

# Teaching for Equity

**The Role of Folklore in a  
Time of Crisis and Opportunity**

Selina Morales, Guest Editor

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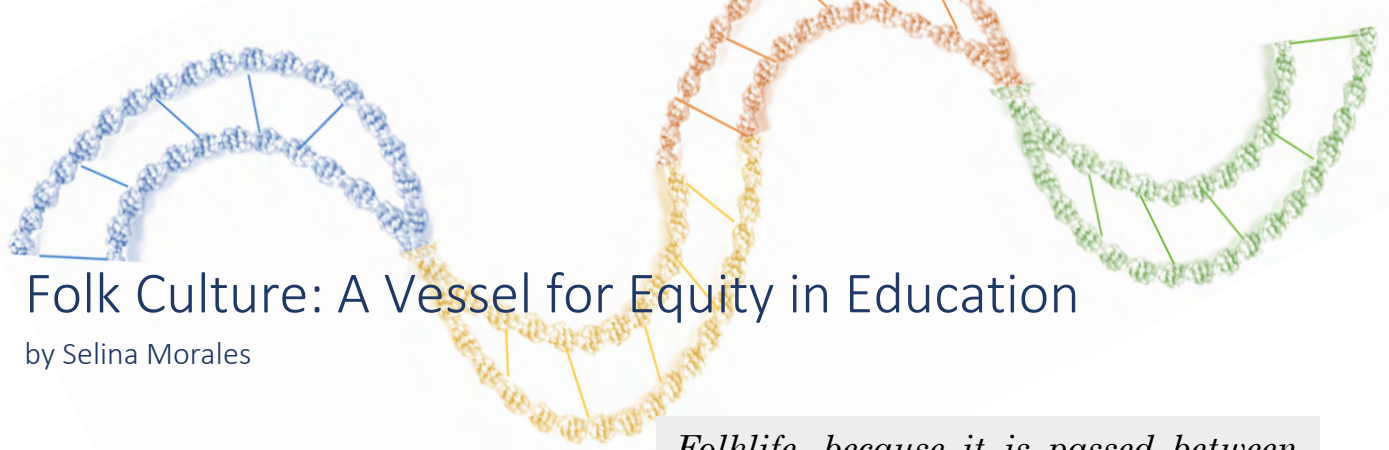
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Selina Morales, Guest Editor ~ 2020: Volume 7

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# Folk Culture: A Vessel for Equity in Education

by Selina Morales

Folklore and folklife<sup>1</sup> are ways that everyday people, in the present, maintain relationships to their past. So much community “DNA” resides in folklife—in community embedded stories, dress, dance, foodways, song, and other cultural expressions. The lessons and flourishes embedded within teach us time-tested ways to be with one another, in community. Folklife can also be visionary, future facing, in that these arts and customs can often depict, foretell, and aspire toward the worlds we want to live in. Staying connected to our community traditions can give us confidence to move into the unknown, and courage to create an equitable future for ourselves and our communities.

*Folklife, because it is passed between people, has an embedded, culturally relevant pedagogy. In addition to holding the DNA of community creativity, these art forms hold critical pedagogical tools for teaching long-valued lessons about beauty, joy, epistemology, ethics, survival skills, leadership styles, community building, visioning the future, and so much more.*

I’ve often been invited as a guest to the annual new teacher orientation at the Folk Arts-Culture Treasures Charter School (FACTS), where I am Chair of the Board of Directors and a parent of two students. I attended these orientation sessions as Director (2015-2019) of one of the school’s founding organizations, the Philadelphia Folklore Project (PFP). During orientation, the founding organizations are tasked with telling the origin story of our school. The Directors of Asian Americans United and PFP retell our story by having the new teachers enact the FACTS Founders Day play, a skit written by FACTS teacher Eric Joselyn. At orientation, it is a fun and whimsical way to hold this origin story as a frame for new teachers.

As a school envisioned and founded by activists and folklorists, ritual is an essential part of building the FACTS school community. For example, every year, on or near March 9, our school community celebrates the day when FACTS won our charter. During that event, students sing together our anthem, “Something Inside So Strong.” It’s our tradition, too, to retell the heroic story of the founding of our school. Using cardboard props and a script steeped in our own mythology, teachers act out the dreaming up of our school and the mobilization of our communities who, in 2005, marched into the Philadelphia School Reform Commission hearing, and, in a moment the kids love to recount, the Commissioners raised their hands and all said yes, yes, yes, the school could open! We all yell, “Hurray, Hurray for Founders Day!” The play is also a future-looking tool, a chance to foster inclusion in the foundational narrative of our school and to ask students, teachers, and staff: How will you steward these dreams? But, I digress.<sup>2</sup>

At that orientation, I’ve often told teachers this: I grew up observing and participating in my own communities’ traditional life and cultural practices. I can attest to the value of these art forms and customs in building my sense of community, inclusion, wellness, leadership, value of my ancestry,

and sense of responsibility to the future. I was raised in New York City among Caribbean immigrants and my culture was all around me: in my home, on my block, in my neighborhood, and in my family's business (we owned a botánica<sup>3</sup>). My grandmother is an *espiritista*<sup>4</sup> healer and spirits were an important part of our family's daily conversation and community. Yet, when my parents drove me to school from the Bronx to the Upper West Side of Manhattan every morning, I knew the spirits, my dreams, and my worldview (my favorite world-making tools) had to stay at home. I was not able to bring my whole self to the classroom. To be honest, I didn't really notice the deficit in my education until much later in life.

As a parent, I want my children to be able to engage their whole selves daily because I know that our home culture has much to offer in building their sense of identity, integrity, and justice. Much of this is my own responsibility. I buy coconuts from the store so they can see me grate them, squeeze milk from their flesh, and tell stories about their supernatural power. I light seven-day candles for peace, clarity, and care, and I ask for their help when I do it. I parent with my culture as a guide. I send my kids to this school because it is a school that respects our home culture and invites our community knowledge into the classroom as a resource. I hope my testimony encouraged our new teachers to view our cultures as resources, treasures, and sources of wisdom.

Folklife, because it is passed between people, has an embedded, culturally relevant pedagogy. In addition to holding the DNA of community creativity, traditional art forms hold critical pedagogical tools for teaching long-valued lessons about beauty, joy, epistemology, ethics, survival skills, leadership styles, community building, visioning the future, and so much more. The tools of listening, observation, and making meaning from context are core to folklife practice and pedagogy.<sup>5</sup>



**How does folklife help us teach equity and teach equitably?** There are many organizations devoted to supporting your journey in teaching for equity, and I invite you to start and continue dialogues with them.<sup>6</sup> These introductory thoughts consider the practice and teaching of folklife as they relate and advance principles of equity. Within, I also offer questions about practice that can serve as frames for reading the articles in this special journal issue, Teaching for Equity: The Role of Folklore in a Time of Crisis and Opportunity.

As I have worked with the articles that authors from around the nation shared about their practices and intentions for Teaching Equity, I was reminded of the significant statement on equity published by the national research and action institute [PolicyLink](#) in 2015. Written as “The Equity Manifesto,” it offers the following seven points to define and activate the meaning of “equity,” two of which I emphasize below and will examine further:

#### The Equity Manifesto

- **It begins by joining together, believing in the potency of inclusion, and building from a common bond.**
- It embraces complexity as cause for collaboration, accepting that our fates are inextricable.

- **It recognizes local leaders as national leaders, nurturing the wisdom and creativity within every community as essential to solving the nation's problems.**
- It demands honesty and forthrightness, calling out racism and oppression, both overt and systemic.
- It strives for the power to realize our goals while summoning the grace to sustain them.
- It requires that we understand the past, without being trapped in it; embrace the present, without being constrained by it; and look to the future, guided by the hopes and courage of those who have fought before and beside us.
- This is equity: just and fair inclusion into a society in which all can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential. Unlocking the promise of the nation by unleashing the promise in us all.

While this entire Equity Manifesto merits inquiry, action, and evaluation in any of our daily encounters with others, I want to focus on the two highlighted points as we consider folklife and community-based culture and our learning spaces for all ages. As we walk through these equity practices named by PolicyLink, I invite readers to hold on to this question: How does the culture of my learning space measure up to the processes named in the Equity Manifesto?

### Community and Inclusion

- *[Equity] begins by joining together, believing in the potency of inclusion, and building from a common bond.*

Folklife comes out of and reinforces common bonds between and among community members. Engaging folklife as a teaching resource in our classrooms brings the lived experiences and brilliance of community knowledge to the front. It is also a way of teaching and reminding students of the value of the beautiful, meaningful things we do together in community. Activating traditional culture through K-elder curriculum reinforces this critical equity-building action.

Consider, as one example, call-and-response techniques of traditional storytellers around the world. “Ago?” *Are you listening?* “Ame.” *I am here and listening.* “Krik?” *Are you listening?* “Krak.” *I am here and listening.* These traditional story frames transform people into community, into tellers and listeners, they join people together for a purpose and are inclusive. What call-and-response frames are used in your education spaces? What call-and-response frames do your students use in their classrooms, in their homes, on their blocks, in their community spaces (playgrounds, religious organizations, after-school programs, and others)?

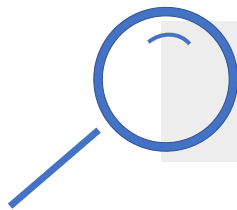
- Might you use this or other folklife forms to establish your learning community?
- Might you plan a lesson in which students explore the everyday acts of inclusion in their communities and the role of these folklife activities in building healthy communities?<sup>7</sup>



Consider, too, that school classrooms, community centers, and museums have their own culture. These learning spaces are important parts of communities.

- What characterizes your classroom culture?
- What ways do you actively build community in your classroom?
- How might your students' home-based cultural practices be honored and shared as part of building and fortifying an equity-centered classroom culture?

Like building equity, building community is an active process. Reinforce this equity-centered principle by creating a learning space where students practice building community and the powers of home communities are valued.



**Not sure where to start? Read the articles in this volume and consider:** What ways does this author (do these authors) engage with folklife to join together, include, and bond to advance equity in learning spaces?

### Learning from Local Leaders

- *[Equity] recognizes local leaders as national leaders, nurturing the wisdom and creativity within every community as essential to solving the nation's problems.*

The wisdom and creativity in community offer another way of defining folk cultural knowledge. For all time, including now, leaders have used local creativity to address societies' issues.

This is an invitation to study community leadership, community-identified leaders like parents and grandparents, block captains, bodega owners, clergy, storytellers, musicians, dancers, teachers, makers, as well as local politicians, to see what wisdom and creativity they nurture. Why do they tend this knowledge, what wisdom does it hold for all of us? How can we consider what we value in our community as lessons for addressing national problems such as racism?

The website CultureTools.org, created by Asian Americans United, the Philadelphia Folklore Project, and FACTS, explores how local leaders use community folklife and traditions to combat systemic oppression. Geared toward K-8 teachers, the site links the importance of knowing one's elders, and honoring their work, with the development of leadership skills. [Click here](#) for folklife-



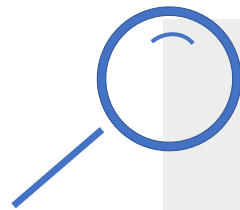
### Local Leader Ira Bond

Below, learn from Ira about his teaching practice from a recent conversation with Selina Morales.

About the photo: Self-portrait by Ira Bond.

centered prompts for developing K-elder worksheets and lessons focused on naming and recognizing the work of local leaders.

Whether you're restructuring leadership at a large museum or creating a lesson plan for your 1<sup>st</sup> grade classroom, an equity-centered practice engages with community creativity and wisdom and uplifts the ways that local leaders bring equity forward into their leadership. The practice centers and values local learning, shifting harmful, hierarchical, white supremacist power structures that overlook the potential of local people and the value of their cultural expressions.



**Not sure where to start? Read the articles in this volume and consider:**

How do local leaders nurture community wisdom and creativity in these examples?

How do these examples of leadership and folklife practice offer manners of uprooting systemic oppression such as racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression?



I've watched the FACTS Founders Day play for ten years, often wondering how this pedagogy centered on social justice and equity actually affects the students. In mid-November 2016, I was feeling afraid and unmoored by the elections. I remember that I decided to light a candle to try to ground myself. Because my Kindergartener was in the room, I asked him to join me. I told him I was lighting a candle because I was looking for peace in my community and in myself. I asked him, "What do you need?" Without missing a beat he said, "I need a fair and peaceful world." I immediately recognized this as a line from the FACTS pledge: "We work to build a fair and peaceful world." We lit the candle. I was choking back tears. Here is how these teaching moments are actually affecting the world.

How will we measure equity? We won't. We must work toward it diligently and come back to processes like those named by PolicyLink or others and develop for ourselves questions that help us deepen our practice. We must commit, in the world-building profession of teaching, to the hard and essential work of centering equity in our practice. Folklife is all around us, and it is one powerful, dynamic and multidimensional tool we can use to teach toward equity.



**Interview with a Local Leader: Ira L. Bond**

*When Philadelphia-based musician and teaching artist Ira Bond pours libation at the opening of an African dance and drum performance or in a school, he recalls the ancestors who came before him and brings their teachings into the future. This act of local leadership teaches how to honor your ancestors and the importance of the past in our lives. It also re-forges a cultural connection and heritage that was interrupted by the transatlantic slave trade. Let's learn from Ira about his teaching practice.*

**Selina Morales:** Would you introduce yourself?

**Ira Bond:** I'm Ira Bond and foremost I'm an educator. There are two areas where I consider myself an educational leader. The first is in schools, where I work with youth and educators to develop leadership skills and knowledge of their selves. I also lead through my involvement with community arts education practice, currently through my organization Malidelphia and as a lead percussionist with Kulu Mele African Dance and Drum Ensemble.

**Selina:** Ira, thanks for agreeing to talk with me about your work as an educator and a leader in Philadelphia. From knowing and working alongside you for a decade, I know you are passionate about working toward equity in your classrooms and that you see folklore as an important way to teach equity. Can you tell me about what grounds your practice?

**Ira:** Sankofa, learning from the past to build your future, is at the center of my artistic and teaching practice. Traditional arts, folklore, and, for me, music, are ways to unify people. The idea is that through tradition and folklore (which in my opinion is an image of tradition, a way we enact it) we can learn about who we are. The idea of Sankofa is to learn from the past and use the knowledge to empower your now and your future. This idea comes to me from Ghana, West Africa. It is a large concept, and it is what fuels my arts and community education practice.

**Selina:** Can you describe for me a way that you show up as a leader that draws on community knowledge and creativity?

**Ira:** I talked about Sankofa, I want to talk about today from yesterday. If we isolate ourselves

### **Sankofa**

The concept of Sankofa is aligned directly with the sixth point of the Equity Manifesto above: *[Equity] requires that we understand the past, without being trapped in it; embrace the present, without being constrained by it; and look to the future, guided by the hopes and courage of those who have fought before and beside us.*

How can we apply this powerful concept from teaching traditions in our learning spaces?

libation as a way that we can learn about without knowledge of the past, we risk living without a real understanding of what is unfolding around us. One main purpose of performing libation is that it reminds us to acknowledge our past. Consider a monument, these public statues depict a story from our past and keep it visible/audible our present, whether true or false.

When I pour libation, I ask permission of the elders, they are the wisest, according to African traditions, because they have been on the earth the longest. Next, I acknowledge the source of life, the Creator. I then talk about *Maafa* (introduced by Marimba Ani's 1988 book *Let the Circle Be Unbroken: The Implications of African Spirituality in the Diaspora*), which is also named as the African Holocaust, Holocaust of Enslavement, or Black Holocaust to describe the history and ongoing effects of atrocities inflicted on African people. In the *Maafa*, I talk about the attempted destruction of people of color and people who aided in the saving of people of color, so it is not just learning about the work of enslavers but learning the story of people who fought for freedom. I talk about civil rights leaders and emancipators who fought and died for civil liberties, humanity, human rights. If I were to be at a school doing a libation, I'd call on our collective academic

understanding of who these people are and consider how their scholarship might fuel our own competencies. If I'm in a community setting, I might talk about how these energies might help guide our steps to freedom, justice or healing. Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X, Ida B. Wells, Frederick Douglass, Maya Angelou: We can talk about hundreds of folks. You have to do your research to find out who these people are and what was their contribution to liberation for your own internalization.

From that point in the libation, I pour libation to your family. I pose the questions: Who are the people in your family that if it weren't for them you would not be here today? Whose contributions to your life helped to dictate, shape, or contribute to your identity? On whose shoulders do you stand? Some of my students don't know who their grandparents are nor their great aunts and uncles. I teach them to ask about their people. I also teach them to learn about the people who are around them. I tell young people, "Maybe you find out things you don't like. You can think about what you don't want to embody. You can be a best version of you."

From there we think about an affirmation for the people who are living and who are around us, people in our churches, on our block, in our lives. Together we think about our future, pour affirmation to our children's children. Our hopes are that our future is better than our present and past.

By going through this libation protocol you follow the track of Sankofa.

**Selina:** You work in school settings and in community settings, you mentioned drawing on academic or spiritual connection in each context. Are there other differences in your community and school practices?

**Ira:** When I talk about libation and spirituality in school, I have to be careful to honor and respect that people have different belief systems. Libation is a nonreligious ritual that can be made religious if you are in a community context. For example, I have seen libation poured in church in conjunction with prayers. If you are pouring libation, the protocol is that you ask permission from the elders to begin, then pour water into a plant and call on the Creator. That can be problematic in a public school because some people don't believe in a creator. In a school setting we might say "source of life," whereas in the community we can talk about Olodumare or Jesus or just be more open about putting our own beliefs out there.

**Selina:** How does this example of pouring libation at the start of a ritual, a performance, or a school day connect to larger issues in our country, like systemic racism or others?

**Ira:** We fight by remembering. We learn truth and dismantle lies that teach us how to move today. This concept is about how you use these practices to make good decisions about who you are now. Apart from the fact that folklife is beautiful, it also builds character, strength, and resiliency. That is what makes it a good tool for education. This is all a part of the idea about learning who you are. For me, as an African American educator, I have seen that many of my African American students believe our historical context begins with enslavement. This makes an indentation in their self-esteem. This is major work that I do as a leader for liberation, using folklife to lift them up by helping them know where they've been and where they are going. Folklife and ritual help build



communities and the fight for justice now. It is my hope that someone will continue the tradition and pour libation for me one day, and that our communities will be stronger because of it.

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***Selina Morales** is a Philadelphia-based public folklorist who consults nationally with a focus on urban folklore, particularly the intersection of community aesthetics and social justice. She is the Board Chair of the Folk Arts-Cultural Treasures Charter School and a mom. She has an MA in Folklore from Indiana University, Bloomington.*

***Ira L. Bond** (Ibrahim Diabate) is a master teaching artist and African Masquerade professional. He has been a cultural enrichment specialist for 30 years. He has a principal certification and an MEd in Multicultural Education from Eastern University. He has an honorary degree in Malian Cultural Arts from Antioch University and the National Dance and Drum Ensemble of Mali. Currently he is the lead percussionist for Kulu Mele African Dance Company, a member of Dunya Performing Arts, and the founder of Malidelphia Performing Arts.*

#### URLs

<https://www.policylink.org>

<http://www.culturetools.org>

[http://www.culturetools.org/people/dorothy\\_wilkie.html](http://www.culturetools.org/people/dorothy_wilkie.html)

#### Endnotes

1. Folklife is defined by the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress as “the everyday and intimate creativity that all of us share and pass on to the next generation” <https://www.loc.gov/folklife/edresources/ed-gettingstarted.html>.
2. See <http://www.folkloreproject.org/sites/default/files/issues/summer14.pdf>, pages 16-17, for an article about the Founders Day Celebration at FACTS.
3. Botánicas are stores that sell ritual merchandise necessary for practicing a variety of traditional Latin American healing and belief systems. From love potions, lucky pennies, and statues of Catholic saints to fresh herbs and spiritual consultations, a botánica offers an alternative health resource to its community.
4. *Espiritismo*, as a belief system with doctrine and rules, has been defined in books. However, in my lifetime of participating in communities of “practitioners” and my 18 years of formally interviewing individuals about their practices, I have yet to meet a person who relies on a formal definition or doctrine when describing what this belief system entails. Here is what my grandmother explains: *Espiritistas*, or people who practice *espiritismo*, share the belief that metaphysical spirits influence people’s lives. The human body is a vehicle or vessel for these spirits or souls. When a person dies, their spirit is released back into the spirit realm and, likely, reborn. My grandmother says, “We are souls more than anything,” and uses Catholicism’s guardian angels to exemplify the place that spirits have in the world.
5. For a discussion of ways of bringing folklife in school settings see <https://www.locallearningnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/Deafenbaugh.pdf>.
6. <https://www.locallearningnetwork.org>, <https://embracingequity.org/mission-and-vision>, <https://www.tolerance.org>
7. For example, threshold traditions offer a concrete form for exploring how rites of passage help practitioners make a transition between two states, such as secular to sacred, outside to inside, child to adult, and so on. (Learn more with [Rangoli: Traditions of the Threshold](#), by Amanda Dargan.)



## We Are All Essential: Is the Heart the Last Frontier?

by Madaha Kinsey-Lamb

It's been months of reflection and of emotional stops and starts, as I worked for a path and vision of bigger answers to come through this article. I reviewed my favorite lessons, absorbed the daily news, stoked my Black Nationalist embers, and remembered to breathe deeply into surprising moments of incongruous light and gratitude. Reliably unpredictable, hope would rise up huge as our amazing team at Mind-Builders Creative Arts Center solidified a new project's promising curriculum. Just as suddenly, I'd be silenced midstream by a sob or shout that I gulped down before its escape during an update to our Board of Directors regarding the unlawful arrest of one of our students, or while sharing another alarming neighborhood COVID-19 infection statistic through a public Zoom meeting with hundreds of people on the screen in front of me.

I am writing this in The Time of Corona. Across New York, across the country and the world, we have been each of us stunned again and again to hear the names of people we love, know, or felt we knew—from close family members and friends of, to all corners of life and position. We all know people who contracted the virus, were initially turned away from hospitals, died, or survived;

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About the photo: Photographer Stephen Furze is a Mind-Builders alumnus who documented the historic 2020 protests.

or joined their fears and astonishment with ours at the fast pace of upheaval and devastation. In the weeks since the start of this article, however, it has also become The Time of George Floyd—of tears, outrage, tear gas, fires, and marches to quiet feelings of powerlessness. Through the clear objectivity of a 17-year-old girl’s cellphone, the modern-day lynching of George Floyd—yet one more unarmed Black person murdered, this time beneath the smirk and stolid knee of a white cop—is evidence captured once again of the pervasive, often deadly results of the racism that continues to course through our everyday lives in one form or another in this country, as it has for centuries. The new use of “taking a knee”—as the quickly unemployed and “blackballed” NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick did both reverentially and defiantly—may from now on also be a gesture done in memoriam to George Floyd, conjuring a nightmarish flashback to the 8 minutes and 46 seconds of his last gasping attempts at reasoning with a racist killer, and his pleas just to be allowed to breathe. Here was the other pandemic for the world to see again under the microscope of modern technology, persistently brutal and insidious for centuries, now without end, which we as a nation and a planet have not yet been able to shake.

The spotlight moves from the continuing coronavirus health pandemic, which we as a country first thought we all shared equally, to the heroic bravery and activism of everyday folk—Black and white, young and old, gay and straight, here and in other countries—people rising up in solidarity with the legions of George Floyds. This solidarity has fueled protests, empathy, and another compelling movement for justice and “equity” for fellow human beings. A term as equally devoid of feeling or agency as “economic disparities” is born again, with all else that is tied to it and to the impact of systemic racism on everyone.

**In the midst of this reflection, I ask the questions: How might the education of our young people, the “de-brainwashing” of ourselves and of this nation, start to cure the disease of racism and discrimination, unleash historical truths, promote equality, and remedy the tangible and psychological impact on every aspect of our lives?** Scholars like Isabel Wilkerson, author of *The Warmth of Other Suns* (Random House 2010), remind us that this impact has continued for 12 generations. Twelve generations. How do we counter the social, system-wide infections and daily assaults on our children’s self-esteem, safety, and futures so that all youth are free to realize their potential and their dreams; to realize that in their own way and wherever they are, they can change their world; to know that they are more than worthy, they are powerful, capable, and essential? Discussing her book in a June rebroadcast on [National Public Radio’s On Being](#), Wilkerson declared that the heart may be that last frontier that holds the cure.

At age 28 in 1978, I gave birth to Mind-Builders Creative Arts Center in the Northeast Bronx finally and yet suddenly. Answering these questions was the covert agenda. The goals that accompanied the more covert objectives were to transform lives through a “nurturing, challenging, and exciting learning environment” that provides full access to all without regard to household income or lack thereof; to build our children’s self-concepts, self-confidence, and understanding of their cultural legacy, while promoting a vision of themselves as global citizens appreciative of the cultures and differences of others as well; to be a professionally run, family-oriented grassroots organization; to reach those considered “at-risk” who may not have experienced much success in school, alongside honor roll students and those differently abled. Mind-Builders knew that through the special relationships, creative talent, and life skills honed by students working with passionately committed teaching artists, they would gain assets for whatever career they might

ultimately pursue. The motivation came from years of building on that familiar heartbreak, the anger, faith, and privilege; the privilege born of a determination that luckily found itself a home with community, friends, staff, teaching artists, parents, and other supporters equally committed to building “conscious” community institutions as vehicles to help address these questions.

### **About Mind-Builders**

Visitors and annual parent surveys overwhelmingly recognize Mind-Builders for its welcoming and supportive family atmosphere as we meet our mission “...to inspire the growth of youth, families and the community through quality arts and education programs.” Since 1978 Mind-Builders has grown to serve over 700 students annually through close to 200 weekly group classes and private lessons in various musical instruments; several forms of dance, theater, visual arts, martial arts, a full-day Pre-Kindergarten class; and our special community Folk Culture Program’s research, documentation, and presentation programming.

We create a learning environment for our young people, their families, and our community that is nurturing, challenging, and exciting—one that transforms lives with inspiring instructors; an engaging curriculum; and an appreciation of our heritage, creativity, and unlimited potential. Operating out of our own four-story former municipal building, students age three to adult participate in free or subsidized and affordable classes and community or citywide productions. Energetic audiences in the thousands participate and support students, special themes, and artists each year.

I was armed with my degrees from a new wave of educational leadership and experimental strategies for the “Open Classroom” approach to teaching—kin in some ways to the “Living Museum” style of public folk culture presentations that the folklorist Beverly J. Robinson, who became integral to our work, had been igniting. The inspiration of the era—that “Black Is Beautiful” and smart—combined with the blessing of a proud family loudly voicing strong political differences and showing a keen sense of humor while often borrowing from each other to make it to the next payday, taught me that I could accomplish anything and that they would always love and support me as best they could, even when they disagreed with my choices.

I had already dreamed of creating a full-day academic school, a dream reinforced after seeing public schools’ challenges from the inside after teaching in Harlem. But when I couldn’t find high-quality dance and music classes in our Bronx neighborhood for my four-year-old daughter, I ended up testing out the interest of other families in the community. On weekends off from my fulltime job as education director at a new community program, I attended a few sessions on marketing and found a volunteer program where I met briefly with a couple of retired executives about how to start a business. Parents paid the \$14 per month budgeted for the salary of “a special kind of teacher,” as the Mind-Builders motto still says, and for rented space with 45 students participating by age groups across three Saturday dance classes. Within three months there was a waiting list of almost a hundred.

Mind-Builders is where I work today at age 70, but the seeds that led me to Mind-Builders were planted when I was young in the 1950s and 60s:



As a child experiencing the flight and fear of neighboring families when, like us, Black veterans with their families moved quietly into promising little neighborhoods in Queens;

Being “woke” by the prejudice exposed when I was a teen applying for my first summer job;

Seeing “Whites Only” signs during summer road trips with Dad to Grandma’s house in North Carolina;

Cheering with my family at the dining room table as we watched Malcolm’s incisive debates with TV newscasters, absorbing the facts he articulated and recognizing the wisdom he preached of creating our own—our own institutions, businesses, and jobs; our own narrative of who we are, have been, and can be; our own understanding and belief in each other; and Malcolm’s evolution to seeing what’s possible beyond racial divides after his Hajj to Mecca, of creating our own megaphone for the truth;

Witnessing Vietnam, the assassinations of John Kennedy and Dr. King, the death and indignities that Black and white civil rights demonstrators staunchly faced, the poignancy of *The Last Poets*, and that welcome baptism in my first weeks at NYU marching and shouting with comrades in protest...

It was all fertile ground—once again nourishing the growth of strong roots standing in our ancestors’ defiant remains, a history of resilience that provided the needed courage and faith to believe in our ability to create something powerful and life-changing, from a dream that insisted it could be so. Just as that rich earth had nourished the start of Mind-Builders ten years earlier, there came the prospect of creating a vibrant Folk Culture Program with teens learning the value of their neighbors’ and families’ stories, talents, and traditions, of documenting and interpreting their own history.



I was hooked from the first moment I saw Beverly Robinson in 1988: a head taller than the crowds around her, moving with the wide smile of an exquisitely passionate and totally present conductor; translating her special knowledge into everyday language; warm and at one with artists and tradition bearers, community folk, youth, families, and scholars like herself. Beverly was there masterfully curating presentations both inside and outside the New York Public Library’s Schomburg Center during the Arts of Black Folk Conference for Community Organizations in the spring of 1988. It was astounding to see how much could be learned inadvertently in the midst of live presentations with commentary, skillful questions, audience participation, and everyday materials referenced on display. *Now that’s the way young people need to learn our history and culture—from their family, neighbors, and master artisans all around them*, I said to myself as I took in that day.

*“Now that’s the way young people need to learn our history and culture—from their family, neighbors, and master artisans all around them.”*

Over time I would see Beverly grab and educate us all, revealing connections between common things like hand-clapping rhymes, doowop, church sermons, shipbuilders, codfish cakes, break dancing, capoeira, and more. She was at least as excited as I was at the prospect of building a thriving community folk culture program in the Northeast Bronx. She made the first of many regular trips from her California home and UCLA enclave, during summer months and breaks, teaching our local teens and simultaneously becoming a mentor for me. After more than ten exciting years of coaching and devotion, of being our program's scholarly cheerleader all over the world, of being an ever-loyal personal friend of mine and godmother to our sons, a compatriot and transformative bright light, there was no preparing for Beverly's seemingly sudden passing from pancreatic cancer in 2002.

Today, our Mind-Builders Folk Culture Program is named in Beverly's honor. Now and every year since 1989, interns ages 14 to 21 memorize her definition of folklore, starting in their first workshop, and share it with audiences at the culminating public presentations for school and youth groups, their families, and community: *Folklore is the combination of two words—folk, which means people, and lore, which means knowledge. Folklore is a special knowledge of the people that is passed down from generation to generation or that holds groups or communities together.* Bev's culminating public presentations with our students each year were often her extraordinary concept of a "Living Museum," with students and her as curators, or facilitators. Highly skilled artisans, stories, displays, and interpretive materials could be found in different studios throughout our building. But they could also be found in public libraries or the park down the block, spread across the tables near the swings, by the basketball and handball courts—perhaps with the players enlisted to work, help, or bring friends as an audience. While adaptations have been made as space, time, funding, and genre require, Beverly's basic course outline, strategies for fieldwork—including interviews and documentation—and her enthusiasm for engaging the public and acknowledging the important work of dedicated tradition bearers, always remain as the goal and as a template for replication.



On the Schomburg Stage: Interns and artists at an Arts and Social Justice program, including Abiodun Oyewole of The Last Poets, author Madaha Kinsey-Lamb, painter/muralist Sophia Dawson, spoken word artist/now rapper Nene Ali, and George Zavala, former Program Director.

## Teaching for Equity

Teaching for equity at Mind-Builders means working to build a fair, honest, and supportive environment where the input of all is welcomed, valued, and used for the good of all. It also means arming young people and the community with an understanding of the inequities to be addressed in the world they will grow to create and the roles that individuals, art, and social movements have had in fueling change.

Teaching for equity can be found where our curriculum provides resources for self-education and peer teaching in small group mini-labs and encourages questions. Our learning objectives include introducing beginners to the concept of community folk culture, the responsibilities of a professional or community folklorist, and our place in the African Diaspora, which can inform their understanding of cultural connections and continuums as they prepare for interviewing tradition bearers from different parts of the Diaspora. Early in the development of these objectives for the Mind-Builders curriculum, I thought those underlying goals might seem too radical, far-fetched, or lofty for funders to support as feasible and compelling. They may have also seemed unrealistic and daunting as goals for teachers and staff—until they started to hear the testimonials come in from parents and students, as well as alumni who come back and say that their experience at Mind-Builders changed their lives. I have a Nelson Mandela quote propped in front of me in my office that says, “It always seems impossible until it’s done.”

It’s not just a cliché when we say that young people are our hope for the future—as long as we accept the responsibility of making sure they have a truthful foundation to build on and opportunities to access knowledge and understanding that may have been missing or different in their social studies class. Our curriculum nourishes their hearts and minds and counters the daily construct that centers whiteness. From that sense of responsibility Mind-Builders Folk Culture Program allows students to explore what may be for many an alternative or expanded view of history. As an example, we share a map of Africa as a continent of 54 countries, with lines delineating routes of ships and numbers for what may have ultimately amounted to close to 10 million African people kidnapped, tortured, and sold as free labor in Europe, Brazil, Cuba, across the United States, the Caribbean, and the Americas. It provides foundational knowledge for small groups to dissect and report back to the class, which sparks investigation into other materials, including audio and video clips, photos, music, films, posters, and news articles.

Our curriculum includes many activities for understanding cultures and differences to promote awareness of unconscious bias, stereotyping, and prejudices we humans incline toward. With the rapid switchover to safer online learning following the citywide shutdown, we continue to re-shape and refine the interactive modules, individual home and neighborhood assignments, artmaking, and materials. The core activities—Identify, Document, and Present—taught and practiced throughout the Folk Culture Program’s five weeks in July and August introduce or reinforce interviewing, note taking, photography, and audio and video recording. Students practice these skills by interviewing family and community members. They develop creative presentations to share with peers, family, and community members. During the school year, classroom teachers with school groups attend Folk Culture Program presentations at the Bronx Music Heritage Center, the Schomburg, the National Black Theater, or neighborhood libraries. We send preparatory activities that can be done days prior as starters for class discussions, home assignments, artifact

interviews, or other specific lesson plans. Some are available in hard copy or online for free from sources like [Mosaic Literary Magazine](#).

It's beyond my imagining now, what outside-the-box series of interventions, training curricula, and opportunities for developing meaningful relationships with local residents could have possibly resulted in an officer like Derek Chauvin radically shifting the underlying fear and hatred that makes him a threat to life and limb in our communities. Involving community organizations in some phase of the training of police officers and in contributing to the evaluation of an officer's readiness to serve the community are innovations that have been floated as requirements to consider.

Education happens through the stories we tell in our families and communities to stay safe as well. Black families have "The Talk" early on, especially with our sons and grandsons—as well as repeating many frequent, anxious reminders thereafter throughout their youth and young adulthood when they are about to go out. We talk about racism, the police, and what to do or say that might save their lives if they are stopped. This, my fluttering stomach reminds me as I type now, is not what may seem like a calm, matter-of-fact account of our everyday lives—although the words travel so easily across the paper. It's a lifetime anxiety and nightmare.

How many could imagine that recurring "Talk" as a part of their regular lives; or the silent fearful tears I let roll sideways quietly as I laid next to my husband and heard late-night radio years ago declare that Giuliani had been voted in as the Mayor of New York City? Or the practical and psychological machinations required even when embarking on a vacation adventure to anywhere in U.S. or in the world to any area where there are more white folk than Black folk? How do you teach about this? It's the anguish and heartfelt questions bravely raised and patiently, painfully answered. It's a thoughtful, unflinching curriculum of "social studies," folk culture studies, and an honest world and national history developed for all students in the nation. It's deeper, broader conversations, sometimes tinged with the humor of the sad irony of it all, with friends, board members, corporate partners, co-workers, neighbors, and family at the dinner table. It's also economic engagement on any level with only those corporations, legislators, media, et al. that are responsive.



### **Mind-Builders Fosters Youth Agency**

"The Mind-Builders High Five" appears on posters throughout the building and are reinforced through interactive student orientations: Be friendly and kind. Be on time and prepared. Give 100%. Create a safe space. Respect differences.

In progress reports teachers summarize students' sense of belonging, generosity, mastery, independence, and awareness of cultural heritage. Students complete anonymous surveys rating instruction, the facility, and other factors. More formal opportunities for student self-expression, creativity, and professional counseling support have been launched through a new Arts Passage Xpress Program. Former students stay connected. For example, one recently recommended that our student recruitment state that "all genders are welcome." It is a point well taken and will be included and considered in planning for young adult alum representation on the Board of Directors.



But who could know by all appearances on any given day that our history and personal experiences have bred these necessary survival mechanisms? Dr. Vincent Harding, a key figure in the Civil Rights Movement, in an interview before his death referred to the U.S. as a “developing nation” in its nascent growth as a fully multiracial, multi-religious, multiethnic democratic society. Ignorance as a factor for some well-meaning folk can’t be ignored either.

Recently listening to the podcast *Talking to White Kids about Race and Racism* on WNYC radio, it was clear that more white parents now see that antiracist education must include potentially uncomfortable and urgent conversations with their children, too. These are conversations that need to happen more than once, age appropriately, and maybe earlier than parents would have imagined hearing these stories in their own lives.

Since I’ve seen the miraculous transformation that so many young people undergo as they work through particular stages of their age and development with proper support and their passionate participation in protests, campaigns, and these difficult conversations, I place my bets on them and remain heartened that our young people and those of all ages who are outraged and aching now will hold fast to the light, relinquish the comfort zone, reshape that “curricula” for daily life, and get to know neighbors and co-workers more fully. This can open up this country’s real history.



### **Power, Beauty, and Responsibility in Action**

The Dr. Beverly J. Robinson Community Folk Culture Program expands our opportunity to continue the evolution of a curriculum that further examines equity through an historical and socio-political lens of the African Diaspora, slavery in the U.S., and strategies of social justice movements. The cornerstone content explores power, concepts of beauty, and responsibility. How

*These vital partnerships support our programs in various ways and may be helpful contacts for research or resources when looking to develop related activities or concepts:*

**Ramapo for Children** with Mind-Builders’ annual teacher training and follow-up coaching

**Good Shepherd Services** for counseling support or family referrals and related staff coaching

**The Will to Adorn/Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage** for targeted project support, training, and presentation collaboration, and ongoing consultation

**Bronx Music Heritage Center** as a venue for presentations and a resource for connecting with tradition bearers

**City Lore’s** research resources, project collaborations, and curricular handouts to strengthen interviewing skills

**CCCADI** and the **NYPL Schomburg Center’s** exhibits and resources for student research

**Community Works** for audience development and outreach to school groups for public presentations

**EARS** peer leadership and mediation training including the 47<sup>th</sup> Precinct’s Youth Explorers and their police officer escorts

**Educators for Social Responsibility** for curriculum that underpins our key bias awareness and conflict resolution and mediation strategies

**Literary Freedom Project’s** *Mosaic* magazine and digital lesson plans on Black Lives Matter and other topics of the African Diaspora

would Beverly view my thoughts on these as lessons in power, beauty, and responsibility? I think they are in line with what I learned from her passion for this work.

**Young people are learning and experiencing the power of our voices, stories, and culture documented and interpreted by ourselves.** Within this power are skills and inspiration to pursue advanced and college training and careers; heightened respect for family, others, and our own potential; and the invaluable inspiration that our culture and traditions have had globally for millennia. It is so important to reinforce the power of knowing we all are capable of great things; the potential of each of us is unknown and limitless; the limits we encounter are not a reflection of a lack of effort, intelligence, or worth, but of a system in place since before we and our parents and theirs were born, based on prejudices we humans develop or devise in pursuit of wealth or power, or against those who are different from what is familiar.

**Beauty and the beholder. Beauty is us.** Just as I learned, along with my mother and godmother when Beverly Robinson convinced them to share childhood rhymes and ditties at one of our more intimate public presentations, there is beauty in everyone's culture, in the stories and humor, the cocky language, the love put into the hand-laced items, and the light in their eyes for what was once a source of shame and evidence of their childhood poverty. This perspective can begin to battle with the persistent internalization of a European-based concept of beauty that we begin taking in as a child, which can be such a killer. On any day, right now, seeing some of our children at play, listening to our family members, friends, or students talk unfiltered to and about each other, can reveal astonishingly demoralizing negative thinking about even the speaker's own skin color, hair, and facial features to an extent that can be actually painful to hear. My good friend's daughter Adila Francis recently sent a link to her funny, insightful blog "[Love the Skin You're In](#)" in which she was talking about the prevalent, sad issue of colorism and a preference for lighter skin when she was little. It is also not rare to hear this expressed by grown men and women of color now. In her blog she included a link to a CNN feature on a study some years ago with Anderson Cooper asking a five-year-old African American child to share what she thinks about her skin color. To hear that she "sometimes" thinks her skin looks "nasty" because it's "dark," and that she believes grown-ups think so too, is devastating. It's also motivation to rethink the concepts of what majority traits have been presented to us, our families, and society at large as the absolute standards for what is considered beautiful, when you have had privy to an understanding of colonialism, oppression, the psychology, economics, and politics underpinning the institution of subjugation.

**There is a sense of responsibility** to interpret and document accurately for historical and educational understanding of the arts, artists, and traditions and a responsibility to the family, ancestors, and community who have entrusted us with the treasured stories of their lives and passages; a responsibility to be accepting of the differences we encounter and to become conscious of the roots of our own biases; to pass along what we have learned so that others may understand and see and realize their value and potential; to have the confidence to pursue our gifts without thinking we were born "less than"; the responsibility of understanding the ego fragility that has evolved in all humans and not to misuse that consciousness, but to support and help each other if you have been fortunate enough to have overcome some aspect of this that others have not.

