Lay and Expert Knowledge in a Complex Society: The AFS Teagle Foundation Project

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Dorothy Noyes (The Ohio State University), chair:

In 2009, AFS received a grant from the Teagle Foundation's program on Big Questions in the Disciplines, intended to revitalize undergraduate teaching by considering how the deep stakes of each discipline could be invoked to engage students.

In writing the grant we decided that there was one question central both to folklore as a discipline and to undergraduate teaching as a practice: What is the appropriate relationship between lay and expert knowledge in a complex society? Of course proposing that topic was a strategic decision on several levels. First, to provoke the field to reflect more explicitly on this topic--hence this year's meeting theme. Second, to create a space for a general discussion of undergrad curriculum in folklore. And third, to position folklore as central to the university's undergraduate and public missions, precisely because we are the field whose business has been since our emergence that mediation between lay and expert knowledge. Recent successes reported from Western Kentucky, U of Oregon, George Mason, U of Houston and elsewhere confirm a growing recognition of our value in this regard.

We assembled a working group made of members whose research focuses in some way on these questions and who represented the variety of institutional and disciplinary contexts in which academic folklorists work. Each of us is now developing and trying out new courses or course units that both thematize lay knowledge and explore new strategies for drawing on the community knowledges to which students have access.

We will report on the teaching experiments in a workshop at Ohio State this spring and again to the membership once they are concluded. Today we wanted to take an analytical rather than a pedagogic focus and offer some reflections on the *kinds* of knowledge encounters that take place in the classroom, and in the academy generally. So we're each going to speak from briefly from our experience, and then open it up to you.

How Do You Know What You Know?
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I was interested in epistemology before I knew the word. Once I began reading some philosophy near the end of high school (not required reading, but reading to acquire some cultural capital before college), I discovered that the nature of knowledge—how we know things, how we take what we know to be "true," and how we know what we know—is a central intellectual question but also a central question for how we live our everyday lives. Reading William James's *Pragmatism* (1907) my first semester in college provided the ideas and words I was looking for to articulate my own epistemology, and the highlights of my subsequent reading included the sociology of knowledge, social psychology, and anthropology.

In the study of American folklore by Americans, the epistemological problem of reflexive culture studies plagues both teaching and scholarship.

For me, these epistemological issues are at the heart of the Teagle project questions. If all knowledge is socially constructed, then what are we to make of distinctions between "expert" and "lay" knowledge? How do we gain access to our own knowledge, let alone the knowledge of others? And do we have any access to knowledge anyway, or is what we call "knowledge" our best guess to explain observable behavior?

More to the methodological point, how does one step outside of his or her taken-for-granted knowledge, what the philosopher Alfred Schutz calls "the natural attitude"? Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann tackle this question near the end of their classic work, *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966). If, as the sociologists of knowledge claim, all of our knowledge is constructed through our interactions with other people and we have no other access to "reality," then how do we live and act in an everyday world knowing that our knowledge is so over-determined? Where is the space to step to in order to look back at our everyday, socially constructed reality when all spaces are socially determined?

William James and Peter L. Berger would say that the first step is an act of will, the moral will to believe. But there are a few more solutions. What we should be looking for are strategies or acts that will break the natural attitude and make space for reflexive understanding, *and* we should figure out what these strategies mean for our folklore pedagogy. I can name three to begin our discussion.

First, reflexive culture studies resembles **individual therapy**, where the goal is self-understanding. Robert Merideth argued this most elaborately for American Studies, even recommending that the American Studies scholar should undergo therapy as a necessary step toward engaging in reflexive culture studies, much as some anthropologists of the 1930s thought that entering psychoanalytic therapy was a precursor to entering the field to study others. From Freud on, the therapeutic principle is that if we can make conscious the unconscious patterns of thought that control our actions, then the power of the unconscious diminishes, making way for more autonomous living and understanding. In the teaching setting (perhaps best one-on-one), we can do what a therapist does in the talking cure" —namely, we can let the students talk in the natural attitude about some phenomenon familiar to them and then examine closely the words, metaphors, and images in that talk. Dreams have lots of cultural content. John Caughey (University of Maryland, College Park) has found it very

useful in his American Studies teaching to have students keep diaries of their daydreams. And, for what it's worth, many of us have had our best ideas come to us in the twilight between sleep and awake.

Second, **ecstasy** can provide a means for stepping outside of one's everyday, taken-for-granted, natural attitude toward reality. The word "ecstasy' comes from the Greek, *ek stasis*, "to be or stand outside oneself." In *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) William James explores religious ecstasy, which can be induced by drugs, by dance, by song, by fasting, by prayer or meditation, by inflicting masochistic pain, and so on. Dream states—both sleeping dreams and daydreams—also provide ecstatic experiences. Music and dance seem the most legal and morally safe ways to induce ecstasy in teaching settings, but how would we do this?

Third, since I think that the cognitive problem is a Batesonian one of moving comfortably between levels of logical types, one solution to the epistemological problem is to engage in the sorts of **play** that enhances easy passage between Logical Types, play that makes us comfortable with the paradoxes of everyday life. The subjunctive, "what if?" mood of play helps us break the everyday frame. Play often is ecstatic, as we enter the state of flow. At one meeting of The Association for the Study of Play NYU Performance Studies genius Richard Schechner led us through an elaborate game of "statues," which somehow combined therapy, ecstasy, and play. Having students do documentary (video or still) photography of a familiar fieldwork site might make them see things differently as they, literally, see the scenes "through the frame." At another TASP meeting Victor Turner recounted one anthropology student's writing a play for the department enacting her research on Appalachian weddings. And I remind you of *The Laramie Project,* the play (2000) and film (2002) based upon ethnographic fieldwork with the community in the wake of the Matthew Shepard murder.

