

# **A Guide to Building School Culture Using Folklore Methods**

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## Introduction

Twenty years ago, it was my passion in innovative education that brought me from India to the United States to pursue my PhD in folklore. In August 2010, after serving as the curator of Education at Mathers Museum of World Cultures at Indiana University, I resolved to work in K-12 education.

With the demise of Colorado Council on the Arts and positions of state folklorists being eliminated from the state, I discovered that there was very little disciplinary understanding of folklore and support for folklorists' work. So, I began contacting principals and administrators at the school district level in Denver and suburban areas to explore the possibility of weaving folklore into their curriculum and research practices. I found that multiculturalism and parent engagement was a top priority for many schools and many school districts had specifically

created positions of Peer Observers, Multicultural specialists, Teaching Effectiveness Coaches, Outreach Coordinators, Literacy Interventionists, Parent and Family Engagement Specialists, and Managers of Culturally Responsive Education. All of these positions were the perfect fit for folklorists seeking a career in K-12 education. However, once again, most job applications submitted by folklorists (and ethnographers) never made the initial cut because the HR professionals sorting their applications were not acquainted with the expertise of a professional folklorist.

The idea of developing this guide came to my mind in the course of my discussion with various educators in Colorado. Each time I sought an appointment or met with a school administrator, I found myself defining my discipline first before defining ways in which I and other folklorists could contribute. I developed PowerPoint presentations, took *Cultural Arts Resources for Teachers and Students* (CARTS) Newsletters, hard copies of *A Kids and Teachers Guide to Local Culture* from the Madison Children's Museum and printouts of folklore and education resources posted on the American Folklore Society website. I talked about Paddy Bowman and Maida Owen's work and Ruth Olson, Mark Wagler, and Anne Pryor's contribution in K-12 education. I felt like a folklore crusader with all of this material as my weapons. I craved to have a booklet that I could hand out to the educators or send them in advance so they could see the relationship between folklore and education.

I was thrilled when Dedrick Sims, the Founder of Global Student Achievement showed enthusiasm for my interest in developing such a guide. I thank him and the American Folklore Society for supporting this consulting assignment. My hope is that this guide will help folklorists make a case for folklore in public education and enable school leaders and administrators to acquire a better understanding of the contributions folklorists can make in their schools and communities.

## **Overview**

The purpose of this guide is to introduce the discipline of folklore to educators who are not familiar with the work of folklorists and illustrate how they can use best practices in folklore to build their school culture. The first section of this guide consists of a brief overview about the discipline of folklore and what folklorists do. The second section comprises recommendations on how schools and school districts can use folklore methods and materials in building and strengthening their school culture.

## Folklore

### ***What is folklore?***

The discipline of Folklore encompasses almost all aspects of human creativity as reflected in folklore and folklife forms. It includes all the genres that one can possibly think of tied to verbal, material, and behavioral creative expressions. These genres include but are not limited to: folktales, songs, jokes, legends, ballads, dance forms, beliefs, rituals, folk healing/medicine, foodways, dwellings, objects, artifacts, photographs—almost anything that is tied to human life and tells a story of individuals and/or their community and their worldviews.

Folklorists are interested in questions pertaining to culture, tradition, identity, gender-roles, and hierarchy central to their discourse. They also explore the interconnections between creativity and the physical and social environments of individuals and their communities. Questions connected with form, function, content and meaning are equally important in the study of folklore. For example, when folklorists are doing a life story of a toymaker, not only would they focus on the type of toys that a toymaker makes and how they are made, but also how they are used by children and adults in everyday life. They will ask questions connected with the function of various toys in the society to determine if those toys are used as decorative objects and souvenirs or as ritual objects and playthings. They will also examine if the motifs and decorative patterns engraved or painted on these toys have a special meaning or are tied to other traditional art forms of the community. Besides examining the meaning of those toys in society, folklorists would also conduct life story interviews with toymakers to learn about how they learned their craft and how their personal experiences and creative style intersect with the traditions and conventions of their community's art form.

### ***Who are the folk?***

Most contemporary folklorists regard all human beings as folks. They don't draw a distinction between folk and elite. They do not regard people living in certain parts of the world, or certain peasant societies as "folk" and populations residing in urban areas as "non-folk." Folklorists understand that all human populations create and maintain culture. They define culture as a set of attitudes, customs, traditions, and any type of learned behavior that is acquired or cultivated or handed down by their family and community members. They believe that cultural diversity cannot and should not be seen in terms of skin color and/or ethnicity alone. All of us are not part of one and the same folk-group instead we are part of multiple folk groups simultaneously. We all bear multiple identities and are members of several cultural groups based on our age, gender, interest, occupation, social class, political affiliation, economic status, region, religious beliefs, ethnicity, language—which makes all of us folks very diverse.

### ***What do folklorists do?***

Folklorists are trained in the art and science of fieldwork and ethnography. Fieldwork, a qualitative research method, is an important part of folklorists' work. Folklorists make firsthand contact with the people they are studying or working with. They often travel and live for an extended period of time in the community they are collaborating with. Folklorists gather information through ethnographic research methods that consist of observation, participant observation and formal and informal interviews. Most folklorists maintain careful field notes on what they learn from their informant—whom they may refer to as collaborator, respondent, or even friend. They also take photographs, record interviews, and incorporate the social and cultural context of their interview setting while interpreting and analyzing their data.

The ethnography prepared by folklorists captures both the text and the context of their research. It reflects multiple perspectives. Not only does it include information and analysis of what they have collected from individuals and community members on the topic through observation, participant observation, formal and informal interviews, but also any information they might have gathered from other resources including print, audio/video media, or learned from people indirectly affiliated with the particular individual or the community.

Most people assume that folklorists are storytellers or performers. While many folklorists are of artistic bend of mind and have a rich repertoire of interesting stories and songs, few are actually professional storytellers or artists.

