a Tibetan *thankga* painter who lived for years in a monastery during his painting apprenticeship. Students produce short (three- to eight-minute) audio pieces that can stand alone or be combined to create a longer audio piece, such as a radio broadcast. In the latter case, students develop a hosting script to record and stitch together their individual segments. NOTE: Depending on students' age, skill level, available time, and engagement, the activities in Step 8 may be done predominantly by project staff, in consultation with students. In the case of the *Between Two Worlds* project, students created a roadmap for their pieces and project staff did the final editing.

Step 9 Project staff develop and implement ways for students to share their pieces with the public through listening events, online or radio distribution, and/or listening stations. The media pieces can also become curricular tools, used for generating discussions about current issues.

In keeping with YMP's format, the *Between Two Worlds* workshop culminated in a public listening event where participants shared their work with a public audience. At listening events, project participants introduce and debut their pieces. Following the listening segment, a Q&A allows the audience to engage with participants and participants to reflect on their work and their workshop experience. The *Between Two Worlds* listening event took place in the GoC, powerfully connecting the audio pieces and the exhibition. Listening event audiences are typically composed of students'

families and friends, participating folk artists and their families, constituents of the participating organizations, and the general public. A circular seating arrangement creates an intimate space and gives a sense of sitting around a fire sharing stories. YMP embraces the tradition of “listening lights”—strings of lights festooning the event space. This practice is highly recommended!

Listen Here:

These individual audio segments by ¡YouthWorks! students were created during the *Between Two Worlds* workshop. These individual pieces are encompassed in the 55-minute broadcast found in the audio section above. The pieces are woven from students’ creative writing and their interviews with *Between Two Worlds* exhibit artists. The GoC installation consisted of an iPad “jukebox” with a touch screen. Visitors selected an audio piece by touching an image of artwork by the artist who was interviewed.



[Dacien Villa interviews Navajo weaver Steiner Cody.](#)

[Gabriel Martinez interviews young Mexican American poet Mildred Rodriguez.](#)

[Sean Martinez interviews Mexican papel picado artist, Catalina Delgado Trunk.](#)

[Philip Talachy interviews New Mexico Hispanic woodcarver, Luis Tapia.](#)

[Kelvin Lopez interviews Tibetan Thangka painter, Lama Gyurme.](#)

[Jacob Tafoya and Nigerian/Yoruba Indigo dye artist, Gasali Adeyemo.](#)

About the photo: *Between Two Worlds* Listening Event in the GoC. Katy Gross of YMP is at far left, Tara Trudell of YMP at far right.

Photo by Laura Marcus Green. Courtesy of the Museum of International Folk Art.

Project Outcomes

At the *Between Two Worlds* listening event, the sense of accomplishment among participants, their families, and ¡YouthWorks! staff was palpable. The opportunity to hear students’ brave and candid voices was among the project’s most rewarding outcomes. At the culminating listening event, there was a sense of wonder, as all the pieces came together. Beyond this crowning moment, the collaboration yielded a number of other positive outcomes.

~ The project resulted in new materials for the *Between Two Worlds* exhibition, augmenting its community-generated components. The listening station installed in the GoC added an aural dimension to the exhibition, allowing visitors to hear the artists’ voices and deepen their experience of the artwork. Further, the audio pieces contributed perspectives from local youth on the themes of belonging and living between worlds.

~ The workshop and listening event brought first-time visitors to MOIFA, broadening and diversifying the museum’s audience.

~ The project generated content for YMP’s *Audio Revolution!* program, as well as individual audio pieces that can be used for advocacy and awareness of immigration issues and as a springboard for discussion.

~ The public listening event brought together diverse community members to honor students' accomplishments and hear their audio pieces before they aired on the radio. ¡YouthWorks! staff reported learning new things about their students through hearing their audio pieces and presentations.

~ Youth acquired hands-on skills such as designing and conducting interviews, library research techniques, and the use of audio recording and editing equipment. They also bolstered their experience and confidence in writing and public speaking. The project provided a unique avenue for exploring complex emotions through creative self-expression. Further, by turning an ethnographic lens on their own lives, they sharpened their analytical skills, often finding new insight into their culture and community and their relationships with others. The development of these skills and participants' exposure to new experiences fulfilled the ¡YouthWorks! mission to "inspire youth to realize their full potential."