## The Future

Our future curriculum continues to evolve and stay current with how contemporary people and youth are communicating their lives and stories and the development of their traditions, style, vernacular expressions, and art. We've refreshed our look at social justice movements and issues and are including how such narratives of related challenges they and their families may have heard, told, or experience matter.

We received serious photo documentation of local protests from former Folk Culture Intern Stephen Furze (See section that follows). His work is another exciting, rewarding example to fuel the future growth of the program as alumni reconnect and possibly consult or train advanced students. It also speaks to the impact that former Folk Culture Program Director Jade D. Banks had on her students' development and the lifelong mentorship position she maintains in many of their lives as they continue in related fields with determination, fine skills, and astute consciousness that her encouraging, captivating approach, infused with their analysis of principles like equity throughout their growth, has sustained their relationships over time.

**Yet, while hard hearts so slowly evolve and teaching for equity ultimately becomes standard curriculum throughout our nation, how will our children and communities be safe and self-actualize; how will we deal with the many Derek Chauvins?** He and others like him must be weeded out and know that the full force of the judicial system will protect its citizens and lock racist murderers away definitively. Ultimately, if you and I and our children, communities, and legislative public servants remain vigilant and diligent, the courts and laws, our institutions, and our neighbors who are stirring themselves awake, will stay "woke" for this life-giving cause; the life, liberty and pursuit that is the goal. I'm actually excited too by the prospect of learning more about the scholars and scholarship presented in a virtual seminar this past June that was produced by the Schomburg Center for the Research of Black Culture in collaboration with Haymarket Publishers, and was entitled "Abolitionist Training and The Schools Our Children Deserve."

I feel a smile start to rise as I conclude by sharing the words of John Wright—a friend whose government relations firm assists organizations that work with underserved communities. In closing a letter he sent out not long ago, John's words resonated dearly for all of us receiving it: "Please be safe and continue to be healthy, and **let's believe that we can and will be better together.**"

I had stopped to read those last few words again, this time seeing images of "We the people" down the block and across the globe; carrying signs while wearing masks; retooling our art, our work, our purpose; and being lit again by that relentless faith and determination. We can and will be better together.

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***Madaha Kinsey-Lamb** is President and Founder of Mind-Builders Creative Arts Center. She holds an MS in Educational Leadership from CCNY and a BA in Elementary Education from NYU. She is also a poet and writer.*

## URLs

<https://onbeing.org/programs/isabel-wilkerson-this-history-is-long-this-history-is-deep>  
<http://www.mosaicmagazine.org>  
<https://www.labrandshe.com/blog>

*Journal of Folklore and Education (2020: Vol. 7)*  
We Are All Essential: Is the Heart the Last Frontier?  
by Madaha Kinsey-Lamb

# A Note on the Pedagogy of Equity

by Diana Baird N'Diaye

Cultural Specialist, Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage

A little more than 30 years ago, I was an organizer (with my late Schomburg colleague Dierdre Bibby) of the Arts of Black Folk Conference for Community Organizations, where Madaha Kinsey-Lamb of Mind-Builders Creative Arts met Beverly Robinson and co-created the Folklore Internship that bears Dr. Bev's name. The conference was co-sponsored by the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, which had recently become a part of the New York Public Library. The event was born out of the desire to introduce more African American community organizations to resources for doing their own folklore research and for building capacity to create research-based public programs that shared important narratives and expressive culture within and beyond local communities. So, even in the era before everyone had a cellphone with a camera and microphone, Mind-Builders' high school aged interns with their instructors were learning to recognize and record the wisdom, heritage arts, and cultural practices of their peers, their elders, and others in their immediate communities.

While interviewing master performers like Scoby Stroman about how he learned to drum and to dance, Mind-Builders interns learned about the realities of musicians in transition from Africa to America, from South to North. In presenting milliners like CeJanel Lewis in libraries for their peers, they shared her perspectives about the history of the church hats she makes for churchgoers.

**This is a pedagogy of equity because the creation of knowledge—through the documentation and interpretation of experience, events, and community practice—is not a neutral act.** It is subjective and can be subversive in the best sense of the word. The stories recorded may be joyful, painful, or a bit of both, but they are essential. As we have seen in recent times, in the service of social justice and building bridges, the act of recording and communicating personal and community narratives using cellphones and social media can be powerful and transformative. It can open up long suppressed conversations between people in the Bronx and in the United States. It can counter divisions and reveal inequities.

*The Dr. Beverly J. Robinson Community Folk Culture Program quickly became a premiere department of Mind-Builders, nationally recognized through Beverly Robinson's mentorship and dedication. After her passing, our growth, visibility, and learning expanded through a dynamic partnership strengthened over the years through Diana Baird N'Diaye of the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. She invited us to join the brilliant, multifaceted Smithsonian [Will to Adorn Project](#) as a community research partner. Diana had worked with NYSCA on the Arts of Black Folk Conference where I met Beverly in 1988. Will to Adorn promotes ongoing reciprocal learning, continuing to excite, challenge, and fuel our curriculum development. As we observe and communicate about the raging news and developments, the many ways this work promotes the fervent commitment to equity is reiterated.*



# Documenting Power, Beauty, and Responsibility in Action

Stephen Furze, photographer



Look at the legacy  
of the FOLK CULTURE PROGRAM.

Stephen Furze is using his  
photographic documentation  
skills during these wonderful  
historic protests!

—Text message from former Mind-Builders Community  
Folk Culture Program Director Jade Banks, July 6, 2020

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*While developing this issue, we received a text message from Jade Banks. The images burst from the screen, but also the significance of the Mind-Builders legacy and the relationships that sustain the work. Madaha Kinsey-Lamb followed up with us, asking if Furze's images could appear with her article: "We're so excited by these [photos] and all he has accomplished since being in the program, and staying connected to Jade Banks as a lifelong mentor."*

*We invite educators to think about how they might use these photos to teach about culture, creativity, community, and equity. For example, students can be asked, "What do I see? What do I think? What do I wonder? We also encourage teachers to look at the 2019 (Volume 6) Journal of Folklore and Education on the Art of the Interview and use the resources there to support students in asking, "How can I document my own community?"*

—JFE Editors

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**Stephen Furze** is a TV producer, hip-hop artist, and photographer. He was born in Jamaica and moved to the Bronx at age 12. His TV credits include Netflix's *Girls Incarcerated* (Associate Producer) Season 2, *Queer Eye* (Associate Producer), *Bravo's Blind Date* (Producer), *BET's 106 & Park* (Production Assistant), and *ESPN* (Motion Graphics Controller). Furze is a University of Vermont graduate and an alumnus of Mind-Builders Folk Culture Program.

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# Revitalizing Folk Art within the Community

by Beverly Robinson

*A Special Reprint from the Arts of Black  
Folk Conference for Community  
Organizations: Presenting African  
American Folk Arts, held April 22-23,  
1988, at the Schomburg Center for  
Research in Black Culture.*

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I want to share with you a series of experiences and bring them into the whole concept of revitalization. In 1971, when I was a student at UCLA, I took a course offered for the first time entitled “Afro-American Folklore and Culture.” The instructor, who is currently director of the Folk Arts Program at the National Endowment for the Arts, was Bess Hawes. Among the topics we studied were African American verbal traditions, including the dozens, signifying, and the toast. At that time, there were two books specifically devoted to the toast. I remember reading the books and calling a few points to my instructor's attention:

This is not the real deal. I don't even know where the author got this from. A lot of it doesn't rhyme. The rhythms are off .... I know better examples than the ones cited in the required readings .... They're not usually done with a lot of profanity because if men or boys were to perform toasts.... and besides, who gave it the name toast?

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About the photo: Beverly Robinson with Jessie Lee Smith, Tifton, Georgia. From the South-Central Georgia Folklife Project collection (AFC 1982/010), American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

I first heard “toasts” in the late 1950s, early 1960s; they were traditionally performed by men. If a toast contained profanity, it was never done in the presence of females. To date, no one has been able to definitively answer the question of how old toasts are, but toasts are what I grew up knowing as poetic poems—that is, poetic narratives such as *The Signifying Monkey*:

The signifying monkey said to the lion one day,  
There's a great big elephant talking about your mama in a terrible way.  
Says she got a . . .

And it goes on and on. The great blues man Willie Dixon (born in 1915) remembers kids performing *The Signifying Monkey* when he was in the third grade and trying “to make poems to criticize each other.” He began writing his own versions of *The Signifying Monkey* in the 1930s, selling them for ten cents, fifteen cents, or two for a quarter in Chicago. An estimated 30 to 40 thousand were sold. This is one of his versions:

Says the monkey to the lion on a bright summer day,  
There's a big bad mother living down the way. He talked about your folks in the  
damnest (sic) way.  
And a lot of other things I'm afraid to say.  
The lion jumped up all full of rage,  
Like a cat from Harlem that's full of gage.  
He met the elephant under the tree,  
Said, “you big greasy mother, it gone'na be you or me.”  
But the elephant glanced him from the corner of his eyes,  
Said, “you better find some one to fight your size.”  
Then the lion jumped up and made a fancy pass,  
That's when the elephant knocked him on his hairy ass.

There was also the dozens, satirical word play in which people talk about each other; it, too, is predominately performed by men. The dozens usually involved “talking about the other person's mama.” In more ways than one, playing the dozens was actually a test of endurance, that is, patience. For instance, how much could you listen to or talk about (especially someone's mother) without being or getting visually upset. Unlike toasts, the dozens usually occurred between at least two people and were not individual narratives that rhymed.

I remember telling my instructor, “I'm going to collect some other toasts. I know there are others with the traditional lyrical quality that are surviving within my culture and they do rhyme. I have not only heard them, but also know they are not what is often called the four-letter dirty ones. They are clean ones.”

So, I decided to go to the campus barber shop; the barber was an African American named Mr. Jackson, and I went to him.

Robinson: Mr. Jackson, I'm taking this course in Afro-American folklore and culture, and I need your help.

Jackson: Sure, baby. I'll give it to you. I know a couple of toasts, especially *The Signifying Monkey*. Why don't you come to the other shop I have, which is over in the community [south central Los Angeles], and you can get more from there.

When I arrived, the men, seeing that I was a young woman, gave me all the clean versions. Proudly, I went back to my Afro-American folklore and culture course and gave a complete presentation. My instructor was very supportive. It was the first time I ever stood in front of a class and performed what I considered a teaching role. Initially, some of my friends (the ones who thought I was an unprepared *racialist* about to mess up) were embarrassed for me. But a few others wanted to know, “Did I really find stuff?”

I said: “Did I find stuff? I've got a lot here. I didn't even know we had this much going.”

The class was racially mixed; and based on responses I received then and over the years, I know people genuinely enjoyed my research and presentation.

In that class I also had the opportunity to share something I knew from my own childhood about a coded language form called Tut. At the time, I thought Tut only existed in my family. But later during my sophomore days and after subsequent research, I learned that Tut is prominent in certain geographical areas of the United States. I found people from Arkansas, Georgia, Texas, and Oklahoma who were familiar with Tut. *Tut* is the phonetic spelling of words. For example:

A = A or AH  
B = BUB or BA  
C = Cut or CA = DUD or DA  
E = E  
F = FA or FUD, etc.

Tut's usage is best understood with a personal example. As a child with larger than normal feet who could have been devastatingly teased by other children, it was at home where overly sensitive feelings were put in check. Adults would say:

My goodness, her fa-square-e-tut are as ba-i-gug as Uncle Bert's!

Initially, their language eluded me. Translated, f = fa, ee = square e, t = tut; i.e. feet. Note that double consonants or vowels (in this case e's) are squared.

...her fa[f] square e[ee] tut[t] are as ba[b] i[i] gug[g] as Uncle Bert's.

“My goodness, her feet are as big as Uncle Bert's.” Uncle Bert was a great-great-uncle known to have the biggest feet in some parts of Texas.

Another example of Tut is centered on skin tones. If a person had very dark skin, you did not say that he or she was black. Rather, the women in my family would say, “That child certainly has bub-la-a- cut-kam skin.” That is: b = bub, l = la, a = a, c = cut, and k = kam skin—black skin.

Since no one was frowning when they spoke, I thought it was the greatest compliment on earth. I was being indoctrinated into life by grandparents and a great-grandmother in our home in northern California. The indoctrination was not only a sensitizing factor but also a socialization process as part of a tradition that had passed from one generation to another. The difference with that tradition, especially the language, was this: It was not Bop Talk and it was not Pig Latin.

A distant relative, Ulyssee S. Guillebeau, who in folklore terms would be called an informant, reminded me that, "Anybody can speak Pig Latin, but only a few of 'ug-sus' [us]<sup>1</sup> can speak Tut!" The same ideology is found in Maya Angelou's novel *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Some of her spelling of the words used in Tut differ slightly from those that I have collected, specifically "ak" and "ack." The structure, however, has not changed, and the superior exclusiveness of Tut over Pig Latin is dramatized in the friendship between two girls:

She became my first friend. We spent tedious hours teaching ourselves the Tut language. You (Yak on you) know (kack nug oh wuy) what (wack hash a tut). Since all the other children spoke Pig Latin, we were superior because Tut was hard to speak and even harder to understand. At last I began to comprehend what girls giggled about. (p. 119-120)

Tut is based on the phonetic spelling of words, which means its roots are grounded in a literate tradition. You had to know how to spell. Folks were not spelling *gluteus maximus*; they were spelling *a-square-sus*, because certain words in their standard form were not allowed in our household (translated, *a-square-sus* is *ass*).

Things have changed over time, but this was my first introduction in a classroom to appreciating a culture I had grown up with. Later, from 1975 to 1976, I, like many of my colleagues, worked at the Smithsonian as a participant coordinator. I will never forget working between the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial with the Bicentennial Folklife Festival. A momentous occasion during this celebration was when fife and drum players from the South were performing. On another stage, some distance away, a group from Ghana was performing. During a brief quiet moment in their performance, the Ghanaians heard the fife and drum players and suddenly stopped their performance altogether and started motioning their hands from their chest toward the audience as though they were lamenting. Continuing with these movements, they began walking toward the fife and drum players. I was with the fife and drum players and saw the Ghanaians and a sizable crowd coming across the mall toward us. I did not have a clue about what was going on. "Oh no," I said, "Something has happened. I don't know what's happened or happening!" I did not know what to do. The Ghanaians appeared deeply concerned about something. The fife and drum performers were baffled. As more people joined the crowd, the atmosphere was one of curiosity and confusion. Yet, there was a strange understanding that "everything's going to be all right."

What happened was that the Ghanaians heard the fife and drum players performing a traditional funeral song. The fife and drum players explained that it was a song they learned from their foreparents many years ago and were simply sharing it with an audience interested in the instruments they played. After all, how often do you hear black fife and drum players? The

Ghanaians confirmed that this was indeed a funeral song. That is why, they explained, they stopped their own performance to show respect for, and to come see, the person who had died.

Suddenly, I saw a merge of what we call Africanisms coming together in real life. It was a revitalization mechanism on one hand; but on the other, it supported something that I knew from what I had learned in a class much earlier. *So much of what we have, we take for granted. Often, we do not even know where it comes from.*



Session of hand games organized by Beverly Robinson.  
South-Central Georgia Folklife Project collection (AFC 1982/010)  
American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

After the Smithsonian festival, the Library of Congress sent me to Tifton, Georgia. Well, that was going to be my introduction to what I then considered the Deep South. It was a challenging assignment. I did not know anyone, had never been to Georgia except to change planes in Atlanta, and suddenly was with one of the first folklife teams for the Library of Congress. I was the only woman and only African American with a team of five people to collect folklore. I had to know where to go and how I was going to do this. I had taken my bicycle with me only to learn that it was not the *ladylike* thing to do. (Riding a bike when you are over 21 is not “cool” in that part of the country, especially for an African American, and in the “summertime.”)

But I went to the churches, Baptist and Methodist, and introduced myself. I got up and tried to explain in my educated manner (I was working on a doctorate at the University of Pennsylvania by then) what it was I wanted to do. I will never forget the suggestion made by this lady who quietly approached me: “Honey, speak plain.”

I said: “Oh, okay. Got it.”



I thought a lot about what it meant to “speak plain,” and when I had to return to these same churches (and visit others), I spoke plain. I said, “There are things that hold you and hold us together as a people. What are these things? Why are they important and who are the important people in your community?” I did not bother with my previous speech in which I asked, “Who are the significant others” or “gatekeepers,” phrases I had learned in anthropology. No, in Tifton, I asked and talked about who are the important people and why they are so.

I also went to social gatherings of both blacks and whites involved with 4-H clubs. When different churches came together, both black and white Baptists and Methodists, I spoke to them as well, asking for the same information: Who and what are important in your community? If we all left here today and wanted to leave a legacy to say “this was important to us” or “these people are important to us,” what or who are they?

In Tifton, I learned that for whites, the important person was someone called Auntie. Blacks felt an endearment for someone called Grannie, Aunt Phyllis, and Ant Phyllis. For some of the young people who were aware of an oral historian, and knew the term, they spoke about the “griot,” while elderly whites and blacks mentioned a “doctor” or the “midwife.”

Because I thought I was dealing with six different people, I attempted to find at least five, if not all six, of them. The results led to one person, and her name was Phyllis Carter. Mrs. Phyllis Carter was then the oldest midwife in the state of Georgia. The search taught me an invaluable lesson that especially relates to people involved with fieldwork. If you begin to really dig to find out from a community who and what are important, you start to see what a community wants to hold on to.

As professionally trained folklorists, we also begin to understand what the process is and what is important—knowing that these people or these things have one commonality which gives a special edge to the word *folklore*, contrary to all its theoretical definitions—that is, *folk* being people; *lore*, knowledge (a special type that has transcended time and often has been passed from one generation to another). The commonality is that people often know what knowledge they want preserved if we as field-workers have the smarts to collect (and ultimately present) it.

In Los Angeles, in 1988, we had a festival called From Louisiana to Los Angeles, the La-LA Festival. It was a great festival, but I want to point out what I call the pauses. Recall here that I have already noted one pause in my Tifton story when I had to move away from my learned notion of significant others to speaking plainly. Another pause I want to share derives from a field-research experience I had with the La-LA Festival.

As part of my involvement with the festival, I did a lot of the field research. I learned much about folks from Louisiana and Texas, particularly the group from Louisiana. These people would rather pay you to leave them alone than to receive \$25 or \$30 to be in a festival. Also, they have a lot of pride about who is selected to be involved in a festival and about being a part of the selective process. The more acquainted the field-worker becomes with the community, the easier it is to explain purposes, choices, and formats. In his presentation on field research in the African American community, Worth Long addresses the question of the field researcher-

informant relationship. The answer has several parts: The field researcher should become a friend and earn the respect of the people after going into their community to talk about presenting their arts and any knowledge about them publicly, and the people must trust the field researcher. Then there is the matter of who comes to the festival, and it is here that I address the pause.

This pause occurred when I looked at the analysis of who came to the celebration: mostly people from Louisiana who had a wonderful feeling of geographical oneness. Witnessing this made me feel very good about part of my own family heritage. But the celebration did not accomplish what it should have. What about the neighbors in the surrounding geographical areas? What about the people who need to discover and learn about Louisianans in and out of Los Angeles? It is important to celebrate one's uniqueness, but there must be a coming together with others, a sharing of cultural and ethnic enclaves whether it is Louisianans in California who acknowledge their African and African American cultural roots or the various African diaspora populations in New York.

New York has the largest population of ethnically diverse descendants of African heritage than probably anywhere else in the world. When festivals are held to celebrate this diversity (e.g., the annual Caribbean festival in Brooklyn on Labor Day), the audiences should not just be from the cultures of the people represented in the festivities. Every effort should be made first to bring the diaspora together and second to share with *all* New Yorkers a public celebration honoring specific cultures or geographic areas. My bicoastal relationship with New York is one of love. Although I do not think New Yorkers like to hear it too often, there are some real questions about how much peoples of African heritage respect and know about each other.

Look at two words: *community* and *revitalization*. "Community," to me, means how people *come* into unity. "Revitalization" means to give new life to, to give new vigor to. When you give life to people and things that we are calling folk art in our various communities, the programmatic issue is how do we bring those two together. I suggest that you be extremely cognizant of *where* you do your festival programming and of how you can get as many people as possible involved, both within and outside the community, so that what you do becomes a learning process for all. One of today's challenges for many programming agencies is that of eliminating the "call them" or "make sure they" are included operations. This is important from a multicultural perspective and is a way of eliminating marginalism—that is, having people hanging on the periphery.

In addition, the state of New York, by virtue of its years of existence, has a phenomenal history. The question of existing or past traditions should never be an issue. Rather, the challenge in fieldwork is to (a) identify the similarities and differences in the art forms of the diaspora (e.g., in costume, music, food, dance, tales); (b) identify perpetuators of these forms; and (c) bring them all together in programs so that people begin to understand each other. Perhaps what needs to happen is for people to begin looking at other genres, other forms of the folk arts that we often take for granted or have some- how overlooked.

With us today is Schroeder Cherry, a puppeteer. I have been aware of his work for some time and have helped display some of his puppets and related art, especially when funds were

unavailable to fly him out for a performance presentation. Ventriloquists and puppeteers are as old as time, a part of African tradition, and are right here in New York. You will not find a lot of puppeteers whose knowledge of the art form has passed from one generation to the next; but ventriloquism is ancient, and there are families who practice this art in New York. The Hatch-Billops Collection and the Schomburg Center have archival information on black ventriloquists and puppeteers. Other sources are the Apollo Theater and records of the Works Progress Administration.

Furthermore, some people—particularly folklorists—have written articles and books and made recordings (e.g., *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* and Folkways Records). A few folklorists, researchers, and organizations in New York City that are or have been involved in folk art programming with national, state, and local agencies are Dr. Barbara Hampton, Alan Lomax, Lynda Hill, Mind-Builders, and Genesis II. You should make a serious effort to tap these people and organizations to make sure they are participants or partners in the programs you plan. For example, Alan Lomax has one of the most incredible collections assembled from his father's and his own work over the years: tapes, field notes, films, and other research materials. I believe you need to begin to understand what is in his possession and learn how to use his collections for research purposes and as presentational items. For instance, if you are going to program someone who is performing and talking about the blues, you, and your audience, will be highly enlightened if you (and they, when possible), can listen to a tape that Lomax recorded of Sonny Boy Williamson talking about the blues. This material is here in New York.

One day while I was standing in the lobby of the Schomburg, I looked at the bust of Ira Aldridge, the first tragedian actor “honored and decorated by nearly every European government.” He was a master actor in performance history whose career began in New York with the African Theater (also recorded as The African Grove) in 1821. Then, there was “no career for him in America.” The tradition of African American drama emanates from the eloquence of the spoken word from preachers, narrators, and the world of play, from churches staging *tom thumb* and *womanless weddings*, *God's Trombones*, and pageant plays, and from scripted drama and performers drawing from folk idioms common in our communities. In the lobby I realized that a whole element of folk drama is not even being tapped. The research and programming that I have done with Youth Theatre Interactions in Yonkers is only a scratch-the-surface beginning. It was in the state of New York that *God's Trombones* was first performed as a staged theatrical production. When James Weldon Johnson recorded *God's Trombones*, he did it after the sermon and prayer had been in oral tradition for many years. So he is the documenter, not the author, which he clearly states in his introduction. I believe there are still a lot of folk artists who continue to perform in churches, with social organizations, at community theaters, and at get-togethers. Folk drama, as a performance art form, has been extremely important when looking at other genres.

Professional folklorists need to go through the New York folklore magazines. I have an old one at home and checked to see what people like Simon Bronner and others have written on the folk art tradition in New York and to find out who are the people they documented. Your research into and answers to concerns of “What has happened to these people or their art forms?” and

“How can you present revitalizing programs that include your findings?” will give new life to the folk arts.

Folklorists are in a prime position to do this. In the *New York Folklore* journal, Bronner (1977), in “Street Cries and Peddler Traditions: A Contemporary Perspective,” begins his article by stating “that our traditions have tended to idealize the rural aspects of our culture. The images of the rural itinerate artists in yankee peddler have long been tenants of our preconception” (p. 2).

One of the preconceptions of many folklorists, at least in the early recordings, documentation, and field research, is that many of the people they documented had to be either illiterate, blind, or impoverished (and I could provide a substantial list of other words). Most African Americans today have some form of education. So to find the noneducated person, forget it. This is not to say noneducated people do not exist. Just be careful of a preoccupation with going out in the field specifically looking for the intellectual and physical restrictive effects of living in America. Begin to see how a tradition works even though people are educated. There is a pressuring issue confronting many of us now: What happens when you have someone who learns whittling and carving from a grandfather and then decides to go to an art institute and get a bachelor's or master's degree? Are people who do this part of a tradition?

The answer as I see it is this: If they learned the art form from their grandfather or grandmother and still perpetuate the form as they learned it, then, yes, they are part of a tradition. That they are able to articulate what they have learned in another form through education merely exemplifies their ability. But if they went to school to learn how to carve or whittle, that is not part of the art traditions we are trying to identify. The same applies to me. I am from a family of storytellers. They are absolute raconteurs. I know these stories to their minute detail, but I have a Ph.D. Yet I can tell you the setting of how those stories were told to us, what the moral was (if there was one), where those stories were learned—in terms of how my grandfather especially taught me—and I do not think it has anything to do with the University of Pennsylvania or my teaching at UCLA.

Of course, people had less education in the past than they do today. What was common in one era is not [necessarily] the norm or the prerequisite of another. The street peddlers and criers, how many of them are there today? For example, Charlie Sayles, a blues harmonica player, does not play on Forty-Second Street anymore. We have to release the myths and place nostalgia in its proper place. As we approach the year 2000, more educated than noneducated people are around us, but traditions continue to exist among them. Hence, why do you revitalize these folk art traditions in the African American community? Because they have not died is the answer. These traditions are there and are important to the community. Further, a narrative (a story) goes with these traditions and helps us to understand the timing and place and the specialness of their existence.

I also believe that definitions need to come from the African American community about what is important to us. What is it that we want people to see about us in our community? And is this just a preoccupation of a field-worker who is determined to go and collect toasts in the dirty forms? Or, are toasts a reflection of our community because we find them to be stimulating, we like them, and we want the whole world to know?

Finally, because of its appropriateness today, I want to share with you something the acclaimed music director, composer, and arranger Hall Johnson said in *Opportunity* magazine in 1936:

Artistically, we darker Americans are in a most peculiar situation with regard to what we have to give to the world. In our several hundred years of enforced isolation in this country we have had plenty of time and plenty of reason to sing each other songs and tell each other tales. These songs and stories have a hidden depth of meaning as well as a simple and sincere external beauty. But the same wall which forced them into existence has closed in tight upon their meaning and allows only their beauty to escape through the chinks. So that our folk-culture is like the growth of some hardy, yet exotic, shrub, whose fragrance never fails to delight discriminating nostrils even when there is no interest in the depth of its roots. But when the leaves are gathered by strange hands they soon wither, and when cuttings are transplanted into strange soil, they have but a short and sickly life. Only those who have sowed the seed may know the secret of the root. (P. 28)

Only those people of African heritage—whether they are from Bermuda, Jamaica, or Trinidad or are descendants of enslaved or freed Africans of these countries or the United States, or wherever they are from—will know what it is they want people to see of themselves and determine how they come into unity. But it is up to professional folklorists, regardless of their ethnic backgrounds, to be able to identify what is in a given community. You cannot just take people's knowledge and things and put them on a stage. Somebody has got to sanction what has been identified, and it should be the people themselves.

That's revitalizing.<sup>2</sup>

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*Beverly Robinson was known as a theater historian, folklorist, producer, writer, director and professor in the UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television. Beverly received her MA in folklore from the University of California, Berkeley and her PhD in Folklore and Folklife from the University of Pennsylvania. She was director of the African Studies Program at UCLA. Beverly was also known for her research for such films as Miss Evers' Boys, Nightjohn, and The Color Purple. Beverly passed away in May 2002.*

#### Endnotes

- 1 "Us" was translated into Tut because of the informant's need and experience not to overtly verbalize group solidarity. Interviewed him in 1972 in Los Angeles, California. At the time, he was in his early 50s and hailed from northern Georgia.
- 2 The course, "Afro-American Folklore and Culture," was revitalized and offered during the regular school curriculum as part of my teaching career at the University of California at Los Angeles.

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# Shifting Paradigms Toward Equity: Infusing Folklore and Critical Multicultural Knowledge into a Teacher Education Class

by Phyllis M. May-Machunda

In the first class discussions of every Education and Multicultural America class each semester, I asked preservice teachers why they wanted to become teachers. The most common response was, “I want to teach just like a teacher I had in \_\_\_\_\_ school. I plan to go back to my community to teach.” As discussions progressed, I asked if there had been students of color in their classrooms. Only rarely did I have students who had had classmates who were students of color and when they did, the students of color were in tiny numbers and marginalized, or were frequently biracial or adopted by white families. Through intentional and unintentional historical traditions of residential segregation, these students had had negligible personal interactions with people of color throughout their lives. Many thought that their familiarity with people of color from television, movies, and social media stereotypes presented them with realistic understandings of communities of color. The stark realities of these preservice teachers’ social limitations made clear where our class discussions of race and educational equity needed to begin. I would need to help students examine their own worldviews and provide windows into the worldviews and experiences of communities of color.

Education is the human process of transferring collaboratively developed repositories of valued cultural knowledges and interpreting them through specified worldviews to new generations. These cultural transfer processes can be implemented by informal or institutionalized means. Teacher education programs offer a sanctioned institutionalized process for preparing new generations of teachers to obtain jobs devoted to transferring cultural knowledge to new generations of students using standardized curriculum and pedagogies. Embedded in those curricula are worldviews that provide lenses for understanding knowledge, interpreting reality, and specifying rules and roles to guide people’s actions and relationships in those things (Koltko-Rivera 2004, 4). To achieve equitable and just education in 21<sup>st</sup>-century multicultural classrooms, teacher education programs must equip teacher candidates with skills and knowledge that respect and incorporate cultural knowledge, worldviews, and pedagogies from the diverse cultures of their students to teach all students effectively. No worldview based in a singular cultural tradition can adequately reach all students, so teachers must acquire a panoply of tools and skills that work within an multiculturally inclusive and critical worldview to be prepared to engage all students fully. If 21<sup>st</sup>-century teachers can infuse their curricula and pedagogies with selected resources from folklore and cultural traditions flourishing within their school communities, they may be able to engage their students more deeply, more effectively, and more equitably, as well as learn from their students and their communities.

Conventional American curriculum has been based in the cultural knowledge and worldviews of Anglo American settlers, including ideologies of white racial dominance and white supremacy (Spring 2016, Jay 2003, Kincheloe et al. 2000, King 1991, Sleeter 2001). Since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century

civil rights movements of people of color, women, people with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ people, schools of education have attempted to become more inclusive by adding some knowledge about diverse racial and ethnic groups into their programs. Yet many teacher education students have not had opportunities to understand how the conventional curriculum excludes, erases, or distorts the stories of people outside the dominant group, nor to examine biases that mainstream culture carries into the classroom (Sleeter 2008). Public school curricula ignore and denigrate multicultural ways of knowing and doing through the use of racial and ethnic stereotypes, distortion of facts and relationships, and incomplete and absent narratives (Loewen 1996, Zinn 1998).

During the last 15 years of my recently completed 30-year teaching career at a predominantly white liberal arts university in the nonurban upper Midwest, I taught several sections of a required undergraduate course to primarily white preservice teachers as a significant part of my teaching load. As an African American professor, trained first as a music educator and later as a folklorist and ethnomusicologist, I taught Education and Multicultural America as a Professor of American Multicultural Studies outside the teacher education program at this university. After

*In this article, I highlight ways I used folklore as a central part of my strategies to raise the critical consciousness of predominantly white preservice teachers by introducing them to multicultural histories, concepts, and knowledges as I prepared them to fulfill licensure requirements and guided them toward developing paradigms of educational equity so they might teach all students in their classrooms effectively.*

our department inherited this marginalized course as a short, superficial overview of the histories of four major racial groups, I redesigned the syllabus to align with the standards required for licensure and to be more directly relevant to students' understandings of the educational experiences of students of color. My interdisciplinary knowledge and skills as a folklorist as well as critical multicultural knowledges, histories, and traditions were central to developing this course. Although several states mandate that teacher education students acquire some knowledge about the histories and cultures of people of color as well as strategies for teaching students of color, some programs minimize and marginalize this information, limiting it to a single course and rarely reinforcing or extending this knowledge to other teacher education classes within the program. However, I contend that truly successful teacher education programs integrate multicultural knowledges into all courses within teacher education programs to generate an inclusive worldview that broadly prepares future educators to teach inclusively and equitably for all children (Merryfield 2000, Gay and Howard 2000). Currently, and in the foreseeable future, children of color make up the majority of students in public school systems across the nation (Noguera and Akom 2000, Ayers et al. 2008). Minnesota, where I live and teach, is among the states that have been struggling to close longstanding educational opportunity gaps for students of color. One proven strategy for reducing this gap and improving the achievement and academic engagement of children of color has been the intentional incorporation and integration of multicultural knowledges and pedagogies into school curricula (Paris and Alim 2017; Ladson-Billings 1995, 2014; *Precious Knowledge* 2011).

Throughout this article, I share a variety of resources and tools that can contribute to preparing teachers better to teach equitably by illuminating essential aspects that must be addressed in these courses and offer examples from my course of infusing cultural knowledges to illustrate these points. In each section, I highlight the use of specific genres of folklore in bolded italics throughout the text.

## 1

**Create a safe and inclusive space for hosting deep discussion.** First, I engaged the class in collaboratively setting ground rules for respectful conversation on topics that often uncover deep emotions. Building consensus on ground rules, I next used George Ella Lyon's poem, "[Where I'm From](#)," an exercise that has become folklore, to help my students become acquainted with each other in structured ways and initiate a semester-long conversation about respect for social and cultural differences. They wrote poems from Lyon's template, then read their writings to the class. This template offered a no-fail model from which students could create and share *personal testimonies* about where they were from, no matter their age or background. Through this activity, students discovered that they each have a distinctive voice and to be successful students did not have to do things in the same ways. I used the assignment to bring each student's voice into the classroom and help them discover commonalities with students whom they saw as different from themselves and with students whom they saw as similar to themselves. Such discoveries highlight the humanity of everyone and help to build safe spaces for deep conversation.

Furthermore, since I was the first African American professor (even the first Black person) whom many students had interacted with, this course challenged many of them in new ways and introduced them to new perspectives and experiences. I worked to expand their limited exposure to the knowledges and experiences of communities of color and created a safe space for them to ask questions in any way they could at first, expecting them to acquire appropriate vocabulary and concepts as the course developed.

## 2

**Have students examine and reflect on their own social locations and biases.** Working at the junction of history, folklore, ethnic studies, multicultural educational praxis, social justice education, and current events, I asked preservice teachers to take a journey with me to explore areas they had not yet been introduced to, beginning with reflections on their own identities and social locations. Many of the students (overwhelmingly white) had not examined the multiplicity of their identities or reflected upon their experiences of schooling. In assignments throughout the semester, I asked students to examine, reflect, and write about their understandings and personal experiences in light of our topics of study. We discussed the power of socialization to shape social expectations and rules for the roles and social identities we each take. They explored personal experience stories of race, curriculum, and being taught in the classroom. They also reflected on their biases. Students wrote short critical journal reflections about what one key idea from both class and assigned readings for each unit meant for them as a future teacher and for their future students. Through these assignments, I hoped to instill the professional practices of reflection and unpacking biases in their own lives, so that they increased their abilities to interrupt biases and build skills to teach more equitably (Howard 2003, Krummel 2013). *Personal narratives* from this process also provide interesting insights into aspects of the *occupational folklore of teaching*, as Merryfield (2000), Au (2009), and Lee et al. (2007) reveal.

# 3

**Help students discover that not everyone has had access to formal education;** in fact, education has operated as a privilege and not a right for everyone. Students read the SEED<sup>1</sup> classic article by Emily Style, “Curriculum as Windows and Mirrors” (1998), asserting that all students should have windows to see and understand realistic images of others and mirrors to see affirming images of themselves and their cultures in their curriculum. After my students realized that many students do not have such opportunities, I set them up to discover that inclusiveness in education is a relatively new idea. Using Segments 2 and 3 of *School: The Story of American Public Education* (2001) for students to learn the history of education in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, I challenged them to detect who was absent in this narrative and who did not have full access to education in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This series highlighted **personal narratives** contextualized by history to tell stories tied to civil rights struggles of people of color. The African American struggle for educational civil rights opened paths for other communities of color and marginalized groups such as women, queer people, and people with disabilities to protest for access to education.

Multicultural education as a discipline emerged to address the concerns expressed by each of the 1930s-1970s civil rights movements of African Americans, American Indians, Mexican Americans, and Asian Americans. These movements demanded educational reforms to move toward equity for the benefit of children from their communities. Each sought to have:

- Teachers who are practitioners of the worldviews of their students and their communities who could be role models and mentors hired in their schools;
- Accurate representations of their cultures to replace derogatory, denigrating, and distorted histories and images of their communities in the curriculum;
- Pedagogical transformations based in cultural intellectual frameworks to replace often ineffective and culturally damaging teaching strategies used to interact with and instruct students;
- An end to corporal and humiliating punishments for students of color;
- An end to practices of segregation that left these communities with inequitably resourced schools;
- The right for groups to control and self-determine educational choices and curricula to fit the needs of their communities;
- Bilingual education for all students;
- Accurate and inclusive histories incorporating multicultural knowledges, histories, and perspectives in all courses;
- Incorporation of pedagogies and ways of interacting based in the knowledges and educational practices of communities of color to facilitate the learning of their children;
- A commitment by educators to the belief that ALL children have the capacity learn and succeed; and
- Access to a liberal arts education and college preparation (Spring 2016; Lopez 2008).

<sup>1</sup> SEED (Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity) Project is a national teacher training program that partners with schools, organizations, and communities to develop leaders who guide their peers in conversational communities to drive personal, organizational, and societal change toward social justice.

Nationwide, many schools have not yet consistently met these demands to positively educate students of color.

4

**Destabilize the assuredness in what students assume they know and instill an understanding that learning is a lifelong process and there is so much more to learn.** Many students, both white and of color, came to the course with assumptions of the unimportance of the subject matter, because it was not placed centrally in their curriculum and it was about people whom they had been taught to marginalize. I needed to challenge these ideas that underpinned what they thought they knew. First, I declared that through schooling, they had been exposed to a single system of knowledge and asserted that there were other systems of knowledge never touched by conventional schooling, citing indigenous knowledges from around the world and other world cultures rarely addressed in their educational experience. Then, using [Library of Congress Knowledge Cards for African Americans and African American women](#) to illustrate this point, I broke them into small groups, followed by large group discussion, and introduced them to accomplished people of color (not celebrities) who were absent from their curriculum. The first round addressed outstanding African Americans in general, while the second featured stellar Black women. Usually, students had never heard of any of these people and had certainly never previously learned anything about any of the more than 50 Black women. When they expressed shock and questioned the absence of these people from their prior curricula, I asserted that this absence was also the case with Native Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinx people (An 2016). Then I revealed the constructed nature of their curriculum as a social, political framework that reflected societal biases and left out people from groups marginalized by hierarchies of race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and ability (McIntosh 1998).

Furthermore, we discussed how many stories that students have learned previously have been incomplete or inaccurate (Loewen 1996). We revisited the *legends* of Columbus, Pocahontas, and the U.S.-Dakota War (1862) taught in schools and public media, comparing them with historical scholarship and the *oral histories* of communities of color. Once again, students were shocked at the ways their prior curricula had distorted historical facts.

5

**Build new transformative frameworks that move students toward skills for equity and begin with the assumption that students of color carry cultural knowledges and worldviews that can be employed as assets in the classroom.** After introducing multicultural education as a response to the demands of civil rights movements, we defined the term and examined several theoretical frameworks designed to achieve equity in multicultural education. Banks (1995) identified five dimensions of multicultural education: content integration, knowledge construction, equity pedagogy, prejudice reduction, and empowering school culture. These dimensions require that educators acquire critically responsive analyses so that all students can be provided equitable opportunities to achieve their full potential and to function accountably in a multicultural and global world (Gorski 2010). The skills and knowledge of folklorists can help teacher education programs draw on the diverse cultural knowledges and worldviews of school communities to implement Banks' five dimensions and to facilitate needed paradigm shifts for preservice teachers, especially in the areas of content integration, knowledge construction, equity pedagogy, and prejudice reduction. Numerous scholars emphasize the centrality of embracing and respecting the diversities of cultural knowledges and frameworks brought by students and their families in schools (Woodson 1933;

Banks 1995, 2013; Banks and Banks 1995; McIntosh 1998; Nieto 2000; Yosso 2002). Deafenbaugh (2015) highlights the relationships that can be built with larger communities, if schools can embrace the diverse *cultural traditions* coming through their doors and underscores the fifth dimension mentioned by Banks, empowering school culture.

6

**Center the voices and experiences of both educators of color and communities of color to tell their experiences of schooling based on personal narratives.** Using interdisciplinary perspectives, I prioritized the voices of communities of color who not only shared their scholarship on education but also their experiences with mainstream educational systems. By ensuring that members from *communities of color told their own personal narratives and histories*, I featured voices from these communities in the course. As a result of decentering and critiquing mainstream narratives about people of color, students were able to view the histories and experiences of these communities in their fullness. Such an approach centers the narratives of communities of color toward equity (Nieto 2002), an idea that is not new to folkloristics.

In addition, two texts for the class, *Beyond Heroes and Holidays* (Lee et al. 2007), and *Rethinking Multicultural Education: Teaching for Equity and Cultural Justice* (Au 2014) provided a plethora of narratives of teachers sharing their teaching successes and challenges across a variety of subjects and grade levels as they attempted to implement strategies to teach equitably. Using personal narratives of classroom teachers reflecting on their efforts to implement pedagogies that are inclusive and equitable in their classrooms is an important aspect of *teachers' occupational folklore*. These teaching stories have been an important tool for helping students understand the power and possibilities of equitable teaching and offering insights into teaching from multiple cultural perspectives.