Folklore is a very broad and exciting field of study. Folklorists pursue a variety of different types of careers. While some folklorists with Ph.D. degrees pursue teaching and administrative careers at colleges and universities, others work as curators, researchers, cultural and heritage specialists at museums, art councils, and not-for-profit organizations. There are public folklorists who employ folklore materials and methods to create vibrant public programming that fosters the relationship between traditional artists and their audience. A number of public folklorists find jobs in Parks and Recreation organizations—they help develop cultural festivals, identify local folk artists and craftsperson, learn about their life and art, develop exhibits, organize teaching workshops, and create outreach programs on multiculturalism and diversity for K-18 students and community members. There are a number of folklorists who are passionate about K-12 education. Many possess advanced degrees in education and work with schools as consultants. They develop lesson plans, exhibits, and teaching resources on local, regional, and world cultures, offer professional development workshops to the teachers on incorporating folklore, and serve as folklorist-in-residence in schools.

### ***Folklore, education, and culture***

Traditional societies use folklore methods and materials to pass on knowledge and life skills to the next generation. In these societies (and in societies where children do not have access to schooling) children apprenticed (and continue to apprentice) with adults in their families and communities. They learned about the family trade and social values and norms through observation, participant observation, and communication. Children learned through hands-on experience in mixed age-groups collaborating with their peers, family members, and neighbors. Before the advent and implementation of Western schooling around the world, children were not constricted within the walls of one classroom and assigned seating for seven hours a day. Learning was interactive and exploratory, rooted in inquiry and practice. Storytelling and art were considered as effective modes of teaching and learning. The popularity and relevance of human values and practical insights reflected in *Aesop's Fables* (5th century BCE), Buddhist *Jataka Tales* (4th century BCE), and *The Panchatantra* (3rd century BCE) from the time of their creation until this day demonstrates the importance of a good story and storytelling technique in education.

Similarly, if we consider philosophy as the foundation of all interdisciplinary knowledge and inventions, and examine the teaching styles of Greek philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates, we find interaction, dialogue and questioning to be one of the best methods of critical inquiry, learning and knowledge production. Children in traditional societies acquired knowledge and life skills from their seniors through the above mentioned processes.

In many respects, the western structure of formal universal education that came to be implemented throughout the world in the last hundred years has failed to meet the needs of our contemporary society. It has deprived children from their natural desire to learn and play and has burdened them with acquiring knowledge that they must reproduce accurately during standardized testing. The current education system gives little recognition to a child's point of view and what they wish to learn and excel in. Contemporary educators are realizing this shortcoming and calling for an educational overhaul. They are focusing on best practices in education so that our schools and teachers begin to meet the needs and challenges of our 21st century learners.

If we evaluate some of the contemporary best practices such as child-centered learning, service or project-based learning and expeditionary learning models in a historical light, we find that these concepts are not new ideas. They are rooted in traditional principles of education: learning through practice, learning through observation and learning through reasoning. These ways of acquiring knowledge align exactly with how folklorists document their information and also how scholars build creative, technical and analytical skills in arts and sciences.

The question then is how folklore, education and culture intersect? The word culture literally has agrarian roots. It is tied to the word cultivation—the cultivation of a set pattern of behavior, norms, attitudes, customs, approved and accepted by the members of a community. Since the acquisition of culture (acculturation) and immersing and/or learning about another culture (enculturation) is learned or acquired behavior, conceptually it is directly tied to education. Culture is acquired through observation and implementation. Language is an inseparable part of human society and culture. Not only does it embody words we choose to communicate with each-other, but how we use those words in a culturally appropriate manner in verbal and written forms to address different members within our society, to address different situations. Language as presented in K-12 curriculum is truly language arts.

Culture is communicated, reinforced, and reformed through language. And language can be used to oppress, victimize, alter, and displace people's culture. The history of modern western education in the colonial world is full of examples of how colonizers removed children from their families and educated them in boarding school, where they were banned from speaking in their native language and practicing their customs and traditions. Many progressive educators realize the importance of native language and cultural familiarity, and emphasize the need to create culturally responsive curriculum and instructional strategies that meet the need of diverse populations. Since folklorists are interested in verbal arts and life stories of individuals and communities, the teaching and learning culture becomes an indispensable part of their research and analysis.

Culture is also rooted in the physical and economic environment of individuals and their community. The geography of a region and history of the land has a strong bearing on how people live, how they dress, what they eat and how they protect themselves. These aspects of folklife also influence the creative expressions and traditional arts of the people. Many schools are creating Folklorist and Artist residencies and Folk Arts in Education programs in their schools so that students can learn about local and regional art forms and can be inspired by the creativity of the artists.

In this era of globalization, increased migration and extensive business and recreational travel, humans are facing common problems connected with global warming, infringement of human rights and toxic wastes throughout the world. It is crucial for both folklorists and educators to cast aside any stereotypes they may have about people and places and understand, analyze, and interpret the implications of culture change in the light of contemporary issues.

### ***What makes folklore a unique discipline?***

Folklore is a unique discipline because of its intimate relationship with human life and culture. It employs ethnographic fieldwork as the basis of developing its theories and practice. The ethnography developed by folklorists captures both the insider and the outsider's perspective and gives a rich and authentic account of an individual and its community. It places the knowledge and wisdom of ordinary people at the center and examines interconnections between the text and context of their everyday life through multiple perspectives. In conclusion, there is no other discipline like folklore that employs such action-based methods to document, archive, inspire and empower communities by presenting their creative expressions in myriad ways. These include but are not limited to publications, exhibits, audio and visual materials and education resources.