Finally, I feel obliged to say something about **the ethics of relativizing**. Relativizing a student's taken-for-granted reality, cutting away whatever certainty the student might have in knowing that some things are true and good and right, is an assault on the person and can do real damage. Our proper intellectual mission is to do this—for or to ourselves, first, and then for or to others—but I believe that it is immoral to relativize someone's taken-for-granted reality without giving the person an alternative, a way to think and live and act in the world. Berger and Luckmann (1966) offer "cool alternation" as a solution, a way of being in the world that never invests too much in any one social role. That may be unsatisfactory for some, but there are other solutions. I like the fact that Peter L. Berger paired *The Sacred Canopy* (1967), his treatise on the sociology of religion, with his *A Rumor of Angels* (1969); he wrote the first as a sociologist of knowledge, relativizing all religion, and he wrote the second as a Christian, showing how one might "relativize the relativizers." We owe our students a way out of Weber's "iron cage." Literature often does this. Perhaps we should teach a novel in every folklore course. As the folk saying goes, "it couldn't hurt."

Lay and Expert Knowledge in the Community College
Sean Galvin
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This presentation will discuss the profile and skill level of the typical incoming student at LaGuardia Community College. Working from extensive discussions within the working group of the AFS "Big Questions and the Disciplines" Teagle Foundation grant, of which I am a member; I will briefly outline the module I will teach in the Spring 2011 semester. I pose the question of how the community college experience will inform the scope and magnitude both of the proposed fieldwork project and the extent to which the lay/expert continuum can realistically be explored.

LaGuardia Community College (LaGCC) was established in 1970 as the newest open admissions college of the nineteen-campus City University of New York (CUNY). Located in a federally designated poverty area, Long Island City, the area has a per capita family income and educational attainment level that are among the lowest in the entire city. For example, 59% of students living at home and 77% of students living away from home have a family income under $25,000. As a result, only 57% of students are enrolled full-time (*Profile*, 6).

LaGCC has an estimated 17,000 full-time and 80,000 part-time and non-credit students, representing 165 countries and speaking 126 languages. LaGuardia students tend to be older students, with 51% of the student body over 23 years old and with females outnumbering males 59% to 41% (*Profile*, viii-ix). CUNY uses the ACT Compass test in math, reading and writing for placement of incoming students. Should a student fail any one of these three subtests s/he is ineligible for admission to the 4-year CUNY colleges. In Spring 2009, approximately 60% of incoming students failed the math assessment and 40% failed the reading and/or writing ACT (*Profile*, 6). As a consequence, LaGuardia students are necessarily enrolled longer than the two years we think of as tenure for a community college. In fact, over the last five years, the average graduation rate is 7.7 semesters, or just over four years. But students take an average one and a half semesters off during their time at the College, resulting in a corrected average of 6.4 semesters (*Profile*, 34). According to Gail O. Mellow, President of LaGuardia Community College, 47% of all US students begin their college experience at a community college, and the national graduation rate from these colleges is well over five years (Mellow and Heelan, 2008).

There are no folklore classes offered at LaGuardia College. There are, however, at least seven Anthropology courses regularly offered. All LaGCC students must take an Urban Studies class to graduate, of which Urban Anthropology (SSN 182) is one. This class focuses primarily on aspects of urban life that help students understand the dynamics of cities and how to systematically explore the resources of New York City in order to reinforce and expand upon the course concepts. "Students are required to participate in at least two field trips or hands-on, out-of-classroom research projects; are scheduled in a mode that promotes using the city as a learning laboratory and that permits follow-through of conceptual material taught in the classroom; and, are designated as Writing Intensive courses and as e-Portfolio courses" (*2010-2011 LaGCC Catalog*, 178).

The borough of Queens, in New York City, will provide an excellent urban environment to challenge SSN 182 anthropology students. As a requirement for graduation students will hopefully come to the class with motivation. As a writing-intensive class students will have to submit weekly journal entries for their semester-long research paper. Information literacy skills are one of President Mellow's goals for students. Library and research using primary documents (the LaGuardia [Fiorello] &

Wagner [Robert F.] Archives are housed on the LaGuardia campus) will be encouraged. Students will learn elementary field recording techniques with digital audio and video recorders. They will also learn the ethics of collecting and preserving ethnographic materials. The broad goals are: to understand the multiple occupational, family, and community identities that their interviewees represent as they span the range of expert and lay knowledge. I will work with them to identify lay experts in their communities and to demonstrate how the lay-expert continuum is developed in a micro setting. In addition to learning the basics of fieldwork methodology and ethnographic writing, students will also be asked to reflect on their experiences at several points during the semester so that together we might gauge their understanding of the lay expert discussion.