~ The project provided GoC staff opportunities for deepening engagement with local exhibit artists and strengthening relationships with community partners. The artists enjoyed interacting with students and contributing to their projects. In most cases, students visited artists in their homes, which was often a new cultural experience. For ¡YouthWorks! students, many of whom are overcoming adverse situations or life choices, the experience of being welcomed and respected in the artists' homes boosted confidence.

~ The collaboration resulted in a replicable project model and curriculum through which museum and media professionals, folklorists, educators, students, artists, and others can channel the power of folk and traditional arts and the media to illuminate contemporary issues, offer a platform for conversations about difficult topics, and provide a tool for outreach and advocacy around immigration and a host of other issues.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

It is satisfying to look back on a successful collaboration and recognize positive outcomes. However, the journey often includes some unexpected twists and turns that must be navigated. The GoC-YMP-¡YouthWorks! collaboration was no exception. This is the nature of collaborative, community-based work, where partners' differing needs and agendas can sometimes collide.

Timing: Making It Work

In the *Between Two Worlds* collaboration, timing became one of the project's primary issues and challenges. Disjuncture between the ¡YouthWorks! annual cycle, YMP's funding period, and GoC's programming and installation schedule led to a modification in the project design. Invariably, this project model and curriculum need to be tailored to every situation to some extent; however, this particular version became especially labor intensive and time consuming.

Ultimately, rather than hold two full three-month workshops as initially planned, project staff transformed the second session into a four-week spoken word poetry residency with Albuquerque's inaugural Poet Laureate, Hakim Bellamy. Bellamy customized the workshop to *Between Two Worlds* themes, including a session held in the GoC. There, students wrote ekphrastic poetry based on an artwork or interactive of their choice.³ This spontaneously designed workshop was possible in large part because of the trust and ease developed with ¡YouthWorks! staff and students during the first phase of collaboration. Some students who had declined to participate in the first workshop, motivated by classmates' experience, eagerly took part in the poetry residency.

The poetry workshop resulted in a second *Audio Revolution!* radio broadcast, *Between Two Worlds Through Poetry*, as well as a chapbook that came into the GoC exhibition. Students and their instructor—who took the workshop as well—performed their poetry in a community arts showcase, satisfying the need for a public program. In preparation for the event, Bellamy devoted one residency session to performance boot camp, strengthening students’ competency in spoken word poetry, an art form in which some were already engaged. The performance offered another opportunity for students’ voices to ring out in the halls of a state museum, for new audiences to come to Santa Fe’s Museum Hill, and for traditional arts to engage audiences around a contemporary issue relevant to all.

Beyond these outcomes, there was a ripple effect. The relationships built through this impromptu “deviation” from the project design resulted in Bellamy’s invitation to be keynote speaker at ¡YouthWorks! graduation ceremony that year. New collaborations developed between Bellamy and the GoC, between the GoC and YMP, and between YMP and ¡YouthWorks!

Staying Nimble, Finding the Sweet Spot

In general, the prototyping approach to exhibit design diverges from a state museum’s typical operations. Organic, nimble community engagement can go head to head with predetermined deadlines and schedules and anticipated outcomes. The very thing that makes this approach so exciting and rewarding—its emergent, unpredictable nature—can also make for challenging moments. Working with community partners in general, and at-risk youth in particular, entails a certain amount of readiness to field unexpected situations. In the *Between Two Worlds* collaboration, student attendance sometimes presented a challenge. Even as engaged as they were with the workshop, students understandably had other commitments competing for time and attention, including work and educational responsibilities, family obligations, and various life issues.

Further, although ¡YouthWorks! staff provided transportation between their home base and the workshop site, students did not always have the means to travel to ¡YouthWorks! from their homes, some of which were in rural areas outside Santa Fe. Students’ occasionally inconsistent attendance inevitably led to delays. Relying on student-generated content for deadline-driven exhibition installations and audio production sometimes stretched project timelines and staff.