## **Culture**

### ***What is school culture?***

According to the Great Schools Partnership<sup>1</sup>, "The term school culture generally refers to the beliefs, perceptions, relationships, attitudes, and written and unwritten rules that shape and influence every aspect of how a school functions, but the term also encompasses more concrete issues such as the physical and emotional safety of students, the orderliness of classrooms and public spaces, or the degree to which a school embraces and celebrates racial, ethnic, linguistic, or cultural diversity.

Like the larger social culture, a school culture results from both conscious and unconscious perspectives, values, interactions, and practices, and it is heavily shaped by a school's particular institutional history. Students, parents, teachers, administrators, and other staff members all contribute to their school's culture, as do other influences such as the community in which the school is located, the policies that govern how it operates, or the principles upon which the school was founded."

It is clear that building positive school culture can be a daunting task. The cultural policies of schools often claim to support social values, attitudes, customs and behaviors that are inclusive and support the priorities laid out by various State Departments of Education. In terms of implementation, there is often a discrepancy resulting in ideological differences, tensions, and cultural conflicts within the school. In recent years, while many schools are attempting to develop programming around immigrants and English language learners, they are addressing

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<sup>1</sup> Hidden curriculum (2014, August 26). In S. Abbott (Ed.), *The glossary of education reform*. Retrieved from <http://edglossary.org/hidden-curriculum>



the topic of culture at a very basic level. From a folkloristic-perspective, organizing an annual celebration and doing a few arts and crafts activities from immigrant children's native countries is the beginning, not an end, for demonstrating support for multicultural education.

Building school culture requires a deeper understanding of culture which helps develop a trusting relationship between students, parents, teachers, staff, and administrators. A positive school culture is reflected in:

- Physical environment
- Curriculum and instruction practices
- Collaborative and constructive relationships between students, teachers, parents and administration, and
- Well-attended, well-supported public events and programs organized by the school

A healthy school culture contributes to the all-round development of students and their academic success. The rules and regulations developed and implemented by schools are created by the administration to meet the needs of students, staff, parents and community members.

### ***Common challenges in building a positive school culture***

- Teachers, administrators and school staff have limited understanding of the impact of culture on teaching and learning outcomes
- Lack of interest among students in studies
- A disconnect between curriculum and life outside school
- Poor test scores and low academic performance
- Poor self-esteem among students
- Increase in behavioral issues
- Lack of parent engagement
- Lack of volunteer support
- Feeling of embarrassment among teachers because of poor test scores
- Feeling of hopelessness among teachers regarding student performance
- Lack of support from the school district office

- Lack of enthusiasm among students, teachers, and staff members

### ***Building and Strengthening Positive School Culture***

#### ***For administrators and the school leadership team***

To create a positive school culture, school administrators and members of school team must recognize the importance of building a positive school culture. Creating a healthy school culture is a wise investment and has direct impact on:

- Student enrollment and retention
  - Retention of teachers and staff members
  - Teaching and Learning
  - Parent Engagement and volunteerism
  - Community partnerships
  - Fewer conflicts among students, staff, parents, teachers and school leaders
  - Closing achievement gaps and improved academic performance
  - Minimizing behaviora; issues and referrals
  - Innovation in teaching and learning
- The school administration and leadership must resolve to make cultural understanding and cultural cues a priority. They must communicate to all stakeholders that their commitment to strengthen school culture is non-negotiable.
  - They should invite a folklorist/ethnographer with a passion for K-12 education to conduct ethnography of their school's culture.
    - This study should include an examination of the school's existing culture by initiating a dialogue among all its stakeholders on issues surrounding culture
    - This research should employ ethnographic fieldwork and qualitative research methods to unfold the relationship and perspectives of staff, teachers, administrators, students, parents, community members on school culture

- It should identify strengths and weaknesses of cultural practices and norms and their impact on the everyday lives and teaching/learning objectives of its stakeholders
  - The social setting has a great impact on the information provided in the interviews. Therefore, the ethnographer should have the freedom to reach out to parents and community members outside the school setting, to facilitate a more open conversation with the stakeholders
  - The report presented by the folklorist/ethnographer should highlight key issues from his/her fieldwork and also include how some of those issues and ideas have been addressed by other schools and educators
  - The final research report should include an analysis of the school culture along with the recommendations for improvement. Since the entire research process would be participatory in nature, it will allow administration to see if the issues and priorities of stakeholders are different from theirs in any way
  - The action plan drawn from this study would be participatory in nature through which everyone connected to the school will be able to take ownership of building a positive learning culture
- The school administration and leadership should commit to organizing two full-day professional development workshops on “school culture” annually, ideally with one in the beginning of the school year and the second after the winter break.
    - Each of these workshops could be divided into two or three sessions.
    - Experienced folklorists-educators and culture experts should be invited to teach and lead workshops on culture and share best practices on how cultural education can be integrated into existing or revised interdisciplinary curriculum
    - These workshops should introduce the concept of culture in all its complexity to its participants and offer strategies on how to address challenging issues regarding that particular school’s culture

Some possible themes for these professional development sessions could be:

- Introduction to Culture
- Using ethnographic approaches to understand and analyze school and classroom culture

- Understanding students' words and worlds through folklore methods and materials
  - Creating culturally responsive curriculum using folk arts and folklife
  - Culture and communication: Strengthening parent engagement and community partnership creatively
  - Culture and communication: Appropriate vocabulary and strategies for building better communication with linguistically and ethnically diverse communities
  - Tools and strategies to go beyond cultural stereotypes and analyze, interpret and communicate effectively in accordance to anthropological concept of cultural relativism
  - Teaching culture, learning culture: Strategies for teaching and learning about culture through project based/expeditionary learning models
- The school must make it mandatory for all staff, teachers, instructional coaches, peer observers and home-visit teams to take the workshop on ethnographic fieldwork methods. A workshop taught by a trained ethnographer will provide them with insights into ways of observing, asking, listening, and connecting
  - In order to create vibrant interdisciplinary curriculum that enhances the practical knowledge of students about the world they live in, school districts should create positions for folklorist-educators to serve as culture and outreach coordinator
  - School administration and their leadership team can also accomplish this by creating folklorist residencies and "Folk Arts in Education" programs in their school

***For building stronger parent engagement/volunteer program***

Students and their families are an integral part of school culture. It is essential for every school to create a learning environment that respects, values, and honors their contribution. Educational institutions can take a number of steps to strengthen parent, teacher and student partnerships.