Sources

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Teaching to Live with Moving Horizons of Knowledge: Folklore Studies and New Social Problems

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I am honored to be a participant in the the American Folklore Society's Teagle Foundation supported "Big Questions and the Disciplines" project. Aimed at strengthening undergraduate education, this two year project is focused on the question: "What is the relationship between lay and expert knowledge in a complex society?" As reflected at this year's meeting in Nashville, this framing captures much of the special expertise that our field has cultivated throughout its history while also orienting our work towards the special circumstances that characterize our global present. My fellow project participants are bringing a really rich set of experiences and a wide breadth of knowledge to our discussions. At the same time, the challenge before us is a large and daunting one. The rapidity with which higher education is changing and the uncertainties--economic, political, technological, social--of the present moment make considering the future of undergraduate education in our field and within our diverse institutions both necessary and daunting. The task is alternatively (sometimes concurrently) deeply exciting and profoundly disorienting.

That same confusing feeling characterizes the piece of the larger whole that I am working on. While aiming to advance a crosscutting conversation within our group and within the field as a whole, we are also developing specific courses and portable course modules that seek to address the needs of the present and the near future. The course that I am developing, and that I will teach for the first time in the spring 2012, is tentatively called Folklore and the New Social Problems: Expressive and Communal Responses. Within the context of the project's focus on "the relationship between lay and expert knowledge in a complex society" my efforts are directed to what Dorothy Noyes has characterized as "teaching to live with moving horizons of knowledge." This seems like a core challenge for higher education in general and for folklore studies in particular.

In its first outing, the envisioned course will be a sophomore-level class for in the Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology at Indiana University Bloomington. While open to majors, the course is aimed at general education students from across the campus. As it stands right now, here is how I am describing the class:

This course considers human responses--including aesthetic, expressive, customary, and communal responses--to a range of recently emergent and highly contested human social problems. Working together to map uncharted territory, we will draw upon the methods, theories, and empirical findings of the international field of folklore studies while cultivating skills in media literacy and critical thinking. As a course in folklore studies, we will specifically investigate the relationship of lay and expert knowledge within the fraught, complex, and large-scale phenomena and dilemmas that are its empirical focus. Among these course topics are: globalization and trade policy, financial engineering, the digital divide, intellectual property, the industrial food system, the trade in living human tissues and organs, biodiversity, geoengineering, climate change, cultural and linguistic diversity, farmer's rights, corporate and media concentration, genetic engineering/synthetic biology, nanotechnology, and bioprospecting/biopiracy. Because these issues transcend the historic disciplines, the course will turn to the insights developed in a range of fields but the intellectual center of gravity will be the enduring concerns of folklore studies, as expressed in such core concepts as art, performance, identity, community, vernacular knowledge, context, expressive life,

worldview, and heritage. While they will not be the focus of this course, we will acknowledge the enduring significance--in and beyond folklore studies--of what might be characterized as the old social problems. These would include such issues as slavery, terrorism, disease, colonialism, war, poverty, hunger, corruption, and racism.

There is little doubt that the students and I will be biting off more than we can chew. My hope is that we will be able to gain some basic familiarity with these issues while demonstrating to ourselves and to others (through public events that the class will host) that grappling with these issues is work with important folkloristic dimensions. Because the issues are pressing, dynamic, and highly contested, my aim is to emphasize core principles of our field and basic information literacy skills--including research, evaluation and analysis--that most of us would see as essential to responsible citizenship.

I have been drifting towards a concern with these issues for a number of years, primarily through my work with graduate students on intellectual and cultural property questions of relevance to folklorists. If there was an catalyst moment, it came in seeking to teach a unit on globalization in my undergraduate introduction to folklife course. The most useful resource that I have found to help me with this is the film *Another World is Possible: Impressions of the World Social Forum*. Directed by Mark Dworkin and Melissa Young and Produced by Moving Images, this 24 minute documentary is distributed by Bullfrog Films. It is an account of the 2002 World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil. The filmmakers created an icon of the alternative globalization event that they were documenting. Panel discussions and organized small group discussion focused on serious environmental and social problems alternate--in both the film and the even--with parades, performances, and protests. Many of the issues that I hope to focus upon in my course are there being discussed and puzzled through by a representative global sample of the diversity of communities--small scale farmers, indigenous people, students, community organizers--in whom folklorists have historically taken a special interest. At the same time, World Social Forum participants are shown using traditional art forms to make sense of complicated problems and to advocate for projects of social justice. In my conventional folklore studies course, the film has been a useful part of the concluding section. My hope is that in the new course, it and similar inspirations can provide a starting point and some of the leads that we will be systematically researching together.

I hope that there are others in the folklore community who have begun thinking about how to teach our field on the frontier of these new social (and political, economic, environmental, technological etc.) problems. I would very much welcome your suggestions and counsel. The goal of my effort and of the Teagle Project as a whole is to develop exercises, syllabi, reading lists, assignments, grading rubrics, teaching suggestions, and other materials that can be shared widely and modified by the community. I will be making my syllabi and other materials available online with Creative Commons licensing with the hope that they can be adapted and used by others.

Associated Links

Information on *Another World is Possible* at Bullfrog Films:
http://www.bullfrogfilms.com/catalog/awip.html

Trailer for *Another World is Possible* on YouTube:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dFLCQ1Cpbj8

Confronting Alternative Realities

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At Kenyon College, I've come to understand the Teagle initiative as involving not simply the relationship between lay and expert knowledge, but also the challenge of engaging alternative reality constructions. Kenyon is a small, undergraduate, residential liberal arts institution located in central Ohio. Our students are drawn largely from major metropolitan areas across America and a wide range of foreign countries. For most, the character and culture of surrounding rural Knox County constitute an unfamiliar and alien environment.