Another challenge was that some participants’ audio pieces were longer than anticipated. The audio segments were interwoven from students’ creative writing and their interviews with local *Between Two Worlds* exhibit artists. Each individual piece was painstakingly edited by participants and project staff. These pieces were anticipated for installation in a listening station in the GoC, as part of the *Between Two Worlds* exhibition. They were also destined to be stitched together with a hosting script developed by participants to comprise a 55-minute edition of the YMP radio program *Audio Revolution!*

As it became clear during the editing phase of production that some pieces erred on the long side, project staff decided to prioritize the integrity of students’ self-expression over prearranged formats. For YMP staff, this meant shortening the hosting script to accommodate the required program format. In the GoC, the listening station consisted of an iPad with a touch screen that had icons of exhibition artwork for each corresponding audio segment. Thus, visitors could sample as many audio pieces as they desired. With the benefit of comfortable chairs and headphones, visitors seemed to take time to listen to the audio pieces, the longest of which ran eight minutes. When such issues arise, a “make-it-work” attitude among all project staff helps resolve these situations. In the end, invoking flexibility and mutual understanding toward finding workable solutions is well worth the effort.

Ethnography Meets Journalism: The Synergy of Compromise

From the outset of the pilot GoC-YMP collaboration, there seemed to be a natural fit between the two partners. Both channel the shared methodologies of working with recorded interviews, photography, and interpretive, creative writing as a springboard for programs that address difficult topics, with a goal of positive social change.

Yet during the pilot collaboration, the length of students' interviews created some tension rooted in professional differences. Working from an ethnographic model and trying to reap the maximum benefit from the student-artist encounters, I considered an interview that lasted an hour or so to be "normal." This timeframe allowed for students to find their stride and the interview to "go deep." Grounded in journalism and the need to produce a radio program, YMP staff balked at interviews longer than 20 or 30 minutes. The longer interviews that I facilitated prolonged the process of logging sound files for students and project staff. These longer interviews also made for more editing and decision making, as first-time interviewers waded through their audio logs. For the second collaboration, we reached an agreement that interviews would be limited to 30 minutes or less. This timeframe proved adequate for students to get a taste of the interview process and obtain material for their media pieces, while upholding the project's integrity.

Each challenge provided opportunities for self-assessment, growth, improving the project model, and strengthening partner relationships. The project's success was clear in the level of participants' engagement with the workshop themes, with each other, with the artists and their work, and with the process, despite its challenges. The training in media literacy and folkloristic inquiry gave participants new lenses through which to interpret their lives, cultures, and communities, along with a multifaceted perspective on issues close to home.

The curriculum was designed to empower participants, as they selected the art pieces and artists on which to focus, crafted interview questions, and conducted interviews. Participants were clearly nervous going into their interviews with the artists, but during the process relaxed and focused on the task at hand. One participant following his interview said, "I feel . . . accomplished." Participants' excitement and sense of achievement fueled their commitment to the hard work of logging and editing the audio recordings, editing their writing, and weaving together the content for their audio pieces. Ultimately, all project participants, including students and staff, would agree that the journey and the final outcome were well worth the sweat and tears.

¡YouthWorks!
student Gabriel
Martinez engineers
for an interview with
Tibetan *Thangka*
painter Lama
Gyurme and explores
Lama Gyurme's
meditation room,
including his
paintings and altar.
Following this visit,
students reported
feeling "peaceful."



Photos by Laura Marcus Green. Courtesy of the Museum of International Folk Art.

Acknowledgements

Support for the *Let's Talk About This: Folk Artists Respond to HIV/AIDS* and *Between Two Worlds* project was provided by the National Endowment for the Arts, Mark Naylor and Dale Gunn, the International Folk Art Alliance, the International Folk Art Foundation, the Museum of New Mexico Foundation, and the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience.

During the *Between Two Worlds* project, the GoC team consisted of three MOIFA staff, including Outreach Educator Patricia Sigala, Exhibition Preparator Brian Johnson-French, and Curator of Textiles and Dress Carrie Hertz. Outside team members included Director Suzanne Seriff, Prototyping Consultant Kathy McLean, and Community Engagement Coordinator Laura Marcus Green. MOIFA Librarian and Archivist Caroline Dechert helped youth participants research their topics. YMP staff were steadfast allies, including Katy Gross, Tara Trudell, Mi'Jan Celie Tho-Biaz, Luke Carr, and interns Nick Beckman, Austin Ross, Ash Haywood, and Yesenia Ramos. Big thanks go to YMP founder and former Director Judy Goldberg for helping forge the pilot GoC-YMP collaboration. ¡YouthWorks! staff included Melynn Schuyler, Michael Santillanes, José Smith, and Jay Hennicke; student participants were Sean Martinez, Dacien Villa, Kelvin Lopez, Gabriel Martinez, Philip Talachy, and Jacob Tafoya.