- Host a community meeting and lead a discussion on the role of positive school culture
  - Discuss the impact of positive school culture on student retention, achievement and development of the "whole-child"

- Expand the discussion to include how the concept of culture plays a crucial role in learning and student achievement
- Solicit support from the community members to participate in intercultural dialogue with the teachers that contributes to their students' learning and improved school culture
- Organize follow up meetings and monthly conversation circles on culture where teachers, students, staff, and parents have an opportunity to share and learn from each other's experiences
  - If tensions prevail between parents and school authorities, invite a folklorist or cultural experts to serve as facilitators and discussion leaders
  - These meetings do not always have to be serious, they may also include fun ice breaker activities, a multicultural game, or even a story
  - If possible, provide refreshments, snacks, and child care for very young children
- The objective of these meetings/circles should be to provide participants with strategies for improvement and problem solving. In these meetings teachers, administrators, and staff members can begin to make a list of their needs, issues and ideas that can be addressed in the next professional development workshop
- Invite cultural experts from the community and other local not-for-profit organizations to give talks on cultural topics to students, staff, and teachers. There are a number of not-for-profit organizations that offer educational workshop on human rights, racial equity, LGBT rights
- Reach out to parents to serve as cultural-ambassadors or resource persons to do class presentations. Encourage them to share their traditions and talents with their children and participate in multicultural programs at school with their families
- In a school catering to multilingual families, it is not uncommon for school to find resources to provide translation services in one or maximum two languages that represent larger majority of the multilingual families. If a student comes from an under-represented minority and s/he or their families that don't understand or speak the predominant language, then they have no support. The school administration must make an effort to reach out to those parents. They must solicit translation support from the district, identify volunteers from the community, and/or direct them to resources that would help them build a relationship with the school

- Formulate a cultural committee comprised of students, staff members and parents to conceptualize and design folklore and folk art festivals. This could be one opportunity for schools to take into account the expertise of families from different countries to share their traditions
- Reinforce the concept—“Everyone has a culture,” and organize family events in which parents from every cultural group (whether they are mainstream or from another country or a culture) have an opportunity to share their traditions
- Ask teachers to think of ways in which they could utilize volunteers in their classroom. Offer volunteer opportunities and trainings to the parents and community volunteers
- Solicit parents input in designing fundraisers for school. Many school fundraisers, such as hosting a fundraising auction in an expensive art gallery for a school catering to primarily working class parents are unsuccessful because parents cannot afford to pay for those events. Or organizing similar events which conflict with their work-schedule and/or values system shows a lack of consideration or awareness for this population

#### ***For teachers and instructional coaches***

Teachers and instructional coaches play a powerful role in creating a culturally responsive classroom. However for some teachers, a third of their instruction time is spent addressing behavioral issues of their pupils. Culturally responsive curriculum and instruction allows students to be engaged and interested in learning with fewer opportunities for unwanted interruptions and behavioral problems.

To create culturally responsive curriculum, before students return for a new session administrators should plan on organizing:

- A two to four day long intensive workshop for teachers and Instructional coaches on creating and teaching a culturally responsive curriculum. In these workshops they shall also learn strategies for developing creative assignments using folklore and folklife materials that would keep student engaged and interested
- These workshops should be followed by a minimum of hour long professional development workshops on culture offered on weekly or biweekly basis. In many TITLE schools, there are funds available to organize professional development workshops
- The purpose of these training workshops should be to broaden the understanding of teachers and instructional coaches on folklore and culture. They would offer them concrete ideas in creating culturally responsive curriculum and instruction strategies

- The skill sets that teachers and instructional coaches would acquire through these workshops would enable them to
  - Learn about the culture of the students and their worldviews
  - Develop strategies to improve communication and instruction with students
  - Develop a bond with their students which would foster a collaborative and congenial atmosphere in their classroom
  - All of this would contribute to create an improved classroom culture
- The schools must collaborate with one or more folklorist-educators to lead and/or teach these workshops
- The schools must consider having a folklorist-educator to serve on the cultural team of their school and/or serve as an interventionist at the school district
- Some of the themes addressed in these teacher training workshops could include:
  - Picture books and stereotypes: Selecting culturally appropriate books for preschoolers to third grade students
  - Reading between the lines: Identifying culturally appropriate books on multicultural topics
  - Leading a discussion on difficult topics in elementary classrooms: human rights, racism, economic disparities, religious biases, social justice, etc.
  - Creating classroom projects and assignments on intercultural themes
  - Strategies for creating culturally responsive lesson plans
  - Strengthening communication with parents
  - Identifying local learning resources
  - Rethinking and revisiting evaluation and assessment rubric

### ***Creating a positive spatial culture***

The physical environment of the school plays a crucial role in enhancing the learning experience of students. The school administrators and leaders should take active steps in creating a positive physical environment that strengthens a student's relationship with their surroundings

and has a positive impact on their learning. The school administrators and leaders can evaluate the spatial culture of the school in a variety of ways:

- The interior of the building:
  - Is it safe?
  - Is it clean?
  - Does it project a warm and welcoming atmosphere to anyone who walks through the door?
  - Do the school premises speak of the values and commitment: its respect for LGBT students, ethnic and cultural diversity, multiculturalism, equality, human rights?
  - If the school caters to students whose family members do not know English language, is their signage and/or translation support in their languages
- The exterior of the building:
  - Is the playground and community garden well kept?
  - Do children and their families feel safe about playing there?
- The relationship of staff, students, family and community members inside and outside the building:
  - Do the students, parents, teaching and non-teaching staff including janitors, bus-drivers, and paraprofessionals show respect to each other? Are students reminded to say, please and thank you to everyone and listen to adults pleasantly, politely and promptly?
  - Determine the extent to which students, teachers, staff members and administrators follow the “Rose” principal of “Respect Others, Self, Environment”
  - Do visitors/children litter inside the building? In school buses? In the vicinity of school?
  - Or, if they find any litter do they pick it up and throw in the trash can?
  - Is there graffiti or writing on the walls? In the restrooms? In the buses?
  - Does the school foster a culture of cleanliness and hygiene?