As director of Kenyon's Rural Life Center, I support educational, scholarly, and public projects designed to advance Kenyon's educational mission and address the needs and interests of the community. Viewed through this lens, expanding the dialogue between professional and lay knowledge represents an ongoing exercise in college-community engagement with both intellectual and practical dimensions.

I've initiated two particular projects in keeping with the Teagle initiative. *Meet Knox County* invites members of the sophomore class to join Kenyon administrators and faculty on three field trips to lay experts in the surrounding community. We've already visited a third-generation dairy farmer and an old-order Amish chair maker. In a few weeks we'll see the natural landscape through the eyes of a veteran trapper. In the spring I'll launch *Visits*, a series of three public campus conversations featuring lay experts exploring aspects of the local community. Simply put, *Meet Knox County* brings carriers of professional knowledge into the lay world, while *Visits* brings lay experts into the world of academic knowledge.

I asked students interested in *Meet Knox County* to submit a brief statement explaining why they wanted to participate. Their responses suggest both the opportunities and challenges inherent in this experience. Here are a few examples:

> As a Kenyon student, I interact with the natives of Knox County nearly everyday, but often feel somewhat removed from their way of life. It is easy to get caught up in schoolwork and studying and then overlook those that live so nearby. The Meet Knox County program would allow me to better understand these people's perspective on daily life.

> Living in New York City has completely shaped me, but immersion in rural life was one of the things that initially drew me to Kenyon … and it ended up becoming one of my main criteria for [selecting] a college. At Kenyon I feel a connection to the natural world more powerful than I ever thought was possible. Still, I feel removed from Knox County because I am so immersed in my own life at Kenyon. I think it would be immensely important for me to see outside of myself, and to seek to understand what everyday life is like for residents of Knox County who I share the region with, but still feel a profound distance from.

> When I first … began thinking about the program, I was more than embarrassed by how little I know about Knox County, OH. It takes me a while to become acclimated to a place or new situation, and in this case, it took a year -- a year of

meeting people, doing homework, and then doing more homework … I want to know something more about the place I am starting to call home. The trips and experiences [you] described … make me both incredibly nervous and incredibly excited. New situations scare me (as they do pretty much everyone else, I'm guessing) because of the risks they entail. And I'm not sure if this sounds crazy, but … applying for this program feels like a risk, however small. But I do want to be able to learn something about the people who are living around me -- people who make up the same community as me. I've spent a year in that oft-mentioned Kenyon bubble, and I'm so excited to get out and see what world exists around it.

I want to share a story involving our visit to Amish chair maker John Miller. My students were very impressed with his shop, particularly with the ingenuity of his system of shafts and pullies with a diesel generator to power his equipment without the use of electricity. They learned a great deal about John's many woodworking skills, and how his unique design owed much to the local chair making tradition of the local community in which he was born. They were struck by the economic challenges facing local craftsmen and by the interplay of technical knowledge and spiritual commitment evident in his work. Over the course of our visit, we began to enter an Amish world.

Following an extended tour of John's shop, we sat down together in some of his rocking chairs. John asked the students what *they* were studying in college; were they learning a trade? I briefly described the character of a liberal arts education and then suggested that the students might tell John their major fields of study. The first student said "math." "What's that?" John asked. Somewhat taken aback, the student eventually replied that it had to do with numbers and arithmetic." The second student said "international studies." "What's that?" asked John. "Biology." "What's that?" "Anthropology." What's that?

John's questions were certainly not meant as a critique of academic study. But in the context of his shop, lit only by daylight on a cloudy morning, the simple statement— "What is that?"—called professional knowledge into question. In trying to explain their academic pursuits in (literally) layman's terms, the students were simultaneously asking themselves about the studies whose validity and value they had heretofore taken for granted. Later, as we returned to the stately historic buildings on college hill, the students suddenly fell silent, realizing that they had experienced themselves and *their* world as the "other."

There is a postscript to this story. At lunch together following our visit to John's shop, several students expressed interest in owning one of his rockers; and they hoped they could entice their parents to buy them during the upcoming Parents Weekend. We convinced the college bookstore to feature a few of the rockers, and the students composed a marketing biography of John's operation based on their field visit. In this small way we created a bridge between lay and professional knowledge with practical benefit to the community.

Our experience thus far suggests a number of lessons regarding the process of engaging lay and expert knowledge. An initial step involves recognizing the very difference between the two; at Kenyon, students experience this as confronting different worlds. We must appreciate that this exercise is not simply intellectual; it carries significant social and psychological valence for all participants. Engaging lay and expert knowledge generates a significant moment of destabilization in students' own knowledge systems. If the process is successful, it can contribute to an integration and expansion of knowledge with positive ends for both our students and the community.

Knowledge Gaps, Lay Experts and Feedback Loops
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I. Knowledge Gaps

The first issue I'd like to address concerns the knowledge gaps my colleagues and I encounter as instructors at Cal State University – Northridge, a regional comprehensive university located in the San Fernando Valley, about 15 miles north of Los Angeles. Located in one of the most culturally diverse areas in the United States, CSUN is a federally-recognized minority-serving institution, in that the majority of its 35,000 students come from minority backgrounds. A plurality are Latino/a, but a significant percentage are Asian- and African American, and many classified as "white" have non-mainstream ethnic backgrounds, such as Persian, Armenian, and Russian. This makes teaching folklore at CSUN an especially exciting project, because we truly do have a slice of the world in each classroom.