The artists engaged with the exhibition *Between Two Worlds: Folk Artists Reflect on the Immigrant Experience* generously shared their time and stories and welcomed participants into their homes. Thanks to Gasali Adeyemo, Steiner Cody, Catalina Delgado-Trunk, Lama Gyurme, Mildred Rodriguez, and Luis Tapia. Hakim Bellamy fostered an inspiring and safe haven for youth poets to grow and shine.

Use of the Xhosa (Ngqika) folk song, “Inkulu into ezakwenzeka” (“Something Big Is Going to Happen”) for Tara Trudell’s audio piece featuring Lulama Sihlabeni was provided by the International Library of African Music at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa. Thanks to Director Diane Thram for her assistance. Also featured on that audio segment are the eKasi Singers of South Africa, performing the second rendition of the South African National Anthem.

Laura Marcus Green, PhD is *Folklife and Traditional Arts Program Director at the University of South Carolina's McKissick Museum and at the South Carolina Arts Commission. Previous positions include Community Engagement Coordinator for the Museum of International Folk Art's Gallery of Conscience and contract fieldworker, writer, and consultant for the Louisiana Division of the Arts Folklife Program, the Iowa Arts Council, and the Idaho Commission on the Arts. With Amy E. Skillman, she is co-founder and co-director of Building Cultural Bridges, a national interdisciplinary project merging the arts and social services in support of refugee and immigrant heritage.*

Katy Gross is a photographer, educator, and multimedia producer. She currently works with Littlelobe as director of its fellowship program and as a team member. Born and raised in Santa Fe, she is happy to be living and working in her native community. She holds an MA in arts education from NYU and a BA from Brown University in International Development Studies. Her passion is documentary storytelling, and she has honed her skills at the Salt Institute for Documentary Studies and the former College of Santa Fe.

Tara Evonne Trudell studied film, audio, and photography at New Mexico Highlands University. She graduated with her BFA in Media Arts. As a poet and artist raising four children, it has become her purpose to represent humanity, compassion, and action in all her work. Incorporating poetry with visuals, she addresses the many troubling issues that are ongoing in society and hopes that her work will create an emotional impact that inspires others to act.

Endnotes

1. See the 2015 issue of the *Journal of Folklore and Education* (v. 2) for an article by YMP founder, Judy Goldberg. [www.locallearningnetwork.org] Since the time of the 2013-2015 collaborations between YMP and the GoC, YMP has merged with another Santa Fe-based community arts organization, Littlelobe.

2 For the purposes of this article, “Hispanic” is the term most commonly preferred and used by descendants of Spanish colonists who settled in northern New Mexico and southern Colorado’s San Luis Valley beginning in the late 16th century. The culture that has developed over generations is unique to this area. In contrast, “Latino” refers to first-generation immigrants and their descendants from Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, and other countries, who have more recently made northern New Mexico their home.

3. Ekphrastic poetry is composed in response to visual imagery, most commonly, art.

Learning Application: Tips for Adapting a Collaborative Curriculum in Classrooms or Museums

Project Resources

Forge partnerships among organizations that collectively provide access to the following key project resources:

Project staff with

- ~ Expertise in folklore and heritage documentation, interpretation, and production
- ~ Connections to local traditional artists, especially those who are immigrants or refugees
- ~ Expertise in digital storytelling, media literacy, and audio production

Community partner organization that can

- ~ Provide consistent access to 6 to 15 youth
- ~ Be a liaison and means of communication with participants outside the workshop

Also:

- ~ Meeting or classroom space
- ~ Transportation
- ~ Computers and audio editing software
- ~ Recording equipment and studio
- ~ Public venue for listening event, if applicable
- ~ Relationship with local public or community radio stations, if applicable

Most states have a state folklorist and/or arts council staff who can help connect you with appropriate traditional artists in your area. If you are not familiar with the folklorist in your state, here is a place to start: www.afsnet.org/?page=USPubFolklore .

And snacks or meals are highly recommended to fuel youth participants!

Logistics

- ~ Ideally, project participants meet twice weekly to maintain students' engagement and fluency with the project, especially at the beginning phases.
- ~ Customize the curriculum to the participants, available resources, capacity of project participants, as well as the community context.
- ~ Consider piloting the project model as a way of customizing the curriculum to the resources at hand in your community, as a baseline for developing future workshops.
- ~ Be sure from the outset that all participants (including staff, students, artists, and any other project personnel) are clear about their roles, the project timeline, and outcomes.
- ~ Build trust with and among participants by establishing mutually agreed-upon ground rules at one of the first sessions (see Sample Agreements document in online curriculum). Incorporate trust-building exercises into session icebreakers and closing activities.
- ~ Model and take part in exercises with students, for example, during icebreakers, check-ins, or reflections. This builds trust and elicits more thoughtful work from students.