- Do the students, parents, teachers, and administration blame each other for the general upkeep of their surrounding or are they willing to take ownership and partner with the school in cleaning initiatives?
- Food is an integral part of human cultural practices.
  - Are children given the opportunity to wash their hands before and after eating? Do they touch books or reading materials with greasy hands?
  - Does school staff and student respect students beliefs, attitudes, and religious preferences connected with food?
  - Is there a vegetarian option or a pork-free or beef-free option available during public events when food is served?
  - Do the vegetarian students who feel uncomfortable eating with non-vegetarian students have the freedom to choose their spot for eating meals
  - Does the school have a community garden? If so does school support composting?
  - Does it encourage students to show respect to food?
  - Does school foster a culture of reuse and recycling?
- The neighborhood and the immediate vicinity of the school:

If the school is in an undesirable location, for example, close to an industrial area or in an economically challenged section of town or in a congested inner city neighborhood where the crime rate is high, a school can play a pivotal role in transforming the neighborhood through the cooperation and participation of community members. Once again this is a great opportunity for a school to have its cultural expert reach out to the community and build relationships with community members, local business, and other area organizations to plan neighborhood improvements.

- Invite neighborhood associations to host its monthly or bi-monthly meetings at your school
- If you are a neighborhood school, spread the word about these meetings through Friday folders and emails to the parents. Solicit active participation from students' families

- Express your concerns regarding the safety and academic success of students. Emphasize the need for creating a positive school culture
- Create an agenda to bring improvements in the community. They may range from requesting community members to call the City government to remove graffiti or to beautify their store windows with flowers and positive signs and slogans that speak of their cultural identity
- Brainstorm ideas for hosting programs and cultural events that would bring community members together for improving their neighborhood
- Identify community partners, local for-and-not-for-profit organizations who would assist in school and neighborhood initiatives in making the neighborhood more desirable
- Tie everything back to curriculum and instruction. Explore ways in which teachers can promote project-based learning or problem-centered approaches to learning. For example, if the school can create and support a community garden, if students can show respect for food and food waste by learning how to compost, and teachers can incorporate art-projects/experiments by recycling waste,
- Give it back to the community: Explore venues for displaying the writings and artworks of students at public places such as local restaurants, the post office and family owned business to strengthen schools ties with the community and to reinforce an environment of cooperation and collaboration

## ***Conclusion***

Few schools require our teachers and administrators to take mandatory classes on expanding their understanding of culture and its ramifications in schools. Culture is often perceived in two very different ways by educators-- some administrators promote culture as a commodity. They believe that organizing multicultural festivals, celebrating diversity, and incorporating arts and craft activities from various cultures is multicultural education. Others connect culture to the ethnicity. They believe the people from the same ethnicity share common culture. This is seldom the case. There is diversity in every cultural group. Just because some students' families share the same language, religion, or ethnicity, doesn't mean that they practice and identify with their traditions and values in the same way.

Culture is a very deep and complex concept and has a strong bearing on school climate and academic success of the students. Therefore, to create a positive school culture, the

administration has to be fully committed to understanding the concept of culture and recognize ways in which it manifests in its full complexity in their school culture.

In recent years, K-12 education has been heavily influenced by the education industry; it has been functioning more like a business, drawing heavily upon the expertise of other businesses such as publishers of text books, online educational resources, and private consulting firms that are too often more interested in profits rather than education. It is unfortunate that the expertise of folklorists, ethnographers, anthropologists and sociologists have been sidelined in K-12 education. As schools begin to think about implementing common core standards in the United States and expanding concepts of interdisciplinary, arts-integrated, project based, expeditionary learning around the world, they should also begin to recognize the power of folklore, folklife, and ethnography in understanding and connecting with global communities. As demonstrated in the first part of this guide, folklore and education go hand in hand, so that the administrators in K-12 education around the world to create positions for folklorists so together they may create a more relevant educational experience for our children.

### Selected Readings

Bartis, Peter. *Folklife and Fieldwork: a layman's introduction to field techniques*. Washington: Library of Congress, 1990.

Bowman, Paddy. "Incorporating K-12 Education and Folklore," (A guide for folklorists wanting to incorporate K-12 education activities into their work).

<http://www.afsnet.org/?page=ConsProfDev>, accessed on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2015.

Briggs, Charles L. *Learning How to Ask: a sociolinguistic appraisal of the role of the interview in social sciences research*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

Georges, Robert A. and Michael Owen Jones. *Folkloristics: an Introduction*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.

Georges, Robert and Michael Owen Jones. *People Studying People: The Human Element in Fieldwork*. Berkley: University of California Press, 1980.

Bowman, Paddy and Lynne Hamer, eds. *Through the Schoolhouse Door*. Logan: Utah University Press, 2011.