There are challenges as well. As one of the Cal States, CSUN accepts students in the top third of their high school classes, but is not as selective as the University of California system. Because of the cuts suffered by public high schools in the years since the passage of Proposition 13 (which stopped all increases in property taxes earmarked for educational support), most of our students arrive at CSUN needing remediation in basic English and Math skills. Many are the first in their families to attend college, and therefore lack important cultural capital that would increase their odds of success. The majority work full-or part-time while attending college, and a significant percentage also have family responsibilities. School is definitely not their first priority. Specific knowledge gaps:

- Little background in grammar, writing, critical reading and thinking skills, especially now among the first of the "No Child Left Behind" generation
- Little information competence. Tendency to see all information as equally valid, reflecting somebody's opinion, with no way to sort valid from invalid knowledge.
- Surprisingly little knowledge about the world beyond their own experience – e.g. lack of "religious literacy" (cf. Primiano) even regarding their own traditions.

II. Lay Experts and Feedback Loops

My research has addressed the relationship between lay and expert knowledge on a number of different levels. On the most basic level, any work of ethnography involves a complex interaction between lay and expert knowledge-producers. An "expert" with academic credentials obtains knowledge from lay tradition-bearers, then analyzes it from a disciplinary perspective and interprets it for both academic and lay audiences. The publication of my ethnographic work on festivals in Sardinia elicited such strong reactions in my field community that it forced me to confront these processes head-on, and led to my current interest in the interplay between academic and lay knowledge production.

These issues were foregrounded in my work on modern Paganism, a new religious movement that revives, re-creates and experiments with pre-Christian forms of worship. Many modern Pagans are extraordinarily well-read, being "lay experts" in folklore, esoterism, ancient history and archeology. Yet their knowledge often comes from sources that represent surpassed and now rejected forms of academic knowledge.

In *Witching Culture: Folklore and Neo-Paganism in America* (2004), I showed how 19th and early 20th century anthropological and folkloristic scholarship influenced the development of this new religious movement. I further explored the feedback loop between academic and lay knowledge production in my 2007 film trilogy "Oss Tales," in which I examined the influence of folklorist Alan Lomax's 1953 film "Oss Oss, Wee Oss" on the Cornish community where it was made, and on an American Neo-Pagan group which decided to re-enact the May Day custom exactly because Lomax's film had portrayed it as ancient and pagan.

Finally, because modern Pagans are themselves avid producers and consumers of expert knowledge who write reflectively about their own traditions, I have collaborated with them closely, co-presenting at conferences and co-authoring publications with them. In 2011, I will be presenting a workshop for Cherry Hill Seminary, a Pagan divinity school, on the ethics of using and appropriating folklore in ritual. I should add that as a member of this group and a priestess in a coven, I myself regularly make use of folklore in the creation of rituals.

My position as both an outsider and an insider in the group has helped me to investigate how this movement both embraces aspects of expert knowledge production, and resists others by creating an oppositional identity. To wit, my most recent work considers how some Pagan groups in Europe are using the discourse of indigenousness to demand the reburial of prehistoric human remains in museums and archeological curation facilities. Each of these different angles exemplifies a part of the multifaceted process of interaction between lay and expert knowledge in complex societies.

Fostering Critical Engagement through Experiential Learning
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The contexts in which folklorists teach today present both challenges and opportunities with regard to integrating and problematizing "lay" and "expert" knowledge. The orientations and skills students bring to the classroom—and those they do not—suggest some ways we might engage and learn from them, even as we advance our own pedagogical and institutional goals. I speak specifically from the perspective of an adjunct faculty member at a large Midwestern state research university with a fairly homogeneous undergraduate population of "millennial" students, but perhaps my reflections will be useful to those teaching in other contexts as well.

A recent edition of a newsletter sponsored by the Stanford Center for Teaching and Learning (*Tomorrow's Professor,* edited by Rick Reis and available at http://ctl.stanford.edu) summarized the expectations and attitudes of "millennials"—that is, young adults born to late baby boomers in North America between 1982 and 1995. Linda Nelson, author of *Teaching at Its Best: A Research-Based Resource for College Instructors* (Jossey-Bass 2010), writes that this generation—kept busy with extra-curricular activities and mass-media engagements—tends to be "self-confident, extremely social, technologically sophisticated, action bent, goal oriented, service or civic minded, and accustomed to functioning as part of a team," but also "impatient, demanding, stressed out, [and] sheltered." Skeptical but not rebellious, less well academically prepared, fairly attached to their hovering "helicopter parents," constantly multitasking and so not partial to sustained reflection, this generation largely views a college degree as a commodity to be purchased rather than earned. Furthermore, millennial students are concerned about not being able to recreate the financial status and stability many grew up with or have seen portrayed in the media, and they may not respect the relatively modest financial or social positions and motivations of instructors in the humanities. The rigorous expectations, intellectual abstractions, and de-centering strategies that professors often take for granted as part of the educational process may engender resentment, anxiety, or disengagement on the part of these students. Further, students may expect displays of "expert" status by their professors, in part so these knowledge consumers feel like they're getting their money's worth.