And don't forget... Maintain flexibility, patience, and a sense of humor, as the unexpected inevitably arises! In collaborations among multiple partners, there needs to be give and take to accommodate each organization's mission, goals, operations, and timeline. As in any collaboration, be prepared to work outside your "normal" way of doing things, or even your comfort zone. Creativity and openness to new ways of working can forge strong relationships and exciting new directions.

Learning Application: Collaborative Curriculum Introductory Lesson Plan

WEEK 1 Introduction—Laying the Groundwork

SNAPSHOT Students get an overview of the project, including the types of activities in which they will engage and project outcomes; students become familiar with participant organizations and project staff. This session may be used as a “pitch” to engage or recruit students, as well as an intro to the project.

OBJECTIVES / INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES Students will ...

- Practice telling their own stories
- Practice and reflect on the art of listening and telling the story of another
- Begin to explore audio and radio as a medium for digital storytelling

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How do I tell my own story? How does it feel to share my story with someone else?
- What makes for effective listening? How do I tell someone else’s story?
- What are the ingredients of an effective audio story? What details bring a story to life?

TIMEFRAME

1.5 hours (includes a 10-minute break between the Two-Minute Life Story & Listening Exercises)

PREPARATION-MATERIALS

1. Laptop or other device and speakers for playing audio
2. Timer for story-sharing exercises

Between Two Worlds Resources

1. “Fatherhood” by Andrew Mata: <https://beta.prx.org/stories/92007>
2. “Stand My Ground” by Tara Trudell: <https://beta.prx.org/stories/103786>

Vocabulary

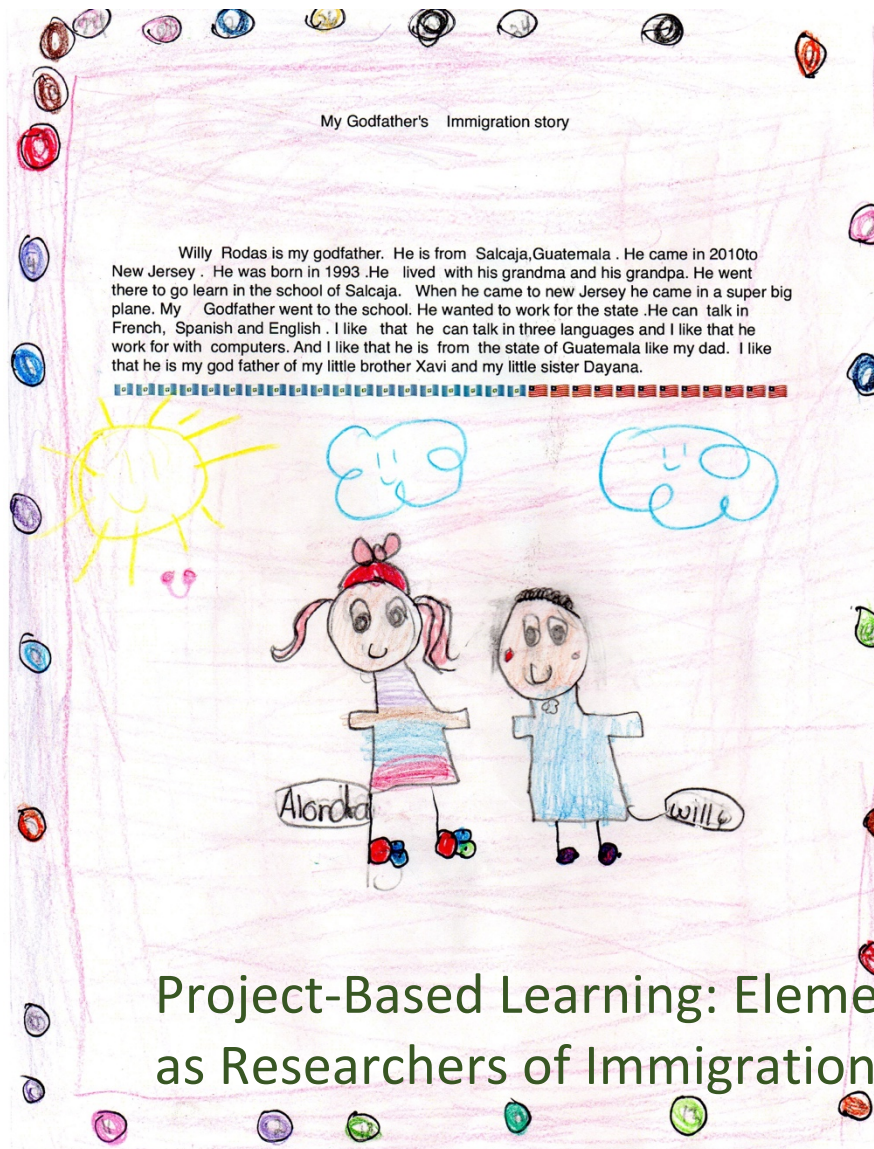
1. Folk & traditional arts
2. Digital storytelling
3. The art of listening