Oring, Elliot, ed. *Folk Groups and Folklore Genres: An Introduction*. Logan: Utah University Press, 1986

A comprehensive list of folklore and education resources is available on the Folklore and Education page of American Folklore Society website. Please visit the following links:

<http://www.afsnet.org/?FolkloreEd>

<http://www.afsnet.org/?page=FolkloreEdResource>

<http://www.afsnet.org/?BiblioEducation>

## Appendix 1: Webography

### Courtesy of the Folklore and Education Section, American Folklore Society

**Alabama Folklife Association** provides audio excerpts of children's songs recorded in 1947 in the online Bullfrog Jumped Children's Folksongs Learning Guide for pre-K to grade 3.

<http://www.alabamafolklife.org/>

**Alaska Native Knowledge Network** offers culturally responsive education standards for schools, teachers, students, and communities and many lessons.

<http://www.ankn.uaf.edu/>

**Alaskool** is a portal website for on-line materials about Alaska Native history, education, languages and cultures, from the Alaska Native Curriculum and Teacher Development Project Team.

<http://www.alaskool.org/curriculumindx.html>

**American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress** houses thousands of photographs, recordings, and documents in multimedia collections and the Teacher's Guide to Folklife Resources.

<http://www.loc.gov/folklife/>

**Appalachian Media Institute** works with young people in Eastern Kentucky on how to use video cameras and audio equipment to document the unique traditions and complex issues of their mountain communities.

**CARTS: Cultural Arts Resources for Teachers and Students:** The Web site of Local Learning: The National Network for Folk Arts in Education links to national and regional resources and provides lessons, articles, and online folk artist residencies.

<http://www.carts.org/>

To subscribe to the CARTS newsletter, please go to

<http://citylore.org/education/resources/newsletter/>

**Center for the Study of Upper Midwestern Cultures** supports the Network for Teachers of Local Culture and projects that deeply engage teachers and students in exploring culture. See the Dane County Cultural Tour and Hmong Cultural Tour, which includes free downloadable

versions of the award-winning, practical Teacher's Guide to Local Culture and the Kids' Field Guide to Local Culture.

<http://csumc.wisc.edu/>

**Crossroads of the Hearts Teachers Guide** provides activities and information for using the website in the classroom, from the Mississippi Arts Commission.

<http://www.arts.state.ms.us/crossroads/main.html>

**Cultural Maps, Cultural Tours** features three documentation tours of local culture by a Madison, Wisconsin 4th/5th grade class: Dane County, Hmong, and Park Street. Each includes a "how we did it" section for teachers, from the Center for the Study of Upper Midwestern Cultures.

<http://csumc.wisc.edu/education>

**The Delta Blues Education Fund** is designed to bring together the children and master musicians of the Mississippi Delta for the continuation of the Delta Blues tradition.

<http://www.bluesed.org/>

**Discovering Community** is a project of the Vermont Folklife Center that provides methods and resources to create locally designed curricula that support and meet the pressing need for cultural conservation and civic participation.

<http://www.discoveringcommunity.org/>

**Discovering Our Delta: A Learning Guide for Community Research** teaches students how to conduct research in their community and to communicate the results of that research to their classmates and others.

[http://www.folklife.si.edu/education\\_exhibits/resources/delta.aspx](http://www.folklife.si.edu/education_exhibits/resources/delta.aspx)

**Documenting Maritime Folklife** by David Taylor is a step by step introduction to what and how to document maritime traditions, from the American Folklife Center.

<http://www.loc.gov/folklife/maritime/>

**EDSITEment** provides high-quality material on the Internet in the subject areas of literature and language arts, foreign languages, art and culture, and history and social studies, from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

<http://edsitement.neh.gov/>

**Field Guide to Hmong Culture** is a downloadable PDF guide to Hmong culture, from the Madison Children's Museum.

[csumc.wisc.edu/cmct/HmongTour/howwedidit/HMONG\\_FIELD\\_GUIDE\\_WEB.pdf](http://csumc.wisc.edu/cmct/HmongTour/howwedidit/HMONG_FIELD_GUIDE_WEB.pdf)

**FieldWorking Online** provides a space for our collaborative electronic community to share members' local traditions and histories from around America, from the co-authors of *FieldWorking: Reading and Writing Research*.

**Folklife and Folk Art Education Resource Guide** provides introductory information to folklore (folklife), techniques for identifying and including community traditions and tradition bearers in the classroom, a folklife and folk art bibliography, and lesson plans that incorporate folklife and folk art education in the classroom and state core curricula, from the Fife Folklore Archives.  
[library.usu.edu/folklo/edresources/ack.html](http://library.usu.edu/folklo/edresources/ack.html)

**Folklife Resources for Educators** is an online portal for educators working in K-12 and undergraduate education. It provides access to resources for teaching about aspects of folklife, culture, and the traditional arts, with a focus on place-based and community-based teaching materials and is compiled by staff at the American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.  
<http://www.lcweb.loc.gov/folklife/teachers/org2.php>

**Folkstreams** is a national preserve of American folk culture documentaries and offers users extensive background materials for each film. See the Educator's Portal and the film *Home Across the Water* about Gullah culture and struggle for land ownership.  
<http://www.folkstreams.net/educators/>

**Folkvine** gives users video, audio, and text options to explore folk artists of Florida, including bobble head dolls who represent real-life scholars of the state's traditional culture and three online board games for students.  
<http://folkvine.umbc.edu/>

**Folkwriting** offers lessons on place, heritage, and tradition for Georgia classrooms, from Valdosta State University.  
<http://ww2.valdosta.edu/folkwriting/>

**Hmong Storycloth Project** is a lesson on making a story cloth, from the Museum of International Folk Art.  
<http://www.internationalfolkart.org/eventsedu/education/handmadeplanet/hmongstorycloth.html>

**Iowa Folklife: Our People, Communities, and Traditions** is an award-winning online lifelong multimedia learning guide for all ages.  
<http://www.uni.edu/iowaonline/folklife/intro/index.htm>

**Kids' Guide to Local Culture** is a downloadable PDF field guide that students can use to explore more than 40 cultural elements in their home communities, from Madison Children's Museum.