How, then, to engage these students and play to their strengths while also encouraging intellectual stretching and thoughtful reflection—especially in institutional environments that increasingly adopt a consumer model of education that aligns with student expectations?

As a recent PhD and contingent faculty member at Indiana University, I am especially motivated to design courses that will "fill seats" and thus bolster my tenuous link to gainful employment. Building on recent enthusiasm for a Do-it-yourself ethic, last semester I offered "By Hand: The Art and Politics of Craft"—a course joint-listed in both American Studies and Folklore. The goal was to explore how and why people have championed or denigrated the handmade. This 200-level course deconstructed the Art/Craft binary, in the process asking students to think more carefully about distinctions drawn between high/low, professional/amateur, and expert/lay; more generally, I also worked to help students rethink definitions and valuations of "skill." A core component of the course was a hands-on project—an experiential exercise in DIY—in which students had to learn a new skill and document their own processes. Student projects included metalsmithing, beadmaking, gardening, cooking, and silkscreening. One student drew and then embroidered portraits of Bob Dylan and Barack Obama; another built a solar-powered charger for his iPhone. Each week, students documented the what, "so what,"

and "now what?" of their projects using individual blogs linked through a class website; they were also expected to read and comment on the postings of their peers.

The 26 students in this class included equal numbers of freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors; they were pursuing majors that included psychology, finance, geography, public administration, apparel merchandising, anthropology, folklore, history, criminal justice, journalism, pre-nursing, communication & culture, recording arts, and continuing studies. Thus, they brought with them divergent and invigorating talents, interests, motivations, and stances on art vs. craft. In addition, given their experience with social networking, they were used to checking in with their peers and making public their own lives (sometimes on a minute-by-minute basis).

What they did NOT bring to this class experience was also instructive. Time, for instance, was in short supply—classes, work, family, and existing social obligations meant that it was difficult for some students to devote time to the By Hand project. Though experiential learning aims to draw on and develop student expertise through hands-on work, this process-oriented strategy does require continuous and sustained activity. More importantly, however, I found that students struggled to address the "so what" component of this assignment. I asked them to reflect on their projects and processes in light of the readings and lectures for the week, but I found myself having to develop much more focused and regular writing prompts than I had expected to provide. Students, it seemed, were used to sharing their opinions or feelings, but were much less used to evaluating theory in terms of practice. That is, they did not approach their own experience as a resource that could be used to critique and explore assertions by published academic experts. When I teach this course again, I intend to model the process more explicitly by completing the project alongside them. Hopefully, as I ask my own "so what" questions, students will see me as a learner but also as a different kind of expert, one who evaluates academic theory by seeing how it plays out in terms of my own embodied practice.

Despite their initial struggles, however, the impact of first-hand experience and joint engagement on critical thinking was reinforced during student presentations during the last several days of class. Each student gave a two-part presentation: a short summary of what they'd argued in their research papers (which were unrelated investigations of wide-ranging topics), and then a show-and-tell portion in which they displayed their final By Hand objects and talked about what they'd learned from the project. Without fail, the energy in the room picked up significantly when students started talking about what they'd made. Furthermore, during Q&A audience members rarely expressed interest in the research papers, but asked thoughtful, insightful, and pointed questions about the By Hand projects. Having participated in similar processes themselves, and having already considered a number of connections and critiques, they appeared much more comfortable evaluating the conclusions (and the material creations) of their fellow students. I believe that experiences with and demonstrations of personal (critical) competence in these more intimate realms are crucial to the development of citizens prepared to engage thoughtfully with ideas in other arenas.

Documenting Community Knowledges in Houston
Carl Lindahl
University of Houston

Houston harbors an enormous surplus of lay expertise centered on local knowledge, self-knowledge. As one of two public research universities (and by far the larger*) in a metropolitan area of 5 and one half million, the University of Houston [UH], where I teach, is the ideal site for identifying, honoring, and channeling such knowledge. UH has the second-most diverse student population of any American research university. My fall 2010 senior-level folklore class, as an example, comprises native speakers of Spanish, Vietnamese, Arabic, Urdu, Mandarin, Tagalog, and Yoruba in addition to English.

Houston is just beginning to reflect upon its identity. None of its nicknames—Bayou City, Oil City, Space City, Energy City—has stuck, and I have often described it as the place with the shortest memory of any metropolis that I know. There are hundreds of contiguous pockets of deep memory and deep knowledge that seldom intersect and that are persistently excluded from the city's construction of civic self. It is thus not surprising to find that the various cultural communities represented in my folklore classes share several identity issues: they all want to be recognized, validated, accepted, and understood. They look hopefully toward the University of Houston as an agent for reaching these goals. Community leaders come forward to bestow honors and incentives at our university, but seldom make the needed connections.

Both of the courses that my colleague Bruce Martin and I are developing together to fulfill the charge of the Teagle Foundation Grant capitalize on this variety and wealth of local self-knowledge in order to penetrate the broader context of mutual unknowing and effect a number of specific goals.