7

**Have students participate in experiential learning to reinforce what they are reading, writing about, and discussing in class.** By exposing students to cultural narratives and ways of being that have been absent from their curriculum, I reinforced and expanded their experiences in the world in multiple ways. I required students to attend, analyze, and write about curated opportunities that helped students apply their knowledge and strengthen their use of new interpretive frameworks (see Phillion et al. 2005). I used videos, guest visitors, participation in live events, trips to museums, and stories from their own lives to bring home the readings and cultural values and practices of the communities they were studying in class. Through public folklore and arts programming students opened their hearts and minds to expressive cultures other than their own. Students repeatedly stated that these exposures made a lasting impact on them. For students with little prior

*You forced us to go to 3 live events for this class. I did not want to go but I don't want a bad grade. I got my roommate to go with me to Nepal night. At first I was scared because I didn't know what to expect but it was amazing! The dances were beautiful, the food was very good, and the people were very friendly. I was invited to dance and I had fun. Thank you for forcing me out of my comfort zone. I'm definitely going to attend live events every semester I have left so that I can learn more about different cultures. I need to learn more about other cultures so I can be prepared to support all students in my classroom.*

—Student Journal Entry



exposure to cultures different from their own, these opportunities provided safe ways to learn about, interrogate, and interact with others, increasing their knowledge of the world (Bowman and Hamer 2011). Students expanded their comfort zones by trying diverse foods, viewing arts from many cultures, hearing music, and experiencing languages, stories, theatre, and rituals from people of color, and meeting students and people of color living here from all over the world. Experiential and participatory components such as the regional *pow-wow* or a local *las posadas* celebration enriched student understanding of other cultural worldviews within the community where they live.

8

**Shifting paradigms is a developmental process (not a checklist) that requires continuous effort for growth.** Allow processing time and time for maturation through discussion, reflection, journaling, questioning, and written assignments that require students to deliberate and apply new information throughout the course. Students find collaborative conversations particularly generative in the growth process. Students who push back tend to be wrestling with ideas, while those who are overwhelmed may shut down and can give up, so it is important to monitor continuously where your students are in their processing and offer several avenues for them to process these ideas.

9

**Interrogate the concept of race and racism and how it shapes perception, opportunities, and reality in life and schools.** In asking the question, “What is race?,” students learned of the power of *rumor, prejudice, and beliefs*. Few knew what race really was, even though they had assumptions tied to the word. We examined definitions, structure, and characteristics of race and racism. Students were shocked to learn that race is an arbitrary category not based in biology and is instead a sociopolitical construct designed to do the work of constructing inequality in our society. I defined race as a concept that uses group social power and sanction to construct inequalities by regulating one group to have access to resources and opportunities at the expense of others. In addition, we explored some of the complexities of racial categories as a way that communities have come to identify themselves, under duress.

*After our discussion on race, racism, and mascots in class, I shared this information with my grandma. I share everything with her. I explained how Indian mascots were disrespecting Indian people and their religion. My grandma said she had not had a chance to learn about this form of racism because no one taught her about it. But now that she knows better, we will do better. She was glad that I was learning about it because it can help me be a better teacher.*

—Student Journal Entry

The dynamic processes that continually construct systemic and pervasive inequalities (the work) are the processes of racism. I differentiated those processes from prejudice and discrimination and investigated racism’s properties as a dynamic system of oppression based in the hierarchical power and privilege of a dominant group who exerts power over other groups directly and systemically through policies and practices. As we explored the educational histories of each racial group, students learned about the strategies each group faced in its encounter with U.S. educational systems and how these were historically and intentionally implemented systemically to produce inequitable experiences for students of color. Whites implemented racism in schools through laws, policies, pedagogy, curriculum, and practices of segregation, stereotyping, distortion, silencing,

forced absence from curriculum, disparate discipline/violence practices, and incarceration—all of which denied students of color access to educational and societal resources and opportunities. These inequities continue to have persistent legacies and consequences in the present, of which most of these preservice teachers were generally unaware.

Finally, we used the video *True Colors* (1991) and a classic article on white privilege (McIntosh 1998) to raise preservice teachers' awareness of their own socialization into a racialized **worldview**. Through vigorous discussion, students affirmed that the video still spoke to **traditions of discrimination and oppression** that persist in our society. Part of the needed paradigm shift is to make this invisible information, visible to them, so it becomes something that they understand that they as teachers have power to change (May-Machunda 2013).

## 10

**Equip students with tools to begin applying critical analysis.** Folkloristics has not yet fully interrogated how racism employs traditional cultural beliefs and practices to operate as a system of oppression in American society, but it has tools and a history of exploring questions of identity, community representation, and worldviews that would be useful in taking on such an examination.

In the African American unit of the course, students explored the power of stereotypes to misrepresent groups and convey ideologies of racial inequality through Marlon Riggs' acclaimed documentary *Ethnic Notions* (1987). This film guided students to understand the power of **racial ideologies** to misrepresent groups through beliefs in the inferiority of nonwhite peoples, the use of **stereotypes**, and **naming practices of individuals and groups**, lessons that extended to each of the other racial groups (Jo 2004, Pewewardy 2004). Students saw the enactment of those beliefs in the intentional construction of legal barriers and segregation that also affected the other groups. They saw the use of incarceration and connected it to the school-to-prison pipeline, beginning in preschool. The unit also deconstructed the stereotype that African Americans have not been interested in attaining education by examining persistent African American attempts to attain education from slavery to Reconstruction to the present.

The Latinx and the Asian American units emphasized linguistic oppression and persistent, unfair immigration restrictions. The toll of hostilities to **heritage language** speakers on learning and the precarity of **immigrant** families have severely affected educational experiences for students in classrooms across the country. For example, we explored the meanings of Puerto Rican **music, dance, and casitas** as they affirmed identities and transnational connections. We also used the video *Precious Knowledge* (2011) to highlight challenges to transforming curricula in the present time, and to show traditions in context, such as a **Day of the Dead ritual** for immigrants who had died while crossing the desert.

## 11

**An equitable worldview for the classroom must strive for educational justice.** How the struggle for educational justice is framed and presented is key to moving teachers to teach for equity. Many stories about people of color in the curriculum have been narratives of dominance, one-sided, incomplete, and characterizing people of color as incapable and deficient. An equitable story must present **counternarratives** that take into account complexities, multiple sides, and systemic power relations and contribute to fuller fact-filled interpretations of events. For example, the **narratives**

about the civil rights struggles for education are not merely about victimization by injustice. They are also stories of persistent resistance to oppression, resilience, and struggles for justice. Educators need to know and tell fuller stories, with their complexities, to make sense and connect to other contextual information students have already learned. Students need to know that success in these struggles involved lots of people participating in multiple struggles, not just a leader. Furthermore, students also need to understand that after achieving success in a movement, oppression demands backlash by the dominant group to try to control and limit advancement of the targeted group.

12

**Present students with the knowledge of allies and their roles as heroes.** Some whites put their lives on the line to assist communities of color in their civil rights struggles. Stories of white allies following the leadership of communities of color provide dominant group models of standing against injustice in systems of oppression (Tatum 1994). Those stories should be part of the curriculum to provide alternative examples to accepting and promoting injustice.

Also, communities of color have often supported each other as allies across racial boundaries. These stories contest stereotypes of communities of color only conflicting with each other. The short video *Mendez v. Westminster: For All the Children/Para todos los niños* (2002) illustrates how Thurgood Marshall and the NAACP as well as other cultures' civil rights organizations helped Mexican Americans fight the segregation of Mexican American schools and highlighted how the Mexican American Mendez family protected the property of an interred Japanese family.

13

**Structure classes and assignments to help students see worldviews other than their own and the power of communities to resist the oppression of racism.** After providing a framework for understanding Native American educational experiences and discussing boarding school experiences during the period of Allotment and Attempted Assimilation, I used parts of three episodes of the video *Ojibwe: Waasa Inaabidaa* (2002) to examine Anishinaabe educational experiences and ***cultural frameworks***. Boarding school attendees shared ***personal narratives*** of boarding school experiences in contrast with culturally based tribal education programs on many reservations today. After viewing these episodes, I asked students to identify and compare/contrast characteristics of the cultural frameworks for education of the Anishinaabe with their own Western educational experiences. Many students reflected on the competitive, individualistic, often punitive, and inflexible mandatory educational system that they experienced, and found it less appealing than many aspects of ***Indigenous approaches to education*** that were cooperative, collaborative, affirming, student directed, and growth centered. The goal of this discussion was to emphasize the disparate nature of Indigenous worldviews of education in contrast to the American worldview of public schooling and awaken future teachers to the profound culture shock (intensified by institutionalized white supremacy) Native students would have encountered whenever they were forced into Western systems of education.

# 14

**Have students envision what equitable and inclusive classrooms and schools would look like. What would be needed for them as teachers to succeed in having schools fully serving all students? What should be in place?** This was the question for the final exam for the course. By the end of the course, preservice teachers had learned how critical it is to build relationships with all students in their classrooms and their families, based in the beliefs that all children can learn and that cultural knowledges are assets. They also recognized how racism shaped and harmed the education of all children, particularly children of color, but they also realized that there is a need to disrupt that process actively. They can even envision what an equitable school and classroom might look like and can acknowledge in what ways they personally needed to grow to have the skills achieve that goal and to serve all students.

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More than 50 years after communities of color made assertions about the need for equitable education through their civil rights movements, schools and teacher education programs have barely implemented these demands and have scarcely attempted to explore the strategies laid out by these movements. Current public school systems seem to struggle in their efforts to envision and implement equitable schools that incorporate cultural knowledges to serve their student populations, as documented in the historic and continuing disparate educational success rates of many communities of color (Meatta 2019; Kozol 2012).

To make lasting change toward equity, future teachers will need to be able to envision and then implement new ways of relating to their students and their communities. They will also need to use more representative, culturally responsive, and affirming curriculum to make positive differences for students to engage and complete school successfully and minimize performance disparities (Ladson-Billings 2014,1995; Paris and Alim 2017).

Infusion of folklore content and methodologies can be central in the content integration and knowledge construction phases of building culturally responsive multicultural education (Bowman 2006). Diverse worldviews and ways of doing things are fundamental to equity pedagogy and prejudice reduction. Through infusion of worldviews, narrative, performing traditions, material culture, belief, language, ways of teaching, and other aspects of folklore and history from multiple cultures, teacher education programs can help preservice teachers make the paradigm shifts necessary to begin the intentional processes of transforming curriculum and teaching praxis for the benefit of equitable educational experiences for future generations.

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## URLs

<http://www.georgeallalyon.com/where.html>

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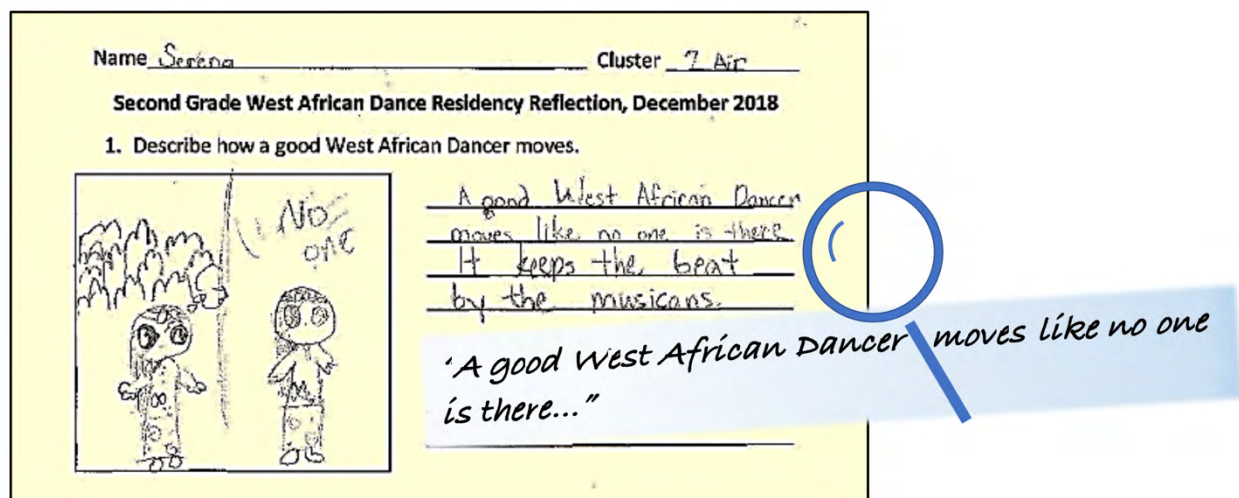
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## Ago/Ame: Co-Teaching Community Cultural Knowledge with a Local Expert

by Avalon Brimat Nemec with Jeannine Osayande

As the field of education offers more inclusive learning environments for students from different backgrounds—for example, cultural, socioeconomic, and neurological, to name a few—providing alternative education models challenges the “one-size-fits-all” approach in conventional classroom education (Brickmann and Twiford 2012, Friend and Cook 2016, Gay 2018, Pratt 2014). Such models include push-in special education support, small-group special education classes, multi-age classes, virtual classroom teaching, education residencies, station teaching, apprenticeships, culturally responsive teaching, and co-teaching.

Although alternative education models are often advocated as new means to support higher academic achievement, folk arts pedagogy has used and/or modified these models for years. Consider an African dance class at a community center in West Philadelphia. You walk in and see 20 students. At the front sit two dancers and seven drummers who share an air of collaboration. You hear grunts of determination; hand clapping; and the polyrhythmic slap, tone, and bass of the djembe. In fact, you FEEL the sounds of the djembe in your chest. In this scenario, a typical example of a community dance workshop, we experience “alternative” education.<sup>1</sup> The multiple teachers guiding the dancers through the steps demonstrate one co-teaching model: team teaching. You see small-group support when one dancer takes two or three students aside to work through a movement. Older students mentor newer students, another alternative teaching model. In the community, examples of alternative assessment strategies exist as well, such as evaluative

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About the photo: West African Dance Reflection Sheet, by Serena, a 2<sup>nd</sup> grader.

All photos courtesy Folk Arts-Cultural Treasures Charter School unless otherwise indicated.

feedback, self-reflection, and performance critique discussions. These examples contrast with schools' reliance on formal assessment, grades, tests, and academic competition.<sup>2</sup> Folk Arts-Cultural Treasures Charter School (FACTS), in the Chinatown neighborhood of Philadelphia, is a prime example of an institution that values alternative learning environments and methods and invites community knowledge and ways of knowing into the school (Deafenbaugh 2015). An excellent illustration of the FACTS curriculum approach is the West African dance residency. It is a collaboration between the FACTS music teacher and a community teaching artist and African dance expert. This article presents a closer look at the intersection of three educational models employed during a West African dance residency in an elementary music classroom: co-teaching, pedagogy focused on folklife and folk arts, and teaching artistry.

### **Co-Teaching, Folklife Pedagogy, and Teaching Artists** by Avalon

Friend and Cook (2016) define co-teaching as the partnering of two (or more) teachers for the purpose of cooperatively delivering instruction to a group of students. Although abundant documentation of co-teaching addresses classroom inequalities, less documentation systematically outlines how co-teaching can affect and increase student understanding in a “specials” classroom.<sup>3</sup> In this co-teaching model that I am offering as a case study, it is important first to articulate the role of each teacher. The bearer of community knowledge was Jeannine Osayande, an African American dancer, Ghanaian cultural expert, and my teaching partner for a FACTS West African Dance Residency between 2016 and 2018.<sup>4</sup> I am an academically trained music educator, and I am specifically interested in co-teaching because it is one of the most authentic, and perhaps exciting, ways to integrate folk arts residencies into a general education classroom. Part of my responsibility in hosting this residency is ensuring that my classroom is a safe environment that treats cultural art forms with respect and authenticity. In making clear our roles, there is also a certain dedication to equity between teachers: Our respective strengths influence the teaching that takes place.

#### ***Ago and Ame***

We borrowed the call-and-response words *ago* and *ame* from the Twi language of West Africa. Any member of the community may use *ago* if they need to get the attention of the group. *Ame* is the response that acknowledges a willingness to listen. Not only does this call and response demonstrate respect for other members of the classroom, it also offers an example of the cultural borrowings that honor cultures of the African Diaspora in the development of a multicultural classroom community (Richards 1996, 41).

Teaching artists at our school include professional and community artists who teach and integrate their art forms into educational settings. They teach others their art form *and* do so through their own way of knowing or doing it. In other words, there is something *else* to learn from creating the art besides completion. It is not within the scope here to document Jeannine's extensive background as a dancer and teacher—that would be an article in its own right! Rather, I seek to illuminate the ways in which FACTS students inextricably gained a unique, meaningful learning experience because of Jeannine's knowledge and presence in my classroom. Including a community artist in the classroom helps bridge the gap between learning *about* an art form and learning *to do* an art form. Jeannine frames this residency to illustrate how seemingly unconventional curricula can indeed become more customary over time and how her work helps to break down systemic racism in education.

## **Decolonizing the Curriculum with Jeannine Osayande & Dunya Performing Arts Company**

by Jeannine

An untraditional curriculum becomes a forward-thinking traditional curriculum (i.e., becomes convention) when long-term collaborative teaching relationships develop between teaching artists and classroom teachers. Over the past 28 years, Swarthmore Rutledge School, Germantown Academy Lower School (for 21 years), and Westtown Lower School (18 years), have collaborated with Jeannine Osayande & Dunya Performing Arts Company. These co-teaching relationships “provide the ability for an integrated multicultural experience into *[sic]* the classroom’s curriculum and stimulate students to think critically about their experience in society” (Patrik 2005, 100). Through her instruction of Diaspora West African dance, storytelling, drum, and song traditions, Jeannine’s participants examine critically the significant polycentric part(s) we hold in our communities as an individual and as a member of a group. Polycentric means “having multiple centers.” In the Diasporic drum and dance cultural traditions, this African aesthetic is significant in our relationship to the cosmos. We have multiple centers, while we hold down different parts. Polycentricism is “motion spending time, the occupant of a time frame and not the moving from point A to point B.” As it regards the body of the dancer, “the polycentric sense allows for both slow and fast (all within the same time frame), with the movements coming from several different directions.” In other words, “the representation of the cosmos in the body is a goal” and movement can originate from any part of the body (Asante and Welsh Asante 1990, 74-5). Our artist-in-residence program invites classroom teachers, students, administrators, and cultural experts to a collaborative opportunity to have a voice in decolonizing the curriculum. The Keele Manifesto for Decolonizing the Curriculum (2018) asserts, “Decolonizing is about rethinking, reframing and reconstructing the current curriculum in order to make it better, and more inclusive. It is about expanding our notions of good literature so it doesn’t always elevate one voice, one experience, and one way of being in the world. It is about considering how different frameworks, traditions and knowledge projects can inform each other, how multiple voices can be heard, and how new perspectives emerge from mutual learning.” In decolonizing the curriculum, Jeannine Osayande & Dunya Performing Arts Company ask these essential questions:

What kind of friend are you?  
What are Africa’s gifts and contributions to the world?  
Where do you see Africa in your everyday life?

The company’s vision is to radiate joy and seek out collaborative experiences that manifest beauty: “Our mission is to add value to our environment and community through arts, culture and social change”.<sup>5</sup> By digging into the co-teaching process, Avalon and Jeannine seek to present practical considerations that could inspire other educators to identify community artists and experts in the cities and towns where they teach and to initiate collaborations with them that are designed to address racial and cultural barriers in the classroom better.

## Methodology

by Avalon

Jeannine's influence shifted FACTS' residency focus to provide students specific insight into Ghanaian culture through the stories and movement of *Kpanlogo*, a contemporary dance from the Ga-dangbe people.<sup>6</sup> I was inspired to write this article after the 2018 residency, our third year working together. Although I am the primary author, Jeannine has contributed by graciously allowing me to describe our partnership, providing resources to further my understanding of Ghanaian culture, and offering invaluable thoughts and passages. We have different strengths as educators, and I have learned a lot working with her. Post-residency reflection has helped me to explain why we work so well together, what from our partnership can be replicated in other residencies or co-teaching relationships, and how a cultural art form remains authentic even in a school setting.<sup>7</sup>

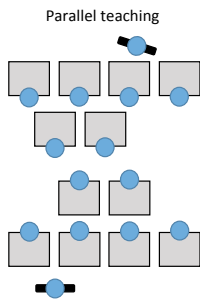
I used autoethnographic research methods to examine the development and execution of instruction and discuss the potential effect this teaching partnership had on both student understanding and teachers' professional development. Data includes video recordings of classes from 2017 and 2018, typed notes and audio recordings from 2016-18 planning and reflection sessions, and supplemental and reflection worksheets developed for students over the history of this residency. Linda Deafenbaugh, the FACTS Folk Arts Education Specialist, recorded most of the classes and scheduled, guided, and recorded all meetings between the teaching partners over the course of this residency. She also coordinated professional development workshops about folk arts pedagogy for teachers and data collection for all residencies and ensembles that take place at FACTS. Jeannine and I spoke over the phone and met in person numerous times during the course of writing this article.

The FACTS student body consists of 512 students. Approximately 68 percent are Asian American, and 12 percent African American. The remaining are Hispanic (5 percent), Multiracial (8 percent), and White/Non-Hispanic (7 percent). In this residency, we worked with 56 students, split between two 2<sup>nd</sup>-grade classes (Class A and Class B). Almost all 2<sup>nd</sup> graders had attended FACTS since kindergarten and were accustomed to weekly choir and music classes. The 2018 residency occurred during regularly scheduled back-to-back music classes on Friday afternoons from September 28 through December 14.

### Our Co-Teaching Methods

Most teachers aspire to have a strong collaboration with their teaching partner, yet our partnership went above and beyond that usual desire for success. Jeannine recently remarked that our partnership felt special from the very beginning because of our intention to "humble ourselves to each other's expertise." In other words, we were dedicated to rethinking instruction in a way that best used our different teaching skills from day one. Many publications centered on co-teaching discuss the ways co-teachers can use systematic teaching and reflection methods to create a strong professional bond. *Interactions: Collaboration Skills for School Professionals* (Friend and Cook 2016) lists six main co-teaching methods: 1) one teaching, one observing; 2) station teaching; 3) parallel teaching; 4) alternative teaching; 5) teaming; and 6) one teaching, one assisting. Jeannine and I did not approach our partnership by coordinating which of Friend and Cook's methods to use; rather, post-residency reflection and video analysis revealed that we primarily used three of

their methods: parallel teaching; teaming; and one teaching, one assisting. **It is instructive to consider how each interaction was engaged in the classroom to facilitate learning.**



### Parallel Teaching\*

The Adinkra symbol *Mpuannum*, or “five tufts of hair” (Korankye 2017) is the starting formation for a dance Jeanine was teaching. She was instructing students to arrange themselves into five separate circle groups, arranged like *Mpuannum* (Figure 1). This connection between their physical arrangement and the symbol was intentionally not made clear to students during this particular lesson; they discovered the connection organically. Students were guided to notice similarities between their dance formations

and Adinkra symbols in a later class. This “discovery-learning” process was emphasized in this residency; we believe it reinforces student ownership and excitement. Jeannine and I walked around the room and held up our hands, instructing small groups of students to make circles around our bodies, and then sit on the floor. The performance starts when a teacher begins the call-and-response song, “O Shei Baba<sup>8</sup>,” and the drumming ensemble begins to play. This formation was later transformed into one large circle; as the students do hand rhythms in their small circles, they are called to join, one by one, the central circle, without missing a beat.

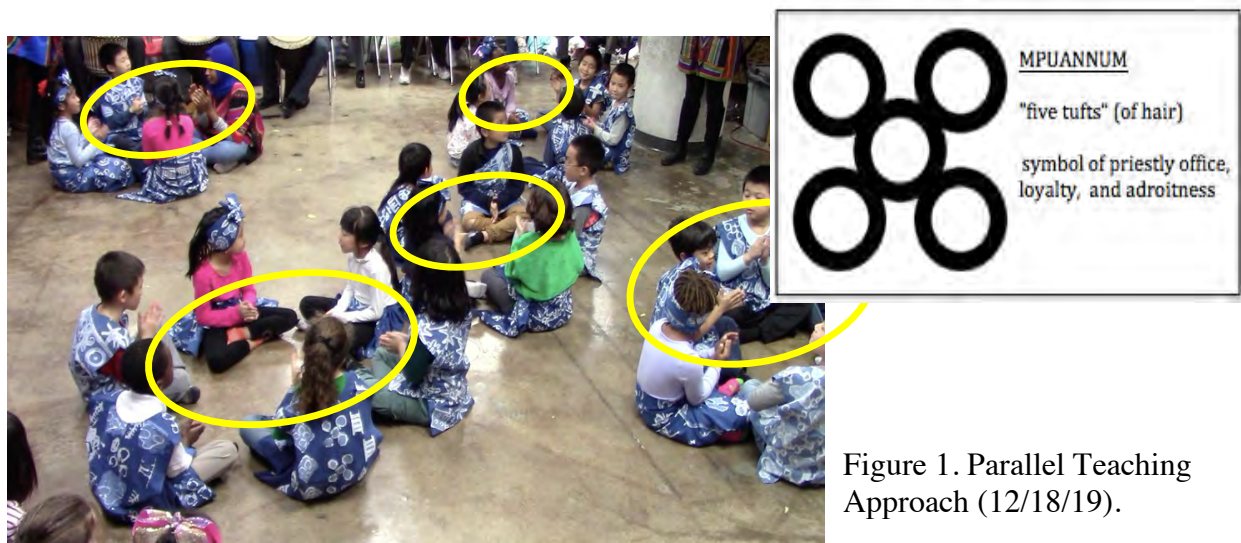


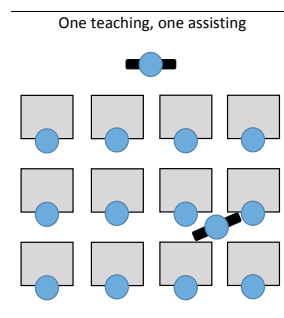
Figure 1. Parallel Teaching Approach (12/18/19).

While teaching this lesson in 2017, we noticed students found it challenging to recreate this figure from verbal direction alone.<sup>9</sup> Jeannine then *drew* the formation on the board, but only a few more students understood the formation. Later in the same lesson, I walked over to a location that would be the center of one group’s circle, put my hands up above my head, and said, “When I say go, group one will join hands in a circle around me...GO!”<sup>10</sup> The students were successful, and Jeannine then copied my procedure. It is essential to the success of lessons within a residency to remember moments like this. We recalled during the planning and goal-setting meeting for the 2018 residency that we should incorporate this formation by using the previous year’s most successful procedure. A general feeling of trust allows teachers to adjust procedures spontaneously, especially if they diverge from the original lesson plan.

\*Images of co-teaching created by Avalon to illustrate Friend and Cook (2016) approaches.



Figure 2. Parallel Teaching Approach. Throughout this class, Jeannine and Avalon moved around the room simultaneously to teach the same dance move to small groups of students (11/16/18).



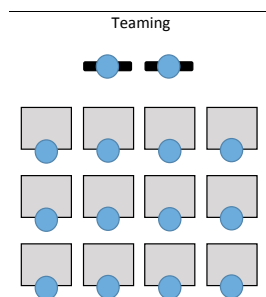
### One Teaching, One Assisting

I noticed from informal observation and review of video recordings of our lessons that Jeannine did a lot more talking and demonstrating than I did during the first weeks of the residency (when much of the information is completely new to the students). By the 2018-19 school year, I had hosted this residency four times. Because of the value FACTS places upon developing residencies that repeat and deepen each year, I know how the residency will pan out, what dance moves Jeannine was planning to teach, and how to help students efficiently. Regardless, the pattern of unequal contribution does seem like the most appropriate option at the beginning of any folk arts residency, as the expert bearer of cultural knowledge *should* be the primary teacher. Not only does this process allow students time to get acquainted with the teacher, it also reflects the classroom teacher's respect for the teaching artist and their way of teaching. In the videos showing the one teaching, one assisting method, Jeannine was at the front of the room demonstrating a move for the students, while I modeled student behavior (such as tracking the teacher and mirroring dance moves) or assisted students who needed extra help or redirection (Figure 3). This further illuminates Jeannine's comment about how we were each "holding down our part" from the very beginning.



Figure 3. One Teaching, One Assisting/Observing Approach. In this class, Jeannine primarily led dance instruction and Avalon primarily modeled student attentiveness and reinforced behaviors (10/26/18).





### Team Teaching

The majority of our teaching style

could be defined as team teaching. Jeannine and I developed a strong partnership from our years of working together and understanding each other's strengths. In fact, Jeannine and I had a special connection from the beginning; it is difficult to define, but our personalities really just *mesh*. Teaching as a team seemed to be the most natural to us: "Go for teaming when co-teaching partners really hit it off; synergy and parity make or break

this approach" (Ploessl et al. 2010, 162). When it is done well and is appropriate to implement, I believe team teaching is the most satisfying for both the students and the teachers. It is important for both teachers to have a sense of ownership in the residency they create together (students notice when teachers love what they are teaching). In the latter half of the residency, when our teaching style was almost exclusively team teaching, weekly classes resembled rehearsals. First, Jeannine announced at the beginning of the residency that *I* was in charge of leading song ("You're the better singer") and *she* was in charge of leading dance.<sup>11</sup> She also asked me to drum in the 2018 residency, which is the authentic way of teaching African dance: one (or more) dance instructor(s), one (or more) drummer(s)/musician(s). I am not a trained African drummer, yet I was able to pull it off for rehearsal. This role allowed me more presence in the residency, whereas in past residencies I have adopted a role closer to that of a classroom "disciplinarian." In this case, the shared responsibility from team teaching helped to reinforce our mutual desire to make the residency as successful as possible, even without sufficient funding to have an African drummer. Jeannine and I shared the responsibility of dancing and demonstrating moves, guiding student formations, and playing auxiliary instruments. It should be clear by now that our roles were different (and changed over time) primarily because of preexisting educational strengths. Equity between co-teachers is achieved when teachers teach to their respective strengths and learn from and trust each other (Ploessl et al. 2010, Pratt 2014).

A pattern of role switching emerged over the course of the residency. Our 2<sup>nd</sup> grade classes are back to back on Friday afternoons and each is 52 minutes. We typically replicate the lesson for the second group, as was exemplified in lesson procedures and teacher language.<sup>12</sup> But I found, upon watching the videos, that we would usually switch roles for the second group. For instance, if I gave the rundown for today's lesson plan in class A, Jeannine would give it in class B. In fact, multiple activities within each lesson were reversed for the following hour of teaching. Although our switch of responsibilities was unplanned, Jeannine was mindful in making sure that both teachers shared the opportunity to lead within the team teaching format once the pedagogy and cultural knowledge were established in the first weeks. Jeannine describes this switching as a type of (teaching) improvisation. Role switching, planned or unplanned, is a clear example of professional familiarity and respect and of modeling professional development techniques for educators (Brickman 2012, Pratt 2014). It was intentional that Jeannine gave me permission to help teach her cultural knowledge, and I gave her some tools for student-appropriate redirection, modeling, and language. We were consistent in keeping each other accountable for our actions and language and doing so in respectful ways.

"The teaming model has been referred to as the most collaborative model of team teaching, as it demands the greatest amount of shared responsibility" (Baeten and Simons 2014, 95).



Figure 4. Team Teaching Approach (11/30/18).

## The Role of Drumming

by Jeannine

Avalon's drumming contribution was invaluable to the African dance residency. She eagerly played the *Kpanlogo* basic rhythm pattern while I played the 6/8 rhythm on the *Gangokui* double-headed iron bell. The relationship of live drumming with African dance is paramount; this drummer/dancer relationship is integral to the cultural tradition being taught. Because we lacked funding for a lead drummer, our skills had to make do. A DunyaPAC/FACTS drummer, Steve Jackson, Sr., was able to teach two 30-minute drum lessons in the beginning of the residency. These lessons were helpful: Avalon and I were able to provide basic drum accompaniment to our weekly lessons from then on. The students embraced the rhythm, motivated to move. The FACTS African Diaspora Drum ensemble, taught and led by Steve, accompanied our final dance rehearsal and the performance. The question remains: What would this residency have looked like if we had the funding to do it authentically, with a professional drummer, every week?

There are not sufficient funds to hire a drummer for every session of this residency. With my input, FACTS administration decided to integrate the middle-school African Diaspora Drum ensemble with this West African dance residency. Scheduling the residency and ensemble to meet at the same time made it possible for the drum ensemble to drum for the dancers' final rehearsal and the final performance, but not in every rehearsal. The African Diaspora Drum ensemble were taught the *Kpanlogo* rhythm in only a few sessions before the final performance; their motivation and performance were admirable, but this is not the culturally authentic way of bringing drums to the dance experience. In not closely examining the art form (and its necessary components), funders can unintentionally uphold practices rooted in systemic racism and white privilege. The lack of sufficient funding to hire a professional African drummer to be present in every session of our African dance class is problematic for teaching the tradition authentically. These seemingly minor funding decisions can directly change how a cultural tradition is practiced and presented.

Ultimately, funders should consider carefully how insufficient funding contributes to dismantling traditions, like African drum and dance, by funding one part and not the other.<sup>13</sup>

## Teacher Language

by Avalon

While analyzing videos, I looked for differences in teacher language. Our differing cultural and educational backgrounds are confirmed by our use of fairly distinct attention-getting techniques. In a typical classroom setting, attention-getting techniques are audible cues to alert students to discontinue conversation and listen to the teacher. Jeannine primarily used the call “*Ago*” (meaning *Are you listening?*), to which students respond “*Ame*” (meaning *Yes, you have my attention*). I typically used a technique of call-and-response-style clapping, a common FACTS practice. Additionally, we both used chanting techniques (*1, 2, 3, eyes on me... 1, 2, eyes on you!*) and, infrequently, a countdown technique. Figure 5 presents the frequency of both teachers’ use of their primary attention-getting techniques. The data does not reveal efficacy of any techniques, but it does show that the teachers’ verbal cues changed over the course of four weeks. I never used the terms *Ago/Ame* to get students’ attention, just as Jeannine never used the clapping technique, yet there is a slight increase in frequency of *Ago/Ame* as the lessons progressed.<sup>14</sup> Contrarily, there is a slight decline in frequency of my clapping technique, as well as our use of the countdown technique, as the lessons progressed. The increase in frequency of *Ago/Ame* suggests that Jeannine’s role in classroom management likely increased over time. Students are interacting with and responding (with success) to our differing language styles, and occasional code switching, multiple times every single class.

Date	Class	<i>Ago/Ame</i> —Jeannine	Clapping Signal—Avalon	Countdown—Jeannine or Avalon	Other (Chants, Chime)
10-26-18	B	0	3	5	0
11-02-18	A	2	4	3	2
11-02-18	B	3	1	3	1
11-16-18	A	6	2	4	0
11-16-18	B	3	0	1	1
11-30-18	A	4	1	2	2
11-30-18	B	5	3	0	1

Figure 5. Frequency of attention-getting techniques.

Jeannine and I had more playful interactions and informal language while team teaching. In fact, the atmosphere seemed more fun when we used team teaching over other co-teaching models. Noticeable smiles and laughter from students and the occasional exchanging of jokes between the teachers characterize an atmosphere of fun. Figure 6 is a selection of a transcript from a lesson that exemplifies the informality of our speech with each other. Informal language does not diminish the success of the student-teacher relationships. I argue that intercultural competence within an elementary classroom setting relies simultaneously on culturally AND age-appropriate speech—and age-appropriate speech for 2<sup>nd</sup> graders includes playful interactions and jokes.

09:19

Jeannine: “Let’s have a smile contest Teacher Avalon. Teacher Avalon and I are going to compete against the *whole* class and see in the groups who can smile. We’re a group, you’re a group. Ah, wait. It’s looking good already. I don’t know Teacher Avalon, I think they might win.

Avalon: “I think *we’re* going to win, haha.”

[All students have huge grins on their faces, and a few chuckle at the comment that the teachers will win.]

Figure 6. Transcript exemplifying “playful” speech (11/02/18).

Students should view co-teachers as equals, regardless of relative classroom teaching experience (Brinkman and Twiford 2012, Friend and Cook 2012). In fact, student learning is enhanced because teachers “bring different things to the table.” Professionals who interact with students and colleagues from diverse backgrounds are engaged in what is called intercultural competence, or the “ability to function effectively in culturally diverse settings” (Günay 2016, 409). Therefore, it is the responsibility of teaching partners to encourage first an atmosphere of respect and intercultural competence with each other and, in turn, foster respect from students. In watching our lessons, I looked specifically for examples in our speech and body language that demonstrated tools of intercultural competence. Our students subconsciously gained valuable social skills simply from observing two adults (with widely different cultural backgrounds) coming together harmoniously to teach one subject. Parity is achieved because Jeannine and I shared the responsibility of teaching and redirecting behaviors and developed healthy communication skills during and after teaching. Furthermore, Alfdaniels Mabingo suggests that participating in African dance is a type of civic engagement (in our case, for FACTS 2nd graders) that undermines stereotypes about the continent of Africa: “...teaching African dances can lead to perceptual and attitudinal changes about Africa” (2018, 107). We believe intercultural competence is reinforced within multiple layers of this residency—for both the facilitators and the participants.

26:31

Avalon: “I think this group—this class is really smart and I wonder if you guys would notice...Teacher Jeannine can you pick one of the first three, maybe two moves to show us with the drumming? ‘Cos I wonder if THEY notice what the drum sounds like during certain parts of the movement.”

Jeannine: “Mm. I like this. It’s a *Blue’s Clues*. (student laughter) Yea, it’s a *Blue’s Clues*. So what Teacher Avalon is saying is—Uh oh. Back row! (looks to Teacher Avalon) I wanna first of all say something for row number four, if I can. (Teacher Avalon nods yes) Row number four, what happened that was wonderful is, at the end of the dance, you all focused... So—

Avalon: “Think about how the drum sounds. Listen to it—

Jeannine: “Should I do the uh...

Avalon: (Author shrugs her shoulders) “Up to you”

Jeannine: “I’m gonna do *open-close* and the *teapot*. I’m gonna do those two...so what you’re doing is you’re going to listen to the music and look at my feet...Did you see it? Everyone please stand up—let’s try it.”

Figure 7. Transcript exemplifying parity in speech (10/26/18).

Developing an effective co-teaching partnership takes work to learn each other's communication styles, teaching styles, and even a little about personal lives (Baeten and Simons 2014, Pratt 2014). Here, reflection is paramount in effecting change in teaching behaviors (Kerin and Murphy 2015). I believe the success in my partnership with Jeannine is due in part to our dedication to these concepts. We spent time outside the classroom to learn about each other's lives and teaching experience. In planning meetings, we took extra care to ensure each was able to share everything she wanted to share; no one was excluded or interrupted. In situations when co-teachers are not as lucky as we were to become friends, they should do everything in their professional power to respect and learn about each other, as friends *would* do.

“Recognize that cultural differences are complex structures that deeply affect not only customs and attitudes but also how different co-teaching partners perceive the same situation. Make time to share personal stories and narratives. These conversations convey partners' culturally driven value and belief systems, helping to build a safe and trusting climate” (Ploessl et al. 2010, 165).

## Materials

Jeannine and I used a variety of materials to aid in planning the residency, setting goals, and providing structure for students during each lesson. Most are far from anything that would be used in an authentic setting like community African dance classes, and especially dance experiences in West Africa.<sup>15</sup> Yet the materials we used are a necessary part of creating meaningful instruction in a conventional elementary school setting. Reflection materials allow teachers insight to students' understanding, and student responses illuminate what part of the residency is most memorable and effective. Linda developed the majority of handouts and supplementary materials for this residency. I highlight a few of the more successful tools to inspire other educators to think about how conventional educational tools can help integrate folk arts pedagogy in public schools.

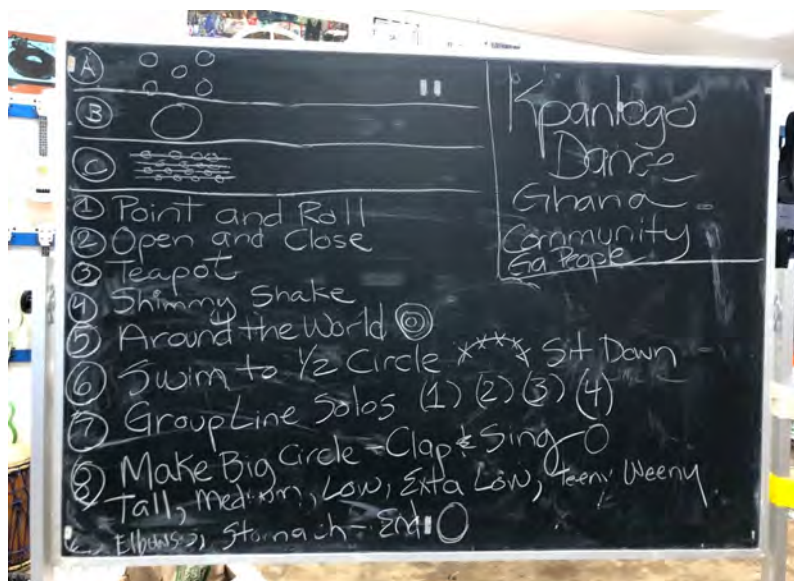


Figure 8. Daily chalkboard (12/3/18).