<http://csumc.wisc.edu/wtlc/?q=resources>

**Learning from Your Community** by Gail Matthews and Don Patterson, is a downloadable PDF curriculum guide based students' documentation of the effects of Hurricane Hugo, from the South Carolina Folk Arts Program.

[www.louisianafolklife.org/LT/Virtual\\_Books/Learning\\_From/Learning\\_From\\_Your\\_Community.pdf](http://www.louisianafolklife.org/LT/Virtual_Books/Learning_From/Learning_From_Your_Community.pdf)

**Local Learning: The National Network for Folk Arts in Education** is a network of hundreds of people interested in engaging young people with their own traditional culture and with the local culture and folklore of their families, regions, and the larger world.

<http://locallearningnetwork.org/>

**Louisiana Voices: An Educator's Guide to Exploring Our Communities and Traditions** This comprehensive interdisciplinary Web-based guide with many lessons, essays, photos, video, and audio is public domain and adaptable for any region. Units VII and VIII are in French as well as English.

<http://www.louisianavoices.org/>

**Masters of the Building Arts Activity Guide** is a downloadable PDF that lets young people explore the artistry and skill of master craftworkers in the building trades and their important contributions to our architectural heritage, from the Smithsonian Institution Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

[www.folklife.si.edu/education\\_exhibits/resources/masters.aspx](http://www.folklife.si.edu/education_exhibits/resources/masters.aspx)

**Mariachi Education Resources** is designed for the mariachi student or researcher, from by California mariachi musician and teacher, Laura Sobrino.

<http://www.mariachieducationresources.com/>

**McKissick Museum** offers several education guides in Digital Traditions such as Jubilation! African American Celebrations and Row Upon Row: Sea Grass Basketry.

<http://www.digitaltraditions.net/>

**Montana Heritage Project** is dedicated to teaching young people to think clearly and deeply about the world they face through exploration of their communities—its place in national and world events, its relationship to the natural environment, and its cultural heritage as expressed in traditions and celebrations, literature and arts, economic practices, responses to crises, and everyday life.

<http://montanaheritageproject.org/>

**Museum of International Folk Art** offers many different curricula such as Carnival!, A Handmade Planet, Cerámica y Cultura, Dressing Up, Tibetan Culture in Exile, Hispanic Folk Arts and the Environment, Hats and Headdresses, and Resist Dye Techniques.

<http://www.internationalfolkart.org/eventsedu/curricula.html>

**Newfoundland and Labrador Salt Fisheries Digital Exhibit** provides access to a wide variety of images, texts, video and audio clips, and links all related to the salt-fish processing industry and way of life that were the backbone of Newfoundland for over 400 years, from Canada's Digital Collections Program.

[http://www.therooms.ca/ic\\_sites/fisheries/main.asp?frame=on](http://www.therooms.ca/ic_sites/fisheries/main.asp?frame=on)

**North Country Folklore Online** is an online library of the folklore and traditional arts of New York State's North Country, which includes the Adirondack Mountains and St. Lawrence River Valley. A great place to sample the rich living heritage of customs and creative expressions in this special place, from Traditional Arts in Upstate New York.

<http://www.northcountryfolklore.org/>

**Oregon Folklife Network** has many online resources for educators and students, from magazines to the exhibit Masters of Ceremony, the videography guide Portraits of Oregon to folk artist residencies.

<http://ofn.uoregon.edu/>

**Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage** has online curriculum guides and links to Smithsonian Folkways Recordings and Global Sounds, offering access to over 40,000 downloadable titles. The Discovering Our Delta student and teacher guides are very useful. Also see the Smithsonian Folklife and Oral History Interviewing Guide.

<http://www.folklife.si.edu/>

**South Georgia Folklife** Collection includes Folkwriting, a folk arts education guide by Laurie Sommers and Diane Howard of the South Georgia Writing Project.

<http://archives.valdosta.edu/folklife/>

**Sound Portraits Education Program** highlights a series of youth portraits created by teens, provides a study guide to the award-winning portrait Ghetto Life 101, and provides a tutorial on how to record your own radio documentary, from Sound Portraits Productions.

<http://www.soundportraits.org/education/>

**Teacher Curriculum Guides and student magazines** on Chinese, Lao, Maritime, Mexican-American, and traditional arts of Oregon, from the Oregon Folk Arts Program.



**A Teacher's Guide to Kentucky Folklife** is a downloadable PDF, from the Kentucky Historical Society and the Kentucky Arts Council.

**Teachers' Guide to Local Culture** is a downloadable PDF that has a detailed introduction and lesson plans on home remedies, rites of passage, storytelling and foodways. It is the companion to the "Kids' Guide to Local Culture," from the Madison Children's Museum.

<http://csumc.wisc.edu/wtlc/?q=resources>

**Wisconsin Folks** is an on-line interactive resource for 4th/5th grade students about artists who highlight their cultures and traditions in their art, from the Wisconsin Arts Board.

<http://www.wisconsinfolks.org/teaching.htm>

**Wisconsin Weather Stories** is an interdisciplinary curriculum that features the science and stories of weather, from the Wisconsin Arts Board and the University of Wisconsin Websites

<http://weatherstories.ssec.wisc.edu/>

## **Appendix 2: Essential Texts for Folklore and Education** (Links and PDF files provided through [locallearningnetwork.org](http://locallearningnetwork.org))

**"Folk Arts in the Classroom: Changing the Relationship Between Schools and Communities"** launched on Local Learning in 1993. A report from the National Roundtable on Folk Arts in the Classroom sponsored by National Endowment for the Arts and City Lore (New York). PDF available at <http://locallearningnetwork.org/library/the-archive/>

### **"An Accessible Aesthetic" by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett**

The folk artist is very much like a curator and the community is a living museum. In unpacking this metaphor, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett explores how the folk artist learns various traditions and then teaches adults and children to develop strong ties to their communities and cultural history. Originally published in *New York Folklore: The Journal of the New York Folklore Society* 9:3-4 (Winter 1983), pp. 9-18.