The students that these various neighborhoods send to the University of Houston are seldom leading experts in their communities, but nearly all possess levels of lay expertise that can put them in the role of teacher for their fellow students and for their teachers as well. The basic trajectory is to deepen cultural self-knowledge in the act of acquiring communications skills to enhance cross-cultural knowledge. Using the principle at least as old as *Foxfire*—that traditional knowledge makes expert knowledge, that one learns quickest and best when building upon what one already knows—my senior-level course, Documenting Community Culture begins with the premise that each student is the world's leading expert in her or his personal community culture and is thus the perfect person to document that community on its own terms and then to introduce it to others. (For our purposes, a community may be a family, a language community, congregation, neighborhood, or a close collection of friends strongly committed to a shared pastime: skateboarders, softball teams, etc.)

The concrete goal of this course is not only to conduct and archive interviews with community experts, but to publish the documentation as well, on a web extension of the Houston Folklore Archive. Publication builds upon a second level of students' lay expertise, as most of them are far more proficient at web technology and web construction than is this teacher. A third principle at work: students who writing for public presentation tend to take more care with their writing, which improves as a result. A fourth learning incentive is the nature of the site itself. Before April 1, 2010, folklore had no official presence in Houston's civic culture, but now, since Pat Jasper has become the director of the Houston Arts Alliance's Folklife and Traditional Arts program, my course has formed a partnership with that program that allows students to serve as interns in producing public programs that build upon those interviews. The course possesses potential to become a boon to the city, whose traditional culture has been very poorly documented to date. Each student, then, has the capacity of joining a group of "lay experts" who introduce elements of their communities to others: not just fellow students, but to members of a huge metropolitan population. The course, then, also fills a significant public need among the diverse cultural communities of Houston—African, Latino, Middle Eastern, South Asian, and East

Asian, among others—that are now looking for a place at the table of the city's civic discourse. The students engaged in documenting community culture serve as messengers conveying knowledge of their communities to an enormous audience yet to meet them. Validation will ideally come to the students from two directions: the wider community educated by the students' work as well as the home community, proud of such representation by one of their own.

   The second course, Houston Communities, taught by my colleague, Bruce Martin, is similar to the course I teach, but more difficult, because it is a first-year writing course that carries a heavy burden of teaching specific writing skills to individuals who have few. Bruce's students are not only beginning ethnographers but beginning writers as well. His course very specifically addresses the knowledge gap in writing proficiency. Bruce's class is, if anything, more diverse than mine, and it is also more closely focused on the specific knowledge that he aims to instill in his students. In his research, Bruce is particularly interested in retention: he is looking to engage those groups (for example, Latino males, on whom he plans to center his Ph.D. research) with the largest dropout rates, through strategies parallel to those I am employing: valorizing their pre-existing lay expertise in their home communities, drawing upon their tech skills, and holding up the promise of a web publication that will not merely fulfill a course requirement, but will also bestow validation from both the home community and the region at large.

[* The University of Houston enrolls more than 61,000 students on multiple campus, including 37,000 at the campus where I teach; historically Black Texas Southern University, the other public research university in the Houston metropolitan area, enrolls 11,635]

The knowledge gap as it relates to the concept of expert and lay knowledge
Tom Mould
Elon University

Problem
o These two dichotomies are often glossed for one another. Students come in with great confusion about the difference between a scholarly and non-scholarly source. What they learn often muddies the waters even more if they assume that scholarly equals expert and non-scholarly equals lay.

   o **Scholarly:** The distinguishing characteristics are based on purpose, audience, author, publisher, appearance, publication acceptance, language, article length, article organization and references. Process is not even mentioned except as peer review. Nothing about how that information is generated. What is clear is just how much we favor our own:
      ▪ Peer reviewed
      ▪ Published in academic journal
      ▪ Represents research and new discovery rather than reporting

   o **Non-Scholarly sources**: on the other hand are typically from people without formal academic training geared toward a general audience.
      ▪ Reporter, journalist
      ▪ Websites that have not been peer reviewed
      ▪ Knowledge that has been constructed by people without advanced degrees.

   o **Expert Knowledge in these contexts is defined as academic knowledge,** knowledge constructed *by* academics, *for* academics. We reify the idea that we are experts and experts are us. Occasionally we'll admit that there are government officials who may be experts on some matters, religious leaders on others, but the refrain is that experts are created through the process of higher education.

   o **Lay knowledge in the vernacular** has some positive connotations, linked as it is with common sense, wisdom, and an understanding earned after years of experience. But framed in the context of scholarly and non-scholarly sources, students learn to be skeptical of lay knowledge.

o The result is that when its time to construct an argument, students are taught to eschew all but academic voices. As folklorists, this is particularly troubling.

Solutions
o **Analysis Vs. Data**: We need to point out the difference between analysis and data. The bulk of the work conducted by social scientists, for example, and folklorists whether in the humanities or social sciences, depends on data from lay people. In fact, much of the information from social sciences depends on lay knowledge that has been interpreted and analyzed by an academic. So, first we can show students how lay knowledge undergirds academic knowledge.

- **Lay Experts:** But we also need to get students to think about the idea of vernacular theories and theorists: people within their communities analyzing their own traditions. Here are people who are experts outside of academia. We might call them lay experts (a term that rightly synthesizes the divide that is useful heuristically but not practically).