The daily chalkboard outlines the steps for that day's lesson and a bird's-eye view of the dance formations. We started using this setup from the first day of the 2018 residency, allowing students to track the visual progress of the choreography and give them hints for the next move if memory failed them (Figure 8). On the chalkboard the reader sees Jeannine's dance book notation style, which reflects how she organizes and internalizes content through words and drawings of the choreography.<sup>16</sup> I suggested using the chalkboard as a visual aid during the 2017 residency when I noticed students' difficulty





### Fabric Design Art Unit for 8th Graders— An example of integrated learning across grade levels

FACTS 8<sup>th</sup> graders made Adinkra cloths in art class to be studied by the 2<sup>nd</sup> graders. This 8<sup>th</sup>-grade art unit includes assignments on designing patterns (ABAB, AABB, etc) on paper with ink stampers to learn design placement of symbols. Students also create an Adinkra symbol stamper from cardboard and then learn to manipulate hot wax on their cardboard symbol by stamping a pattern on brown paper. Moving on to fabric, students learn about transferring the designs to the fabrics, attentive to how the fabrics would be sewn and worn. The process of teaching wax-resist technique continues through multiple iterations before students can view their finished products and celebrate the work completed. Second-graders became the end users of what the 8<sup>th</sup> graders made, which adds a community service layer on this unit (see Zoey's Adinkra Worksheet, Figure 10).



remembering the steps from the previous week's lesson, and I was, admittedly, having difficulty remembering the trajectory of our lesson. We adopted this tool from then on. So the "chalkboard" tool was borne out of necessity; if we had the opportunity to meet for this residency more than once a week, students would be better equipped for rote learning the dance. We also took informal pictures of the board (with a cellphone) after each week's class to reference for the next lesson.

To deepen student understanding, we also needed to address the deep cultural context of the dances being learned in the music classroom. Folk arts provide ample opportunities to connect with other specials, as well as the general education classroom, because of the significant cultural contexts that these arts engage. In our case, Linda launched an Adinkra cloth sub-unit within the 2017 residency. Adinkra symbols are visual connections to proverbs and significant values within the Akan culture of Ghana, West Africa (Inscribing Meaning 2007). This sub-unit included showing 2<sup>nd</sup> graders a video of FACTS' 8<sup>th</sup> graders creating the cloth for the 2<sup>nd</sup> graders' final dance performance and teaching students the meaning behind Adinkra symbols. In one example, Jeannine and I held up student-

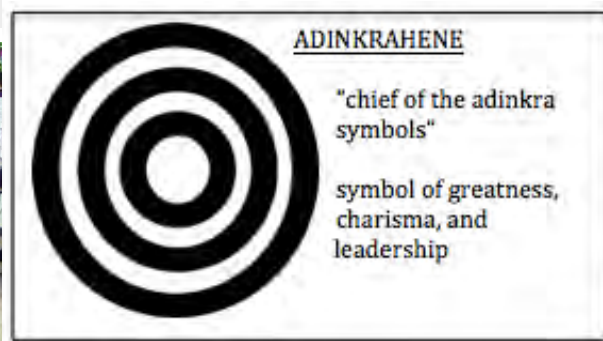


Figure 9. Student connects Adinkra to dance moves (11/16/18).

created fabrics and asked the 2<sup>nd</sup> graders, “Is there anything on the fabric that reminds you of our dance?” One student connected the dance movement we referred to as “around the world” with the *Adinkrahene*: “That one looks like ‘around the world’” (Figure 9).<sup>17</sup>

Grade/cluster:

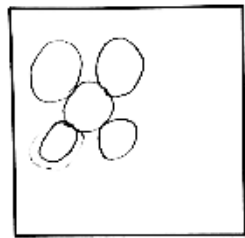
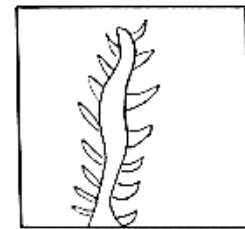
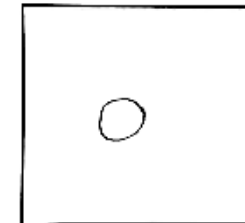
	Name of the symbol: <u>Five shafts of hair</u> What does this symbol mean? <u>Focus on what you are doing. Do it with joy.</u>
	Name of the symbol: <u>The staff of life</u> What does this symbol mean? <u>Have faith and trust.</u>
	Name of the symbol: <u>Circle</u> What does this symbol mean? <u>Unity.</u>

Figure 10. Zoey’s Adinkra Worksheet.

In the 2018 residency, we created a new homeroom classroom activity in which students looked at African fabrics to locate Adinkra symbols, match symbols on the fabric with those on a worksheet Jeannine created, and redraw the symbols, with their respective meanings, on a separate worksheet. We may infer that this small project influenced student understanding of the connection between the Adinkra and the dance; one student commented, “We wore [the cloth] because it meant peace. And it showed we really know African Dance and understand.”

At the end of this residency I modified an existing reflection template to generate a post-residency reflection worksheet for 2<sup>nd</sup> graders. The reflection sheet included age-appropriate questions and places for both written answers and drawings. The reflection process is important to the integrity of the residency programs and should be integrated into the curriculum with respect and intention. I was able to carve time out of two music classes, following the final residency performance, to allow students a total of 50 minutes for reflection. Students were encouraged to talk to each other during the reflection process.

### Deepening Understanding and Next Steps

The most effective co-teaching partnerships are characterized by a dedication to reflection of student achievement and teacher satisfaction following every co-taught lesson (Ploessel et al. 2010, Pratt 2014). In each FACTS residency, the general education teacher and teaching artist sit down and plan the goals of the residency and materials to track progress. We also have a post-residency meeting to assess successes and address areas of concern. Jeannine and I had informal weekly check-ins. We would reflect for 15 minutes each Friday afternoon following our last class to discuss questions: What went well during the lesson? What did not go well during the lesson? What are we going to teach next week? Future partnerships in this particular residency might be


more successful with more consistent, standardized reflection. Teachers may use a reflection checklist or follow a stricter regimen of written reflection, through email.

Likewise, hosting student interviews would allow additional honest and comprehensive student responses. Such an extension could provide an opportunity to link to other curricula within the school. For example, older students might interview younger students' residency experiences as a project for a unit on interviewing skills. Further research and more systematic data analysis is warranted to explore the qualitative differences of teaching partners' language and evidence of student understanding as illuminated by student reflections.

Name Serena Cluster 7 A/C

**Second Grade West African Dance Residency Reflection, December 2018**


1. Describe how a good West African Dancer moves.



A good West African Dancer moves like no one is there. It keeps the beat by the musicians.

A good West African Dancer moves like no one is there. It keeps beat by the musicians.

2. What does it mean to think like a dancer?



To think like a dancer you have to be calm and focused.


You have to think about what comes after that dance move.

To think like a dancer you have to be calm and focused. You have to think about what comes after that dance move.

3. How did the cloth we wore when we performed help us with the dance?

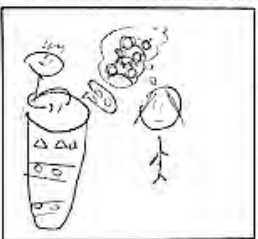
It helped it because it meant peace.  
And it showed we really know African Dance and understand.  
We wore it because it meant peace. And it showed we really know African Dance and understand.

4. When we worked with Teacher Jeannine, how did we show community?



We showed her love and peace with friends and family. And we showed her love and peace with friends and family.

5. How did the drumming help you as a dancer?



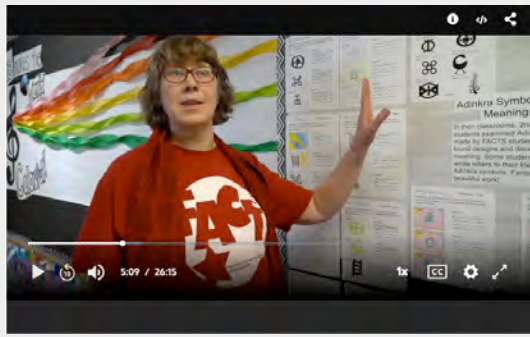
It help us follow the beat and when I got stuck I listened to the beat to figure out what to do.

6. Why do you think FACTS teaches folk arts like West African dance?

To show that if even if we are different we can do other cultures because we can do many things. And love to each other.  
To show that if even if we are different we can do other cultures because we can do many things. And love to each other.

Figure 11. Front and back of West African Dance Reflection Sheet, with typed transcriptions. From Serena and another 2<sup>nd</sup> grader.

The culturally responsive co-teaching frame is more important now than ever, amid significant changes in educational practices in public schools and the globalized world our students live in (and have more access to each day). I hope educators reading this article can reimagine their classroom as a safe space to include diverse voices intentionally, especially those typically left out of conventional educational models, and recognize the power of connecting school and home life. In other words, school and community ways of knowing need not be mutually exclusive (Deafenbaugh 2015). It takes more than an “open mind”—teachers need to be actively looking at the communities in which they teach for ways to integrate community and home life with school life. Educators can bridge the gap to make education more culturally responsive and equitable; this effort requires a dedication to being truly reflective and critical of their own work and to bringing in community voices: “However important they are, good intentions and awareness are not enough to bring about the changes needed in educational programs and procedures to prevent academic



See this feature on local public television WHYY to hear more from the FACTS Folk Arts Education Specialist Linda Deafenbaugh about this special program. (Start the video at the 5:05 marker.)

inequities among diverse students. Good will must be accompanied by pedagogical knowledge and skills as well as the courage to dismantle the status quo” (Gay 2018, 14).

For our fellow educators, ask yourself: How am I helping my students engage appropriately with the world when they can just as easily conduct a Google search on their tablets? How am I guiding my students to learn from their community and find value in their own cultures? How can learning an art from outside my students’ cultures inform their understanding of the importance of folk arts in societies? I think this residency is at the forefront of change in education, and I hope it excites other

teachers to consider how their teaching addresses the equity between school and community knowledge. Other educators can use my partnership with Jeannine as a framework for developing their own partnerships with other teaching artists, folk artists, and cultural experts. I encourage educators to think about how co-teaching opens up the door for equity in education and helps connect best practices in cultural pedagogy to the public school classroom. The respect that Jeannine and I have for each other as remarkable educators and talented artists not only created a safe and productive learning environment for our students, it also created a magical atmosphere that helped us each become *better at what we do*.

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*Jeannine Osayande has been a choreographer and master movement and teaching artist of Diasporic West African dance and drum traditions for 38 years. She holds a BA in Anthropology from Temple University, Traditional and Contemporary African Dance Certification from Noyam African Dance Institute and the Ghana Board of Education, and Teaching Artist Certification from Columbia University Teachers College. Her Diasporic African teachers/mentors include De Ama Battle, Ibrahima Camara, and F. Nii-Yartey. She is owner/director of Dunya Performing Arts Company and on the roster of Young Audiences of NJ and Eastern PA.*

#### Endnotes

- 1 This example describes an education experience that is alternative to typical public schooling, yet core within the context of folk arts pedagogy.
- 2 It is worth mentioning, in participatory art forms—e.g., West African dance—value is placed on participation rather than presentation. Success is measured by the inclusivity of the experience. This is somewhat contrary to westernized music and dance experiences in public schools, where the final performance is the *most* important aspect for evaluating the success of the experience (Turino 2008).
- 3 “Specials” refer to Music, Physical Education, Art, and Foreign Language subjects, typically considered by public schools to be extracurricular to core academic subjects.

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- 4 Jeannine and Alexis Adams, the current music teacher at FACTS, worked together on this residency for the 2019-20 school year.
- 5 Jeannine Osayande, email message to Avalon Nemec, July 15, 2020.
- 6 *Kpanlogo* (PAHN-loh-goh) is a recreational dance and music form from Ghana, West Africa. It was first played by the Ga-Adangbe people, most of whom live in and around the capital city, Accra. *Kpanlogo* can now be seen on national and international stages. The rhythm, songs, and dance became popular among youth during the Pan African and African Independence Movements of the late 1950s but is based on ancient drumming patterns that “contain musical motifs borrowed from older Ga pieces like *Gome*, *Kolomashie*, and *Oge*, as well as highlife.” *Kpanlogo: Background and History*. n.d. Accessed May 14, 2020, <https://thisworldmusic.com/kpanlogo-african-drumming-dance-ghana>.
- 7 Consider that teaching a cultural art form (as opposed to teaching about a cultural art form) is cultural appropriation without the *voice of the* community member.
- 8 This song is *Kpanlogo* from the Ga people of Ghana. The full title is *Baba baba shie baba OO, O shei Baba*. Jeannine learned the song from Professor F. Nii-Yartey, Ghana National Dance Company, Noyam African Dance Institute, Ghana Dance Ensemble. For more information see, <https://www.potsdam.edu/sites/default/files/West%20African%20drum%20and%20dance%20ensemble%20on%2011%2020%2016.pdf>; <http://africandrummingclub.blogspot.com/2005/08/what-we-play-kpanlongo.html>; and <https://youtu.be/AHTBjasyiWo>.
- 9 This was discussed anecdotally in the 2018 pre-residency planning session.
- 10 Anecdotal approximation of a quote.
- 11 Jeannine directly said on multiple occasions before classes that she preferred my singing voice for modeling.
- 12 In analysis, I observed these mirrored language and lesson progressions in videos of lessons that were taught on the same day.
- 13 FACTS administration recognizes this is not the optimal teaching and learning situation for this tradition, yet this compromise prevented other significant arts residency cuts. The authors appreciate everyone's efforts to rectify this problem and believe we did everything in our power to make the residency successful and engaging. We acknowledge that the funders didn't *intend* to disenfranchise the cultural tradition because of lack of funding; however, the effects are felt either way. During a time of national protest and the Black Lives Matter movement, it is important to have these conversations.
- 14 Interestingly, *Ago/Ame* was not uttered a single time in one class early in the residency.
- 15 The term “experience” is intentionally vague in this context. It is not necessarily culturally appropriate to refer to dance as an instructional experience.
- 16 Jeannine carries this learning tool from the FACTS school residency into her teaching practice. She writes her choreographic notes and movement sketches on the chalkboard for students and co-teachers as a reference and to share how a teaching artist organizes her dance journal notes (Jeannine Osayande, email message to Avalon Nemec, May 14, 2020).
- 17 In the dance movement “around the world,” the dancers balance on their bottom with feet raised a few inches above the ground. They use their hands to spin their body in place.

## URLs

<https://youtu.be/PuGN820toUs>  
<https://why.org/episodes/visions-of-community>

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## *Let's stand together, rep my tribe forever:* Teaching toward Equity through Collective Songwriting at the Yakama Nation Tribal School

by Kaity Cassio Igari, Juliana Cantarelli Vita, Jack Flesher, Cameron Armstrong, Skúli Gestsson, and Patricia Shehan Campbell

*Under dimming gym lights, an audience of teachers, students, and families shifts eagerly into place as high schoolers fill the stage. Brimming with anticipation, Yakama Nation Tribal School students pick up drums, guitars, and violins, preparing to share the songs they have been crafting over the last four months. University of Washington musicians bustle in the background, hovering over computers, whispering final reminders about entrance cues, and attempting to calm band members' nerves. After introductions by Yakama and university Elders, the moment finally arrives—raising their instruments, breathing deeply, the students lift their voices and begin to sing.*

Twenty years ago, Yakama Nation Elders and University of Washington (UW) music education leaders forged a partnership called “Music Alive! In the Yakima Valley” (MAYV), a cultural exchange program to share music and promote equitable education. After a brief hiatus, UW-affiliated experts in popular music and collective songwriting returned to Toppenish, WA, in 2018

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About the photo: Ezilda Winnier leading students in the Ichiskíin language flow.

to facilitate youth songwriting at the Yakama Nation Tribal School (YNTS).<sup>1</sup> Since then, UW and YNTS students come together each year to create music that explores and celebrates students' identity as Native youth, culminating in the composing, recording, producing, and performing of songs.

The current cultural partnership program is rooted in two complementary processes; the first is *testimonio*, followed by collective songwriting. In a contemporary example that inspired our project, activist and scholar Martha Gonzalez used *testimonio* in her project [Entre Mujeres: Women Making Music Across Borders](#), in which women expressed their lived experiences as migrants. The *testimonios* were eventually turned into songs and recorded on an album (Gonzalez 2015). This brings us to our second process, collective songwriting, in which the *testimonio* is translated into lyrics and gains new life through rhythm and melody. These two processes uplift individual and community identities by honoring student experiences and, further, synthesizing their interests in contemporary popular music, dance, poetry, and Indigenous traditions.

*Testimonio* is a process of transmitting lived experiences into a literary form. Birthed in Latin America, the exact genesis of *testimonio* is not defined by a specific moment or event but has been alive since the 1970s; it is a literary mode associated with acts of liberation, specifically related to resisting imperialism in developing nations (Reyes and Rodríguez 2012). In Chicana and Chicano education research, *testimonio* is concentric with Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's liberationist pedagogy, which uses the learning of literacy as a tool of liberation. Jointly, liberationist pedagogy and *testimonio* "empower the speaker or narrator to transform the oral to its written representation not as an act of oppression and ignorance, but rather as an acknowledgment of the revolutionary aspect of literacy" (Reyes and Rodriguez 2012, 527). *Testimonios* have historically come in many forms such as speeches, newsletter columns, *corridos*, or spoken word.

Our program sought to use pedagogy that worked with, not against, ways of learning, knowing, and being within the Yakama Nation. Opportunities for students to develop their individual and community identities within the tribe already existed and became a crucial part of both the *testimonio* and collective songwriting process. The Yakama hold weekly cultural nights when young people and adults share meals, practice pow-wow dancing, and participate in traditional drumming and singing (Campbell et al. 2019). The cumulative pedagogical processes of *testimonio* and collective songwriting are rooted in the act of sharing lived experiences, therefore these processes are not only congruent with current Yakama traditions, they also further amplify student voices as they express their Native identities in conjunction with their intersecting identities as modern youth.

Participating students relay personal experiences on and off the Reservation, developing their expressive-creative voices as Native people in an empowering musical setting. During six or seven half- and full-day sessions, YNTS students compose songs to share with the tribal community, incorporating Indigenous Yakama musical expressions and Ichiskíin<sup>2</sup> language, while working with YNTS teachers and Elders to craft lyrics and drumming. Each year's workshops culminate in a live performance and digital song sharing.

We aim to reflect collectively, with consultation from YNTS leadership, on our experiences as activist-music educators celebrating collective songwriting as a powerful decolonizing pedagogical approach, intent on pushing back against the institutionalized curricular inequities of the American music classroom. We write collaboratively, each bringing unique perspectives to our understanding and support of decolonizing practices. We highlight the process of this project, informing how other musician-educators may explore similar practices in teaching and learning for equity. Using narrative description, we reflect on particular moments through the lens of Linda Tuhiwai Smith's decolonizing dimensions of research (Smith 2012). Decolonization has emerged in educational circles as a movement to confront and challenge oppressive systems, so we attempt to root our article in this rich, dynamic current of Indigenous theory and practice. Smith's dimensions delineate the purpose of our workshop by defining decolonization as not merely consciousness raising, but also as a multidimensional approach to disrupt settler-colonialist and capitalist practices, reprioritizing Native sovereignty and cultural values (Smith 2012). This approach also connects to Lee and McCarty's (2017) three components of critical culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogy: recognizing "asymmetrical power relations" toward transformation, "reclaiming and revitalizing traditional practices," and embracing "community-based accountability" (Lee and McCarty 2017, 62).

From an understanding of the struggle of decolonization as dynamic, collective agency, Smith argues for the complex interplay of critical consciousness, reimagination, disparate cultural and social elements combined, counter-hegemonic movement and disturbance, and challenge to power structures. Decolonizing efforts, then, move beyond individual moments of healing and into communitywide conditions and actions that support collective liberation from oppressive systems. We describe Smith's overlapping dimensions in the following order: (a) disparate elements combined, (b) counter-hegemonic movement, (c) critical consciousness, (d) structures of power and imperialism, and (e) reimagination. The project seeks to be "an activity of hope," an "effective political project . . . [to] touch on, appeal to, make space for, and release forces that are creative and imaginative" (Smith 2012, 322-23).

This section considers the distinct elements of the project that combine to build community. This dimension of decolonization is "the coming together of disparate ideas, the events, the historical moment, which 'creates opportunities' and 'provides the moments when tactics can be deployed'" (Baldy and Yazzie 2018, 5; Smith 2012, 320).

### **The Combination of Disparate Elements: Creative Chaos toward Building Community**

An average day in the collective songwriting program is chaotic. Handfuls of YNTS students trickle into the classroom while we, the UW team, connect speakers, gather materials, and wrestle the Wi-Fi. Some students participate enthusiastically in beat and movement warm-ups; others lean back in their chairs, checking the Snapchat app on their mobile phones. Transitioning into large-group conversation, students might be reticent or volunteer comments about their school, traditions, and community concerns. YNTS staff listen quietly in the background or

join in the brainstorming and pop music singalongs. During breakout sessions, sounds of drums, guitars, free-styling, and beat-making overflow. After breaks, raucous song planning resumes as students yell out ideas for "hooks" and try them to various beats, performed on drums or sampled from a computer. Students might leave at the lunch bell or linger until conversation and jamming

fizzle out. After leaving YNTS, we debrief over coffee, gathering the threads of the day for the next visit.

The program's primary elements are the students and their community. YNTS is expressly committed to educational achievement and cultural preservation for 8<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> graders. Teachers ensure academic activities align to state learning standards while supporting students' acquisition of traditional language, culture, and history. "The kids need to realize 'I have something to contribute,'" culture teacher Ezilda Winniers shared. Through traditional seasonal activities, mentorship programs at a local college, dance and drumming performances, all-school opening and closing circles, competitive basketball teams, and the collective songwriting project, students have the opportunity to do just that. Students are members of youth and tribal communities and take obvious pride in their school, for example, planning a music video for a recent collective song to highlight "a day in the life of a student," with "fun and friendship."



Figure 1. Electronic beats and instruments, acoustic violin, and Yakama drumming come together in performance.

Other elements are the UW facilitators. We are experienced music educators, ethnomusicologists, and performing musicians, working in local and global school music programs and community music settings. Our diverse backgrounds—international elementary classrooms, secondary and tertiary bands, studio lessons, American Roots music, Brazilian Maracatu, various styles of folk and traditional music, and international rock performance—along with strong commitments to intercultural exchanges, prepare us for making music in myriad styles. Team membership shifts with funding, with some members constant throughout. From the original two to this year's conglomerate of five graduate students and one faculty advisor, we bring distinct strengths to our planning, facilitation, and student interactions. We lead breakout sessions based on our skills and

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alternate guiding songwriting, documenting the process, or engaging with students on the fringes. The addition of female facilitators proved significant. On one visit, two returning male facilitators led discussion and musical planning with confident returning students (mostly male), while two female facilitators huddled with new students (mostly female) and relayed their whispered responses to the group. During one lunchtime conversation between the female facilitators, a YNTS student teacher, and Ezilda, she emphasized the importance of providing strong female role models to help students develop self-confidence and self-esteem. The next year, the returning female students led discussion, prioritizing their favorite musical styles and insisting on attention to the missing and murdered Indigenous women.

The collective songwriting project is also intergenerational and multilingual. Students work with Ezilda and Elder Tony Washines to translate lyrics into Ichishkíin, with Ezilda calling on her own Elders to finesse the grammar. Students combine multiple musical styles, from Yakama drumming to rap and country styles, weaving diverse preferences into a personal musical setting (Figure 1). Their music also connects the broader school community through all-school performances and recordings shared on social media or local radio. A YNTS teacher applied a collective song to a basketball tournament slideshow, even making videos on the TikTok mobile app with it.

After one songwriting session, a pep assembly celebrated both the women's and men's basketball teams making it to the state playoffs. Basketball is a source of pride at YNTS, with coaches and players diligently fostering athletic achievement and sportsmanship. As they prepared to go to the state tournament, the whole community cheered them on. At the suggestion of a YNTS teacher, the students' collective song blasted through the gym and everyone sang along (Figure 2):

*For a good vibe, rep your tribe  
Gotta keep your culture up to stay alive  
Let's stand together, rep my tribe forever*

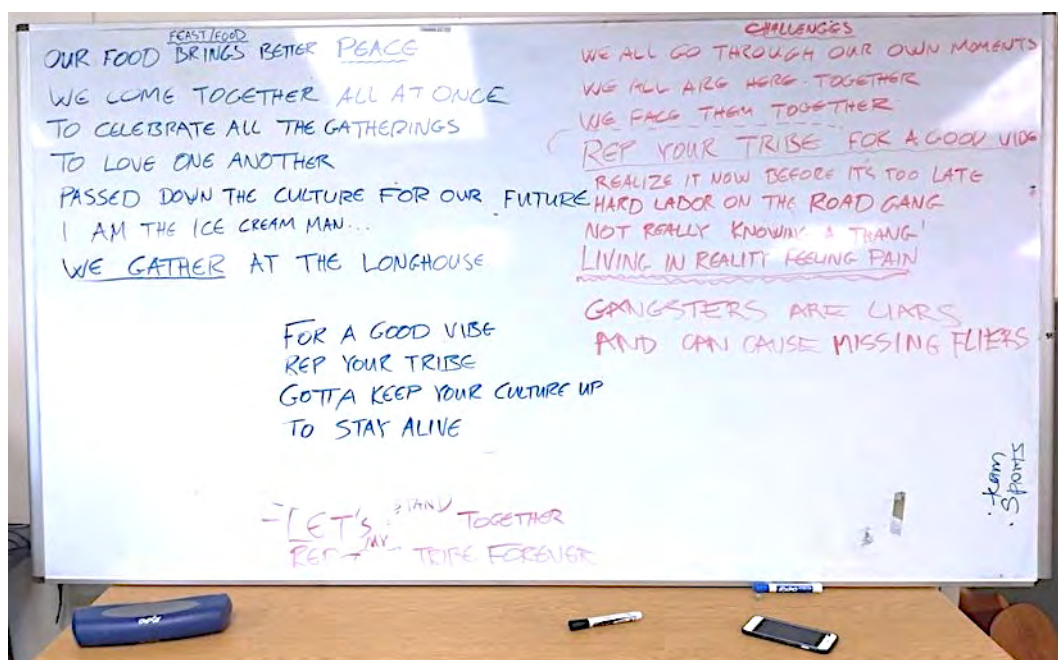


Figure 2. Lyrics from the 2019 collective song.



### Counter-Hegemonic Movement: Transversing Pride and Sites of Struggles

The creative chaos that is very much part of building community within this project happens hand in hand with the duality of counter-hegemonic movement, as students share that space for transversing pride and struggle. The collective songwriting project at YNTS, much like the efforts of the school itself, is engulfed in counter-hegemonic tendencies as students share in poetry and music their struggles and reasons to celebrate as a community that belongs to both tribal and youth cultures (Campbell et al. 2019). During a visit in the winter of 2020, while students were at the computer lab creating “beats” with audio interfaces and MIDI keyboards, another group was playing with possibilities for a music video. Standing tall on tree stumps and making a human alphabet with the letters Y-N-T-S on top of the baseball field bleachers, the idea was to portray their favorite school campus spots, connecting to the song they were writing.



Figure 3. Students performing a Māori stick game.

Throughout this process, students raised issues of cultural loss between generations, while responding to ways to tackle these issues, such as being role models within their community. In the context of the tribal school, these discussions provided a space where students could call upon their experiences as Native individuals to formulate new approaches to the issues their communities face. In one of the early workshops, students at YNTS learned and explored a Māori stick game, while singing in Māori language (Figure 3). This particular activity normalized languages other than English for creative production. This process aligns with the aims of the tribal school to fortify Ichishkíin within the younger Yakama members and to close the language gap, as it is spoken mostly by community Elders but not by most parents of the tribal school students. In a later visit, when invited to choose a new song to go with the stick game, students were quick to pick a popular song they like to listen to (“Home,” by Phillip Phillips) as a mashup of traditional Māori culture and the musical world they live in mostly and value.

Students also explore counter-hegemonic opportunities to disrupt gender norms across tribal and global youth identities within the collective songwriting project. Operating as a culturally safe space for gender exploration and solidarity, the program allows students to question and disturb the status quo within the school community through their music-making process. One activity of a three-day workshop involved breakout sessions (lyric-making and guitar) and all girls decided to play guitar. Under the guidance of one of the female UW team members, the all-female group learned a few basic chords and strumming patterns and some extended techniques such as tapping a percussive rhythm onto the body of the instrument. From there, they wrote a song with the chords, strumming patterns, and extended techniques they had worked on to perform for the whole group. After a few surprised reactions from the other students when the often-quiet girls returned to the

room with a whole new song created on their recently learned instruments, it was hard not to notice the celebration from the whole group—and the girls' boosted confidence and assurance—after their performance.

### **Critical Consciousness: “Awakening from the Slumber of Hegemony”**

Counter-hegemonic movements are further fortified when accompanied by critical reflection. Critical reflection is a social justice pedagogy that encourages students to question social arrangements and structures to become attuned to their sociopolitical, and socioeconomic circumstances (Freire 2000, 48). Beginning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, hegemonic educational injustices against Indigenous communities began with U.S federal boarding schools, whose administrators and teachers often banned Indigenous music and culture from education with the intent of breaking down tribal relationships (Shipley 2012). Euro-American traditional music was even used as an agent of cultural assimilation for Native youth (Hill 1892; Campbell et al. 2019). The reality of this contentious hegemonic oppression remains present and palpable and can be felt in the lyrics of YNTS students who wrote and sang the critical and poetic prose, “The tribe that has experienced the worst is the tribe that has always been here the first.”

The genesis of a collectively written song stems from the collective sharing of *testimonio*, a generating of ideas, each born through the lived experiences of those involved, and eventually synthesized into a collective artistic artifact. At YNTS, this process begins with providing students general and open-ended questions such as “What’s important to you?” and “What are issues in the community?” At first students are hesitant, mumbling typical teenage responses like “sleep,” or “mac n’ cheese.” But the tone and atmosphere eventually shift as concerns of tribal alcoholism and drug abuse rise to the surface. Soon to follow are passionate descriptions of what seem to be critical matters on students’ minds, including the prominent societal issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women (MMIW).<sup>3</sup> Moreover, preservation of tradition emerges as students speak of tribal identity in the form of pow-wows, drumming, and fry bread. This act of sharing individual and community concerns manifest in a tree of ideas, with one thought branching out into many more, produced by collective minds, and sprawling across a large whiteboard.

Collective songwriting in classrooms is an act of pedagogical equity and social justice, encouraging students to become truth-tellers and change-makers, with teaching practices that make space for students to become aware of historical injustice and feel connected to a legacy of defiance (Bigelow et al. 2004, 3). This manifests in an excerpt from YNTS students:

*Land is our pride and joy  
Our land is sacred and  
Is not to be destroyed  
...We stand for our land tonight* (Campbell et al. 2019)

Making space for Indigenous ways of knowing in classroom music-making implicitly challenges longstanding educational hegemonies and should be critically considered by educators. From *testimonio*, tribal pride materializes at the epicenter of a newly emergent collective epistemology—a way of knowing birthed from the exchange of lived experiences. Students collaboratively craft scattered feelings into a draft of heartfelt phrases (Figure 4).

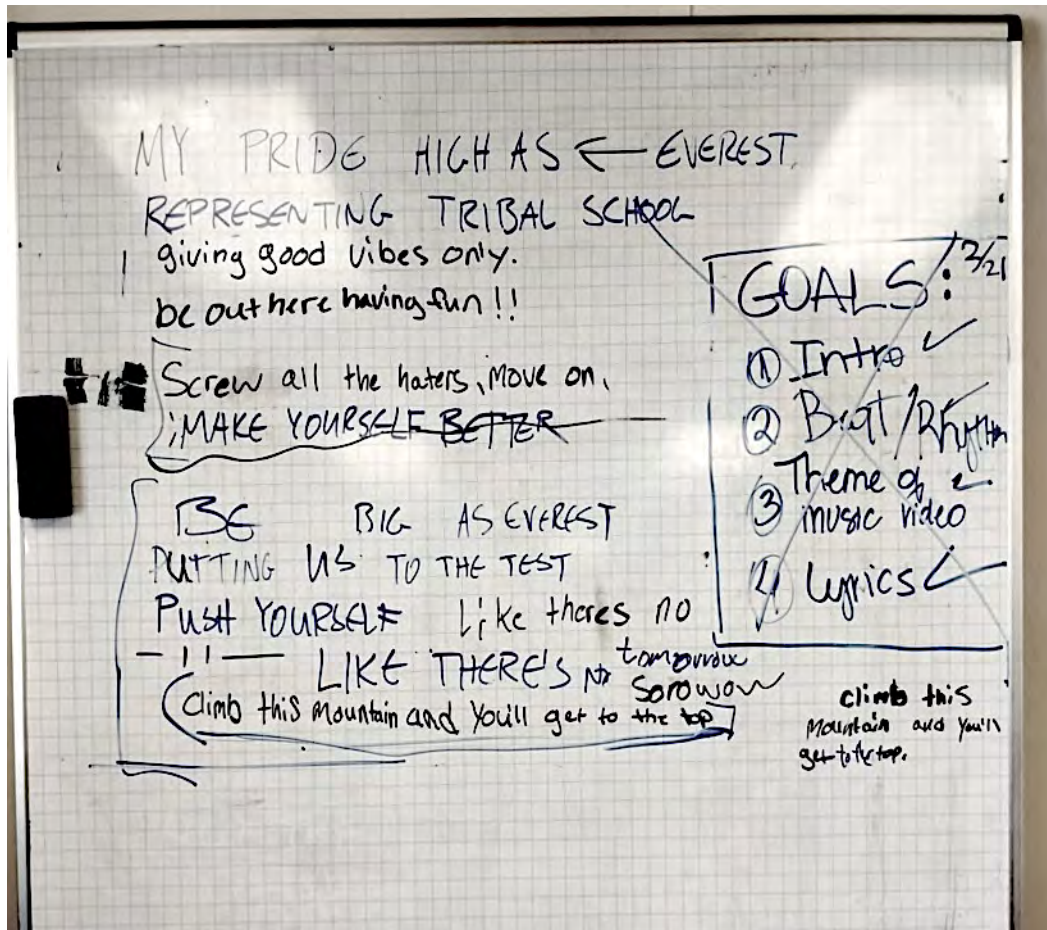


Figure 4. Students' draft of heartfelt phrases.

The final three lines were students' favorite of the day's work session; they are a message of determination, resilience, and pride:

*Push yourself like there's no tomorrow  
Like there's no sorrow  
Climb this mountain and you'll get to the top*

*Testimonio* was a way to engage in a pedagogical responsiveness that allows students to learn on their own terms and express their lived experiences as a collective, and as individuals. This project departed from conventional teacher training pedagogies. Process took precedence over product; emphasis on “authentic” replication of Western masters like Beethoven, Souza, or even Ellington, was discarded; and synthesis of tribal tradition and popular culture took center stage. In summation, in our experiences at YNTS, collective songwriting showed the capacity to promote equity and social justice through a pedagogical process that is inherently decolonizing, critical, and a strong step toward awakening American music education from the slumber of hegemony.





Figure 5. Students practice accompaniment for their collective lyrics.

### **Structures of Power and Imperialism: Mediating Tribal Education with State Demands**

While *testimonio* and collective songwriting represent powerful tools for decolonizing work at YNTS, the tribal school does not exist separately from the structures of imperialism and power that have shaped the Yakama Nation's borders. In fact, the school leadership team is continually mediating requirements of the settler-colonial state educational structures and their own interests in tribal culture sustainability through education in their school planning. Formerly controlled entirely by the Yakama Nation, the tribal school's curriculum has included classes on tribal knowledge, such as Ichiskíin language, beadwork, and drumming. Alongside subjects like English, mathematics, and science, these classes on tribal heritage are supplemented by community involvement at the school and school events, such as opening and closing circles, champion sports programs, and family nights supported by Heritage University. However, the need for more funding and resources to attract and maintain teaching staff and create educational opportunities to allow students to compete with public school peers necessitates compromises between the bureaucratic demands of the state and the school's tribal heritage education.

In a substantial meeting about our program and the school, Principal Adam Strom described how YNTS has recently become a state-tribal education compact school. As he explained it, this new hybrid structure has increased funding alongside the amount of formal expectations like testing, higher test scores, and increased attendance demands. Moreover, while YNTS has always endeavored to prepare students to compete academically with state public schools, this new affiliation affects the amount of time and emphasis they can give to classes focusing on tribal knowledge. As Smith (2012) states, "[structures of imperialism and power relations are] grounded

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Let's stand together, rep my tribe forever: Teaching toward Equity through Collective Songwriting at the Yakama Nation Tribal School

by Kaity Cassio Igari, Juliana Cantarelli Vita, Jack Flesher, Cameron Armstrong, Skúli Gestsson, and Patricia Shehan Campbell

in reproducing material realities and legitimating inequalities and marginality” (201). In essence, the additional funding that the state-tribal education compact provides does indeed create opportunities and resources that YNTS might not have otherwise have. However, the simultaneous increase in bureaucratic state educational demands that necessitates restructuring of YNTS curriculum to focus less on tribal cultural classes reinforces and maintains the hegemonic imperial codes that situate settler-colonial knowledges in positions of power over Indigenous heritage.

We saw this firsthand during the 2020 project. Many students were pulled out of collective songwriting sessions for formal testing of academic learning. The availability and use of the computer lab, which functioned simultaneously as a site for music production on GarageBand and as a state testing lab, required more strategic planning. At the same time, YNTS retains forms of tribal authority within this structure, and their focus on sustaining tribal knowledge was still seen and felt, mediating these new demands. For example, community-based, tribal activities were still encouraged, and students were allowed to opt into programs like ours as they wanted. This effectively excused them from their academic classes (with the exception of the testing pull-outs) to do projects like collective songwriting. One notable example was a male student who, after several informal chats with one of our team members in the hallway outside the computer lab, eventually opted into a beat-making session in the lab midday on our third visit. He subsequently returned for the full fourth session the next week. Thus, the tribal school’s continued support of such co-curricular decolonizing projects centering student-driven tribal issues represents an important corrective to increasing settler-colonial state structural demands, offering alternative structures that continue to support tribal cultural sustainability through education and the arts.



Figure 6. Poster at the YNTS entrance.



## Reimagining the World through Music: Traditional and Contemporary Practices

In preparation for the 2018 revival of Music Alive! In the Yakima Valley, when the program came out of hiatus turned toward *testimonio* and collective songwriting, a grant provided instruments for digital music-making so students had contemporary tools for creative musical expression. The purpose was to create workstations where students could explore recording audio, MIDI-controlled software, and loop libraries, tools that lend themselves easily to popular music production. When ideas of pride were probed in our workshop discussions, questions of music of the Yakama were raised. We, the teaching team, had no prior experience with the music, thus it became essential to consult with culture bearers. In one case, the family of one of the YNTS teachers joined us with hand drums and shared songs, while in other cases students themselves led with songs they had acquired in pow-wows, family gatherings, and practice sessions. As students graciously shared their stories and their music, the roles of teacher/student flipped.

Valuing student agency and voice is at the core of the workshops, forming a collaborative environment in making music. Musically, the project is student-driven and therefore students' musical identities are a subject of much of the conversation throughout the workshops. At the start of the workshops, we ask students to fill out a survey on their musical preferences that works as a place for students to report their favorite musical styles and artists. The process of musical compositions and production begins by exploring rhythmic and sonic properties of their favorite songs. Genres that fall under popular music (hip hop, pop, rock, country) are well represented and when Native heritage and pride enter the conversation, traditional music and language become topics. Addressing and exploring their identities through this process make for powerful moments. During a lyric-making session, students worked in small groups using handheld whiteboards for writing the poetic lines they would invent. After sharing and reviewing the work by the entire group, some lyrics made it onto the bigger whiteboard where we worked out a poetic meter over a modern hip-hop beat. A small group of female students got together with their whiteboards and asked if they could leave the room to write a separate song using their lyrics: "Gotta keep this thing up called a strive / We never hide keep our pride / We'll never die inside." They wanted to meet with John Scabbyrobe, a teacher and musician at their school who teaches, among other subjects, drum classes using traditional hand drums. He is a well-respected musician in the community, a member of the Grammy-nominated Black Lodge Singers. The drum classes are all male at YNTS, a custom in Yakama drumming circles, as women stand in an outer circle, singing and drumming (Perea 2014). After getting a positive response from us, the group of girls went to Scabbyrobe's classroom and asked for help using the hand drums and composing a melody for the lyrics they brought to him. After conferring with him, they returned with an original song, in traditional Yakama drumming and singing style, circumventing the popular music-making going on with the more outspoken student group. At the end of our workshops, during the final performance, Scabbyrobe joined the group of girls onstage, validating their efforts to seek a more traditional Yakama composition.

Other sessions included discussions about blending hand drums into the hip-hop production, resulting in hand drums pulsing through the whole track. Fitting their own Native musical heritage, the students reinforced their identity as Yakama, claiming their past heritage while reimagining what it can become. Elders involved in the process reported that songs had reached the tribal council (which was already supporting language revitalization efforts, one of which is a language

app). As Ezilda recalled, the reaction was positive since the lyrics were meaningful for the students involved and also for the wider Yakama community (Figure 7).