INTRODUCTION & ICE BREAKER

- Facilitators share a brief anecdote about how they got into their line of work (10 minutes)
- Introduction to participating organizations; this can include film, PowerPoint, etc. (20 minutes)
- Two-Minute Life Story Exercise: see instructions below.

INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES

1. **Two-Minute Life Story** (5 minutes) In pairs, students give life story to one another in two minutes; the listener takes no notes, asks no questions during the partner’s life story. Instruct the speaker: tell who you are. The story can be presented any way the teller wants—whole life, particular incident or event, all the places you’ve been, etc. This exercise offers practice in the art of listening. What goes into listening? What’s important to do while you’re listening? Elicit responses; can include: eye contact, focus, actively listening to another. Switch roles and repeat after two minutes.
2. After students have shared their stories, they reconvene back into the whole group. Each student has one minute to share his/her partner’s story with the whole group.
3. **Debrief on Two-Minute Life-Story Exercise** (10 minutes) facilitators ask group: how did that feel? What was hard or challenging about this exercise? How did it feel to have someone else tell your story? How did it feel to listen without taking notes or asking questions? What was easy? What was hard or easy to remember about the other person’s story? (details, dates, places . . . make it interesting.) Have students explain their answers to these questions. This *Between Two Worlds* program is a chance to help you tell your story.
4. **Listening Exercises** (20 minutes) As a group, students listen to “Fatherhood” audio piece (7 minutes) and “Stand My Ground” (2:25 minutes). After listening to each piece, facilitate separate discussions about each piece: What did you think about this piece? What stood out to you? Discuss radio or audio as a medium to relate visual details, imagery, as elements of a good story. How can you create imagery through audio? (Create pictures with words.)
5. **Looking ahead** (5 minutes) What we’ll be doing in the coming weeks. Visiting a museum or looking at folk art. Creative writing. Learning to use recording equipment. Interviewing folk artists and creating our own audio pieces, which will be included in a radio broadcast.
6. **Questions** (10 minutes) Invite questions about the program from students.



Project-Based Learning: Elementary Students as Researchers of Immigration Narratives

by Natasha Agrawal

Seeing the *Between Two Worlds* exhibit in Santa Fe at the Museum of International Folk Art inspired me to think about my New Jersey students' journeys to the U.S. As an English as a Second Language (ESL) Teacher at Carroll Robbins Elementary School in Trenton, New Jersey, I wanted to design a curriculum that would inspire my students and meet learning goals for the classroom.

Many young people have traveled through deserts and across oceans to come to Trenton. As an ESL teacher at Robbins School, I am curious about and thankful for each child who walks through my classroom door. What are their experiences like? How do they feel about being immersed in a new culture? What strengths do immigrant children bring and how can teachers empower them to use those strengths?

The more young people who get the opportunity to travel the world, live in other cultures and learn new languages, the more they will begin to understand our shared ideals and the shared opportunities to keep moving this world forward.

~ Michelle Obama¹

With these questions in mind, I began an immigration project with my grade 3 and 4 after-school ESL students. I realized that the children were eager to talk about their experiences and their home countries. To facilitate interaction and collaboration, we began our project with conversations about our home countries and the languages we speak. Speaking and listening are integral domains of language learning. Additionally, the Common Core Anchor Standard 1 for Speaking and Listening defines that students should *prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively*.

