Introduction: A Call to Teaching with Primary Sources

by Alexandra S. Antohin

For me, primary sources have long had an enduring appeal because of their direct link to people and their knowledge. In fact, helping create the conditions for people to share a piece of their lives is what attracted me to anthropology and specifically fieldwork that studied the "life of folks." I wanted to play a role in the production of original research materials through extended observation and participation of local customs, and by having casual and sometimes recorded conversations with people who could share how they see their world. I also knew that this kind of learning required risk, vulnerability, and a fair share of humility. Anthropologists often refer to this engagement as a kind of "negotiation"–a give and take where the researcher is eager to learn and absorb, to ask questions that are not always comfortable, and, most crucially, to listen. Over time, I discovered that there were other types of researchers drawn to a similar allure. Ethnomusicologists, folklorists, sociologists, historians, archivists, and curators also treat primary sources as intimately tied to the process, circumstances, and people who share what matters to them from their past and present.

This volume is dedicated to showcasing a kind of research and researchers who seek to make direct human connections to documentation and treat cultural knowledge as a type of primary source. It also pivots around a term–folk sources–that is likely new to the general public. "Folk sources" are materials from ethnographic and folk arts collections that are housed in museums, libraries, historical societies, and other educational institutions. They can be photographs, recorded interviews, artifacts, recipes, music, and maps, to name only a few. Folk sources can also refer to the products of a researcher's fieldwork, such as their notes, audio recordings, interview transcripts, visual media, and material culture examples such as textiles. Importantly, folk sources are an act of co-production and shared authorship between the researcher and the individuals and communities whose expertise and experiences inform a study.

All contributions to this issue present multiple compelling reasons for why educators should use folk sources in classroom settings. These collections are a wealth of community records and an occasion to get better acquainted with local histories, personalities, customs, and traditions. Williams and Hilliard present the wide array of digital materials available from the West Virginia Folklife Collection that cover topics such as foodways, music traditions, traditional artists, and local celebrations. They also spotlight a collection that documents the state's 2018 teachers' strike as a springboard for discussing local histories of public education, protest, and labor movements. The "bottom-up archive" at Ohio State University (Borland, Lovejoy, and Christensen) also profiles their folklife holdings and a collection of student ethnographic projects dating from the 1960s that feature students' families, their hometowns, and local occupational life. The use of folklife archival materials is a dialogue with the past in ways that are direct and close. These two regional archives showcase that folklife collections contain diverse topics relevant to contemporary life and are repositories that are constantly being added to by local people, including students.

To engage with folklife and ethnographic collections can elevate lived experience as a primary source that offers numerous dimensions to discuss culture, race, class, and identity. The music education program Lâche Pas ("Don't Let Go") in Louisiana's Vermilion Parish Schools (Vidrine) presents Cajun and Creole artistic expression and history, grounded in primary sources of song lyrics, instrumentation, and performance recordings, as a vehicle for teaching cultural themes, language, diversity, and music. For the OurStoryBridge program (Bartlett, Huntley, and Schwartz), crowdsourcing oral history interviews into short personal narratives is a conduit for students to orient to the idea that their perspectives are valued and essential, and "they, too, are storytellers" and creators of primary sources. The worldview of folklife education, as Deafenbaugh outlines, treats every member of a community as possessing "golden nuggets of knowledge" and encourages playing the long game: Observe the small moments of everyday life, pause to reflect, re-examine, form new questions and curiosities, and demonstrate the infinite qualities of human expression.

Folklife and the unique sources ethnographers generate can ignite critical reflection and sensitivity to the stories left out of the public record. The Black Diaspora Quilt Index (MacDowell and Furman) is an archival project that works closely with Black quilters and collectors to build out the larger social and cultural context of this folk art, details largely missing from cultural institutions. The Densmore (Lakota/Dakota Song) Repatriation Project (Swenson, Engelman, and Geist) positions Lakota and Dakota communities to engage with archival recordings from the early 20th century to recover and reclaim linguistic and artistic expression and practices that were historically criminalized. Engaging with folk sources means listening for the silences in the archives and addressing these gaps through actions such as record keeping, item description, keyword/meta tags. The use of folk sources, because they are closely tied to their human authors, can deepen consciousness about not only creating a more just and inclusive record but also how those individuals and communities are ethically and accurately represented.