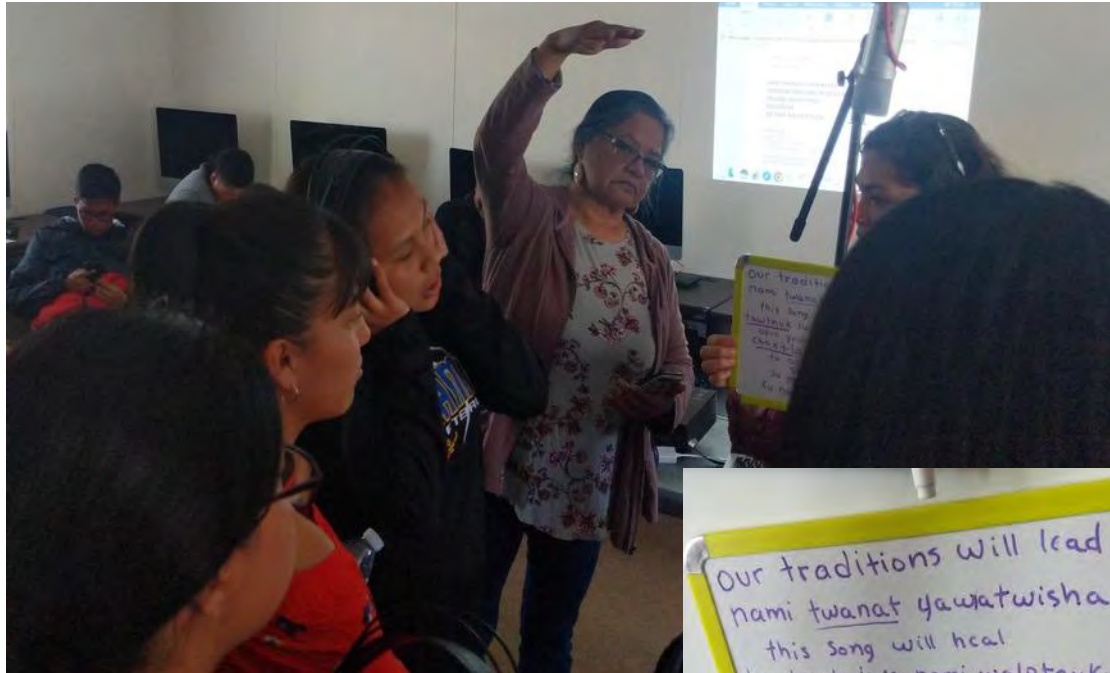


Figure 7. Ezilda Winnier leading students in the Ichiskíin language flow.

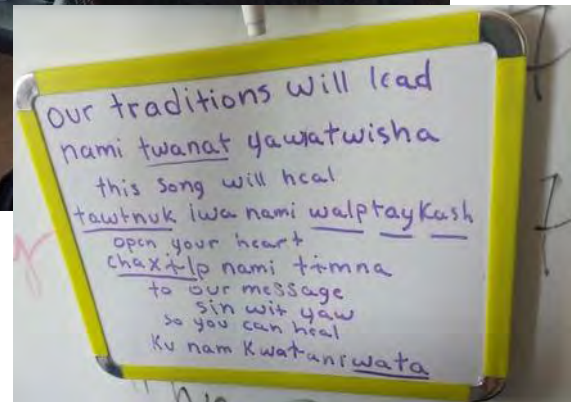


Figure 8. The introduction of the song that incorporates Ichiskíin language.

### **“Gotta keep your culture up to stay alive”**

This paper is a reflection on issues of equity and inclusion through *testimonio* and collective songwriting in a tribal school setting. It is the result of collaborative pedagogical design and delivery involving the university team of teachers with Native students, their teachers, and several community Elders. Situated alongside the efforts of the Yakama Nation to assert their identities, claim their sovereignty, and continue their decolonizing efforts, the students' work acknowledges their relationships with people and their values and visions off the Reservation and around the globe. Throughout the years of the collective songwriting project, students' compositions have expressed their multiple identities as Native youth in a globalized world dominated by popular culture and mediated by technology, as their songs blend drums of the Yakama tradition with software hip-hop beats, incorporating Ichiskíin language (Figure 8).

The “adults” of the project bring unique perspectives to the venture and its unfolding for the benefit of the adolescent students who fully deserve opportunities to explore and express their identities and interests musically and communally. Through this exchange, a process has evolved that allows blending and balances tools and techniques of school music pedagogy with Yakama cultural values and transmission practices. Highlights of the project were chronicled here with the intent of illustrating not just the project components but also the manner in which teaching toward equity requires sensitivity to the values and practices of students learning and living their Indigenous

heritage while also responding to their place within the global youth community. Although the global outbreak of COVID-19 disrupted the final sessions and performances in 2020, YNTS students and teachers alike continue to text, talk, email, and use Google Classroom with the UW facilitators to share ideas and continue their music-making efforts. We all remain hopeful for the continuation of this project as the COVID-19 pandemic unfolds.

With these stories, we have attempted to bring forward moments from a music education project that acknowledges commonplace settler-colonial structures while giving students the opportunity and space to exercise their agency to resist them. These narrative snippets are meant to inspire a new way of conceptualizing instruction by focusing on process over product and embracing a level of cultural responsiveness that leaves space for Indigenous ways of knowing and expressing. Decolonizing efforts also encompass a disruption of Eurocentric and federal and state pedagogies that may fall short in capturing the hearts and minds of students, especially Indigenous students mediating local and global youth identities. While we, as a singular team of state university activist-educators, are not in a place to disrupt larger imperial power structures within education in accordance with a framework of teaching for equity, we believe that our collaborative efforts with the Yakama Nation are an aspirational example of teaching *toward* equity. Through an exploration of these collaborative processes of Native student-driven music-making, we hope that others may find ways to tell their own stories as a means for teaching toward equity.

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## Endnotes

- 1 Consisting of 14 Confederated Tribes and Bands, the Yakama Nation has more than 10,000 enrolled members. Traditional lands originally included approximately 12 million acres in Eastern Washington and surrounding areas; an 1855 treaty with the Washington Territory governor established a 1.3 million-acre Yakama Nation Reservation near Toppenish, WA. The Nation retains hunting, fishing, and gathering rights and maintains a number of enterprises and community programs, including public and tribal schools. Language revitalization is of particular concern. Located in Yakima County, the Nation was especially hard hit by COVID-19 during the Spring 2020 outbreak, losing many Elders and community members.
- 2 The state education compact allows YNTS to replace “foreign language curricula” with Native language classes (Washington State Superintendent of Instruction-Yakama Nation 2019), so Elders Ezilda Winnier and “Tony” Washines coach students in the Ichishkiin dialect, part of the Sahaptin language family. Language classes emphasize vocabulary, syntax, and grammar as well as the Native epistemologies embedded in the language

and its use. While students may not attain total fluency, they have the opportunity to be more connected to their culture and, sometimes, to speak Ichishkíin with grandparents and Elders. As of 2012, it was estimated only between 5 and 25 first-language speakers remained, all of whom were bilingual in English (Jansen 2012). Revitalization efforts also include a dictionary by Beavert and Hargus (2010), available via a website used by students at YNTS.

- 3 The issue of MMIW has plagued the Yakama Nation for over a century (Washines 2019). The local newspaper, the *Yakima Herald-Republic*, published a non-exhaustive list titled “Vanished” in 2020 of 37 MMIW on or around the Yakama Nation Reservation extending back to the 1980s. In 2018, the Yakama Nation formed an MMIW committee to begin address this longstanding issue formally and further gained support of U.S Senator Patty Murray (Petruzzelli 2019).

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## A Focus on Folklife: Fostering Cultural Equity at HistoryMiami Museum

by Michael Knoll, Tina Menendez, and Vanessa Navarro Maza

*Home to wanderers—almost everyone is from somewhere else and brought the best of where they were, to mix and mingle in merry mayhem—a haven surrounded by water topped by magically lit towers springing from glistening waters against a blazing sky—it's magical. It's Miami.*

—HistoryMiami Museum anonymous survey response

What makes Miami, Miami? A stranger to Miami may answer this question by drawing from the city's common portrayal as a tropical paradise, but many Miamians will tell you that this fascinating city is more than its beaches and weather. The city is richly complex under its glimmering surface, and exploring this complexity is essential to our work at HistoryMiami Museum. In its efforts to do so, the museum seeks to reflect the community's diverse peoples and cultures, collaborate with the community in producing museum content, and create a welcoming institution for those it serves. Established in 1986, the [South Florida Folklife Center](#) (SFFC) is one of the organization's essential mechanisms for accomplishing these goals. SFFC documents, presents, and supports the region's traditional arts and cultural heritage and has embarked on many

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About the photo: Children participate in an Ikebana (flower arranging) workshop led by 2012 artist-in-residence Mieko Kubota, a Japanese master ikebana artist, during Family Fun Day.

All photos courtesy HistoryMiami Museum.



projects that have fed directly into the work of the museum's collections, exhibitions, education, and marketing divisions.

This article examines how a focus on folklife at HistoryMiami Museum supports the institution in accomplishing its goal of fostering cultural equity. Specifically, the article highlights efforts at relationship building, facilitating and not prescribing opportunities for community self-expression and cross-cultural connections, co-creating public offerings with tradition bearers and community partners, and evaluating and adjusting our methods as we strive to represent our city's mix of cultures. We believe that these approaches to cultivating a more equitable museum are applicable across various fields.

HistoryMiami Museum and its folklife division serve the population of South Florida with a focus on Miami, a transient city with a long history of migrants and travelers journeying in and out from all directions. Over centuries, and especially since the city's incorporation in 1896, the diversity of peoples living in the region has been remarkable. Those who have made Miami home have roots in the Americas, Caribbean, Africa, Europe, and Asia, and include present-day Native American groups such as the Seminole and Miccosukee Tribes, originally from outside South Florida. Today, over 2.7 million people live in Miami-Dade County, 69 percent of whom are Hispanic or Latino, with more than half that population claiming Cuban ancestry. The Black community, which includes African American and Afro-Caribbean residents, makes up almost 18 percent of the total population, while the white, non-Hispanic population accounts for 13 percent (U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program). The city's cultural landscape continues to evolve with constant waves of newcomers and visitors to Miami's shores.

Our museum's mission is to safeguard and share the diverse stories of our city. Through research, collections, exhibitions, education, and other endeavors, the museum fosters learning, inspires a sense of place, and cultivates an engaged community. In recent years, we have evaluated our effectiveness at achieving cultural equity in our work (both past and present), an endeavor that museum professionals across the world are taking on. Staff members have participated in national and international initiatives, including MASS Action convenings, the Of/By/For All Change Network, and a Universal Design workshop, and engaged in internal assessments, trainings, and more. To assess past and present failings and improve on how we reflect our community within the museum and represent it through our offerings, we continually engage in essential conversations on race, exclusion, authentic narratives, and other topics. Through examples of various folklife projects undertaken by the museum, this article explores some of our ever-evolving methods for achieving our equity-related goals.

[MASS Action](#) is a platform for public dialogue on a variety of topics and issues affecting our communities locally and globally, leading to actionable practices for greater equity and inclusion in our institutions.

[Of/By/For/All](#) equips civic and cultural organizations to become of, by, and for their communities by providing tools, community, accountability, and coaching on radical inclusion.

[Universal Design](#) is an approach to design that increases the potential for developing a better quality of life for a wide range of individuals. It is a design process that enables and empowers a diverse population by improving human performance, health and wellness, and social participation.

## Our Work: Representing Our Diversity through Research, Collections, and Exhibitions

*As a Colombian American, I am a proud bilingual and bicultural person. I know about the beauty and greatness of Colombia, and it is a pleasure to share a piece of these traditions with my fellow citizens of this great state.*

—Rosmy Camargo, 2018 HistoryMiami Artist-in-Residence



[Watch Rosmy Camargo's Meet-the-Artist video](#) and learn about Puerta de Oro de Colombia's residency at HistoryMiami Museum.

For over three decades, folklorists and other museum staff members, along with a variety of community collaborators, built and programmed multiple types of folklife-related projects at the museum and throughout the city. Folklife initiatives have included documenting Miami traditions; collecting the material culture of the region; curating a long-term gallery dedicated to local cultural practices; creating temporary and online exhibitions; and organizing folklife festivals, performances, demonstrations, workshops, and other programs. Through this work, SFFC highlights the region's folklife, which includes various types of expressive traditions learned through word of mouth or by example. These traditions are not learned in schools but through our involvement in folk groups such as families and ethnic, regional, occupational, or religious communities. Staff document many types of folklife, including music, dance, storytelling, handmade objects, foodways, rituals, occupational skills, and more. These practices are rooted in a community's history and are dynamic, changing to meet contemporary needs. Our work strives to encompass the traditions practiced by South Florida's varied cultures, and we aim to foster cultural equity by being inclusive of Miami's myriad cultural groups within our research, collecting activities, and exhibitions.

Our collaborative research initiatives include partnerships with communities to document cultural practices through recorded interviews, still photography, videography, and fieldnotes. Staff rely on local stakeholders to identify key topics, individuals, and practices and have hired cultural insiders as contract fieldworkers for projects. SFFC has also partnered with and trained community members to document their own traditional culture. The resulting collection of archival documentation and artifacts, including religious items, musical instruments, textiles, and other objects, is accessible to the public and available for use by the museum. This process uses the research methods found in the discipline of Folklore and related ethnographic fields. We approach ethnography not only as researchers, but also as curators, taking into account the cultural groups and types of traditions we focus on over time. Through documentation, our team seeks to preserve traditional knowledge and acknowledge the value of a particular group or cultural practice. When determining upcoming projects, we inventory our past work, identify underrepresented cultures, and discuss the current dynamics of our community. These considerations inform next steps and allow us to think responsibly about our influence as a research institution.

Historically, much of the museum's folklife work has emphasized greater Miami's racial, national, and ethnic diversity. We feel that it is essential that staff reflect on personal biases in selecting research topics, so we complicate the notion that "diversity" refers to only race, nationality, and ethnicity. Many past initiatives have focused on cultural groups who have been underrepresented at the museum and in museums throughout time, including our city's African American, Bahamian, Colombian, Cuban, Haitian, Nicaraguan, Peruvian, Puerto Rican, Trinidadian, and Venezuelan communities. We have also made an effort to concentrate attention on religious, regional, occupational, and other folk groups. A selection of past research projects, each resulting in public educational offerings, include Jewish Traditional Arts, Folk Arts of the Florida Keys, Afro-Cuban Orisha Arts in Miami, the Florida Jai-Alai Project, and the Guayabera Preservation Initiative. Through SFFC's work, the museum has sought to document various forms of cultural expression to deepen understanding about local traditional practices and inspire a feeling of belonging in the larger community.

SFFC understands that it must evolve to remain responsive to the community and its ecosystem of traditional artists and cultural organizations. In 2007, we initiated the Artists Access Survey project. The purpose was to determine how the self-identified needs of Miami-area folk artists and folk arts organizations correlated to the museum's resources. Much of the critical feedback guided SFFC in outlining new ways to serve the area's traditional artists and arts groups better. The survey informed the creation of SFFC's current menu of programmatic offerings and the creation of the Folklife Gallery. Although over a decade has passed, these recommendations continue to guide our planning, and future goals include creating a small grants program and a support network for local artists and cultural institutions.

Because of its city-centric focus, SFFC also aims to respond to the community at large and changes or trends in Miami. Although some locals describe their relationship with Miami as a "love-hate" dynamic, the last decade or so has seen a growing movement of civic pride, including community-driven explorations of "Miamianness." In response, over the last five years, some SFFC research projects have ventured beyond documenting the cultural practices of a specific folk group to investigating the distinct cultural practices of the city. Such projects include the [What Makes Miami, Miami? Project](#) and the Miami Street Culture Project. Focusing on topics of this kind enables us to explore our collective sense of place and how people create a sense of community in an exceptionally diverse and fragmented city. These Miami-centric projects are an opportunity to work with new types of tradition bearers, work in diverse geographic regions of the county, and produce educational products that aim to inspire a feeling of connection.

For most of its history, SFFC's exhibition initiatives included temporary shows that appeared in the museum's exhibitions calendar every few years. These have included *Tropical Traditions: the Folklife of Southeast Florida*, *At the Crossroads: Afro-Cuba Orisha Arts in Miami*, *Haitian Community Arts*, *The Guayabera: A Shirt's Story*, and *Avenues of Expression: Street Traditions in Miami*. Some exhibitions have been co-curated with traditional experts. An example is *At the Crossroads*, which highlighted the religious practices and handmade ritual items of Orisha practitioners. Miami is one of the major centers of the Afro-Cuban Orisha religion, and its array of traditional arts is practiced by numerous specialists who produce beadwork, textiles, metalwork, woodcarvings, altars, and other items. The exhibition was co-curated by members of the religious community, and practitioners built ceremonial thrones within the space. For the exhibition, the

### Explore SFFC Online Exhibitions

*At the Crossroads: Afro-Cuban  
Orisha Arts in Miami*

<http://www.historymiami.org/at-the-crossroads-afro-cuban-orisha-arts-in-miami/>

*The Guayabera: A Shirt's Story*

<http://www.historymiami.org/wp-content/themes/historymiami/assets/guayabera.html> (See JFE 2014 [The Guayabera and Cultural Research](#).)

museum also commissioned local artists to create ritual items, many of which were added to the permanent collection.

The SFFC's exhibition efforts evolved in June 2014, when the museum opened the South Florida Folklife Gallery as a space to educate visitors on the area's cultural diversity and expressive traditions that give the region its unique character. The gallery features artifacts from the museum's collection and serves as a venue for performances, demonstrations, and other cultural programs. The addition of the Folklife Gallery provided

SFFC new opportunities to engage the public and interpret local culture. On display is a selection of communal, familial, occupational, and religious folk crafts and objects from different cultural groups. We often rely on partnerships with local artists and organizations to acquire objects for the museum's collection and, to facilitate representation, typically encourage them to recommend what best represents their tradition, culture, or community. The museum acquired the majority of the items in its collection and in the gallery through folklife research projects. We continue to add to the collection by identifying "gaps" in our representation of significant facets of Miami's traditional culture. During each annual gallery rotation, our staff inventories the array of communities and folklife genres represented throughout the gallery's history as part of our ongoing commitment to showcasing traditional practices not yet featured. The Folklife Gallery also includes a stage, which is used as a temporary display area and a programming venue for music and dance performances, live demonstrations, workshops, and other presentations.



HistoryMiami Museum's Folklife Gallery, 2015.



## Facilitating Cultural Expression through Public Programs: A Closer Look

*Indian dances are very diverse and truly represent a country that is a melting pot of varied cultures. It provides me with the most effective canvas to engage, to educate, and to entertain an audience.*

—Ranjana Warier, 2016 HistoryMiami Artist-in-Residence



[Watch Ranjana Warier's Meet-the-Artist video](#) and learn about her residency at HistoryMiami Museum.

Since SFFC's establishment, folklife staff have produced a variety of cultural programs. This includes collaborations with the museum's Education Department to offer programming for schools, families, and other audiences. Today, SFFC's annual programming includes two artist residencies, Cultural Encounters programs, and CultureFest 305, a folklife festival. All our programs rely heavily on partnerships with traditional artists and community partners. While developing each program or program component, we co-create the content with our partners and follow the lead of traditional artists as to which aspects of their culture they would like to highlight and the best mechanisms for doing this. SFFC aims to serve as a facilitator for cultural expression and cross-cultural learning, and staff view museum resources such as gallery spaces, programs, and webpages as opportunities for tradition bearers to represent themselves to the general public.

In 2012, SFFC launched an [artist-in-residence series](#) that became the department's primary program focus, and has, for the most part, presented traditions tied to ethnicity and nationality. In the last few years, we have made a conscious effort to diversify the types of identities we highlight and have created additional, more flexible programming mechanisms to explore religious, occupational, and regional cultures. SFFC's residency program has presented 22 Miami-area traditional artists, including a Cuban *tres* guitar builder, a Haitian storyteller, and a Jewish textile artist. Each year, the series showcases two individual artists or ensembles and their traditions, and participating artists share their art through public events, school programs, and multimedia products. Each four-month residency includes three public programs at the museum, one youth program, and one outreach program with a community partner.

We intentionally curate the series to ensure that we present a variety of artists, local communities, and folklife genres over time. Although we organize each residency into five programs, we collaborate with each artist or ensemble to co-create these offerings. Staff present minimal parameters, encourage experimentation, and pose guiding questions to each artist. These questions include:

What are your goals for your residency?

What do you want others to learn about the tradition(s) you practice?

How can audiences engage meaningfully with your tradition(s)?





2019 artist-in-residence Pedro Zepeda offers a demonstration on the Folklife Gallery stage.

During the planning phase for each residency, we also ask artists to share stereotypes or misconceptions about their culture and discuss ways to address these throughout the collaboration. For example, Seminole artist Pedro Zepeda spoke to our staff about the public's common misconception that Native American culture is "stuck in the past." During his residency, Pedro addressed this notion by describing himself as both a traditional and contemporary artist and showcased a selection of his woodwork, basketry, sculptures, and paintings in our Folklife Gallery. With Pedro, we developed each residency program to provide opportunities for one-on-one engagement with the public and informal conversations exploring these public misunderstandings.

Many of our residency programs take place in the Folklife Gallery, and the gallery's versatile stage also allows us to produce short-term exhibitions that showcase resident artists, as well as the material culture of celebrations in specific religious and cultural calendars. As part of our artist-in-residence series, the Instituto Cultural de Mexico Miami created an *ofrenda* (a Día de Muertos altar) in conjunction with the residency of Ameyal Mexican Cultural Organization. The museum hosted a Día de Muertos celebration, well attended by members of the local Mexican community and the general public. The event provided a space for the Mexican community to commemorate the holiday and attendees unfamiliar with the tradition to learn more. Similarly, in preparation for a Persian New Year celebration, the Iranian American Foundation used the gallery's stage to create a *haft-seen*, a table display central to the holiday. Despite its small population, Miami's Iranian community participated in full force, enthusiastically singing and dancing along with the performance. Through this exhibition and program, the museum transformed from a place for learning to a place for communal expressions of religious and cultural practices.

Although successful, the series is limited to highlighting a few traditions per year and excludes master artists who are unable to participate in a residency but are otherwise ideal for other types of programs. In response, SFFC launched the Cultural Encounters series in 2017, enabling us to showcase artists, communities, and folklife genres (such as occupational traditions) rarely covered in residencies. Cultural Encounters includes intimate experiences at local businesses, workspaces, and other locations for small groups of participants to go behind the scenes and learn from the artisans whose crafts, skills, and services make Miami, Miami. Similar to our recent Miami-centric research projects, these programs celebrate the city's distinct character, foster a sense of place, and connect locals to each other. Programs have included a live demonstration and conversation with a cigar roller and a tropical horticulture workshop at a botanical garden and park.



A Nowruz *haft-seen* display created by the Iranian American Foundation on the Folklife Gallery stage in celebration of the Persian New Year, 2019.

We co-create these events with partners and seek to facilitate meaningful connections. By limiting participation to a small group, we encourage open conversations. Featured artisans, business owners, and other local experts share their knowledge and personal stories, while participants ask questions and explore their curiosity in an informal setting. These events can also break down stereotypes about misunderstood traditions. During a tour of a local Afro-Caribbean religious store called a *botánica*, participants learned about the religious communities the shop serves. The fruitful conversation with the owner addressed misconceptions and explored topics such as “black magic” and animal sacrifice. The experience allowed participants to develop a more empathetic understanding of the religious practices, and they described it as “unforgettable.”



Participants gather for a cigar rolling demonstration during a Cultural Encounter at Havana Classic Cigars, 2018.



In 2017, SFFC piloted the first CultureFest 305, a free folklife festival featuring performances, demonstrations, craft activities, storytelling, and more. The festival explores the question “What makes Miami, Miami?” and each year we showcase tradition-bearers, folk groups, organizations, and businesses that, in the collective, answer this question. Although the festival celebrates Miami’s various cultures, this organizing theme focuses attention on the city’s identity in an effort to inspire feelings of communal unity and belonging. CultureFest 305 is not only an opportunity to celebrate local diversity, but also a mechanism for building relationships with artists, organizations, and other partners. This festival is highly collaborative, involving over 30 partners that include traditional artists, community organizations, food vendors, and others. In addition to scheduled performances and demonstrations, the festival includes an ongoing demonstration area that features a dozen tradition bearers and organizations. Envisioned as more than information tables, these spaces are opportunities for the public to engage meaningfully with the featured tradition. SFFC works with each partner to co-create an activity or offering that is both informative and builds a connection. Additionally, the museum has focused on improving the festival’s accessibility, including reallocating funds toward ASL interpretation and purchasing craft supplies appropriate for children and adults of all abilities.



Delou Africa Dance Ensemble leads an interactive performance at the 2018 CultureFest 305.

## Education Initiatives: Teaching for Equity

*Through my practice, I hope I encourage my audience to get to know the Iranian people and culture and their many contributions to humanity. I hope that the sound of my music will take them beyond the immediate stereotypes that have created a wall between our two countries.*

—Reza Filsoofi, 2019 HistoryMiami Artist-in-Residence



[Watch Reza Filsoofi's Meet-the-Artist video](#) and learn about his residency at HistoryMiami Museum.

Our Education Department welcomes opportunities to share the community's varied experiences, stories, and cultures with students and families through programs, exhibitions, and social media. The museum is committed to serving South Florida's students, teachers, and adult learners through exciting, innovative programs that bring over 10,000 years of South Florida's history to life. We design education programs to provide age- and grade-level appropriate experiences, focusing on different learning modalities. Programs elicit critical thinking as students compare and contrast the past and present and are encouraged to visualize and discuss what the future may be like, based on patterns of the past.

Folklife programs are one of many types of Education Department offerings. Museum educators use Folklife Gallery exhibitions in formal and informal ways to explore the diversity of local culture and introduce the concept of "folklife" with school groups, nonprofit organization leaders, university students, adult groups, and community stakeholders. Staff begin the gallery tour by breaking down the institution's definition of folklife, asking essential questions, and engaging in dialogue to make connections. These discussions encourage participants to build empathy and reflect on and connect with personal cultural practices. Discussions center on each participant's folk expressions and the familial and communal context of these traditions. During these conversations, each person adds value as they share, and we aim to create a sense of community that welcomes various points of view and experiences. Example questions include:

What is traditional culture, or folklife?

How is culture retained?

How are cultural traditions passed on?

How does culture change?

How do people carry culture with them to new places?

What is your favorite holiday/festival/special family occasion?

What is your favorite thing to eat during these occasions?

What are special sayings that your family uses?

Focusing on folklife also validates informal learning in a way that institutional learning and schooling do not, and this inspires relationship building and amplifies under-recognized cultural contributions. The value placed on informal learning is essential when working with students. For example, the school program component, co-developed with resident artists, allows the museum to introduce students to Miami's diverse cultural heritage through interactive presentations of local

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A Focus on Folklife:

Fostering Cultural Equity at HistoryMiami Museum

by Michael Knoll, Tina Menendez, and Vanessa Navarro Maza

folk traditions led by some of South Florida's expert traditional artists. Students in Miami-Dade County Public Schools engage with local artists and our staff folklorist without leaving the classroom. Schools and administrators face difficult budgetary realities, and additional funds for art initiatives are not always available. This component of our residency program supports authentic arts engagement one classroom at a time, even at a small scale. While these free programs are available to all local educators, some school programs are tailored to specific groups for a more significant impact. During the residency with The Lee Boys, who practice an African American gospel music tradition called "sacred steel," the ensemble offered a workshop for Guitars Over Guns, an organization that delivers arts-based mentoring programs to empower youth in underserved neighborhoods where many art programs in schools have faced budgetary cuts. This experience was memorable for not only the music students, who were fascinated by the band's lap steel guitar, but also for the band's members, who enjoyed sharing their stories and learning from the youth.

In recent years, the museum has modified the classroom component of the artist residencies to be useful in alternative educational settings such as libraries, after-school programs, community centers, and camps. As an example, we partnered with Miami-Dade County's Juvenile Services Department to bring their youth cohort to the museum to meet Reza Filsoofi, an Iranian musician specializing in multiple instruments, including *santoor* and *setar* (stringed instruments) and *daf* and *tonbak* (percussion instruments). The group learned about Persian culture, played instruments, and gained an understanding of the cultural context for these traditions. The workshop provided an intimate hands-on educational experience. Reza's journey as a musician and the time and dedication required to reach his level of expertise fascinated the participants, some of whom were musicians as well. Organically, the program ended with a group conversation on how music can enrich lives by providing purpose and fulfillment. Through programs such as this, the museum aims to create spaces for youth of all backgrounds to connect with one another and the broader Miami social landscape, learn about different communities, and break down stereotypes.

Through our Family Fun Day program, the artist residencies provide another educational opportunity. Once a month, we host a free family-oriented day of programming, including crafts, tours, music, and art activities to engage our community stakeholders and families. Each artist-in-residence participates in a Family Fun Day, and museum staff intentionally collaborate with other local guest artists, vendors, and community groups on this day to provide additional cultural context and opportunities for learning about the resident artist's traditional practices. Dance ensemble Puerta de Oro de Colombia, for example, brought their passion for Colombia's vibrant traditions to a Family Fun Day. Attendees experienced live music and dance performances, craft activities, hands-on music-making, traditional Colombian cuisine, costumes, and bilingual storytelling. The presence and contributions of the local Colombian community proved integral to the success of this well-received event. From vendors to guest artists to attendees, the Colombian community participated in full force to celebrate their culture with Miami at large. Similar to past holiday-related programs, this Family Fun Day provided a space for community expression and an engaging learning experience for the general public.





2014 artists-in-residence Flipside Kings, a B-Boy dance crew, lead an interactive presentation during Family Fun Day.

Because of its versatility as a community space, we have also used the Folklife Gallery in informal ways not directly tied to a particular artist or folk group but focused on fostering equity and inclusion. Last year, we had the privilege of partnering with a local organization with the mission “to prevent suicide and ensure the healthy development of all youth through powerful communication and education on gender and orientation.” We met with their LGBTQ+ youth advisory committee to discuss their interest in working with the museum. Our staff was in the midst of planning an exhibition around queer history in Miami, and we invited the cohort to work with us on a youth component tied to the exhibition. Through various workshops and meetings, we developed a relationship with the group over time, and they opted to create their own exhibition in response to the *Queer Miami* exhibition and the gaps they identified surrounding LGBTQ+ youth issues. They focused on gender and the negative impact of stereotypes and had total control over the project, including the featured content and the exhibition design. We used the Folklife Gallery to create their exhibition, setting up art supplies and ten real doors to use as canvases. The Folklife Gallery created a welcoming and inclusive space for the group, the majority of whom are Black and Brown youth, ages 13-21. The partnership empowered these individuals, amplified their voices, and attended to the absence of a youth voice at the museum.

## Closing Words

*Participating in Junkanoo gives you a feeling of release, passion, and pride as you see how observers become mesmerized by its unique sounds. There is a reward in bringing joy to others who may otherwise have a grim day.*

—Langston Longley, 2014 HistoryMiami Artist-in-Residence



[Watch Langston Longley's Meet-the-Artist video](#) and learn about Bahamas Junkanoo Revue's residency at HistoryMiami Museum.

In all that we do, HistoryMiami Museum staff are committed to serving as a genuine partner to community collaborators and to implementing initiatives as inclusive as possible, being mindful of the cultures we have or have not represented. By co-creating educational experiences with folk artists and community partners, we serve not as managers, but as facilitators of projects, expanding our capacity for undertaking equitable work. We view this work as flexible, responsive, and ever evolving as we constantly reflect on our impact and adapt accordingly. There is, of course, more work to be done, and we seek to build on the strategies discussed in this article to improve our service to the community. We will continue to address internal biases, interrogate our methods of representation in research, collections, exhibitions, and programming, and improve the accessibility of our spaces and programs. When community stakeholders see themselves represented in our initiatives, are fully engaged in collaborative efforts, and feel invested in our collective endeavors, we can build meaningful relationships and cultivate a sense of a common humanity.

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**Michael Knoll**, Director of Curatorial Affairs and Chief Curator, oversees HistoryMiami Museum's Archives and Research Center, object collection, exhibitions, and folklife division. During his tenure as the museum's Folklorist, he directed several fieldwork projects, including the Florida Jai-Alai Project; established the artist-in-residence program; curated the award-winning exhibition *The Guayabera: A Shirt's Story*; and created the Folklife Gallery. He has also worked with the Wisconsin Arts Board, the Smithsonian Institution, and the Jewish Museum of Florida, and he serves on the board for Local Learning. He studied Folklore at the University of Wisconsin and the University of North Carolina.

**Tina Menendez**, Director of Education at HistoryMiami Museum, has worked in public school education, cultural education, and nonprofit management at various organizations in Chicago and South Florida for over 25 years. The Education Department at HistoryMiami Museum includes Public Programs, School Programs, City Tours, Outreach, and Visitor Services. Tina holds an EdD from the University of Illinois at Chicago in Urban Education Leadership and Public Policy. She has been with HistoryMiami Museum since 2016 and has developed and sustained partnerships with numerous community organizations, museums, and schools.

**Vanessa Navarro Maza**, Folklife Curator, directs HistoryMiami Museum's South Florida Folklife Center. She curates exhibitions in the museum's Folklife Gallery and conducts fieldwork and collecting projects such as the *What Makes Miami*, Miami Project research initiative commissioned by the Florida Folklife Program and the Miami Street Culture Project, resulting in the exhibition *Avenues of Expression: Street Traditions in Miami*, which she curated. She also develops educational programs, manages the artist-in-residence program, and established the *Cultural Encounters* series and *CultureFest 305 Folklife Festival*. Additionally, she creates media products about local folklife and assists the region's traditional artists. She studied Anthropology at the University of Florida and Ethnomusicology at Florida State University.

#### URLs

South Florida Folklife Center <http://www.historymiami.org/folklifecenter>  
 Museum as Site for Social Action <https://www.museumaction.org>  
 OF/BY/FOR ALL <https://www.ofbyforall.org>  
 Universal Design <http://www.universaldesign.com>  
 How HistoryMiami Empowered LGBTQ+ Youth with a Project OF and BY Them  
<https://www.ofbyforall.org/updates-feed/2019/5/10/how-historymiami-empowered-lgbtq-youth-with-a-project-of-and-by-them>  
 What Makes Miami, Miami? Project Report <http://www.historymiami.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/FFP-Report-What-Makes-Miami-Miami.pdf>  
 Miami Stories <http://www.historymiami.org/miamistories>  
 Artist-in-Residence Meet-the-Artist Video Playlist <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL-6bEPO8PMxjWRNkzdnE6iBKQgvtOsTzg>  
*At the Crossroads: Afro-Cuban Orisha Arts in Miami* <http://www.historymiami.org/at-the-crossroads-afro-cuban-orisha-arts-in-miami/>  
*The Guayabera: A Shirt's Story* <http://www.historymiami.org/wp-content/themes/historymiami/assets/guayabera.html>  
 Guayabera in JFE 2014 <https://www.locallearningnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/bowman-from-JFE2014VolIreducedsize-15.pdf>  
 SFFC Artist-in-Residence Series <http://www.historymiami.org/folklifecenter/artist-in-residence>



## Untold Stories, Unsung Heroes: Using Visual Narratives to Resist Historical Exclusion, Exoticization, and Gentrification in Boston Chinatown

by Carolyn Leung Rubin, Loan Thi Dao,  
Izabela Villanueva, and Cynthia Woo

*Beauty is around you. You have to discover it and use your heart to feel it.*

—Inside Chinatown Participant

“Seafood Encounters” is a photo of the fish counter at a local grocery store with a male Chinese worker in the background filleting a fish. The caption reads, “They have surgeon-like precision when filleting the seafood. In fact, some of them were surgeons before they immigrated here.” This image and others in Robert’s series of photos entitled *Unsung Heroes and Heroines* are a testament to the day-to-day struggles and sacrifices of immigrants like his parents and workers in Chinatown.

Robert is a worker in Boston Chinatown who participated in the Inside Chinatown project to document the neighborhood, which is critical during this time of rapid displacement of residents, luxury development, and gentrification. As an immigrant who came from China at an early age, Robert spent his childhood accompanying his father to the restaurant where he worked. Robert

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About the photo: “Seafood Encounters” by Robert. All photos © 2020 by Inside Chinatown participants.



was struck by his father's story and his sacrifices—a man who had a good job in China but immigrated to the United States because he felt his family could have a better life here. Restaurants are fundamental to the ecosystem and economic viability of Chinatowns across the U.S. and their immigrant workers, yet we do not often know about the lives of the workers (Lee 2013). In illuminating the significance of restaurants and restaurant workers, Robert wanted to shed light on the people “who do not get enough credit.” He hoped his photos encourage people to have a broader perspective on workers in Chinatown aside from their role as workers. About the restaurant workers and dishwashers, “There is so much more to them,” Robert asserted.

For residents and workers like Robert, Boston Chinatown is one such Chinatown that is fighting to maintain its historical and cultural legacy as a home to the Chinese immigrant community in the wake of rapid displacement of longtime residents and luxury development (Lee and Bell 2019). These development trends affect not only residential composition but also the health and well-being of remaining residents, particularly the elderly and recent immigrants, who experience more stress and social isolation. The majority of Asian households in Chinatown have limited English proficiency and rely on both formal and informal social networks of neighborhood service providers, nonprofits, friends, and relatives to access jobs, services, and translation assistance.

This article presents a case study of Inside Chinatown, a project that enabled current and former residents and workers of Boston Chinatown to use photography and visual storytelling to create their own narratives about this moment in Chinatown's history. The project took place November 2018 to December 2019. First we describe the structure and curriculum of the project, followed by examples of participants' photos. The participants in the program, workers and residents in Boston Chinatown, documented their daily experiences, engaging with Chinatown's history, notions of home, traditions, rituals, and identity to address the question asked by the program for participants to consider: “What does Chinatown mean today and how does it shape a Chinese American identity?” They took photos, wrote artist statements about the work, and wrote captions to accompany the photos. The artist statements provided context for the series of photos taken by each artist and their intentions of what they were trying to capture through the photographs. This year long project culminated in a group photo exhibition at Pao Arts Center. Their photos are multifaceted stories of the people of Chinatown, whose stories collectively, as Robert wrote, “may be longer than the Great Wall of China!”

### **Informal learning spaces: Creating conditions for community-based education**

Inside Chinatown took place at Pao Arts Center (the Center) in Boston Chinatown. The Center opened in January 2017 as a new arts space. It is a project of the Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center (BCNC), the largest social service agency serving the Asian community in the Greater Boston region, and Bunker Hill Community College. BCNC's vision for the Center was to amplify Asian American and Asian immigrant voices and create a physical community space for using art, culture, and creativity to improve health and well-being of the neighborhood.

Center staff and University of Massachusetts Boston (UMB) faculty conceived of this project, which was supported by Mass Humanities. BCNC and UMB Asian American Studies have a longstanding relationship. The project team included members from the institutional partners. The Project Scholar (Loan Dao) and Project Facilitator (Izabela Villanueva) were from UMB and



specialized in Asian American and Ethnic Studies. The Project Director (Cynthia Woo) and Project Associate (Vanessa Woo) worked at the Center.

The team designed the participant application to be bilingual in English and Chinese, and applicants could complete it by phone, email, or hand. The project team had a mix of native Cantonese, Mandarin, and English speakers. The Project Associate provided simultaneous translation for two participating elders who spoke Cantonese. Outreach through the Chinese Residents Association, senior classes at the Center, neighborhood business owners, and UMB residential buildings produced a mix of participants, including residents, business owners, high school students, retirees, and administrative workers. The age range was equally diverse with two high school students, four seniors, and participants of many ages in between.

The pedagogical approach of Inside Chinatown demonstrated best practices in how to bring local cultural knowledge to bear on important social justice issues using the power of observation through visual storytelling. Spiegel (2020) argues that when historically marginalized communities have the power of telling their own stories through visual storytelling in photography, “ideas about ‘place’ and the relations that shape particular place-based knowledge could be framed through diverse individual and collectively shared histories, inflected by class, gender, age, ethnicity, and a range of idiosyncratic experiences that might defy such categories” (126). Visual storytelling attempts to re-center historically marginalized communities to narrate their own stories, highlighting narratives that are important to them, thus reframing themselves through counter-hegemonic stories and creative practice. This methodology involves teaching people how to use cameras and preparing them to tell stories through a process of prompt-based, scaffolded discussions that illicit their stories as experts of their own lives, removed from dominant cultural perceptions of them, their culture, and their environment (Wang and Burris 1997). Making the program accessible, in terms of schedule, language, and income, facilitated participation of some people who often do not have access to formal learning spaces. The iterative curricular design gave space for participants’ voices, experiences, and perspectives to drive the evolution of the program organically, ensuring that it always was rooted in community knowledge. The [Curriculum Example](#) in our Classroom Connections at the end of this article illustrates how the curriculum evolved over time to embody these principles.

In recognition of financial barriers to participation, the residents and workers received a stipend. In addition, three cameras were available for participants to check out and use for the January-June 2019 photography process. Editing equipment such as a laptop with editing software was available at the Center during open hours, 9:00 am-8:00 pm, Monday-Saturday. The elders would often use the equipment during weekdays. The Project Facilitator remembers that one participant watched YouTube videos to learn to use all the camera functions and started taking photos from the beginning. This student, Edward, said, “I wanted to have as much practice as possible to create the best final pieces.”

All four project team members collaborated in the curriculum planning phase and development of the overall framework. They ensured that the academic content was balanced with interactive, discussion-based activities so sessions were not didactic. Brief evaluations followed each session. The team met regularly to debrief sessions, look at evaluations, create a preliminary structure for each upcoming workshop, and talk through how to make the content streamlined and

accessible. During workshops, the team quickly realized they had to make real-time decisions and adjustments to make sure the workshops were accessible and relevant to participants.