Our immigration project concluded with presentations of written narratives as well as oral interviews recorded with iPads. I partnered the students so they could work together to interview each other and create a narrative about each other's immigration experiences. Here are the steps of our project:

Step 1: Brainstorming questions for an interview

What would you like to know about your partner? For ESL students, using the right sentence structure for questions is often difficult. So we began with some easy questions. Where did you come from? Who was with you when you traveled? How did you feel? The children added many more to this list. What colors do you like? What games do you play? Were you afraid? Was your family rich or poor?

Step 2: Using technology

Common Core Speaking and Listening Standard 4 outlines that students should be able to *make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations*. We used iPads to record interviews so our information was oral and visual. It was also easily accessible when the students needed to listen to the interview to clarify information to put into their written narratives.

Step 3: Integrating community

To involve the parents, we invited them to the classroom, asking if they would like to be interviewed by the children. It was a matter of great pride for the students to bring their parents in and have their immigration narratives recorded. The most interesting part was when the parent revealed certain details about their lives and travels, which their own child did not know. For instance, one little girl learned that her mother was a weaver and can speak Quechua. She glowed with pride when other students commented on how smart her mother was to be able to create such beautiful fabric and speak such a difficult language!

Step 4: Involving the school staff

Interestingly, many of our staff members also have fascinating immigration stories to tell. The students interviewed our principal who is from Dominican Republic, our custodian who is from Gambia, and a teacher from India. Between them, they spoke and demonstrated a variety of

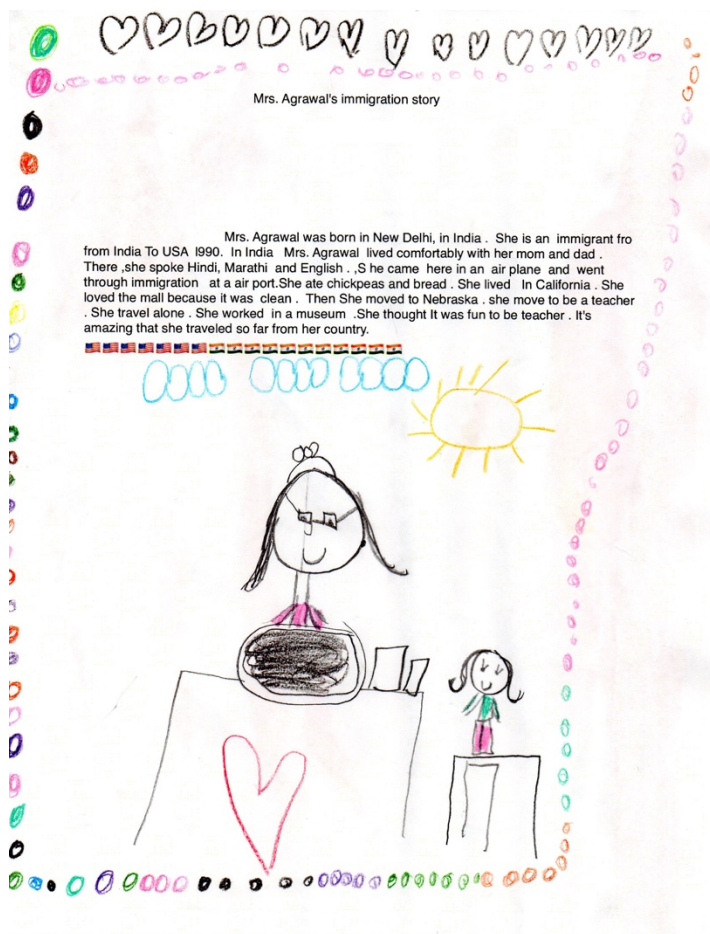
languages. Through the interviews, students learned the names of several different languages, enhancing their understanding of the peoples and tongues all around the world.

Step 5: Written narratives

After all the information had been collected, each student picked one person to write about. According to Common Core Speaking and Listening Standard 3 students should be able to *evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric*. My students returned to the recorded interviews to glean information and type a narrative about a staff member, a parent, or their partner. Giving students a choice to select the immigrant narrative they want to write about enhances decision-making skills and creates accountability.

Step 6: Presentation

Once the narratives were printed out and the illustrations were complete, it was time to present! I instructed students to bring one artifact from their home cultures to add to their presentation. First, the children read aloud their writing about a new culture that they learned about, and then they presented an artifact from their own homes. There was undeniable pride in the students' writing and presentation of their artifacts. From Ecuador, we got a big flag, from Haiti, a book in French. The Guatemalan girls brought handwoven *huipils*, and another little girl wore special shirt with a picture of Our Lady of Guadalupe.