### **"Passing it On" by Rita Zorn Moonsammy**

Excerpts from the now classic folk arts-in-education book, *Passing It On* which explores collaborative programs between classroom teachers and folk artists/community educators. We have excerpted four sections that map the New Jersey Main Road School's sixth grade residency with auctioneer Andrea Licciardello. Licciardello worked with classroom teacher Glenn Christmann to present a study of auctions within a frame of regional socioeconomics. Originally published as: Moonsammy, Rita Zorn. & New Jersey State Council on the Arts,

Trenton. & Cumberland County Library, Bridgeton, NJ. (1992). *Passing It On: Folk Artists and Education in Cumberland County, New Jersey*. [Washington, D.C.]

**"Holidays and Schools: Folklore Theory and Educational Practice, or, 'Where Do We Put the Christmas Tree?'" by Lucy Long**

How an Ohio parent and folklorist successfully engaged the issue of holiday celebrations in schools by integrating community study, family folklore and social studies curricula.

***Through the Schoolhouse Door: Folklore, Community, Curriculum, Paddy Bowman and Lynne Hamer, eds., 2011.***

Winner of the 2012 Dorothy Howard Prize, this collection offers experiences from exemplary school programs and analysis of an expert group of folklorists and educators dedicated not only to getting students out the door and into their communities to learn about the folk culture all around them but also to honoring the culture teachers and students bring in to the classroom.

***Valuing the Ordinary by Paddy Bowman***

Bowman, Paddy. "Oh, that's just folklore": Valuing the Ordinary as an Extraordinary Teaching Tool. *Language Arts*, 81(5), pp. 385-395, 2004.

**Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage** provides online lesson plans, curriculum guides, and online exhibits as well as two interviewing guides.

- ***Discovering Our Delta*** Although developed for the Mississippi Delta, these student and teacher guides are useful and practical for any region.
- ***Smithsonian Folklife and Oral History Interviewing Guide*** features a general guide to conducting an interview, as well as a sample list of questions that may be adapted to your own needs and circumstances.

For an extended reading list, visit: <http://locallearningnetwork.org/>

### **Appendix 3: Directory of Select Folklorists and Education Specialists**

(This is not a complete list of all folklorist K-12 educators. Please contact

[Deeksha.Nagar@gmail.com](mailto:Deeksha.Nagar@gmail.com) to update entries or to add other names, Thank you! )

**Paddy Bowman**, Director, Local Learning: The National network for Folk Arts in Education

Contact: [pbbowman@gmail.com](mailto:pbbowman@gmail.com)

Website: [Locallearning.org](http://Locallearning.org)

**Dr. Lynne Hamer**, Professor, Educational Foundations and Leadership, The Judith Herb College of Education, The University of Toledo

Email: [lynne.hamer@utoledo.edu](mailto:lynne.hamer@utoledo.edu)

Webpage: <https://utoledo.academia.edu/LynneHamer/>Susan Eleuterio

**Susan Eleuterio**, Adjunct faculty at Goucher College Master's in Cultural Sustainability

Email: [Sueeleu@gmail.com](mailto:Sueeleu@gmail.com)

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/susaneleuterio>

**Dr. Gregory Hansen**, Professor of Folklore and English. Arkansas State University

Email: [ghansen@astate.edu](mailto:ghansen@astate.edu)

**Dr. Mary Hoefflerle**, Art Education Program Director, University of Wisconsin, Madison

Contact: [hoefflerle@wisc.edu](mailto:hoefflerle@wisc.edu)

**Dr. Jim Mathews**, Educational Researcher and Designer, Field Day Lab, University of Wisconsin

Contact: [jimmathew@wisc.edu](mailto:jimmathew@wisc.edu)

Website: [www.jimmathews.info](http://www.jimmathews.info)

**Dr. Ruth Olson**, Associate Director, Center for the Study of Upper Midwestern Cultures and Distinguished Faculty Associate, Department of Comparative Literature and Folklore Studies at University of Wisconsin-Madison

Contact: [reolson3@wisc.edu](mailto:reolson3@wisc.edu)

Website: <http://csumc.wisc.edu/>

**Maida Owens**, Folklife Program Director, Louisiana Division of the Arts, Office of Cultural Development, Department of Culture Recreation & Tourism

Contact: [mowens@crt.la.gov](mailto:mowens@crt.la.gov) Websites: [www.crt.state.la.us/arts](http://www.crt.state.la.us/arts) Websites:

[www.louisianafolklife.org](http://www.louisianafolklife.org)

[www.louisianavoices.org](http://www.louisianavoices.org)

<https://www.facebook.com/Louisiana>

**Dr. Anne Pryor**, Folk and Traditional Arts/Arts Education, Wisconsin Arts Board

Contact: [anne.pryor@wisconsin.gov](mailto:anne.pryor@wisconsin.gov)

Websites: Wisconsin Arts Board - [artsboard.wisconsin.gov](http://artsboard.wisconsin.gov)

Wisconsin Folks - [www.wisconsinfolks.org](http://www.wisconsinfolks.org)

Wisconsin Teachers of Local Culture - [csumc.wisc.edu/WTLC](http://csumc.wisc.edu/WTLC)

**Lisa Rathje**, Assistant Director, Local Learning: The National Network for Folk Arts in Education and Director of Folklife Programs with Company of Folk in Chicago, Illinois.

Contact: [rathje.lisa@gmail.com](mailto:rathje.lisa@gmail.com)

Website: [www.locallearningnetwork.org](http://www.locallearningnetwork.org)