

• *Book Reviews* •

Through the Schoolhouse Door: Folklore, Community, Curriculum. Edited by Paddy Bowman and Lynne Hamer. (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2011. xiii + pp. 250, foreword, bibliography, index.)

“Out-of-school experience is the great unspoken curriculum,” a phrase utilized in the first parts of the text, is one of the best ways to discuss the value and content of Paddy Bowman and Lynne Hamer’s collection *Through the Schoolhouse Door*. In this volume, Bowman and Hamer bring together pieces that demonstrate the value of folklore as a form of experiential knowledge that can be used effectively in the classroom. With essays by teachers and educational specialists from all over the United States, this book provides both folklorists and non-folklorists alike with an accessible guide to the wide range of possible applications for folklore in education.

Both Bonnie Stone Sunstein’s foreword and the editors’ introduction focus on the importance of unconscious and unspoken knowledge, often invisible within school walls but nonetheless significant to daily life. Sunstein utilizes a mix of philosophical and anecdotal commentary to encourage “transformative learning” in the classroom. Bowman and Hamer provide both a general discussion of folklore and of the historical context for the study of tradition within schools. Their discussion sets the stage for the first chapter, Paddy Bowman’s “‘I Didn’t Know What I Didn’t Know’: Reciprocal Ethnography”. In this piece, Bowman ably demonstrates the importance of utilizing life experience and hands-on ethnographic work in the classroom. Bowman’s approach stems both from her emphasis on collaborative learning and her conviction that teachers should also think of themselves as learners.

The second chapter, “A Tale of Discovery,” looks at the processes of incorporating folkloristic projects into state curricula. Authors Maida Owens and Eileen Engel provide an unvarnished account of the difficulties associated with the implementation of folklore projects into schools, the decrease of program funding for public folklore, and the low rate of follow-through by educators in applying

folkloristic training in the classroom. Building on the professional development focus of Owens and Engel, the third chapter, Anne Pryor, Debbie Kmetx, Ruth Oslon, and Steven A. Ackerman's "Here at Home," demonstrates the value of a cultural traveling tour as a form of training for teachers.

Amanda Dargan's "Art at the Threshold" shifts the focus from teachers to folk artists. In this chapter, she discusses the value of placing local folk artists in educational roles in schools, and argues that these roles are important not only for students but for the artists themselves. Similarly, Lisa L. Higgins and Susan Eleuterio's piece on teaching folk art in Missouri discusses the practical elements of folk art residencies, especially the important steps one must take in order to incorporate such artists into a school.

Following in this vein of emphasis on the value of direct experience with tradition, Gwendoyln K. Meister and Patricia C. Kurtenback's chapter on folklife trunk projects in Nebraska also demonstrates the value of learning about culture through authentic experience. In the case of folklife trunks, assembled and distributed throughout the state as an educational resource, teachers and students used the artifacts contained in the trunks as thinking pieces for language arts and social studies lessons. The authors' blending of practical details with examples of successful implementation should prove useful to any educator seeking to undertake a similar project.

The role of creation carries over to Kristin Congdon and Karen Broner's essay on the postmodern, arts-based research strategy used to create the website folkvine.org. Bringing together artists and students, this site aims to use techniques of narrative storytelling to educate the public about folk traditions and tradition bearers. Along the same lines, Lisa Rathje's piece "The Art of Many Voices" performs a critical analysis of the myths commonly shown in such films as *Stand and Deliver* and *Freedom Writers*, and argues for the way in which folk culture can be a method of breaking barriers and dispelling preconceptions about the abilities of urban schoolchildren.

Finally, Lynne Hamer's chapter centers on a technique for researcher-community collaboration, known as participatory action research (PAR). Hamer presents a case in which a PAR initiative to introduce university culture to the wider community in Toledo, OH, was successful in fostering a greater sense of community and continuity between people at the university and in the surrounding areas. By providing an experience-based account of how PAR works in the community, Hamer's essay is an excellent example of how the formal and informal can work together for educational purposes.

Bowman and Hamer's book demonstrates several important points. First, their work calls attention to the widespread lack of awareness among teachers and students of the educational value of informal and vernacular culture. In this regard, the authors' highly accessible volume is well-suited to their goal of bringing teachers and students into an active engagement with folk culture. Also, the chapters in this book do a great job of explaining the value of cooperative endeavors in the classroom, and they clearly explain the practical aspects of implementing these endeavors in terms of logistics, success rates, and roadblocks. Incorporating such programs, as the authors repeatedly point out, often involves overcoming a lot of obstacles, so the authors' careful consideration of the problems that may arise in the early stages of educational folklore projects is also important encouragement for those who are interested in implementing these projects. Collectively, these pieces demonstrate that, with time, these kinds of projects often grow into valuable and meaningful educational tools. Finally, the book addresses the larger problems of the modern school system, such as declining performance, funding decreases, and bureaucratic anxieties. The essays in this volume ably show the important role that folklore specialists can play in helping to address these problems and in improving educational outcomes.

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