Our immigration project created meaningful dialogue and deepened relationships between students, parents, and staff. Together we learned about traditions, food, and languages from different parts of the globe. It is by investing in similar projects that students will discover “shared ideals and shared opportunities to keep the world moving forward” that Michelle Obama espouses.

Natasha Agrawal has been an ESL teacher in Trenton Public Schools for eight years. She enjoys teaching and learning from children who come to her classroom from all around the world.

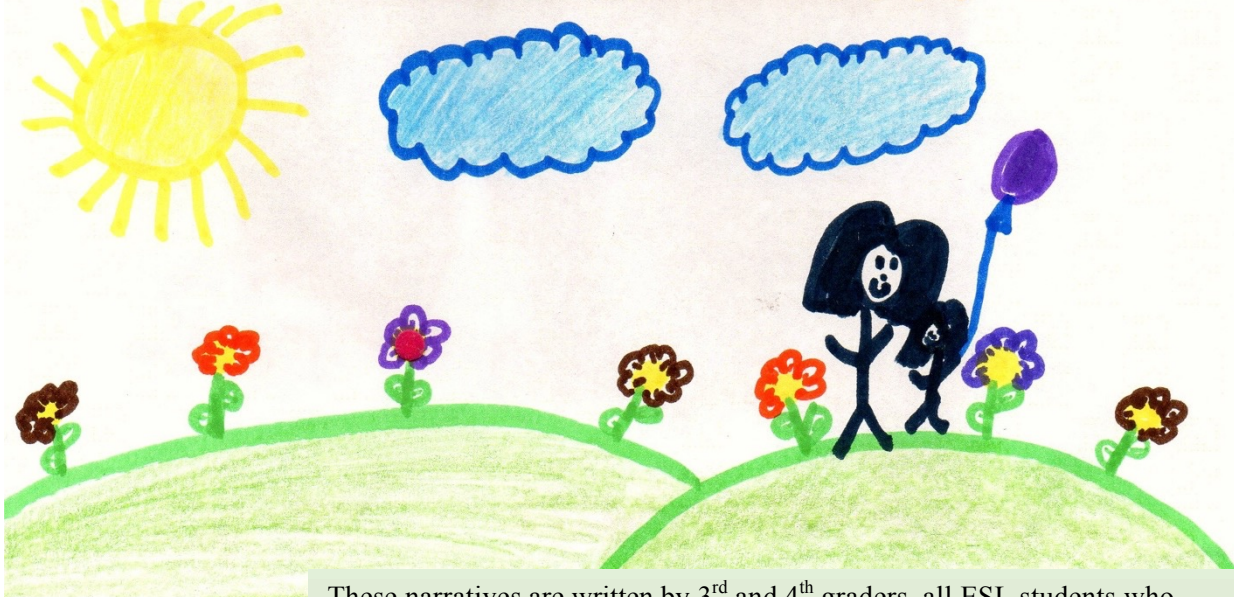
1. Quote from CNN iReport Interview with First Lady Michelle Obama on the value of study abroad experiences. See <http://www.cnn.com/2014/03/25/politics/michelle-obama-study-abroad-interview>

The Best Principal In The World: Bienvenida Gardinet

Beeeeeeeeep! The lunch bell is ringing Mrs. Gardinet stays in her office to do some work and then she rushes to the lunch room. Mrs. Gardinet is my school principal she is nice and kind. Mrs. Gardinet is the best principal in the Carroll Robbins Elementary School.

Mrs. Gardinet came to the United States from the Dominican Republic when she was 15 years old. She was afraid of the plane. Mrs. Gardinet misses the warm weather of Dominican Republic and her family. Mrs. Gardinet came to the United States in August 26, 1988. She was very sad when she left her country and her family but happy to see her dad. Mrs. Gardinet's father was in New York City. Mrs. Gardinet was sad because she was going to leave her friends behind. Mrs. Gardinet was 15 years old when she left her friends behind.

Mrs. Gardinet came to be a principal because she was bilingual. She is a great principal because she is always prepared to do important work. She also respects the other teachers in the school. Mrs. Gardinet treats the students like this are her own kids. She is the best!



These narratives are written by 3rd and 4th graders, all ESL students who are level 2 and 3 (level 6 being native-like fluency).