At a time when teachers are searching for ways to navigate politicized classrooms, ethnographic and folklife materials offer pathways into themes and topics of "challenging history." Because these collections are co-produced and co-authored by local people they chronicle life as witnessed on the ground, and are located (sometimes in hidden ways) in local and state records and archives, the facts of community history are part of collective memory, although not always shared. These perspectives come from past and present residents, neighbors, family, and friends one or several generations removed. To face historical truths that are unjust, painful, and contested with folk sources is a way to lift the filter of analysis and interpretation and allow students and teachers to listen and learn directly from sources that come directly from peoples' lived experiences.

To me, a folk source is a provocation to recognize that every person, every group, and every institution have specific vantage points and positions they speak from. Some might call this personal or cultural bias. But I want to suggest that bias, when used reflexively, can be a useful tool. To recognize bias is an opportunity to inventory one's assumptions and reflect on how and where one got them. What About Delia? (López López) describes how diving into folklife collections of Colombia's folklore foremother Delia Zapata Olivella and creating a listening journal initiated a process of critical reflection–of motivations, interests, and curiosities and of the ways cultural knowledge is preserved and presented locally and internationally. This is among many powerful tools that can reveal one's lens or position of

observation, and challenge oneself to listen for voices and perspectives in each cultural encounter, whether in real time or in the archives.

Learning with folk sources, therefore, involves a similar risk and vulnerability that it takes to listen to people's stories. To have the confidence and enthusiasm to step into unknown conceptual territory, to learn from strangers, you have to be aware about the limits of your knowledge and be brave about expanding your perspective. This is the paradox. While personally challenging, this learning is simultaneously liberating and transformational.

We are happy to celebrate our 10th Volume of the *Journal of Folklore and Education*! Offering a two-issue volume seemed an excellent opportunity to mark this occasion and highlight the growing networks of folklife education. As we first explored the thematic idea informing this volume, we named as a goal to expand mainstream notions that primary sources are historical documents housed in hard-to-access archives to include our vision of community, self, the past, the future, pedagogical opportunities—and, yes, history. What if young people saw themselves in an archive? Recognized their families and communities in a folklife collection? Grew curious about documenting what is going on in their lives? Explore these possibilities in Issue 1 of our two-part 2023 *Journal of Folklore and Education*, entitled "Learning with Folk Sources: Listen, Observe, Connect." This theme was inspired by our consortium project Teaching with Folk Sources, funded by the Library of Congress Teaching with Primary Sources (TPS) program.

Issue 2 features frameworks and detailed lesson plans from the four TPS consortium members and their educator partners, organized as a Curriculum Guide. As we note in our introduction to the Guide, oral histories and ethnographic materials help present complicated issues and topics by comparing and contrasting life experiences, voices, and vantage points. Readers will find different ways that localizing knowledge connects people with one another across time and space through articles that highlight teaching with regional and national archival materials, from recorded and transcribed interviews to music, photographs, maps, recipes, and artifacts. The largest and most significant collection of these materials in the United States is the Archive of the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, but similar, smaller collections are held by individuals, organizations, and academic institutions across the U.S.—a point particularly evident in the Borland, Christensen, and Lovejoy article here in Issue 1, which includes a list of local and regional folklife archives and an invitation to add to it.

Ethnography literally means to "write culture" and uses interviews and documentation as research tools to learn information directly from our community members that might not be in a published book or searchable online. Accessing collections also mutually benefits teachers, students, and local archives. There is a reciprocity in introducing students to archives and archivists. Although they do often reflect historical truth, primary sources are valued as powerful reference points for understanding individual and community perspectives on memory, meaning, and identity.

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