

The following essay was taken from a panel at the 1997 Iowa Folklife Education Seminar. The seminar, a collaborative venture between the State Historical Society and the State Arts Council's Folklife Program, was held in conjunction with the conference "Vital Communities: Showcase the Past, Imagine the Future," sponsored by the State Historical Society of Iowa.

Using Folklife Studies in Schools, Museums, Libraries, & Community Centers

Forum Summary Notes:

Matthews-DeNatale

Sue Eleuterio:

Eleuterio had five suggestions for people interested in developing folklore-related educational programs:

1. *Build on existing programs, relationships, and resources.* For example, you might find that some of the best teachers of local food traditions are working in your school cafeteria. You can also piggyback your idea onto a regularly occurring event, such as P.T.A. (or P.T.O.) nights. Many local museums, libraries, seniors centers, and historical organizations are eager to partner with schools. For example, a museum partnered with Eleuterio's school to expand the museum's annual "Christmas Around the World" festival, extending the presentation to include trees decorated with the actual ornaments of community residents and examples of other holiday light celebrations, such as Kwanzaa, Divali, and Chanukah.

If you represent a community-based organization, make sure that you check existing curricula to find out what local teachers have to cover in their classrooms. Teachers will be a lot more interested in developing a partnership if the project is directly relevant to their teaching mandates. Consider working with local schools to develop a suitcase exhibit that teachers can borrow and use in their classrooms.

2. *Explain the context--who, what, when, where, why, how, etc.* If presenters don't talk about the larger context and background, gently stop them and prompt them with open-ended questions that inquire about the settings in which the tradition takes place, community aesthetics, beliefs, etc.

3. *Beware of stereotyping.* Remember that all communities have internal diversity. Learning about a person's traditions should be a springboard for dialogue, not a means for lumping people into rigid categories.

4. *Familiarize yourself with local resources.* Most places have arts councils, historic societies, etc. Some of these organizations may even have small grants programs that can help fund your program. Don't be afraid to talk with grant program officers and ask for help in writing mini-grants. Remember that many local businesses and regional utilities also have corporate giving programs that fund local events. While you're shopping at Wal-Mart, Target, or any other place of business, stop by the office and ask if they fund educational events in the community.

5. *Don't forget to market your event,* advertising it through press releases and P.S.A.'s. Remember to contact local public radio affiliates and ethnic media (e.g., bilingual radio, TV, and papers).