### **Using photography and storytelling to create resident and worker-centered narratives**

This program was inspired by photographer Katie Salisbury's photo essay *Thank You, Enjoy*, a portrait of restaurant and food delivery workers in New York City's Chinatown. The Project Scholar initially explored ways to connect issues of race and ethnicity with worker rights. On a visit to New York, she happened upon Salisbury's exhibit. Her work extended beyond the specific geography of the city's working class of Chinatown to the experiences of Chinatown workers across the country. The Project Scholar reached out to Salisbury, the UMass Boston Labor Resource Center, and Boston Chinatown organizations to explore whether a collaboration to bring the exhibit to New England was of interest to these campus and community partners. The Center Director suggested a broader program that integrated local Chinatown workers and residents and highlighted Boston Chinatown. Together, the Project Director and Project Scholar created Inside Chinatown, for which the Center received a grant to pay for participant stipends, a bilingual-bicultural graduate student assistant to facilitate the program, photography equipment, and Center staff time. *Thank You, Enjoy* opened at UMass Boston in November 2018, as a collaboration with UMass Boston's Labor Resource Center and Asian Student Center. It featured a public opening reception and panel with the artist, exhibition partners, and guest speakers from the Chinese Progressive Association, and served to recruit participants for the Inside Chinatown project. Salisbury's work gave a real live example of what a photography exhibit generated by the actual workers and residents of a neighborhood could look like. Engagement with Salisbury was interwoven through the curriculum. She worked with the cohort at the beginning of the program and toward the end. In session one Salisbury modeled her storytelling process for *Thank You, Enjoy* from image selection, photography technique, written artist statements, and caption, and in session two she worked one-on-one with participants to deliver feedback and refine their own stories and photographs. Her exhibit grounded the work of the project team and allowed participants to see a model of how photography could shed light on untold stories, preparing participants to create narratives rooted in their experiences, rituals, and traditions.

At the onset, the project team was deliberate in setting up the project to be an ongoing community resource. Photographs and artist statements would be archived at the Chinese Historical Society of New England (CHSNE), a local nonprofit dedicated to preserving Chinese American history for present and future generations. Archiving the photographs ensures residents' and workers' perspectives are given priority when remembering this time in Chinatown's history. Housing the photographs at CHSNE ensures that this community resource can be accessible to others and be used as archival materials for classroom use, representing a perspective not typically heard in formal academic spaces.

*The Chinatown Gate: The power of intergenerational storytelling*



“Popular Gate” by Yang.

Visual storytelling enabled participants to use close observation to capture contemporary moments in the life of Boston Chinatown that represented history, resilience, identity, and beauty. In the Asian American Studies context, community-based education focuses on priorities of the community and highlights voices often marginalized in academia, namely immigrants, non-English speakers, workers, and low-income populations (Omatsu 1994, Hirabayashi 1995, Osajima 1998, Le and Sy 2019). In *Inside Chinatown*, the gaze of the workers and residents brought to light important cultural symbols of the community. For example, the Boston Chinatown Gate was a common image captured by both youth and elders as a symbol for belonging. Three participants featured the Chinatown Gate prominently in the center of their photos, clearly illuminating the importance of this landmark through their composition. One elder, Eugene, wrote, “The gateway of Chinatown has shed light on a pathway to Chinatown where we can conduct our lives almost as if we were still in our homeland.” As an immigrant and longtime Chinatown resident, Richard saw it as an important reminder of his immigrant past in China and his childhood. Eugene saw it as a symbol of “civility, justice, integrity, humility.” Eugene and Richard captured the Gate at a moment of quiet, with few other humans figured in the composition. In contrast, Yang, a high school student, saw the Gate as a tourist icon in “Popular Gate.” His image is filled with human movement, capturing the Gate at a moment when a group of students captured the site themselves.

This common theme of the Chinatown Gate illustrated how the intergenerational design of the program manifested itself visually and organically. The Project Facilitator intentionally framed workshops to elicit traditions, rituals, and memories. The iterative nature of the program allowed the stories to shape the process as the workshops unfolded. For example, the project team paired intergenerational individuals for group discussion and exchanging ideas. After one senior, Richard, saw another participant's presentation of photos, he told him that his project really resonated with him. The two men began talking to each other about their stories and noticing similarities in their experiences. Sometimes participants brought in other photos or artifacts to share with the group to talk about their immigration story, providing context and detail for how Chinatown has evolved over time. By the last session, conversation had moved beyond talking about the photos. Seniors advised teen members on how to apply for college scholarships. Teens, in turn, showed seniors how to edit pictures on phones.

*“Still Standing”: Chinatown narratives of resilience*



“Still Standing” by Edward.

Workers’ and residents’ perspectives on Chinatown captured through photos showed a community resisting the forces of gentrification that threaten to change the human and physical landscape of the neighborhood (Main and Bell 2019). Visual storytelling serves as an important way to claim and reclaim voice and space. Storytelling is a powerful tool to convey perspectives and values (Fairbairn 2005). Between 2000 and 2018, the number of high-end and luxury housing increased from 561 units to 2,602 units (Chinatown Master Plan 2020). At the time of this writing, there were three proposals for new hotels in the neighborhood. Despite this development, Chinatown remains a “Community of Contrasts” (Asian Americans Advancing Justice 2011). It is one of the densest and poorest neighborhoods in Boston. Chinatown has the lowest median income but the



highest median rent (Chinatown Master Plan 2020). Median income is \$17,997 compared to the citywide average of \$62,021 and the adjacent neighborhood of Downtown at \$113,678. More than half the residents live in households whose income is considered “extremely low” under U.S. Housing and Urban Development’s definitions, meaning at or below 30 percent of the Boston area median. Displacement threatens the sense of community and tight knit social fabric.

Despite these threats to the character, social fabric, and future of the neighborhood, Inside Chinatown photographs capture the strength and resiliency of the community. Edward wrote that his photo “Still Standing” is an old Chinatown building that “displays a faded advertisement for a long-closed restaurant in Chinatown.” The building sits squarely in the center of the photo “flanked by two expensive downtown high-rises,” which could be read as simply the changing landscape of Boston. Edward, however, wrote how this “juxtaposition of the newer skyscrapers in the background and the weathered building in the forefront symbolizes the resiliency of Chinatown even with the encroachment of neighboring development.”

*“I Am 竹昇” (Jook Sing): Forging a unique Chinese American identity*



“湯圓 (Tang Yuen)” by Liz.

The Project Director and Project Facilitator incorporated hands-on group work and discussion around cultural traditions, personal narratives, and experiences of Chinatown, with a focus on intergenerational conversations and pairings. Residents and workers used photography to observe rituals and practices in their personal lives. In doing so, their photographs demonstrated what Chinatown means to them and their families and what is at stake in maintaining their heritage. In her series of photos entitled *Traditions of a Jook Sing*, Liz reflected on occupying two cultural



spaces: growing up in the U.S. eating meatloaf and mashed potatoes one day and Chinese sausage the next. She describes her choice of the theme *Jook Sing*:

The term *Jook Sing* is Chinese slang used in a negative way to refer to Chinese who were not born in China. It translates to hollow bamboo; the bamboo is hollow and compartmentalized, and thus water poured in one end does not flow out of the other end. The metaphor is that *Jook Sings* are not part of either culture—water within the *Jook Sing* does not flow and connect to either end. [My mother] taught us to embrace the term positively, and she showed us that we get the best of both worlds. We weren't just Chinese and we weren't just American; we were Chinese American and with that we got to break the mold of stereotypes and create our own identity.

Most of her photos depict traditional Chinese rituals, traditions, and food made for Chinese holidays such as Lunar New Year, Winter Solstice ("*Tang Yuen*"), Grave Sweeping Day, Mid-Autumn Festival, and Ching Ming, or Chinese Memorial Holiday, when families go to the cemetery to pay respect to the ancestors by lighting incense, bringing food, burning money, and bowing with respect three times.

When Liz exhibited her photos at the Center, she placed two contrasting photos deliberately side by side. A picture of her daughter's baptism, family gathered around a baptismal font, stood in contrast to the picture of the same child having a red egg rolled over her head, a traditional Chinese custom for newborns. These pictures illustrate the blend of western and Chinese traditions. Although Liz admits that knowledge of the origins of these traditions may have been lost, the meaning of the tradition and the connection to heritage are still salient and resonant with the *Jook Sing*. Although the legacy of racism and colonialism has caused many immigrants to become disconnected from their heritage, Liz, through her visuals, reclaims the beauty and richness of being part of two cultures, determined that her Chinese heritage not be replaced by the commercialization and commodification of Asian "otherness" (Lee 1999). Liz's approach to her exhibit, her curatorial choices, and her photographic content offer an insight into the ways in which the participants used this program as an opportunity to disavow the spectacle of Chinese cultural exoticization to share cultural rituals and traditions that carry meaning and memory within the Chinatown community (Anderson 1987, Andreoli 1994).

Digital storytelling challenges stereotypes and creates counternarratives as it humanizes (Greene et al. 2018.) During the process of creation, individuals have the opportunity to "learn about self through story-making" and "establish a sense of community by learning history" (Greene et al. 2018). Engaging in visual storytelling provides a sense of safety so that individuals can "express vulnerability."

*“Raining and Wet”: Shining light on the beauty of everyday life in Chinatown*



“Raining and Wet” by Ling.

Using photographs of everyday life, participants captured subtle moments of life in Chinatown that show the neighborhood’s elegant beauty and counter stereotypes of Chinatown as “dirty.” Through photographs, individuals can “indirectly speak about thoughts and feelings” (Prasetyo 2017). It is a particularly powerful tool for marginalized groups who are often seen as “the other” (Greene et al. 2018). To tell the story of Chinatown from an insider’s perspective, the residents and workers used a creative process. They learned to use the camera, tell their narrative through photographs, use photography to capture what particular perspectives looked like and what order photos should be in. See our Classroom Connection worksheets, [Photography 101](#) and [Visual Analysis](#) for examples of the tools developed for participants. The sessions used a variety of media to explore history, including archival photos, lectures, walking tours, and contemporary photography. This process allowed participants to engage in visual analysis; critical thinking; and photo composition, technique, and curation. Participants used these tools to capture “everyday life.”

Ling saw the beauty of Chinatown in different moments of the day. She captured quiet moments in her photos. Her photos also depict the neighborhood as energetic, lively, and vibrant. Her photo “Raining and Wet,” taken in the evening of what is usually a busy street, shows “when Boston Chinatown gets wet in the rain, the rain makes Boston Chinatown colorful at night because the light shines brightly and the wet floor has a reflection where the light pole shines on the ground.”



Countering stereotypes of Chinatown as “dirty” was important to Meihua. She wrote that it is important to acknowledge that “beauty is around you.” By playing with angles, her photos captured particular perspectives of key buildings, giving insight to what she wrote of “the sense of community to support Chinatown.” In “Blue Top” the top of a modern high-rise building forms a “V” toward the viewer, blending into the bright blue sky. In contrast, the bottom of the composition features an inverted “V” created by the crosswalks of the hustle and bustle at street level. Together, these contrasting angles draw the viewer's attention to the central building that represents both the modern architectural developments and the Asian businesses below, which may be read as representing both sides of Chinatown.

“Blue Top” by Meihua.



“Concrete Jungle” by Edward.

Similarly, Edward played with angles in “Concrete Jungle” with a photo of his former elementary school. In snapping a photo of the school, he crouched down to capture the angle of a young child, remembering how he had seen the school as a child.



*“Go”: Capturing the dynamic nature of this ethnic enclave*



“Go” by Cathy.

Markusen and Gadwa (2010) write that place keeping is important because it enables residents and other community stakeholders to shape and control narratives about themselves, to remember and write their own history, and, in doing so, foster inclusive belonging. As such, there is growing evidence that place keeping can decrease stress, increase usability, incur social benefits, increase social interaction, and contribute to a sense of community (Dempsey and Burton 2012). Fang Fang wanted people to know that Chinatown is more than restaurants. Although not a resident herself, she considers it her “second home” since she works here and comes into the neighborhood five days a week. She presented “a day in the life” of her day-to-day experience of working in Chinatown. With her photos, she wanted viewers to see the “excitement in everyday things” and not just think of the food in Chinatown. Her photos captured her daily life, her walk to South Station, the boba drinks that she gets as a snack during work.

In a similar vein, some residents and workers captured rituals unique to Chinatown. These are everyday practices that the outsider eye may miss. Eugene photographed the long line of people waiting to get a freshly slaughtered chicken. The picture of the van that comes to Chinatown to pick up workers for the suburbs is captured in “Go” by Cathy, taken with a wide angle, capturing the entirety of the Chinatown street. The white van is the focal point, following “the rule of thirds” as a mechanism that successfully draws the viewer’s eye right to the van.

**Unsung Heroes: Amplifying a resident- and worker-centered, Chinese American narrative in the face of gentrification**

Inside Chinatown asked residents and workers to consider questions of what it means to be Chinese in America and how that identity is articulated in and through the physical space of Chinatown. Today, again, Chinatowns are seen as dangerous. These photographs are even more poignant and relevant today given the fears about Chinese immigrants and Chinatown during the COVID-19 pandemic. Historically, Chinatowns were viewed as a dangerous place, a den of vice that justified segregation and containment (Lee 1999, Tchen 1999, Lee 2001, Park 2010, Wong 1995). Deep-seated racism has reared its ugly head once more, with Chinese individuals attacked in public and

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Untold Stories, Unsung Heroes: Using Visual Narratives to Resist Historical Exclusion, Exoticization, and Gentrification in Boston Chinatown

by Carolyn Leung Rubin, Loan Dao, Izabela Villanueva, and Cynthia Woo

some Chinatowns losing close to 70 percent of business during the pandemic (Lee 2020.) Top government officials fan the flames of xenophobia by calling COVID-19 “the Chinese virus.” Because of this racism, it is even more critical to implement projects like Inside Chinatown for workers and residents to have a voice in defining Chinatown for themselves and their families.

Inside Chinatown sought to create counternarratives of Chinatown from participants’ perspective, addressing stereotypes of the neighborhood and creating counternarratives in the wake of gentrification. Through visual storytelling, observation, and the creation of the photo captions residents and workers captured the sense of Chinatown as a place with cultural practices and longstanding rituals where people have survived and thrived despite discrimination and structural racism. The photographs of Inside Chinatown captured the humanity and reality of what it means to live and work in Chinatown, enabling the residents and workers to reclaim this neighborhood on their own terms and from their own perspectives and standpoints. Creating primary source material was the vehicle to help participants develop photography skills. Giving participants autonomy of their subject matter created the space for each to exhibit personal creativity by telling the story of Chinatown from their unique perspective and what they want future generations to remember.

Inside Chinatown gave residents and workers the tools to capture the beauty and complexity of their everyday life in Chinatown. Participants sought to get beneath surface-level understandings of Chinatown and the people who make up this vibrant, dynamic, and exciting neighborhood. In doing so, they provided important insights on a community that outsiders often neglect to see or notice. Their photographs elevated the people in the neighborhood whose stories are often silenced or invisible, yet keep the community vibrant and dynamic.

The intergenerational classroom space of Inside Chinatown enabled participants to co-construct a new Chinese American identity on their own terms. The photos force the viewer to confront the image of Chinatown as a place and disrupt the notion of Chinatown as exotic. Housing the photographs and artists’ statements at CHSNE was an explicit pedagogical tool so that the photographs are accessible to future students of all ages and the community, particularly those who may not have access to formal institutions of learning.

With their cameras in hand, participants were not only protagonists but also directors in creating these counternarratives of Chinatown, providing unique perspectives on the changing and evolving Chinatown. In this dynamic classroom space, no one person was seen as the expert; no one voice was privileged because of background, credential, or level of education. Meaningful, in-depth intergenerational dialogue was as important as teaching Asian American history and the technical skills of photography. In highlighting the value of everyday life in Chinatown, the residents and workers found a place to connect that enabled them to create and recreate an emotional home, finding a place in this era of displacement.

This desire for home was especially salient for the elders in the program, many of whom had moved away from Chinatown to live with their children because the family was priced out of the neighborhood. In the suburbs, elders can experience isolation, loneliness, and boredom. Many were happy to come back to their Chinatown home and find a new sense of camaraderie and kinship with complete strangers of different generations. The relationships forged during the



project were powerful, catalyzing dynamic intergenerational relationships and connections, demonstrating how creative work can help to build powerful relationships.

During this critical moment in Chinatown's history, when its borders and people are threatened, the photographs and stories of the residents and workers became part of a larger, community narrative of resilience. With the keen eye of an "insider," the residents and workers of Inside Chinatown created an intergenerational collective narrative that focused on the beauty and meaning of everyday life in this historic ethnic enclave.

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## Classroom Connection: Curriculum Example

<p>January 26 (Session One)</p> <p>10-10:15 Introduction Student Policy and Agreements Distribute schedule of classes</p> <p>10:15-10:40 Project Introduction Icebreaker questions-favorite memory in Chinatown Overview and Project Goals</p> <p>10:40-10:55 Guest: Chinese Historical Society of New England What does it mean to tell our lives and document our stories? What does it mean for storytelling?</p> <p>11-11:30 Group Discussion Visual Analysis of a CHSNE photo What do you see? What do you see that makes you say that? What more do you see? What story do you think it tells? / What's happening? What is the mood? Introduce technical terms for photography</p> <p>11:30-11:50 Group breakout discussion on their own photographs/CHSNE photographs</p> <p>11:50 Wrap-up Reflection and next classes</p> <p><u>January Homework</u> It is Lunar New Year! Take 12 photos from Lunar New Year and 12 of everyday life on a digital camera, cellphone, or iPad. Come back next month and explain why you took those photos. Think about some of the photography techniques we reviewed in class when you take your photos.</p>	<p>April 27 (Session Four)</p> <p>10:00-10:10 Introductions What has been your favorite thing/subject to take pictures of over the past 3 months?</p> <p>10:10-10:20 Big Group Discussion Think about what story/stories you want to uplift or highlight. Were there any key moments of your time in Chinatown that you believe are essential parts of who you are? Take at least 20 photos keeping in mind what you want to uplift and highlight about Chinatown. What are some common stories that have come up for you thus far? What specific locations in Chinatown have a story to tell?</p> <p>10:20-10:40 Small Group Breakouts Guiding Questions Do any of your photos you took this past month show your stories and/or experiences? How might you retake the photo to show YOU? What techniques would you change and/or keep to accomplish this?</p> <p>10:45-11:50 Walking Tour w/ Tunney Lee, local historian</p> <p>11:50- 1:55 Wrap-up</p> <p><u>May Homework</u> Storyboard work. Over the next month keep fine-tuning your stories and filling in the gaps. Consider picture analysis and what can a photo exhibit look like.</p>
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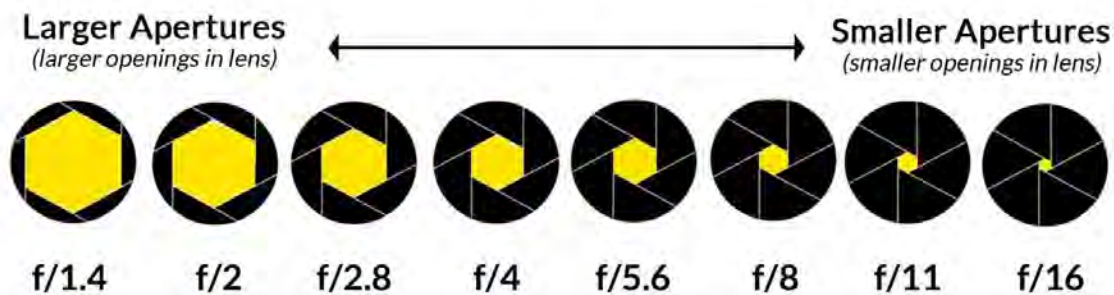
### ***Understanding How Your Camera Works***

Photography is all about capturing light. The goal of a photographer is to create the best possible exposure that will capture the information contained within a scene or frame. There are two things that control how much light enters your camera: the aperture (also known as the f-stop) and shutter speed.

#### **All cameras have the following elements:**

**Lens:** The optical device in front of the camera that focuses the light as it enters the camera. It also determines the angle of view.

**Aperture:** A variable diaphragm or opening inside the lens that determines the amount of light the lens allows through.



**Shutter:** The mechanism that controls how long the camera's shutter stays open to let light in.

**Light sensitive material:** The film or image sensor that records the light in the camera. The light sensitive material always has a given light sensitivity (ISO).

### ***Aspects of Composition***

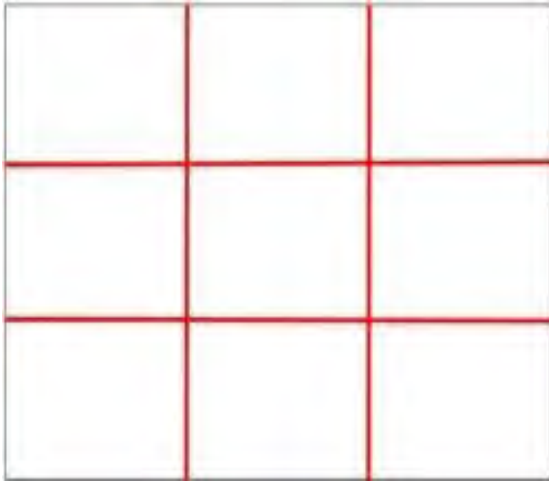
**Exposure:** Exposure is the total amount of light recorded by the image sensor.

A good exposure is created when just the right amount of light enters the camera enabling the viewer to see information clearly.

A bad exposure means that either too much light (washed out) or not enough light (too dark) is recorded.

The three factors that determine exposure are the aperture opening, the shutter speed, and the sensitivity of the ISO. When using the automatic setting on your camera, these factors are controlled and optimized for you.

## Rule of Thirds



By applying the rule of thirds to an image, imagine the image can be broken down into nine equal parts, as in the example to the left.

The grid that these nine parts create give you a useful way of thinking about how you position the various elements in your picture.

By placing points of interest in the intersections or along the lines your photo becomes more balanced and positions subjects where viewers' eyes most naturally gravitate to.

Here are some questions to ask yourself when composing a photograph:

What are the points of interest in this shot?  
Where am I intentionally placing them?

**Depth of Field:** Depth of field is a term used to describe how much of the photo is in focus.

Shallow depth of field means the foreground and background of the subject will appear soft and fuzzy, out of focus. This is achieved by using a wide aperture opening (more light).

Long depth of field means the foreground and background of the subject are more defined and in focus. This can be achieved by using a small aperture opening (less light).

**Motion:** The shutter speed is used to control how moving objects appear in your photographs.

To freeze action, use a faster shutter speed.  
To blur action, use a slower shutter speed.

## *Editing and Enhancing Digital Images*

### **Ways to Edit Your Photos**

Crop images to adhere to the rule of thirds or center the subject of the image.

Straighten images that appear crooked or off kilter.

Enhance and sharpen details.

Correct color balance or exaggerate specific colors.

Adjust the contrast, shadows, or highlights.

### **Recommended Software**

Adobe Lightroom (desktop and mobile)

Apple Photos (desktop)

Instagram (mobile)

VSCO (mobile)



## Classroom Connection: Visual Analysis Worksheet

**Step 1: Examine the photograph.** What do you notice first?

**Step 2: Identify type of photo** (check all that apply):

<input type="checkbox"/>	Portrait
<input type="checkbox"/>	Event
<input type="checkbox"/>	Documentary
<input type="checkbox"/>	Landscape
<input type="checkbox"/>	Architectural
<input type="checkbox"/>	Family
<input type="checkbox"/>	Selfie
<input type="checkbox"/>	Aerial/Satellite
<input type="checkbox"/>	Panoramic
<input type="checkbox"/>	Action
<input type="checkbox"/>	Posed
<input type="checkbox"/>	Candid

**Step 3: Observe its parts.** List the people, objects, and activities you see.

**Step 4: Analyze what you see in Step 3.**

**Step 5: Provide evidence from the photograph to support your answers.**

**Step 6: Where is the photo taken?**

**Step 7: How does it make you feel?**

**Step 8. Write one sentence summarizing the photograph.**

**Step 9: Consider the photo as archival material.** What could you find out from this photograph that you might not learn anywhere else?

How can we provide a classroom space where Black girls are not silenced?  
How can we provide a classroom space where Black girls are not silenced?  
How can we provide a classroom space where Black girls are not silenced?  
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How can we provide a classroom space where Black girls are not silenced?

## Denying Black Girlhood: Racialized Listening Practices in the Elementary Classroom

by Kennedy Alexis Johnson

In April of 2017, I was in my third month of student teaching in a general music classroom. At this point in the semester, I taught all classes—three sections each of kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade—by myself without constant supervision. Since I was providing the lesson plans and acting as “lead” teacher at this time, my supervising teacher would conduct other activities in a spacious storage closet connected to the classroom. In addition to being a Title I school (a school with a large concentration of students who come from “low-income” households), the students were predominately Black and/or Brown. As a Black woman, I recognized that my supervising teacher—a white woman of middle age who had been teaching general music for over two decades in the same elementary school—viewed the students as racialized bodies and did little to recognize her own biases. I say this for a number of reasons, but one story may illustrate aspects of how this bias affected the classroom.

One day I was continuing a lesson with a 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade class on the form of a song. Since I had not seen this class for a week, I wanted to see if they remembered the name of the form—rondo. One student—a Black girl—excitedly responded with the correct answer, “Oh, I remember, Ms. Johnson! It’s a rondo! Do you want me to teach the class how it goes?” Recognizing the joy and pride in her eyes, I began to invite her to keep speaking; however, neither of us had the opportunity to continue. Seconds after the student answered the question, my supervising teacher barged out of the storage closet demanding that the girl stop being “sassy and disrespectful.” I was shocked. After the class left the room, my supervising teacher told me that I needed to learn to have control over a classroom and not to let students speak to me rudely.

Over the last few years, I have frequently returned to this moment and asked myself what was it that made my supervising teacher register something as innocent as excitedly answering a question as an act of insubordination, of “sass.” This essay will attempt to unpack this moment through an examination of racialized listening (Stoevers 2016). Being constantly misheard and denied the right

of voice and expression is common to the experience of Black women in the United States (Collins 1990, Brown 2013); however, I am most bothered by the mishearing of Black girls. Racialized listening practices in the classroom result in the policing of the Black body and a denial of humanity and childhood. To discuss these listening practices and their effects, I will engage ideas of controlling images, sound studies, and auto-ethnography. Lastly, I consider the ways in which educators, ethnomusicologists, and folklorists can transform the classroom into liberatory space through Black feminist thought, critical pedagogy, and intersectional active listening.

Intersectionality—a term and theoretical framework initially coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989)—has proven useful for a number of activists and scholars for thinking through the various ways that social and political identities intersect. Crenshaw specifically coined this term for us to think through how Black women may be simultaneously subjected to racism *and* sexism.

To begin, the idea of racialized sound, hearing, and listening derives from Jennifer Stoever’s book *The Sonic Color Line* (2016). Stoever writes that “U.S. white supremacy has attempted to suppress, tune out, and willfully misunderstand some sounds and their makers and histories” (4). Stoever’s argument is that racism as it exists within this country has depended upon the sonic as much as the visual: “Far from being vision’s opposite, sound frequently appears to be visuality’s doppelgänger in U.S. racial history, unacknowledged, but ever present in the construction of race and the performance of racial oppression...Sound has been entangled with vision since the conception of modern ideas of race and it has often operated at the leading edge of the visual to produce racialized identity formations” (4). To show the ways that race is not just a visual phenomenon but also a sonic one, Stoever looks the cultural and political history of the United States and how listening became a racialized practice. She begins by detailing how print media and other technologies were essential to the construction of the “Black sound”: “Essentialist ideas about ‘black’ sounds and listening offered white elites a new method of grounding racial abjection in the body while cultivating white listening practices as critical, discerning, and delicate and, above all, as the standard of citizenship and personhood” (5). Another important argument that Stoever makes is how hearings and listenings are not only raced, but also gendered. Think about the angry Black woman stereotype versus the soft, innocent white woman. The next question, then, is to what visual stereotypes of Black women and girls are these sonic understandings of Blackness attached?

The term misogynoir was coined by queer Black feminist scholar Moya Bailey in a 2010 *Crunk Feminist Collective* blog post (as quoted in Bailey and Trudy, 2018). As one may deduce, the word combines misogyny and noir. Misogyny can be defined as contempt or prejudice directed toward women, while noir is French for “black”; however, it also has connotative roots in “film noir”—typically dark, sexualized crime films. Misogynoir “describes the anti-Black racist misogyny that Black women experience” (Bailey and Trudy 2018, 762). They conceptualize the term around the portrayal of Black women and “racial visual violence” frequently seen in popular culture throughout history, and Bailey notes: “For me, naming misogynoir was about noting both an historical anti-Black misogyny and a problematic intraracial gender dynamic that had wider implications in popular culture. Misogynoir can come from Black men, white men and women, and even other Black women” (Bailey and Trudy 2018, 762). Bailey’s writing clarifies that misogynoir is not to be appropriated by other women of color or white women—it is a term specific to Black women’s experiences of misogyny and anti-Blackness.

### **Mammies, Matriarchs, and Other Controlling Images**

Patricia Hill Collins shows how Black women have been stereotyped into specific categories or images as a means of control, writing that “intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender, and sexuality could not continue without powerful ideological justifications for their existence” (2000, 69). According to Collins, these controlling images essentially exist on a scale from “mammy” to “jezebel.” The “mammy” can be generally characterized as the faithful, obedient domestic servant who “knows her place” and is content with her subordination. On the other hand, the matriarch is considered a mother figure who is unfeminine, overly aggressive or assertive, and emasculating. Last, the jezebel is a stereotype that characterizes the Black woman as hypersexual and naturally so.

As Patricia Hill Collins reminds us, controlling images of Black women are typically defined by oppositional terms. In other words, Black women are either seen as a matriarch or mammy, as a jezebel or as asexual. There is little room for a Black woman to be an individual and exist outside these stereotypical boxes. This understanding of difference in terms of dichotomous categorization is also important in thinking about the ways in which Black women and girls are read as either being good or bad, sassy or ladylike, quiet or loud, and/or assertive or aggressive. Pulling from themes of intersectionality, Collins is clear that these controlling images differ between Black and white women: “Unlike the controlling images developed for middle-class White women, the controlling images applied to Black women are so uniformly negative that they almost necessitate resistance” (2000, 100). However, as Collins writes, schools should be considered institutions in which these dominant ideologies

or controlling images are both resisted and reproduced (2000, 85). By using Collins’ and Stoeber’s arguments, we might see how racism is injected into the listening practices of educators and administrators. How might these racialized listening practices operate in the classroom and how do these practices disrupt students’ learning?

The use of controlling images in the schools can be seen in Edward Morris’ essay “‘Ladies’ or ‘Loudies’?: Perceptions and Experiences of Black Girls in Classrooms” (2007). Morris seeks to understand the “unique educational perceptions and obstacles” Black girls face in schools. Morris, a white “middle-classed” man, conducts this two-year ethnographic study in a predominately Black, “working-class” middle school. He was clear about his position, or rather positionality, and that he did not have the ability to connect with the Black girls as much as he might have if he were of the same race, gender, and “age position.” Morris discovered that a number of teachers encouraged students to exemplify a “docile form of femininity, emblemized in the prescription to act like ‘ladies.’ At the same time, however, most teachers viewed the existing femininity of these girls as coarse and overly assertive, leading one teacher to describe them as ‘loudies’” (2007, 491). This form of femininity was most certainly predicated on white supremacist, patriarchal interpretations—interpretations that leave little to no room for other understandings of the feminine. In *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*, Collins writes that we exist within a society that finds the “middle-class, heterosexual, White femininity as normative” whereas Black femininity is considered a “subordinated gender identity [that] becomes constructed not just in relation to White women, but also in relation to multiple others, namely, all men, sexual outlaws (prostitutes and lesbians), unmarried women, and girls” (Collins 2004, 193). Therefore, when a girl, particularly a Black girl, steps outside these desired



performances, Morris found that they were often punished for being too loud, unladylike, or behaving (and dressing) like a “hoochie-mama.”

According to Morris’s findings, teachers subjected Black girls to a form of discipline that was not interested in their students’ academic growth, but a discipline that was largely directed at curbing their students’ demeanor. This discipline stemmed from teachers’ perceptions of the girls as challenging authority or being loud and not “ladylike” (Morris 2007, 501). This complements Ann Arnett Ferguson’s articulation of adultification in *Bad Boys: Public Schools in the Making of Black Masculinity* (2000). In this book, Ferguson focuses on the socialization and punishment of Black boys in the public school system. She writes that as Black boys are denied the ability to be children in the eyes of society and their educators and administrators: “as black children, they are not seen as childlike but adultified; as black males, they are denied the masculine dispensation constituting white males as being ‘naturally naughty’ and are discerned as willfully bad” (Ferguson 2000, 80). Because of this denial of childhood to Black boys and society’s belief that they are already adult-like and therefore worthy of adult-like punishments, Black boys are more likely to be viewed as deserving of punishment. Perhaps Black girls are also subject to a form of adultification that differs from that of Black boys.

To connect ideas of adultification to his findings, Morris does the work of linking Collins’ description of controlling images to perceptions of femininity related to Black womanhood and girlhood. He focuses on the stereotype of the matriarch:

This adultification may pertain to Black girls as well, whom many view as overly sexual and controlling at a young age. [Patricia Hill] Collins discusses the stereotypical “controlling image” of the Black female matriarch. The matriarch portrays a negative view of African American femininity as overly aggressive and dominant. Similar to Black boys, whose adultification leads to a perception of them as aggressively masculine and justifies strict punishments, the adultification of Black girls can lead to a perception of them as aggressively feminine, which can justify restriction of their inquisitiveness and assertiveness in classrooms (503-04).

Another controlling image in Morris’s “Ladies” or “Loudies” is the “hoochie-mama.” Collins frames this stereotype and the related images of the whore and jezebel as central to the various controlling images of Black women. She argues that these images are central because “efforts to control Black women’s sexuality lie at the heart of Black women’s oppression” (Collins 2000, 81). The image of the jezebel has its roots in American slavery. The term was used to cast Black women as sexually aggressive and thus deserving of sexual assault(s) at the hands of white men. Attached to the stereotype of the jezebel was also an assumption of heightened fertility. On the other hand, the term “hoochie” is much more contemporary. While the term can still be defined as a “sexually aggressive” woman, its popularization has been made possible through popular culture—such as images produced through hip-hop videos. Apparently, there are a variety of hoochies—the “plain” hoochie, the “club” hoochie, the “gold-digging” hoochie, and, finally, the “hoochie mama.” Hoochie mama, a term popularized by the hip-hop group 2 Live Crew, marries meanings of the hoochie to ideas of Black American poverty. Collins writes that the “‘hoochie mama’ is a ‘hoodrat,’ a ‘ghetto hoochie’ whose main purpose is to provide them sexual favors” (Collins 2000, 81). We also should understand why the hoochie is a “mama” in this iteration. Collins explains

that because she is also a mama it “speaks to the numbers of Black women in poverty who are single parents whose exchange of sexual favors for money is motivated by their children’s economic needs” (Collins 2000, 81)—a notion less rooted in reality and more so in misogynoir.

In his time at the middle school, Morris found that educators attached the hoochie-mama label to students who had “perceived over-active and overly mature sexuality stands in contrast to dominant proscriptions of ladylike restriction of sexuality” (Morris 2007, 508). Since the educators were primarily interested in molding Black girls into “ladies,” many of their efforts were aimed at curtailing behavior deemed “provocative.” These were the educators’ attempts to police girls’ behaviors seen as a “mark of inappropriate, overly sexual femininity” (508). In one exchange, a teacher’s aide deems it acceptable to interrupt a Black girl’s education to call out “hoochie-mama” clothing:

The school usually requires uniforms, but it’s a free dress day today. I’m sitting in an Art class. A Black woman who is an aide for the class asks a Black girl, ‘Why you wearin’ that hoochie mama skirt? I can almost see your butt in that!’ The girl ignores what the aide said and continues working on her project (503).

What stands out to me is that the education in art is less important than correcting her choice in clothing that is too “grown” or overly sexual. We see that it is more important for educators to mold Black girls into “young ladies,” in addition to “subtly (and [sometimes] unwittingly) molding them into less active” (511) and enthusiastic learners.

This is not discussed within the Morris essay: however, as we have seen in this single episode, perceived aggressive femininity and unladylike behavior can also be classified as “sassy” behavior. In her second book, *Hear Our Truths: The Creative Potential of Black Girlhood*, hip-hop/Black feminist scholar Ruth Nicole Brown spends considerable time analyzing sassiness. She writes that “[t]eachers, parents, and community workers are quick to offer anecdotes about Black girls are in need of management, because of what they say and *how* they say it” (200). As we see with my classroom incident, the *how* is often perceived as sassy. Brown uses a definition for sassy put forth by Joyce Stevens as a “willful forthrightness in demeanor that expresses a spirited behavioral expressive style of boldness, independence, and courage, which Black adolescent girls learn early to deal with everyday hassles” (200). Unfortunately, Black girls are acknowledged for a brand of sassiness that is somehow an affront to those in positions of power and authority.

In the previous findings and my own experience in the classroom, Black girls occupy a unique intersection of race, gender, and often class where they become rendered invisible. This invisibility can be best defined as an “absence of, or erroneous representations of, oppressed groups and/or individuals” (Macías 2015, 261). In other words, while “Black women are not literally invisible to others, persistent stereotypical labels allow for others to fail to identify them as individuals and to ignore their voices” (261). What happens when a Black girl’s individuality is erased and the person in authority is allowed to see or hear them not as themselves, but as a girl with sass, a “loudie,” hoochie-mama, or disrespectful? How do these beliefs in control justify the “miseducation” of a Black girl? Further, how do controlling images police and, in turn, criminalize the Black girl in these spaces of education? Lastly, how might Black girls be responding to this brand of policing?

We might have an idea of how these images actually influence the learning and policing of Black girls through Monique Morris's *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools* (2016). In *Pushout*, Morris interrogates how gender and racial inequalities in public schools have continued to persist in the nation's educational system and how Black girls bear a large brunt of the effects. The central argument of the book is that Black girls are being "criminalized (and physically and mentally harmed) by beliefs, policies, and actions that degrade and marginalize both their learning and their humanity, leading to conditions that push them out of schools and render them vulnerable to even more harm" (Morris 2016, 29). Morris raises the fact that Black girls are pushed out from the school system through the school-to-prison pipeline—the practice of criminalizing Black and Brown children in schools, which leads to a higher probability of imprisonment. While Morris acknowledges the reality of the pipeline, she finds that current analyses of the pipeline and criminalization in school are too masculinized. Similar to what we have seen with Morris, Collins, and Brown, Black girls are largely punished when they "engage in acts that are deemed 'ghetto'—often a euphemism for actions that deviate from social norms tied to a narrow, White middle-class definition of femininity" (30). This view of Black girls as deviants from the norm has resulted in their restriction not to only jails but also other forms of policed confinement such as house arrest, digital monitoring, and detention centers. In addition to their literal criminalization, how else are Black girls affected by this objectification and criminalization?

If we return to Brown's *Hear Our Truths*, we see that this criminalized, deviant view of Black girls can police them into silence. She writes: "Taught to be unseen and unheard, their silence may be self-imposed or sanctioned. Silent Black girls have a lot to say; however, without time, good relationships, and patience, their voices remain a backdrop to conversations about them" (Brown, 184). Unfortunately, when Black girls choose the route of silence, it counts against them in class for some teachers as being shy or apathetic. Brown warns against these assumptions by asking people to consider the possibilities that Black girls may be silent because they find safety in silence or that they are "willfully lost in fearful power struggles that position them as mute" (184). This rendering of silence fits with Black feminist Pauli Murray's discussion of how systems of oppression operate: "A system of oppression draws much of its strength from the acquiescence of its victims, who have accepted the dominant image of themselves and are paralyzed by a sense of helplessness" (Collins 2000, 99). Adding on to Murray, Collins adds that "the notion that Black women's objectification as the Other is so complete that we become willing participants in our own oppression" (99).

I have also seen Black girls choose the route of willful silence in the face of their objectification. I momentarily return to the 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade girl whose education or moment of learning was interrupted by my supervising teacher's inability to register her response as anything but "sassy and disrespectful." Immediately after the supervising teacher cut the girl off, the girl remained silent for the rest of class. I was toward the end of my lesson; however, I still had a few minutes left of instruction. The girl was completely disengaged even though I tried to recreate the inviting atmosphere that I hoped was present before the moment of interruption. Regrettably, this disengagement and silence did not stop after this day—the girl did not willingly speak in that classroom for the remainder of the semester. Yes, we would chat in the cafeteria or hallway or before class actually began, however, the classroom was now a space where she did not feel safe to be herself or even speak without being accused of some perceived sass.

How can we provide a classroom space where Black girls are not silenced? A space where Black girls can speak freely without fear of being sonically policed, misunderstood, or punished? How can we create a space where Black girls feel safe and able to use the totality of their voice, their expression, and their range of emotions, their self? What will this classroom space even look like and can it exist in today's society—a society that has not dealt with its racist past and present? A concept that may guide us in that direction is intersectional active listening.

Before defining what I understand to be intersectional active listening, I would like to explore “intersectional listening” as coined by the ethnomusicologist Allie Martin. While active listening is typically used to describe a form of listening that requires a person to engage fully with a person's body language and speech to respond properly to the content and intent of what has been said, intersectional listening asks us to perform a quite different task. I first heard of this idea during a presentation by Martin at the 2019 Society for Ethnomusicology annual meeting titled “Listening Intersectionally to Gentrification in Washington, DC.” She put forth the concept of “intersectional listening” as an “intentionally speculative mode of listening that challenges us to hear multiple axes of analysis” (Martin 2019). She continued by saying that this type of listening “refutes the consideration of only race, class, or gender, instead encouraging a listening practice that refuses the language of either/or and instead lives within the both/and” (Martin). While her study focuses on hearing gentrification in Washington, DC, she argues that intersectional listening can transform the way we “hear black life” (Martin). As I understand it, intersectional active listening requires us to understand the totality of a person. We must actively empathize with one's gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, and all other aspects of their identity if we are to hear them truly. Additionally, we must actively and consistently be reflexive in our understanding of how our own positionalities or identities impact how we hear others. What, then, would it mean to apply this concept to the ways we hear Black girls in the classroom? This kind of listening would not only require us to listen actively, but also require us to suspend our biases and to listen/hear the totality of the Black girl's being without casting judgment or stereotyping them into confinement. Furthermore, how might this intersectional active listening also be useful in hearing and responding to queerness, foreignness, and so on? How can this form of listening build the inclusive, loving spaces that Morris and Brown are striving to create for Black girls?

If we return to my student teaching experience, what would it have been like for the student if my supervising teacher had the tools to practice an intersectional active listening? Would the supervising teacher have felt the need to disrupt the moment of learning to chastise the girl for being “sassy?” Or would she have heard the excitement that I was able to hear (and see)? In this situation, I was able to recognize the girl's response as excitement not only because of my own positionality as a Black woman, but also because I had taken the time to figure out who this student was and, in turn, how she sounded. I knew what she sounded like when she was sad, upset, happy, or excited—my supervising teacher did not. Instead, my supervising teacher was operating on biases she internalized about Black girlhood—that Black girls are inherently sassy and they must be taught to behave and respond in a way that is more “acceptable” for a white society. If my supervising teacher were able to account for the girl's entirety of being, through the practice of intersectional active listening, the student would not have been misheard. This kind of listening requires us to unpack and address the assumptions we make surrounding matters of identity. Using and practicing intersectional active listening—a listening that values the Black girl's voice and

self—is a first step we may take to address racialized listening practices and affirm the humanity and girlhood of Black girls in the classroom.

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## The Ohio Field School: A Collaborative Model for University- Community Research

by Katherine Borland,  
Cassie Rosita Patterson, and  
Jasper Waugh-Quasebarth

In 2016, the Center for Folklore Studies (CFS) at The Ohio State University (OSU) developed the Ohio Field School (OFS), a service-learning ethnographic methods course that provides opportunities for hands-on research while documenting and archiving placemaking practices in Appalachian Ohio.<sup>1</sup> Through work in Scioto and Perry counties, the course has provided structures for reflexive, equitable exchange between students, faculty, staff, and community partners who respond to ongoing environmental, economic, and social inequities stemming from a legacy of extractive industry and compounded by emerging economic and health crises. The COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, has set back already struggling community organizations when they were only beginning to find their feet after the 2008 economic crisis. As John Winnenberg, a community partner in Perry County, told us, “[our organizations] are the first to bleed and the last to heal.” “Parachute” academic work and journalism at times of crisis often aggravate persistent inequities, making community organizers wary of partnerships that can cost more than they contribute. In response to these concerns, we employ frameworks of collaborative ethnography, which stress long-term intentional, participatory, and transparent relationship building between researchers and community partners (Campbell and Lassiter 2015). The course documents and supports the work of diverse grassroots community organizations and works to provide platforms to amplify their work despite national discourses that downplay or completely ignore the contributions of progressive organizations in Appalachia.

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About the photo: Maureen Cadogan narrates her personal archive with OFS student cataloguer and digitizer Emma Cobb in Portsmouth, Ohio, in March 2019.

Photo by Jenny Morrison.

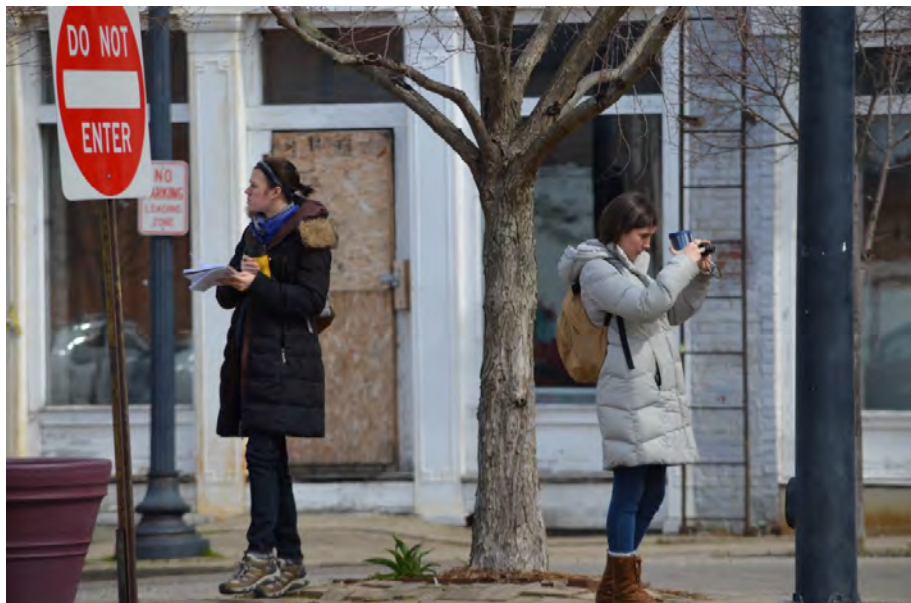
All photos courtesy Ohio Field School, Folklore Archives, Center for Folklore Studies.  
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### Reciprocity

We acknowledge OSU's historic and present practices of economic and intellectual exploitation of experts situated outside the university, many of whom have not been properly compensated for their contributions to university-community partnerships. We also acknowledge and actively work to disrupt the power that institutions of higher education can wield in collaborative relationships, sometimes through financial means. Indeed, the initial impetus for the OFS was to counter the ways in which university funding for short-term service projects was reinforcing systemic inequalities by producing tourist-like economies in host communities (see Borland 2013). Therefore, we take a holistic approach to reciprocity that attends to our university's complicity in systemic inequality while also resisting the reduction of our interactions to capitalistic exchange. Our goal is to respond to the values of the communities with whom we work, which sometimes operate through informal modes of support and exchange as well as financial compensation for expertise.

Our experiential pedagogical model is anchored in the Folklore Archives of the CFS and focuses particularly on vibrant social and environmental justice efforts in a region often characterized by pessimistic narratives of exploitation, acquiescence, and abandonment. This article describes and reflects upon the OFS model as a method of developing university-community partnerships that support locally driven efforts to address longstanding inequities in the Appalachian region, including those arising from university-implemented programs. Despite our successes to date, our entanglement in university structures and expectations for research on the one hand, and local contexts to which we are still relative newcomers on the other, create ongoing challenges to ethically responsible university-community partnerships.

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2017 OFS students Sarah Craycraft and Destiny West conduct a walking audit of the downtown Boneyfiddle neighborhood of Portsmouth, OH.

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## The Pedagogical Model

The OFS emerged as a way to introduce a team-based approach to folklore fieldwork that better reflects current practice in engaged public arts and humanities research than the tradition of the lone ethnographer or collector. Simultaneously, we wanted to recuperate a tradition at OSU of fostering and maintaining community partnerships across the state. During the relatively flush era of the 1970s and 1980s, when federal funding supported folk arts surveys, festivals, and documentation projects, folklorists conducted substantial fieldwork statewide.<sup>2</sup> By 2014, however, that robust, publicly engaged, statewide effort was significantly reduced. In the absence of a state folklorist or folklife program, the CFS Folklore Archives aspire to be the primary repository for Ohio's expressive culture. However, our occasional team-based fieldwork projects directed by individual professors have been practically restricted to the Columbus metropolitan area and don't reflect the diverse cultural settings of the state as a whole.<sup>3</sup> As we worked to develop a more engaged research profile, we were supported by an anonymous donor who recognized the importance of our mission. Thus, OFS was born as a two-year proposal for research and teaching, focused on the placemaking activities of small communities in Appalachian Ohio. We were able to stretch an initial gift of \$100,000 to cover three years of research and teaching in Scioto County. Our fourth and fifth years, as well as offshoot collaborations, have been funded through an additional \$187,035 in grants and by continuing our relationship with our donor.<sup>4</sup> These grants have allowed us to hire undergraduate and graduate students over the summer, contract independent folklorists, and host a postdoctoral scholar both to broaden and refine our work. Our enhanced research team has contributed expertise in fields such as social work, education, ethnomusicology, public folklore, cultural anthropology, and Appalachian Studies.<sup>5</sup> Although the positions we have been able to offer are ultimately temporary, they often serve as important training and professional development opportunities for students or recent graduates. Due in part to changing funding opportunities, in 2019 we shifted the physical location of our field school from Scioto County to Perry County and simultaneously broadened our collaborative network to engage our partners with each other across counties.



2020 OFS students Jacob and Lydia Smith interview Brent Bailey at the Rendville Cemetery.

Photo by Jasper Waugh-Quasebarth. Some rights reserved: CC BY-NC-ND.

From the beginning, we wanted to create an opportunity for students to learn fieldwork skills (participant observation, field notes, photographic documentation, interviews, digitization, and archival accessioning and research) as members of a team-based project anchored by the CFS Folklore Archives. Our class therefore emphasized the importance of labeling and accessioning materials so that students' work would become available both to future researchers and interested community members. These skills are not usually taught in university-based, ethnographic methods classes. Moreover, recognizing that the trope of the lone fieldworker relies on a largely unacknowledged freedom of movement based on gender and skin-color privilege, we had our students work in pairs. This approach alleviated the stress many students feel when moving into unfamiliar terrain. It also made interviewing more manageable, as one student took the interviewer role while the other handled tech and took notes that could later be turned into tape logs.

Anchoring the project in the Folklore Archives ensured that collected materials would be appropriately housed and the relationships students and faculty cultivated with community participants were maintained even as individual researchers moved on to other classes and projects. We hoped to avoid the inevitable weaknesses of class-based service-learning models in which successful projects often balloon beyond the limits of a semester and can be abandoned as priorities of a new semester take hold.<sup>6</sup> In our model, the project lives at the Folklore Archives; each year's fieldwork class contributes their part without being responsible for bringing all the research to completion.

Moreover, our model allows us to refocus the work continually according to the goals and priorities of our community partners, moving in the direction of Participatory Action Research (McIntyre 2007). As Columbus- and university-based researchers interested in working with communities outside our metropolitan area, we first needed to develop contacts with people living and working in those areas. In the first year we conducted monthly fieldwork trips to learn what we could. We began by casting a relatively wide net, visiting with an initial set of contacts in Washington, Perry, and Scioto counties. Each county struggles with the unemployment, environmental degradation, and outmigration characteristic of both the deindustrialized Midwest and Appalachia. Our initial focus on sense of place in a changing environment allowed us to enter into collaboration (and satisfy the Institutional Review Board, which does not commonly recognize the importance of exploratory research) so that we might discover how best to support our community partners through documentation. The emerging collaborative model aligned community partner goals with the particular set of skills we had to offer and possibilities for connecting partners with other external resources for projects outside of our professional purview (Lassiter 2005).

We were interested in collecting a diverse set of place-based experiences and expressions—across race and ethnicity, age, and patterns of residence. As we narrowed our focus to develop the necessary infrastructure (e.g., lodging, places of interest, community experts) to bring students into the field, we settled on Scioto County, which offered the small city of Portsmouth as well as Ohio's largest state park and forest within easy driving distance. We invited our initial contacts to serve on a Community Partner Advisory Committee (CPAC). Initially, our advisors provided local contacts for our students to interview, but as we deepened our collaborations, the Advisory Committee provided substantial feedback and suggested new directions and possibilities for the work.<sup>7</sup> They were joined in Year 2 by a volunteer-based OSU Advisory Committee made up



primarily of students and independent folklorists who choose to remain involved after completing their initial involvement in the field school.<sup>8</sup>

Using the fieldwork textbook *Doing Ethnography Today: Theories, Methods, Exercises* (Campbell and Lassiter 2015) as the foundation for our class-based pedagogy, we prepare each cohort of students to interact with community partners in an open-ended, self-reflexive way. We ask students to hold their fieldwork objectives lightly during their admittedly short, one-week immersive experience, remaining flexible and adaptable to their emergent circumstances and to the evolving goals of their hosts. Practically, one student researcher team might conduct multiple interviews with people they had not previously met while another might spend the week side by side with one individual before conducting any interviews at all. We stress the importance of daily fieldnotes to capture the conversations and activities that students and partners share, opportunities and limitations of partners' community work, and students' evolving sense of themselves as ethnographers. We try as much as possible to rid students of the idea of fieldwork as a recipe with a right way and a wrong way to do participant observation and interviewing. Instead, we model and emphasize the importance of trying out different styles, always being thoughtful about what a certain approach might accomplish and what it might obscure. When discussing how they felt about listening to and analyzing an interview they had conducted, for example, students from our 2020 field school recognized that they had missed opportunities and made assumptions that may have prevented their interlocutor from fully developing a thought or idea. Through reflexive review, they learned that listening in such a way to allow the next question to emerge out of the conversational nexus requires practice and attention.

By the end of the semester, each student team produces three products: an archival collection of photographs, interviews, and scans with each item properly labelled and described; a public facing project, which usually takes the form of a digital gallery for the CFS website ([go.osu.edu/ofs](http://go.osu.edu/ofs)); and a final report, loosely modelled on the kind of document an independent folklorist would produce for a grant agency, with a summary of the work accomplished, a contact list, and recommendations for future research. Through these assignments, students transform their groups' ethnographic and interpersonal experience into a collection that community partners and future students can access and build upon.



2017 OFS students work on accessioning their materials and creating public facing projects after their week in Scioto County.

Photo by Cassie Patterson.  
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## **Establishing Community Partners in Appalachian Ohio**

Establishing long-term community partners with research relationships that last over a period of years has been a hallmark of the OFS. Working in Appalachian Ohio, we are strongly influenced by collaborative and social justice models from Appalachian Studies and Folklore. Both contexts stress that knowledge and social action “come from the people” and ground work in the practice of “deep listening,” which seeks to understand the meanings that people make within their own lives according to their worldviews (Hinsdale et al. 1995; Portelli 1991, 1997, 2011; Lindahl 2012). Extending these frameworks, we resist extractive approaches by working alongside people and organizations who remake place in socially and environmentally just ways (Fisher and Smith 2012, Hufford 2002). We view our relationships with community partners as collaborations, in which we can provide skills and attention to projects that partners value but often lack the time or technical capability to do, such as the digitization of organizational records. These collaborative frameworks assume an asset-based stance, listening to community partner needs and requests, valuing community partner knowledge, and recognizing the limited scope of our work in relationship to a communities’ larger struggles (Billings and Kingsolver 2017, Campbell and Lassiter 2015, Keefe 2009, White et al. 2012).

Our community partners are deeply and extensively connected in their work to effect meaningful change. They are also, we have found, worn out by promises from would-be allies who can offer little meaningful follow-through on projects. With this history in mind, we find that delivering on small, discreet projects is important to building trust over time. Rather than creating our own projects, we tap into existing meshworks—interwoven localized, self-organized, and nonhierarchical interrelationships—to build projects together (Harcourt and Escobar 2002). Recognizing that our community partner organizations manage a host of external partnerships, such as those with AmeriCorps VISTA, Rural Action, and OSU Extension,<sup>9</sup> we follow a model of learning and listening similar to that of embedded allies, while bringing new skills and perspectives to the work. We also take advantage of university networks. We have partnered extensively with Andrew Feight, Professor of American and Digital History at Shawnee State University in Portsmouth for our Scioto County work. In Perry County, Rachel Terman, a sociologist at Ohio University in nearby Athens, has shared insights from her recent focus groups with local (inter)generational leaders. In these ways the OSU team strives to position our work humbly in relation to multifaceted contexts, challenges, and advocacy strategies.

Our collaborations have taken shape in response to differences in local meshworks and environmental terrains. Our work in Scioto County (population 75,314)<sup>10</sup> aligns with county boundary designations, which allows us to make connections across categories of demographic diversity, such as race, ethnicity, class, population density, gender, and sexual orientation. We have focused especially on the city of Portsmouth (population 20,240), including the previously segregated and historically African American neighborhood of the North End and the small communities in and around Shawnee State Forest to the west. Our work in Scioto County has centered around gathering groups across lines of difference, providing time and space for relationships to grow or be renewed.

In contrast, our first year of work in the microregion of the Little Cities of Black Diamonds (LCBD) in Perry County follows the geographic contours of a series of small coal mining towns nestled within the Wayne National Forest, spanning portions of Perry, Monroe, and Athens

counties.<sup>11</sup> Here, fieldwork and project development have focused on several interrelated organizational initiatives operating in downtown Shawnee, Ohio, and the nearby towns of New Straitsville and Rendville,<sup>12</sup> a historically integrated coal mining town with a history of African American culture and leadership. Since our community partners typically work on continuous and overlapping grant-funded projects, our role has been to document the rich histories of organizational cooperation and to support succession planning. John Winnenberg of Sunday Creek Associates has been a key ally in connecting us with our partners in the region. Public folklorist Jasper Waugh-Quasebarth of CFS is leading [Sharing Visions: Intergenerational Work in Appalachian Ohio](#), a 2019–2021 initiative to foster community-to-community networking and sharing between partners in Scioto County and the LCBD microregion.



Sue Eleuterio and Cassie Rosita Patterson consult with community partners Drew Carter, Jenny Richards, and Charlie Haskins in Charles' shop, Haskins House, in downtown Portsmouth to plan a community meeting in February 2018. These partners knew about each other but appreciated the opportunity to meet. Photo by Katherine Borland. Some rights reserved: CC BY-NC-ND.

Principles that guide the OFS include navigating communication hurdles in ways that hold space for stakeholder input. Community organizations prioritize projects that keep the lights on and everyday communication that ensures the thriving of their organization. With this in mind, we draft statements of collaboration that outline our expectations for ourselves and community partners early in the process.<sup>13</sup> We also commit to finding locally legible ways of communicating, making a toolkit of SMS messaging, messaging apps, email, phone calls, and knocking on doors essential. Our spring break field experiences from 2017 to 2020 formed the pedagogical backbone of our project, but these visits were knit together by smaller, less formal visits when individual faculty, staff, and former field school students assisted our partners in their ongoing community work. This can be challenging, as we are not embedded in these communities, but as our university cohort grows, we can draw on a larger and larger pool of volunteers to assist in deepening



connections with our partners. For instance, faculty and students helped partner Maxine Malone document the summer North End Super Reunion, a festival of the predominantly African American North End neighborhood of Portsmouth. Others assisted Barbara and Kevin Bradbury, owners of Hurricane Run Farm, with maple sap tapping and syrup making in midwinter, and another answered Jody Newton-McAllister's call to join the Friends of Scioto-Brush Creek watershed group's stream clean-up the following spring.



Father and daughter from Rarden, Ohio, pull tires out of Scioto-Brush Creek during the Friends of Scioto-Brush Creek Creeksweep in May 2018.

Photo by Katherine Borland. Some rights reserved: CC BY-NC-ND.

Asking community partners to trust us, we also trust community partners, former field schoolers, and short-term project collaborators to advise on the future of the field school as CPAC and OSU Advisory Committee members. Moreover, we maintain these relationships through other CFS initiatives. For instance, the [Placemaking in Scioto County, Ohio](#) traveling exhibit is designed to cultivate county-wide discussion of regional placemaking practices, and the Sharing Visions project discussed earlier, works to facilitate connections among activists working in different counties by providing spaces for cross-county conversation and committing resources to documenting and publishing the emerging themes of those conversations as resources for groups across Appalachian Ohio.



OFS OSU Advisory Committee member Caroline Toy facilitates a World Café roundtable to gather input from community members Jeanette Langford and Cora Johnson for the Placemaking in Scioto County, Ohio traveling exhibit in February 2018. Photo by Breanne Lejeune. Some rights reserved: CC BY-NC-ND.

As we seek to become contributing members of the communities with whom we partner, we bring our skills and networks to bear situationally by serving on committees for local efforts where partners have asked for an outside perspective. For example, Waugh-Quasebarth has recently been invited to provide an outsider's perspective to conversations among multiply entangled local individuals and organizations who make up the Shawnee Trail Town Group.

### **The Role of the Archives in University-Community Relationship Building and Collaborative Archiving**

Housed within CFS, the [Folklore Archives](#) contain several collections of original Ohio-based fieldwork dating back to its founding by Francis Lee Utley in the early 1960s (Mullen and Shuman, forthcoming). For example, the *Student Ethnographic Papers Collection* features over 11,000 undergraduate student collection projects, the *Ohio Arts Council Collection* contains cultural documentation from 1977–1982, and the *Slang Journals, University District Project, Columbus-Copapayo Sister Cities Collection, Oral Narratives of Latin@s in Ohio*, among others, explore specific forms of Ohio expressive culture. The OFS Collection builds on this foundation while also shifting toward community-based collaborative ethnography and public programming.

As an integrated archival collection, community engagement initiative, and service-learning course, the OFS is rooted in the Folklore Archives, providing critical continuity for our work. Although faculty members Katherine Borland and Cassie Rosita Patterson have been a consistent presence throughout, nearly 50 individuals have conducted fieldwork for the project since 2016, making communication and synthesis crucial for maintaining continuity within and across

partnerships in Scioto County and the Little Cities of Black Diamonds microregion. Both a mode and space of engagement, the Archives bring a sense of longevity to our interactions with community partners: We are co-creating a body of work that will persist beyond our individual contributions and positionalities. Because we know that we are constructing a public repository through our interactions, we can genuinely ask who else we should interview to understand the story of a particular place better. Working intentionally, we search for materials that complicate dominant historical or local narratives. Practically, the Folklore Archives does this work, but, unfortunately, always with an understanding of our own precarity given shifting university priorities.<sup>14</sup>

Pedagogically, the interviews, photographs, digitized materials, and final reports of previous years provide context for current students prior to their field experience and before meeting their community partner(s). Whether collected by OFS lead researchers or by previous students, primary sources within the Folklore Archives allow students to engage in the first step of ethnographic fieldwork: conducting preliminary research. Listening to existing interviews grounds and demystifies interview and archival accessioning processes by providing direct examples of our work. Further, students can access immediately relevant archival materials, to which they will contribute by the end of the semester for the next group of researchers.



Cheryl Blosser provides the story behind a photo to OFS student team Paola Enríquez-Duque and Isabelle Lambert at the Little Cities of Black Diamonds archive in Shawnee, Ohio, in March 2020.

Photo by Cassie Patterson. Some rights reserved: CC BY-NC-ND.

Since 2018, digitizing small personal or local organizational collections has been a core service-learning project for the OFS. Digitizing alongside community partners—scanning one piece at a time in high-resolution, reviewing it, describing it in detail, and engaging in dialogue about the items—is an act that combines curiosity, attention, deep listening, and critical thinking, hallmarks of folkloristic methodology. Paying attention to the personal and organizational documents that community partners have assembled and preserved provides an opportunity to pay shared attention to the past as well as consider the future.<sup>15</sup>

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The Ohio Field School: A Collaborative Model for University-Community Research  
by Katherine Borland, Cassie Rosita Patterson, and Jasper Waugh-Quasebarth



Because community archives and personal collections tend to be as fascinating as they are underserved, digitization projects provide opportunities to build long-term working relationships. Successive student teams may delve deeper into a research question or expand to understand a wider context. Our work with Kevin and Barb Bradbury of Hurricane Run Farm in Scioto County, for example, continued across two student cohorts and extended into an Archival Internship for undergraduates Benjamin Beachy and Lily Goettler. Knowing the value of return, we wrote a two-year commitment into our proposals for work in Perry County to digitize the organizational records of grassroots environmental and cultural organizations. Students from the 2020 OFS initiated scanning for Sunday Creek Associates, Monday Creek Watershed Restoration, Little Cities of Black Diamonds, and Buckeye Trail Association, work that will continue in 2021.<sup>16</sup>

Our CFS graduate assistants have also contributed to digitizing efforts. For instance, in 2018 CFS Graduate Archivist Sarah Craycraft digitized several years of *The Community Life News*, a Perry County publication written by partner John Winnenberg. Not only did this work enhance the archival collection and offer a resource for future students, it also helped build our relationship with Sunday Creek Associates, the organization that had produced these portraits of local life and subsequently became an OFS partner.



Dr. Barb Bradbury sits with her home archive at Hurricane Run Farm.

Photo by Ashley Clark and Emily Hardick. Some rights reserved: CC BY-NC-ND.

OFS provides copies of community materials either to collaborating organizations (as with Perry County) or to diverse local stakeholders who can provide access to the collection (as with Scioto County). Rather than centering knowledge, power, and access at the university, we return materials to those who collaborated to produce them so that they can easily access, share, and research them. This process, of course, creates some challenges and requires thoughtful labeling, easily transferrable content,<sup>17</sup> interviewees' consent,<sup>18</sup> and attention to local social dynamics. Overall, we aim to use our institutional resources to support local archives, collections, and community members, the Folklore Archives serving primarily as a backup to their collections.<sup>19</sup>

### **Conclusion: Opportunities and Challenges**

We recognize that our unique context presents challenges to reproducing the structures of our integrated pedagogical, engagement, and archival project in other places. Yet it provides valuable insight to those who might want to develop collaborative projects of their own. Because the OFS was initially funded by an open, flexible donation, we could build the project and its component parts in response to our community partners. Although we had sketched broad categories of funding in our initial proposal, we knew that we had our donor's trust and support to shift as needed. The funding followed the direction of the project, and a relatively small group of initial collaborators enabled a tradition of responsive decision making. Internally funded OSU grants, however, proved more cumbersome and constraining, as meticulous planning was frontloaded in the process, and metrics were articulated in detailed timelines. The Sharing Visions grant, for instance, required five rounds of proposals and presentations, brought together multiple collaborators across several organizations, and secured funding from four units across the University, offering opportunities for broader collaborative input but introducing layers of requirements and restrictions as well. While we recognize that engaged scholars navigate this terrain regularly, we think it is worth emphasizing the mutually constitutive relationship of responsive funding and participatory community engagement. Thankfully, our early experiences enabled us to anticipate and build into our later funding proposals participatory structures, community partner compensation, and the time necessary for fieldwork and relationship building.

Our advisory committee structures—both the CPAC and OSU Advisory Committee—have allowed project stakeholders to speak from their own positionalities, expertise, and experience at brainstorming and decision-making meetings. They enrich our experiences as coordinators of this work, helping us to understand issues, notice opportunities, and respond to challenges in new, interesting ways. We strongly recommend that those interested in developing prolonged

### ***Placemaking 2.0***

Responding to CPAC interest in repurposing the *Placemaking in Scioto County, Ohio* traveling exhibit for K–12 education, in Summer 2020 we contracted independent folklorist Sue Eleuterio to assist with assembling a local Educator Committee and hosting a professional development workshop in which five educators from varying contexts across the county each created a place-based education lesson plan to implement in Fall 2020 (adapted, of course, to the emerging conditions of the pandemic). The Educator Committee consists of Amy Barnhart (Portsmouth STEM Academy), Bridgette Compton (Northwest Middle School), Kinsey Hall (Shawnee State University Children's Learning Center), Marcia Harris (Time Out for Me), and Robin Hileman (Portsmouth West Middle School). For more information, visit [go.osu.edu/sciotoplacemaking](http://go.osu.edu/sciotoplacemaking) and click on *Placemaking 2.0*. Educator Committee members received an honorarium and Continuing Education Credits from OSU.

university-community engagements consider developing an advisory structure to guide the work and incorporate reciprocity through compensation or other meaningful ways.

One enduring challenge is having the time to follow through on the ideals and methodological commitments of collaborative ethnography. Sustaining, let alone expanding, long-term working relationships is challenging when we (engaged university partners) experience financial and institutional instability and must meet performance metrics that do not account for a slow-research model. University publication, teaching, and administrative demands are notoriously asynchronous with the physical, emotional, and logistical realities of deeply engaged and responsive collaboration with external partners. Our community partners are often also overburdened, overscheduled, financially strained, and organizationally fragile. In short, we find that our university has adopted the language of inclusion, engagement, and collaboration without investing in the frameworks that enable equitable interactions among partners. This means we must construct those frameworks ourselves and wedge them into our grant applications.

In our particular case, our initial vision of a stable, ongoing project rooted in the Folklore Archives with rotating leadership as well as rotating student participation has been undercut by the decades-long attrition of folklorists and folklore positions at Ohio State University.<sup>20</sup> With only one tenured faculty member realistically able and willing to lead this work and with College leadership that persistently challenges the CFS to justify both our program and our Folklore Archives, the infrastructure upon which our model depends remains insecure. When our sense of our own future is tenuous, we cannot assure our community partners that the work will continue.

Because these precarities are pervasive within and beyond the academy, we navigate them in the best way we can to continue our engaged work. Still, we can advise those who wish to embark on this journey to write realistic grant proposals that factor in trust building, mutual assistance, and regular consultation and make room for the unexpected opportunity. The OSU advisory committee structure keeps students informed about the challenges we face and the adjustments we must make to our model and (for those who are in paid positions at CFS) often involves them in grant writing. Further, it exposes students to conversations that require talking transparently with our community partners about our mutual precarities as well as our small victories in the long-term struggle for equity and inclusion. We think this kind of exposure is crucial to developing the next generation of engaged scholars. At OFS we all learn how to assess the resources at hand creatively and identify as many sustainable options as possible. When the future is fragile and unknown, we can at least face it together by doing our best in this moment.

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**Jasper Waugh-Quasebarth** is a Public Folklorist and Postdoctoral Scholar at the Center for Folklore Studies at The Ohio State University. He holds a PhD in Anthropology from the University of Kentucky, where he researched musical instruments, craft livelihoods, and forest environments in Appalachia and Transylvania. He continues to explore his interests at the connections between expressive livelihoods, global mountain forest regions, and place-based, experiential methodologies.

## Endnotes

- 1 Appalachian Ohio consists of 32 counties as recognized by the federal Appalachian Regional Commission in the North Central and Northern Subregions, extending across southern Ohio from Cincinnati to the border with West Virginia and along the Pennsylvania border to Lake Erie. However, Appalachian Studies scholars have defined Appalachia as not simply a socioeconomic administrative region but also an internal colony (Lewis et al. 1978), a social imaginary (Batteau 1990), a site of social activism and contestation (Fisher and Smith 2012), and an interconnected global mountain region (Kingsolver and Balasundaram 2018). With a history of extractive industry in timber and mining, large mountain forests, diffuse populations, and high rates of poverty, Southeastern Ohio is often seen as archetypically Appalachian in Ohio (often to the exclusion and marginalization of people living there). Yet the region is often also left out of national narratives that identify the coalfields of Southern West Virginia and Eastern Kentucky as the core of Appalachia. Like many across Appalachia, our community partners embrace, contest, and negotiate the terms “Appalachia” and “Appalachian.”
- 2 Including Pat Mullen, then a professor at OSU, and Tim Lloyd, who headed up the Traditional Arts Program at the Ohio Arts Council at the time.
- 3 Our student ethnographic projects, however, reflect content collected from across the state. See [cfs.osu.edu/archives/collections/summary](https://cfs.osu.edu/archives/collections/summary) for more details.
- 4 \$136,000 was awarded by the Ohio State University Global Arts + Humanities Discovery Themes to support a postdoctoral researcher 2019–2021, two years of fieldwork and the on-site portion of the service-learning course, as well as two community-led projects in Portsmouth. An anonymous donor provided \$25,000 through the Columbus Foundation to support Placemaking 2.0, an Archival Internship, and fees for CPAC members Andrew Carter and Andrew Feight to attend the 2019 annual meeting of the American Folklore Society. The OSU Office of Outreach and Engagement gave \$26,035 to support Sharing Visions: Intergenerational Work in Appalachian Ohio ([go.osu.edu/sharingvisions](https://go.osu.edu/sharingvisions)).
- 5 We follow the American Folklore Society’s Position Statement on Compensation for Self-Employed Folklorists when hiring contractors; undergraduate, GAA and postdoctoral scholar pay rates are set by the university in alignment with relevant state and federal guidelines.
- 6 For more on the difficulties of course-based service-learning, see Borland 2017. For a discussion of challenges of maintaining a social justice focus in international service-learning contexts, see Borland and Adams 2013.
- 7 Scioto County CPAC members were not financially compensated through an honorarium. Instead, we have written grants and used project funds to support CPAC travel and presentations at conferences, and spin-off projects that directly contribute to their personal and professional goals. We also engage in informal exchange of

services in keeping with a local mutual aid ethos. The Perry County CPAC requested compensation for their participation in the OFS (in Perry, all CPAC members were also project collaborators), rightfully citing the time and expertise involved for already thinly stretched non-profits to supervise students. Each collaborating organization received a \$2,000 contribution.

- 8 Continued participation in the OSU Advisory Committee is voluntary and emerged as former field schoolers wanted to stay involved in a low-commitment capacity. Additionally, involvement on the Committee allowed members to cite the position professionally on their curriculum vitae.
- 9 OSU extension officers Treva Williams (Scioto County) and Theodore Wiseman (Perry County) connect the OFS with ongoing research collaborators and provided invaluable advice on creating and maintaining programs in local contexts.
- 10 All populations given are based on estimates from the 2010 US Census.
- 11 The Little Cities of Black Diamonds include Buchtel (pop. 558), Carbondale (pop. 2,562), Carbon Hill (pop. 233), Corning (pop. 583), Glouster (pop. 1,791), Hemlock (pop. 155), Murray City (pop. 449), Nelsonville (pop. 5,392), New Straitsville (pop. 722), Shawnee (pop. 724), and Trimble (pop. 390).
- 12 Rendville is Ohio's smallest incorporated town, with a population of 34 ([rendvillehistory.org](http://rendvillehistory.org)).
- 13 OFS faculty and staff draft the statement of collaboration, which has two major functions: to outline expectations for the partnership and provide university documentation of the collaboration for financial purposes. The statement concretizes obligations of the project to focus research on community desires, return collected documentary materials, provide stipends for community partner time and efforts, and for community partners to engage with the project through the field school period.
- 14 Over the years we have sustained several mandated assessments of our Archives that leave us perpetually unsure about the future of our governance and safety of our collections.
- 15 Ideally, time spent with service-learning collaborators is intensive throughout the service-learning week. However, since community partners often juggle personal and professional commitments, we remain flexible and available, understanding that sympathetically negotiating schedules is an important fieldworking skill.
- 16 Another 2020 field school team worked with Janice and Harry Ivory of the Rendville Historic Preservation Society to document those buried in the Rendville Cemetery and created a digital version of the cemetery where current and former community members might post their memories about former residents of the town. The last team worked with Destination Shawnee to interview townspeople about what kinds of things they wanted to see on a restored Main Street.
- 17 We use a simple Excel file that can be easily searched and integrated into various metadata and content management systems.
- 18 We use a double consent process, in which interviewees are given a month to review or edit their interview before it is made public.
- 19 An exciting outcome of our archiving work in Scioto County is the inclusion of the OFS archive in the Digital Commons@Shawnee, a fully accessible item-level digital archive that our advisory board member Andrew Feight created at Shawnee State University ([digitalcommons.shawnee.edu](http://digitalcommons.shawnee.edu)).
- 20 Currently, we are exploring ways to recruit OSU faculty from outside folklore whose work and interests ally with our own to collaborate with OFS and strengthen our instructional core.

## URLs

[cfs.osu.edu/archives/collections/summary](http://cfs.osu.edu/archives/collections/summary)

[go.osu.edu/sharingvisions](http://go.osu.edu/sharingvisions)

[go.osu.edu/ofc](http://go.osu.edu/ofc)

[rendvillehistory.org](http://rendvillehistory.org)

[go.osu.edu/sciotoplacemaking](http://go.osu.edu/sciotoplacemaking)

[cfs.osu.edu/archives](http://cfs.osu.edu/archives)

[digitalcommons.shawnee.edu](http://digitalcommons.shawnee.edu)



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## The Stories We Tell: Disrupting the Myth of Neutrality in Math through Counternarratives

by Kristyn Lue and Blake O'Neal Turner

Perhaps one of the most common reasons a student's favorite subject might be math is because, unlike English or history, math has a right answer, and there is little debate whether the solution is correct (Crean 2017). True, there may be many different ways to solve a problem, but, ultimately, mathematics is a universal language that leads to an objective truth (Sarli 2017). For these students, math is a beloved subject because they find comfort in both its simplicity and its assurance that there *is* a universal, objective, *correct* answer.

### **Or at least this is a story that we tell about math.**

Other students like math because it *just makes sense* to them. There is an innate ability to loving and being good at mathematics; some people's brains are *just wired that way*, while others' aren't—they may be an *art person* or an *English person*, just not a *math person*. They can still learn math—it would just take more time and more work and more effort, and that's okay— *some people just aren't wired that way*.

### **Or at least this is a story that we tell about math.**

Math skills are an indicator of natural intelligence, of academic ability. The smartest kids are the ones who are the best at math, the *math people* (Martin 2000). Students for whom math *just makes sense* and *clicks* are positioned differently in the classroom by teachers and their peers (Cobb, Gresalfi, and Hodge 2009). And once a student is positioned as a math person, they are always a math person.

### **Or at least this is a story that we tell about math.**

From an early age, children receive messaging and implicit stories about the nature of mathematics and their role in it, through interactions with their families, communities, teachers, and schools (Martin 2000; Cobb, Gresalfi, and Hodge 2009). Sometimes the stories we tell about mathematics are told succinctly. Sometimes, they take years to unfold. But what is consistent across all these stories is that they are framed in white racial imaginations (Martin, Price, and Moore 2019). The stories we tell about who can do math, who is inclined to do math, or even who is meant to do math, are racialized and gendered (Leonard 2009). As two women of Color who are mathematicians and math education scholars, we, ourselves, have struggled to recall these stories being communicated to us in such explicit words—but have lived out the consequences of our racial identities in mathematics spaces. Despite early academic achievement in mathematics, Blake, like many other Black students, was deemed an outsider of the mathematics community by her teachers and other gatekeepers. Kristyn, like many Asian American students, experienced a contingent insider status that was subject to specific norms and expected behaviors.

Through our autoethnographic explorations, we hope to illuminate the consequences that these normative narratives about mathematics have on students—particularly students of Color. The stories that we tell—to ourselves and to each other—carry remarkable power in defining who gets to be doers and teachers of mathematics—and who *doesn't*—in very racialized ways. Educators serve as both gatekeepers of the mathematics community and as storytellers who shape and perpetuate these norms. While many of us may have good intentions and want all students to succeed, we may also be unaware of the racialization process and power dynamics that “neutral” stories of mathematics carry. In this essay, we (Blake and Kristyn) reflect critically on our positionalities and journeys into becoming mathematics insiders, and the incidents that shaped this process. Although this work is hard and labor intensive, we contend that it is work that all educators should undertake. By making our stories explicit, and by using them as counternarratives to critique the myths of neutrality, objectivity, and universality in mathematics, we can begin to imagine the power that counternarratives can have in restructuring the field in equitable and justice-oriented ways.



Using critical autoethnography, we leverage our experiences as students, educators, and researchers of Color to counter explicitly the status quo and dominant narratives in mathematics. To the extent that our lived experiences cannot be divorced from the realities and consequences of living in a raced, gendered, and classed society, we are also told that mathematics *can* be. Framed by Critical Race Theory (CRT), our autoethnographic explorations confront the ways race and its intersections create unjust—yet normalized—power dynamics enmeshed in our society through years of historical oppression and legacies of white supremacy. This is done through two basic foundational assumptions: 1) the permanence of racism in mathematics spaces and structures, and 2) mathematics as white property. As a lens of analysis, Critical Race Theory allows us to compose counternarratives that critique white liberalism, using an interdisciplinary approach that centralizes experiential knowledge to move toward social justice (Davis 2019, Solórzano and Yosso 2001).



Counternarratives emerged from Critical Race Theory as a powerful methodology to honor the voices and experiences of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and push back on the dominant narratives that normalize whiteness and neutrality. Counternarratives center these contexts and intersections and name the faulty, discriminatory assumptions that our normative stories about mathematics rely on. As Delgado and Stefancic write, “once named, it can be combated...powerfully written stories and narratives may begin a process of correction in our system of beliefs and categories by calling attention to neglected evidence and reminding readers of our common humanity” (Delgado and Stefancic 2017, 51). That is, counternarratives, through the act of remembering and retelling, can serve as a collective voice of support and validation for our experiences. We hope, then, that our counternarratives might illuminate the mathematics experiences of a Black woman math educator and an Asian American woman math educator through a critical lens, push back on white narratives about the neutrality and objectivity of mathematics, and imagine a more liberatory future for mathematics education.

Stories hold power for the storyteller and for those who get to bear witness. However, storytelling—without the “counter”—has also been used to reify cultural norms and expectations through “master narratives” that define and represent groups in the broader society (Montecinos 1995). Such narratives are presented as “neutral” and “objective,” based on “facts” to serve as a tool that “distorts and silences the experiences of people of color” (Solórzano and Yosso 2002, 29) and privileges whiteness as the norm. This neutrality is preserved through stories that are ahistorical and devoid of a critical analysis of socialization, power dynamics, and identities.

Having defined what is meant by counternarratives, we will now move on to discuss how we enacted this methodology. We first drew on and immersed ourselves in the literature of critical mathematics education scholars who have problematized dominant narratives about mathematics. From there, we began to structure interview questions that would help us unpack our experiences in mathematics. In the interview process, we served as both storyteller and audience for each other, engaging in what Delgado Bernal (1998) refers to as *cultural intuition*: “a complex process that is experiential, intuitive, historical, personal, collective, and dynamic” (567-68). Although we used the interview questions to begin the storytelling process, the audience actively bore witness by asking questions or offering insights, thus also allowing the storyteller’s memories to carry the conversation. This process also allowed us to engage in collective meaning making during the interview stage.

After the interviews, we transcribed our conversations and began to engage in critical analysis. By looking for themes and using CRT as our lens, we began to transform our stories into counternarratives. Through each step—choosing this topic, creating interview questions, telling our stories, analyzing our data, and writing—we contextualized our stories, engaged in collaborative critique, and traced the ways our stories converged and diverged because of our racial identities. We challenged what we had been told in our earliest mathematical experiences, reflected on critical turning points, and began to envision the new narratives that will guide our work as scholars and educators.



## **The Beginnings**

From an early age, education was portrayed to us as the key to success and achievement; hard work would bring about educational success. And, so, the earliest stories about mathematics that we received from our families focused more on the importance of education broadly, rather than any specific subject such as mathematics.

### **Blake**

For many families of Color, education is seen as a gateway for success and opportunities. As Blake explains:

I think as a Black family, that was one of the things that my dad... And he always would say that, being Black, you have to work twice as hard and so you have to be twice as good in school. When we think now about some of the messages that we get in math, that math is a gatekeeper and if you're not good in math, it prevents you from being a doctor or a scientist. I didn't have those same messages from home. It was just like, you need to get an education because that's the only way to be successful as a Black person.

For Blake, the stories that her family—and in particular her dad—told her revolved around the relationship between being Black and being educated. The American Dream (meritocracy, upward social mobility, and equal opportunity) was obtainable if only Blake was “twice as good,” which meant that she needed to work twice as hard. But we know that in mathematics classrooms hard work does not equate to being granted insider status.

In middle school, Blake was an excellent student. She earned As and high standardized test scores in all subjects, including math. Yet she was told by her mathematics teacher, and then her principal, that she was not a “strong enough” math student to handle being placed into honors math. Blake recalls:

...my parents fought him on it. It was a white man and they said it was racist because there were no students of Color at all that he had recommended for the honors...the principal decided that [the teacher] would get to create a diagnostic and grade said diagnostic and then based on who did well on the diagnostic, they would go to honors. I missed his arbitrary cutoff point...by one question... I did not go to honors that next year. It positioned me to not see myself as a math person.

While Blake’s teacher purported to recommend students for honors math through objective standards, Blake’s prior high mathematical achievement, as well as the fact no students of Color at her school were recommended for honors math by her white teacher, contradict the teacher’s claims of objectivity. His initial assessment that Blake would not be able to “handle” honors math were challenged by Blake’s parents, who knew how brilliant their daughter was. Their protests, however, were then met by the principal instituting another alleged objective and neutral cutoff: the diagnostic. Yet the diagnostic was still created and administered by Blake’s math teacher, who used this as further “proof” that she was not capable of succeeding in honors math.



Blake's story is reminiscent of many students' experiences with standardized testing, but particularly students of Color. Testing, although purporting to be objective and neutral, is used to reproduce racialized hierarchies in mathematics. Testing is just one structure that functions to maintain whiteness in mathematics education and restrict minoritized students from accessing resources and opportunities (Battey and Leyva 2016).

Blake's "incapability" was not intrinsic to her as a mathematics student, although this is how her teacher framed it: Blake was simply not good enough to be an advanced math student. As noted, there are students who are naturally "good" at math, and there are students who don't make the cut. Despite Blake's high performance in math, the teacher categorized her as the latter. Blake's experience is unsurprising, given that Black and Brown children are often not placed or recommended for higher-level mathematics courses by their teachers and counselors, even if they excel in the subject, as Blake did (McGee and Martin 2011). Structural racism and implicit bias, manifesting in how students are positioned as students and doers of mathematics, affects how students see themselves as intelligent and doers of mathematics, a common experience for Black students (Martin 2009). The trauma of this incident shadowed the remainder of Blake's high school career. The way she was positioned through her teacher's narrative, and his inability to reconcile her Blackness and her brilliance, had profound consequences. She continued to excel academically, taking Advanced Placement and honors courses in English, history, science, but she never pursued high-level mathematics courses. Moreover, while writing our autobiographies and during our interviews, Blake remembered very little of her high school mathematics experiences. The effects of this critical racial mathematics incident also caused Blake to shy away from taking mathematics courses in college. Her early experiences in math bruised her confidence and cracked her foundation as a mathematics student in ways that felt permanent and persistent. Blake struggled to connect with mathematics, stating, "I had a lot of fear. I went into class just anxious everyday... I had already positioned myself to not be good at math." It did not help that the stories Blake was told about the nature of mathematics in later years was that it was a theoretical subject often divorced from real-world applications. This story is not unique to Blake's experiences: Many students express learning mathematics in a vacuum, separate from context and application.

### ***Kristyn***

As an East Asian American woman, Kristyn was positioned early as a contingent insider in mathematical and educational communities. She recalls:

My parents always really emphasized the importance of education, and they had high expectations for us to go to college, because that's why their parents had come to the United States. For them, it was really like, "If you want books, if you want workbooks, if you want math games, whatever you want. If it's educational, we will buy it for you."

Education was seen as a vehicle to the American Dream for which her family had made generational sacrifices. Kristyn's grandparents had sacrificed their native languages and cultural traditions for their children's education. Kristyn's parents in turn sacrificed financially for this American Dream. Similar to Blake's family, Kristyn's parents believed that everyone could succeed—if they devoted the requisite time and financial resources. Her family believed familial sacrifice was necessary in a white American society.

This notion of sacrifice, however, often ran contrary to what Kristyn was implicitly told by teachers and peers about what it meant to be “good at mathematics.” She was taught that you were either a “math person” or “not a math person,” that success in mathematics was dependent on innate ability. And, as an East Asian student, Kristyn’s teachers and peers often associated her as being a successful math student and “smart”—in other words, the “model minority.” Although Kristyn was a year “ahead” in math, she struggled when she reached geometry in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. She didn’t grasp the concepts as quickly as others around her, and she was not receiving As in the course. She interpreted these struggles to mean that she was no longer good at math. This feeling persisted in her precalculus course in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, when she struggled more than she ever had in a math class.

At the same time, in both 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade, Kristyn received awards in mathematics. Teachers categorized her as this model minority, a student innately good at mathematics and therefore an *insider* to the mathematics community. This did not align with Kristyn’s notion of how she saw herself, however, and she felt like an imposter who had somehow fooled her math teachers. The struggles she faced to “fit in” among her peers further compounded this internal struggle. Being ahead a year in math meant that Kristyn took courses with older students, many of whom did not like math and were already friends with each other. They positioned Kristyn as “one of those smart Asian students” who did not need help in math and probably liked the subject—in other words, someone very different from themselves. She often felt like an outsider and isolated from everyone else, even when she shared some of her classmates’ struggles in math. Kristyn recalls her experience in precalculus:

I didn’t want to speak up or really make waves, or engage with the content because that wasn’t the “cool” thing to do. I didn’t want to be singled out more than I was. I did not do well in that class, I really struggled with the material and the content... I convinced myself that I wasn’t good at math.

For Kristyn, community and mathematics were closely linked. A community that positioned her as a contingent insider based on her race made her feel unseen in the ways she saw herself, which she found traumatizing. She began to dread going to math class, fearing the day when she would be “found out” as an outsider. Math began to give her a deep anxiety, and she began to burn out and dissociate, waiting for when she would no longer be required by the school system to take more math courses.

And here might be where the stories should end. Numerous stories about young children of Color start—and end—in these ways. For young Black students, stories about their mathematical achievement focus on ways they are “underachieving” or are traumatized by racist teachers and administrators. Young Asian American students are positioned as the “overrepresented model minorities” or good students who do not need help, regardless of the nuances of their academic performance. As a result, they may struggle to reconcile these views of themselves but keep their heads down and continue to work as hard as expected. Studies about disparities in STEM and math identity development highlight these early formative experiences and how parents and teachers shape who we are as mathematicians and as students.

But for us, it didn’t—and doesn’t—end there.

## Turning Points

For a long time, the ways we saw ourselves as mathematics students seemed static and permanent, and we both divorced ourselves from the field. Yet as we progressed through our educational journeys, we both reached unexpected turning points that began the process of reshaping our views of ourselves as mathematicians and as “math people.”

### *Kristyn*

Kristyn’s turning point was in AP statistics when her teacher explicitly named her as a mathematician, citing how she saw Kristyn as a peer mentor to classmates. This was contrary to what Kristyn had previously been told constituted a mathematician, which helped her to begin the process of redefining what being a mathematician meant. She recalls:

...she wrote me this Christmas card...She's like, "Yeah, Kristyn is a really excellent mathematician." She had nominated me for this award [in] math, because she's like, "Well, you're really good at explaining your thought process. You're really good at piecing things together, and thinking critically, and you help other people."

This experience helped Kristyn contend with the idea that being good in mathematics was about effort, critical thinking, and edifying others, which began to combat the imposter syndrome she felt powerfully. She decided to take more math courses in college beyond the requirements, which further expanded her views on mathematics and her potential place in it. Reflecting on her college mathematics experiences, Kristyn states:

My calc teacher would get excited talking about graphs, and how you could zoom in on these graphs. Different ways of thinking about it, I think made a really big difference for me. Them being able to tell stories about how, I had a teacher for multivariable calculus who talked about these different applications of partial derivatives, and we'd talk about that, or we would talk about shapes, and things like that in ways that were different than purely lecturing on like, "Here's the formula you need to learn." They were excited about the different ways that this math could be used, and the beauty of it, and they really saw some beauty in it. I liked hearing about the cultural stories about math. I liked that kind of stuff.

Math is traditionally taught as a conglomerate of standard algorithms, rules, and definitions. But Kristyn was exposed to both the beauty of mathematics and its rich cultural histories. These histories were not confined to the western cultures and famous mathematicians she had learned about in high school, for whom theorems were named (such as Pythagoras). Her professors, who employed ethnomathematics (Powell and Frankenstein 1997) and culturally responsive pedagogy (Ladson-Billings 2009), expanded her worldview and conceptions of mathematics. The new stories Kristyn was told about math were of joy, wonder, and exploration. She recalls, “The biggest stories come from the classrooms and the teachers and sort of where that power is housed and who are the storytellers.”

Through blending the history of mathematics and cultural anthropology, Kristyn's professors implicitly communicated that mathematics was not confined to the notions of whiteness and thus perhaps outside the notion that one is innately "good" or "bad" at mathematics. She began to see mathematics through the stories and histories her professors presented, and as a collaborative journey and process.

### **Blake**

These sentiments rang true for Blake as well, who also eventually got her mathematics teaching credential, despite early traumas with mathematics. Blake attended a Historically Black University (HBCU) for her undergraduate degree. There her teachers nurtured her development academically and personally, a trend not uncommon at HBCUs but in stark contrast to her K-12 experiences. Blake was encouraged to pursue graduate school by her professors, advisors, and peers, who not only acknowledged—but also centered and supported—her brilliance. After graduating with her bachelor's degree, Blake enrolled in a master's program at the same HBCU, intending to pursue her teaching credential in history.

However, Blake's professors encouraged her to reexamine her mathematical brilliance and see herself as they saw her. They began recommending her to tutor young students in math, including their own children. One faculty mentor then approached Blake and suggested she apply for the Robert E. Noyce Teaching Fellowship and teach mathematics instead of history. The prestigious Noyce Fellowship's aim is to increase the number of minoritized STEM teachers in urban schools. The support and encouragement of faculty mentors and professors gave Blake the courage to apply for the fellowship and to reimagine herself as a mathematician and as a teacher of mathematics, which she could not have imagined a decade prior. She recalls:

It was definitely meaningful for parents to be recommending me and for some of my professors to be recommending me, because I think it helped me to see that they were seeing something in me that I necessarily wasn't seeing in myself.

Being seen as a doer of mathematics and also a teacher of mathematics ignited a passion to tell and to be a character in the other positive stories for minoritized students.

These turning points allowed us to begin rewriting and reconceptualizing what we believed mathematics was and what it meant for us to be doers, learners, and teachers of mathematics. Our experiences challenged and dispelled many early and formative stories that had shaped our views of mathematics from a young age and encouraged us to become math educators who may create turning points for others like us. As we have embarked on our journeys of becoming critical math education scholars, we believe that if we can first identify what these narratives are and how they have shaped our views of mathematics, we can then change them in profound and powerful ways.



### **Looking Ahead**

We look forward with the hope that we can reshape the stories and notions of mathematics and who gets to be doers and learners and teachers of mathematics for all students, from the beginning. Yet we know that it is not enough to change the individual stories of each mathematics learner by

giving them their own turning points. We have to reshape these stories more broadly. Although we have both experienced transformative turning points that started the process of rewriting our stories, we recognize that our turning points came down to chance. The shifts in our stories were the result of multiple people who believed in us and encouraged us explicitly, who saw something in ourselves that we no longer were able to see. We recognize that not every child, nor every student, has this opportunity, and we continue to wrestle with the questions: Why us? Why not all? And how do we give all children a winning hand from the beginning?

If change is going to occur, teachers and other educational stakeholders must be willing to confront and change their own biases and misconceptions. We recognize that this is difficult work; the critical examination of deeply held biases and their origins—as well as how they manifest in classrooms—will also be deeply uncomfortable. One way to start this process is by engaging with the work of critical mathematics scholars. Scholars who have been helpful for us in challenging our assumptions and traditions have been Danny Martin, Ebony McGee, Ubiratan D'Ambrosio, Dan Battey, Luis Leyva, Robert Berry, Maisie Gholson, Julius Davis, Na'ilah Suad Nasir, Rochelle Guiterrez, Jemimah Young, Niral Shah, and Jaqueline Leonard—just to name a few. These scholars have been instrumental in helping us to dismantle our beliefs that the world consists of “math people” and “not math people.” As teachers engage in this critical introspection and growth, a community of accountability is key.

While one way to restructure the field might be to cultivate a workforce of teachers like our transformative ones, we also know that this will not be enough. Our stories are about a system and structure both within and beyond the mathematics classroom. We see this as evident in the ways that we still both struggle with identifying fully as mathematicians, even though we hold degrees in mathematics, serve as mathematics educators, and center our research on mathematics and mathematics learning. Our early experiences and traumas still exist within us in powerful ways. For us, our stories have been reshaped, but the context of mathematics has remained the same, because the narrative of what it means to be good at math, and what mathematics is, has not changed. We continue to exist in this context, which built and continues to build the foundations for what math is, and what it means to be “good at” math, and, ultimately, who gets to be an insider—who gets to be a “math person.”

Our aim, through continual introspection, reflexivity, and critical scholarship on how we navigate as doers, learners, and teachers of mathematics, is to write and tell counternarratives about mathematics and, in doing so, to change these foundational contexts. Mathematics is a social and cultural practice, and our identities as mathematics learners cannot be separated from context and our other identities, both inside and outside the mathematics classroom. In other words, context matters (Chazan, Herbst, and Clark 2016; Martin 2000). This context drives how we, as a Black woman and as an Asian American woman, were positioned as math learners—as an outsider and as a contingent insider of mathematics, respectively. Racialization played a strong role in this positioning, and this is true of all students—not just students of Color. Although the racialization process looks different for white students, they are positioned in mathematics classrooms in a raced way that is structurally tied to the positioning of students of Color (Battey and Leyva 2016). Thus, white teachers must also engage in critical self-examination as a part of this collaborative reflexivity and of re-storying (Milner 2007). We hope that our stories provide examples for beginning this process.



### **These are the new stories we want to tell about math.**

Neither of our math trajectories has been seamless and we have both experienced feelings of discomfort and anxiety in mathematics courses. As emerging critical mathematics scholars, our stories don't end here. We continue to reflect critically upon the stories we have been told and hope to change the types of future stories and what mathematics learning can be. As Blake says:

I like math because I like rules and structures, but I also recognize that you can love math because you don't like rules and structures. Because there are a million different ways to solve any problem. You don't necessarily have to use an algorithm. You can draw pictures, you can do a graph, you can cut up stuff. And there's a ton of different ways to solve a problem. And I'm realizing now that I liked that part of math.... I like the algorithms of math and I want people to love math the way that I love math, but that also means loving math the way that you see it. If that makes sense.... I see it for the rules and the algorithms, but some people... I think of mathematicians who love it because of the creativity in it and the ways... an engineer who uses math and the different ways you can apply it. And I want students and people to love it for that.... And it's the rules and algorithms part of it that, because we show such a small part of it, kids rarely get to see. I think kids and adults rarely get to see the beauty of what math is.

And it is the beauty of math, and the beauty and brilliance of us all as learners, that will be the stories that we will continue to tell.

### **These are the stories we will now tell about math.**

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*Blake O'Neal Turner is a mathematics educator. She earned a BS in Psychology and an MA in Teaching Secondary Mathematics and Special Education from Xavier University of Louisiana. She also holds an MEd from the University of Illinois-Chicago in Measurement, Evaluation, Statistics, and Assessment. She is a doctoral student at the University of Maryland in Minority and Urban Education with a concentration in Mathematics Education. She is particularly interested in social justice and liberatory pedagogies within mathematics education. As a critical Black mathematics scholar and educator, she aims to problematize anti-Black rhetoric, teaching, policies, and pedagogy within the field to create a Black liberatory mathematics. Her areas of research focus on how mathematics education operates as an anti-Black and white institutional*

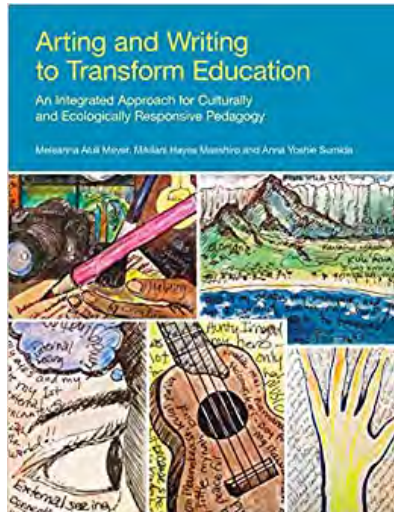
*space and challenges dominant perspectives and constructions of minoritized students in mathematics research and classrooms.*

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## Journal of Folklore and Education Reviews

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Arting and Writing to Transform Education: An Integrated Approach for Culturally and Ecologically Responsive Pedagogy, by Meleanna Aluli Meyer, Mikilani Hayes Maeshiro, and Anna Yoshie Sumida

(Sheffield, U.K.: Equinox Publishing Ltd. 2018, vii + 261, forward, editor's preface, acknowledgments, references, appendices, list of contributors, index.)

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Three Indigenous women, through a Native Hawaiian worldview (*Kanaka Maoli*), encourage us to reframe our everyday teaching interactions as radical acts of inclusion. They effectively call us into critical circles of relational constructs through their inspiring text, *Arting and Writing to Transform Education: An Integrated Approach for Culturally and Ecologically Responsive Pedagogy*. This narrative, from which emerges the neologism, *arting*, encourages the reader to consider this new concept as an inextricable, contextual connection to the act of writing. For additional conceptual support, the overall text includes 215 visual representations: graphics, photos, paintings/drawings, and charts, as well as nine Appendices offering representative, interdisciplinary classwork templates. The theme of *arting and writing* is effectively woven throughout the text and is the foundational catalyst for dialogue *and* calls to action in three distinct sections.

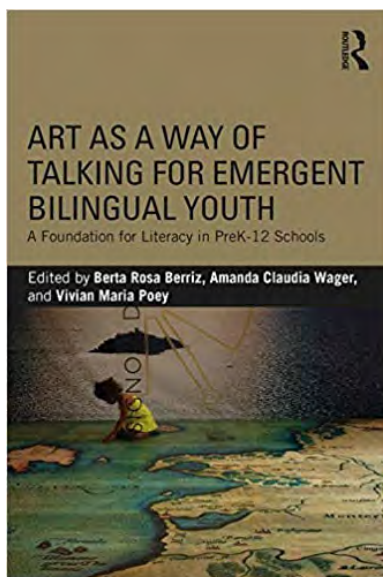
Part I, “New Ideas of Transformation and Culture,” begins by encouraging us to reconnect with the Freirian premise that inclusion of the political, economic, historical, cultural, ecological, and social issues of *real life* sustains the power to “...deconstruct stereotypes, awaken intellectual strengths, and work toward social justice for the greater good” (p. 18). Furthering this proposition, the authors suggest that a situated and empowered sense of self can be achieved when *arting and writing* essentially centers on the local ecology and primary culture of students.

Part II, “Arting and Writing in Parallel: Catalysts for Transformation,” offers an Indigenous perspective on creativity, which iterates the energy-producing and organic nature of all things. This section focuses on the origin of *arting* and presents it as parallel to the process of writing, which includes an aspect of visual thinking, and is “a kind of knowing, from an intuitive sensorial orientation” (p. 54). Additionally, the *Four Realms of Culture*, illustrated in this section as “nesting baskets,” are introduced as a backdrop **and** foreground for engaging students as they employ the

*arting-and-writing* process as a tool for interpreting their world. The first realm, the *home culture* is where identity is formed, shaped, and validated. It is the starting place where familial, ancestral, and ecological relationships begin to interconnect. Next is the *Host/Indigenous Culture*, the notion of homeland, which can be a contested space. The third realm, the local, involves the everyday, the familiar spaces that Freire would consider opportunities for both observation (understanding our own relational subject position) and transformation (deepening those understandings and their impact. Finally, the global realm positions everyone as a contributor to our humanity. Overall, Part II is infused with clear and adaptive tutorials on how to implement projects. This section culminates in a subsection titled, *Exhibiting and Publishing: Nurturing the Writer*, which speaks to a mentoring journey, getting a student to the point of pride in their work and their story.

Part III, “Arting and Writing in Practice: Illustrative Teaching Material,” begins with *Active Seeing: Relationships to all Living Things*. This unit gracefully incorporates the elements of the Indigenous worldview into the *arting-and-writing process* by offering teaching units and lessons that take into account background knowledge, objectives, arting-and-writing activities, materials, and supporting illustrations, for example, clear photos of leaves for identification in the natural environment.

This powerful and generous final section challenges the real and perceived boundaries between elementary and higher education spaces. This text written primarily for elementary teachers has crossed that boundary by employing an Indigenous approach to learning, clearly presenting the interrelated path that brings knowledges together. The authors discuss moving through the process of “arting” and equivocate that newly introduced verb to the act of writing. They discuss the interplay between writing and arting and identify it as a dynamic interface through which these two processes weave a convergence beyond their individual benefits to create a compelling and holistic learning experience. This focus places this entire text into the category of “critical and ongoing resource,” for all educators who desire a collaborative, place-based, community-responsive approach to their teaching.



Art as a Way of Talking for Emergent Bilingual Youth: A Foundation for Literacy in PreK-12 Schools, by Berta Rosa Berriz, Amanda Claudia Wager, and Vivian Maria Poey, eds.

(New York: Routledge. 2018, 275 pp.)

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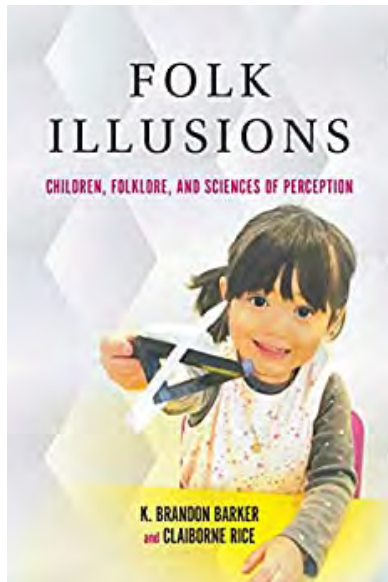
*Art as a Way of Talking for Emergent Bilingual Youth* centers on the idea that students, in particular those who are multilingual and from multicultural backgrounds, do not arrive to the classroom with an empty slate. Each project described in this important collection builds on students’ *funds of knowledge* to create

collaborative art projects that honor students' cultural and social capital. There are three sections, each focusing on a specific art form and all centered on using culturally relevant pedagogy that nurtures students' self-confidence about who they are and their linguistic journeys. Chapter after chapter, we are presented with an example and a project that teachers have creatively designed to build equity among all learners, in particular, our emergent bilingual youth. Although I find each chapter pushing us to think about the value of building spaces in our classrooms and, just as crucially, inviting family to engage in the learning process, I was particularly interested in thinking of our students as *linguistics geniuses*, as Alfaro and Bartolomé refer to our emergent bilingual youth in Chapter 3. They define a linguistics genius as "a communicatively competent student who can discern their audience speaking ability and use of language(s) and spontaneously employ their own linguistic and creative repertoire to receive, process, communicate and deliver information" (46). Indeed, whether students engage in original writing, digital art, video production, drawing, photography, hip hop, drama, poetry, or graphic novels, when they are encouraged to bring their lived experiences into their creative productions, they are empowered and educators recognize the knowledge they already possess as they are learning a new language. In doing so, hierarchies that make English the language of success are broken down.

This collection of essays walks us through projects that educators and practitioners have created with the students and community in mind, in particular communities who are often marginalized and go to school in districts with limited funding. One key example of pushing to continue to incorporate the arts into the lives of students is the family art backpack project in Chapter 5. The project was a response to budget cuts, but it showed the commitment of educators, students, and families to continue to make art a central part of academic growth. It is worth noting that each project presented offers an opportunity to develop creative thinkers who work in teams to analyze different media. This is most explored in the chapters of Section III that describe how students engage in social activism through drama, storytelling as a way to revitalize Indigenous languages, and critical multi-literacies via the graphic novel.

In a time when arts education is often the first program to be eliminated in our public schools because of funding, teachers can use evidence-based approaches to continue to integrate the arts as a vital element for students' social-emotional growth and their development as bilingual and multilingual learners. Even more, each chapter offers resources such as a list of books for each project, websites, and other references to support educators who might want to use a similar design. In addition, each section ends with a "questions for reflection and further application for practice" unit that provides further insight into how to integrate these ideas into our classrooms. This is a wonderful resource for the K-12 classroom, and it can be especially useful to those who teach courses for Heritage Language Learners at the university level, given that students have historically not been asked to share their lived experiences in the classroom as a source of knowledge. As an educator, this book offers me several examples of how to decolonize my classroom linguistically and culturally, whether in K-12 schools or at the university.





Folk Illusions: Children, Folklore, and Sciences of Perception,  
by K. Brandon Barker and Claiborne Rice

(Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 2019, xvi +244 pp.)

Lisa Gabbert is Associate Professor of Folklore and American  
Studies at Utah State University.

This well-informed, highly theoretical book by K. Brandon Barker and Claiborne Rice is an excellent contribution to the field of folklore that breaks new ground. An important contribution of the book is the identification, classification, and analysis of a heretofore unrecognized folklore genre, usually performed by children, that the authors call “folk illusions.” Folk illusions are defined as “traditionalized verbal and/or kinesthetic actions performed in order to effect an intended perceptual illusion for one or more participants” (04). The first chapter is spent arguing for the existence of this genre and outlining its salient features, while other chapters discuss aspects such as transmission, variation, the effect of performance on perception, and relations between perception, embodiment, and belief. The authors primarily are interested in overlaps between embodiment, awareness of perceptual processes, and culture, and their main argument is that embodiment and perceptual processes are always already enculturated and that perception is active, shared, and culturally influenced. They use different kinds of folk illusions as evidence to support these points.

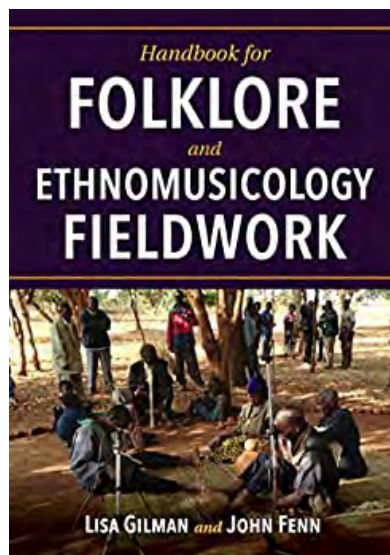
Folk illusions have not been attended to in folklore studies (my own guess is they likely have been included more generally under “games” or “tricks” by children’s folklorists, if at all), so the authors are to be commended for carving out this bodily genre with specificity. Barker and Rice approach their subject interdisciplinarily, drawing from a variety of fields that deal with perception and the body—including the cognitive and behavioral sciences and experimental psychology—as well as phenomenology and philosophy. These disciplines have attended to the perceptual dimensions of illusions and are helpful for identifying embodied processes, but, as the authors note, there is no research that examines perceptual illusions in the context of situated cultural traditions, and non-folklore studies tend to ignore or trivialize the discursive aspects, which are quite important to some illusions like “Light as a Feather” that include an extended narrative. Folklorists have long been interested in children’s folklore for what it may reveal about developmental and cognitive processes as well as learning, and this book can be situated within that vein of scholarship.

In addition to being well grounded theoretically, the book also has a number of practical aspects such as the appendix, which is entitled a “Catalog of Folk Illusions” and is a typology. Type A, “Haptic Illusions,” consists of multiple sub-types, including A1 “Crossed Fingers,” which is then further divided into A1A, “Crossed Fingers, Split Tongue” and A1B “Double Crossed Fingers.” A2 is “Where Am I Touching You?,” and A3 is “The Chills,” each of which is discussed in the book and further classified into additional divisions. The catalog ends with the letter J, “Taste Illusions,” and, like other typologies, has the capacity to be expanded. There are also online

audiovisual materials available, consisting of videos of children engaging in and performing folk illusions, which is useful as it can be difficult to follow the written descriptions. There is not a video of every folk illusion in the classification guide, but there are videos for many. There are also several indices, including an index of subjects and an index of illusions.

This is not a child-centered book, meaning that it does not unpack what folk illusions mean to children or provide a children's emic perspective. This is not a criticism, but merely a statement of fact. One critique, however, is that the concept of play is given short shrift in the discussion and analysis. Given that play by definition entails the creation of an alternative reality, and that this also seems to be a purpose of folk illusions, a more thorough theorization of play in relation to the performance of folk illusions might have shed further light on the processes and nature of the genre. This criticism is quite minor, however, since, as noted above, the book is very highly informed and informative.

The audience for this book is primarily university researchers, particularly those interested in overlaps between folklore and cognitive science and/or phenomenology, and scholars interested in the ways in which perception and embodiment more broadly are enculturated. Children's folklorists also will find it of interest, as well as those teaching university graduate classes. It is not geared toward K-12 educators or those working in the public sector. In this very thorough book, the authors have moved the field forward by forging further links between folklore and the cognitive sciences, illustrating quite concretely how the gaps in those disciplines can be served by the field of folklore.



Handbook for Folklore and Ethnomusicology Fieldwork, by  
Lisa Gilman and John Fenn

(Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 2019, 248pp.)

Jordan Laney is a research consultant, writer, and instructor for Virginia Tech, where she completed her PhD in Social and Cultural Theory.

From those engaging with folklore for the first time to experienced researchers, Lisa Gilman and John Fenn's *Handbook for Folklore and Ethnomusicology Fieldwork* serves as a clear guide to the ethnographic process. Unique in its attention to both folklore and ethnomusicology's methodological concerns, the *Handbook* is clearly organized by reflecting the process of being "in the field" while thinking of challenges and questions from an educator's point of view. The *Handbook* reflects the research process by organizing content into three sections: preparation, immersive fieldwork, and project analysis and completion. This organizational schema allows practitioners and educators to address challenges often overlooked in qualitative study and introduces different methods within context. The authors consistently define and limit

the scope to participatory and observational ethnographic fieldwork, encouraging readers to engage with interactive research practices.

Just as the text encourages engaged research practices, it offers resources for an engaged classroom. Uniquely, weaving questions of research ethics with helpful “how to” guides and formulaic examples for conducting research, the *Handbook* urges readers to question why particular methods are chosen and the impact that methods have on research. Chapters often present content and conclude with exercises and tips. For example, Chapter 5, “Documenting and Technology,” offers extensive options for documentation and fieldwork equipment or gear. It includes reasons for using one over the other and examples (63-74). The chapter concludes with tips for technology. Many exercises throughout include follow-up reflection questions for students. Educators will find supplemental activities beyond the examples and premade activities on the press website, accessible with purchase of the book.

Similarly, the authors make it clear that “fieldworkers affect what happens in a research situation” and urge students to take power relations in the field seriously (138). This explicit call to recognize power within methodology can be a heavy topic. While issues of social and cultural power have been widely discussed in ethnomusicology and folklore, teaching texts and practical lessons designed to engage in transformative pedagogy are few. The *Handbook* delves into theoretical discussions of knowledge production as well as ethical issues. Drug use, coding, and relationships that arise throughout the fieldwork process are a few of the carefully explored topics. Data, discussion questions, and scenario examples are provided, equipping those entering the field with tools to navigate ethically almost all anticipated situations. While this level of discussion would be specifically helpful for higher education settings, much of the content could be successfully adapted for middle and high school classrooms.

Perhaps most importantly, the authors address the work to be done *after returning* from the field. How to organize, identify, protect, and share data can be frustrating in practice and elusive to teach, but Gilman and Fenn create a clear path for the reader. Particularly helpful are sections on managing data with attention to the ethics of coding, analysis, and representation (199). Handouts, clear examples of data logging and organization, and common transcription practices are provided, as well as important conversations about interpretive authority and translation. While there is not an appendix for educational activities and handouts, appropriate scenarios leading to discussion questions and group or individual exercises are featured in each chapter as ready-made lessons.

Above all, Gilman and Fenn pull from different sources to gather and synthesize best practices for the researcher or educator in one highly organized book. A strength of the *Handbook* is its incredible adaptability with a broad intended audience, making the *Handbook for Folklore and Ethnomusicology Fieldwork* a promising textbook for introductory college courses and practitioners alike. From helpful tips on data collection to personal introductions and gaining consent, one cannot overstate the usefulness of this text in the classroom or the field.

## 2021 *Journal of Folklore and Education* Call for Submissions

Folk Arts and Creative Writing

“Poetry’s potential to create indelible images, to extend the reach of language, and to express complex ideas and feelings through metaphor makes it a powerful force for illuminating cultural experiences.”

—from the City Lore program  
*A Reverence for Words:*

*Understanding Muslim Cultures through the Arts*

The *Journal of Folklore and Education* (JFE) is a peer-reviewed, open-access journal published annually by Local Learning: The National Network for Folk Arts in Education. JFE publishes work that uses ethnographic approaches to tap the knowledge and life skills of students, their families, community members, and educators in K-12, museum, community and higher education. Our intended audience includes educators and students at all levels and in all settings, folk culture specialists, and those working in community-based organizations.

As a digital publication, the *Journal of Folklore and Education* provides a forum for interdisciplinary, multimedia approaches to community-based teaching, learning, and cultural stewardship. It is found at [www.locallearningnetwork.org](http://www.locallearningnetwork.org).

## Creative Texts | Creative Traditions

Folklore includes the traditions, arts, and stories that make cultural communities unique and strengthen our social bonds. The tools of folklore—such as observation, identifying important traditions and rituals, and deep listening to diverse narratives through interviews—create opportunities for educational equity because the study of folklore centers linguistic, cultural, social, and racial pluralities. This special issue of JFE asks how calling upon folklore can equip educators with tools and resources to engage diverse students and audiences more fully in the process of making and appreciating creative texts.

The 2021 *Journal of Folklore and Education* (JFE) is titled "Creative Texts | Creative Traditions." Submissions will consider the art of “Creative Texts” through poetry, story, song, and narrative; the process of making “Creative Traditions” through oral tradition, technology, and writing; and the craft of “Creative Writing” as a discipline. We imagine endless possibilities found in the many “texts” that communicate meaningfully within cultural communities and believe that this issue will provide opportunities to showcase spoken word traditions like rap and slam poetry, lyric traditions like the *corrido* and *décima*, visual traditions of graphic novels and comics, writing traditions such as poetry and creative nonfiction, and media submissions that include audio and video materials. The heart of this issue will be creative writing and ethnography. We will also accept submissions considering multimodal compositions and artistic communication of ideas that teach or creatively signify culture. Short examples or excerpts of creative writing are welcomed in the context of methodological or theoretical articles about the uses of creative writing and folklore in teaching and learning. Topics like representation and decolonizing classroom texts will inform this issue.

**We seek submissions that present case studies, programs, lessons, and research on the significance of arts that are based in community cultural life for the following audiences:**

- Educators in diverse settings or contexts engaged in literacy and/or writing;
- Curators and program managers at museums, community centers, and cultural institutions addressing issues of representation and access in content creation and program development;
- Administrators addressing the need for literacy tools that reflect the diversity of their students that may be used in teacher preparation and professional development; and
- Students and community members who want to see their cultural knowledge valued in educational practices, curricula, and policy.

**Essential questions that contributors may use to inspire their writing, interviews, and/or media submissions include questions that...**

***Consider the craft and function of creative writing through a cultural framework:***

- ~ In what ways can the study of culturally specific oral and written traditional forms help young people connect their lives and cultures with those of others? Between literature and social studies?
- ~ How do improvisational writing and oral traditions fit within formal writing curricula?
- ~ The intersections of creative writing craft with ethnography may include both opportunities and pitfalls for students. What frameworks and models may examine this dynamic creative space productively? (Topics may include representational practice, decolonizing curricula, understanding cultural appropriation, and trauma-informed pedagogy.)
- ~ How can folklore in education approaches share content, value, and insights about human relations, creativity, and problem solving?
- ~ How can poetry, songs, and stories be a window into studying culture?

***Examine how folklore and creative writing lend an important lens for significant ideas:***

- ~ Culturally responsive teaching asks educators to recognize students' cultural displays of learning and meaning making (see Gloria Ladson-Billings). Culturally sustaining teaching sees culture more deeply as an asset that should be explicitly supported (see Django Paris). How might writing and folklore engage with these pedagogies?
- ~ What are best practices in Indigenous methodologies to bring traditional ways of learning, writing, and creating into a classroom, museum, or community?
- ~ How may Folklore Studies inspire various types of writing for products and presentations in schools and community organizations, including creative writing, as well as research papers, museum exhibits, podcasts, comics, and social media posts?
- ~ How might media and text creatively partner in creative writing contexts?
- ~ How can educators from multiple disciplinary areas, such as English language arts (including composition and literacy), ELL, science, or social studies use folklore and creative writing in their teaching to create inclusive learning environments?
- ~ How can higher-education teacher-preparation programs incorporate cultural ways of knowing, creating, or learning as a key part of their literacy pedagogy?

**More about Submissions:** *We seek submissions of articles, model projects, multimedia products, teaching applications, and student work accompanied by critical writing that connects to the larger frameworks of this theme.* We particularly welcome submissions inclusive of perspectives



and voices from underrepresented communities. Co-authored articles that include teachers, students, administrators, artists, or community members offer opportunities for multiple points of view on an educational program or a curriculum. We publish articles that share best practices, offer specific guides or plans for implementing folklore in education, and articulate theoretical and critical frameworks. We invite educators to share shorter pieces for “Notes from the Field.” Nonconventional formats are also welcomed, such as lesson plans, worksheets, and classroom exercises. Media submissions, including short film and audio clips, will also be considered. When considering a submission, we highly recommend reviewing [previous issues of JFE](#). We encourage authors to contact the editors to learn more and explore whether their concept might be a good fit.

Research-based writing that theorizes, evaluates, or assesses programs that use folklore in education tools and practice are also welcomed. These research articles may intersect with the theme, but all submissions with a research component will be considered. We expect that, regardless of the format, all projects presented in submissions will have appropriate institutional permissions for public dissemination before submission to JFE, including approval from Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) and/or data licensing for the acquisition of existing data, as may be required. See the protocol for publishing a study used by [ArtsEdSearch](#) for guidance.

*Format:* Articles should be 1,500-4,500 words, submitted as a Word document. We use a modified Chicago style (not APA) and parenthetical citations. All URL links hyperlinked in the document should also be referenced, in order, at the end of the article in a URL list for offline readers. Images should have a dpi of at least 300. Be in touch with the editors to discuss submission and media ideas and to learn formatting, technical specifications, and citation style.

Contact editors Paddy Bowman at [pbbowman@gmail.com](mailto:pbbowman@gmail.com) or Lisa Rathje at [lisa@locallearningnetwork.org](mailto:lisa@locallearningnetwork.org) with ideas for stories, features, lessons, and media productions. You may also request a citation style template. Initial drafts of submissions are due April 1, 2021.

*Please share this announcement with colleagues and educators in your community. This endeavor is supported, in part, by the National Endowment for the Arts.*

Thank you to our Creative Texts | Creative Traditions Advisory Committee:

**Betty Belanus**, *Author and Education Specialist and Curator at the Smithsonian Center for Folklore and Cultural Heritage*

**Kimi V Eisele**, *Award-winning author and editor of Borderlore at Southwest Folklife Alliance*

**Nadia Inserra**, *Department of Focused Inquiry, Virginia Commonwealth University*

**Rick Kearns-Morales**, *Award-winning poet and freelance writer*

**Sarah McCartt Jackson**, *Teacher, award-winning poet, and folklorist*

**Andy Kolovos**, *Vermont Cartooning and Culture Project, and Associate Director and Archivist of Vermont Folklife Center*

**Sahar Muradi**, *Director of Education at City Lore, poet, author, and educator*

**Mark Miyake**, *Assistant Professor of Music and Society, Western Washington University*

**Christine J. Widmayer**, *Co-editor for Gazing Grain Press, an inclusive feminist chapbook press, MFA in Creative Writing, and current PhD student in Folklore*

**Langston Collin Wilkins**, *Director of the Center for Washington Cultural Traditions*

**Steve Zeitlin**, *Poet, author, and Director at City Lore*

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Local Learning connects folklorists, artists, and educators across the nation and advocates for the full inclusion of folklife and folk arts in education to transform learning, build intercultural understanding, and create stronger communities.

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**Creative Texts | Creative Traditions**, Volume 8 of the *Journal of Folklore and Education*, will be published in September 2021. See the Call for Submissions in this issue.

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#### About the Editors

Selina Morales is a Philadelphia-based public folklorist who consults nationally with a focus on urban folklore, particularly the intersection of community aesthetics, heritage, and social justice. She is currently working with Southwest Folklife Alliance on the national Radical Imagination for Racial Justice initiative, coaching community-based researchers to document and interpret racial justice projects in their own ALAANA communities. For nearly a decade she worked at one of the country’s premiere folklore organizations, Philadelphia Folklore Project, the last five years as its Director. Selina is a faculty member at Goucher College’s Masters in Cultural Sustainability Program where she teaches ethical and effective cultural partnerships and nonprofit leadership and management. She serves as the Chair of the Board of Directors of the Folk Arts-Cultural Treasures Charter School and on the Advisory Council of the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

**Paddy Bowman** is Founding Director of Local Learning and creator of numerous folklore and education resources. She co-edited *Through the Schoolhouse Door: Folklore, Community, Curriculum* (2011) and taught for Lesley University’s Integrated Teaching through the Arts masters program for a decade. She was awarded the Benjamin A. Botkin Prize for Lifetime Achievement in Public Folklore and is a Fellow of the American Folklore Society. Reach her at pbbowman@gmail.com.

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