Knowledge Gap #2: Over valuing of personal opinion; everyone as the layperson

Problems
- Ironically, the knowledge gap for students exists at the other pole as well.
- As teachers, we recognize the power of having students reflect on their own lives, groups and traditions as positions of power and knowledge. Starting with the personal, we are able to move students to consider themselves as the folk and make a personal connection to their learning, and then use that understanding as a means for exploring the traditions of other people, other groups.
- However, whether students miss the second half of that lesson or if they do not move through this process at all, students may participate in discussions believing that their opinion is equal with views developed among groups of people in our fieldwork. Personal anecdotes and experiences are shared as evidence on any given topic without critical analysis. Cultural relativism is reinterpreted as individual relativism. Lay expert knowledge risks being devalued in a culture that ignores the social construction of knowledge within communities. This problem may be exacerbated by the growing Facebook culture where extensive personal sharing is both increasingly common.
- This view and approach to discourse is reinforced in many mass media forms today. They see pundits on TV in formats that mirror news programming and grant victory to the person who outshouted another.

Solutions
- **Methodology**: We need to work with students to think carefully about methodology, either humanistic (that delves deep to understand the individual construction of belief and perception) or social scientific (that surveys more broadly so the anecdote of one isn't interpreted as the sentiment of all). This should help students critically examine their own experiences as well as caution them about generalizing from insufficient fieldwork. We must guide students in addressing the issue of the heterogeneity of lay knowledge even within a coherent, bounded community.

- **Epistemology:** In particular, we should focus on epistemology. The focus on process and performance that many folklorists employ today suggests a way to understand and evaluate the process of knowledge construction and dissemination. We need to discuss those processes within a community that people use to identify and create local experts, and how lay knowledge can operate as expert knowledge within its specific contexts.

What can student vets teach the teachers? An observer's perspective
Dorothy Noyes
The Ohio State University

Ohio State has more than 1100 students recently returned from Iraq or Afghanistan. After teaching some of them and hearing them talk about their discomforts in the classroom, folklorist Susan Hanson designed a pilot Veterans Learning Community, providing a sequence of two courses in which students could read about the experience of war in literature, film, and folklore, and then explore their own military experience in ethnographic writing. At their request and because often vets don't discuss the experience even with their families, we made this courses vets-only, so that they would feel free to speak, away from officers, civilians or "the kids," as they call traditional students, and family members. In this way the course could rely on the common experience of which Danille spoke earlier.

The experiment was challenging and quite controversial--Susan will talk about all of this in more detail next year. A primary tension with our sponsors and the university community was whether the project was academic--as we insisted--, therapeutic--as most assumed-- or celebratory--as some feared. At last spring's symposium of student research it struck me that the payoff from the experiment was not quite what I had expected.

Most students barely mentioned the politics of the conflicts or encounters on the ground with Iraqis or Afghans. They talked vividly about soldiers' emotional metaphors,[1] about the rituals of basic training, about the badly failing rite of passage that is "separation" from the military, about the costuming and self-presentation of Special Forces units among the regular military, about mourning mothers. Their papers were ethnographic, though naturally animated by heavy personal investments, and they analyzed basic discursive and performance mechanisms without, for the most part, drawing back to reflect on their significance for the military's role in society or the nature of conflict. The "so what," as Danille says, was largely absent.

One of our most sympathetic academic sponsors was very disturbed afterwards, feeling that there was no great "knowledge" here that was going to help us understand the war better, and that we were contributing to a general climate of celebrating the military rather than pushing these students to an appropriately academic critical awareness. To be sure, the climate of celebration was evident in some audience response and in the university's support generally. I myself was disturbed in some of the ways that our colleague was disturbed. But there are other conclusions to draw.

As Susan learned from her students, in the current organization of US military engagements the primary environment and existential space of the average soldier is not the international conflict but the military as an institution. As many pointed out, they have sworn an oath, their jobs are technically defined, and critical reflection impedes rather than favors efficiency. Ours not to reason why. Lay knowledge is discouraged. It might be said that for the great majority of young soldiers, who join the military for the sake of a job with benefits and who once in the military must be primarily concerned with their own physical and psychological survival, knowledge is too expensive a luxury;

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[1] Katz, Pearl. "Emotional Metaphors, Socialization, and Roles of Drill Sergeants." *Ethos* 18.4 (1990): 457-480. Susan discovered this article and found it an extremely productive model for students.

it is not adaptive.[2] The Afghans and Iraqis, on the other hand, more desperate but living under anarchy rather than a powerful institution, could not afford to dispense with research and theorizing. There is comparative food for thought about the conditions that foster lay intellectual work.[3]

Second, what Susan achieved pedagogically was the first step towards critical consciousness. (This is Jay's point about the talking cure to break the natural attitude.) By objectifying their lives as something that could be described ethnographically, she enabled them to gain an initial distance from the strong in-group consciousness that makes students feel alienated from civilians. They could now see how the military had worked on them--how mechanisms of social control and ritual intensification created an identity strong enough to create trust within and destroy it without. What we got was not lay knowledge of the war but studies in occupational folklore. This, by the way, is a reminder that the academic approach to knowledge--detachment and systematization-- has its place in a general ecology of knowing. There are implications for the students, however, about the challenge of moving to intellectual critique. They experience the university as another mammoth institution with power over their lives. With all the disruptions and displacements they have lived through, knowledge destabilization is the last thing they want.

Third, and this is the general reflection I'll leave you with. We saw from these students and even more from our conference "Making Sense in Afghanistan," which brought together actors from the full range of political and international perspectives, the value of ethnographic description as a tool of democratic deliberation. (Sabina's project is telling here.) We live today in a country that cannot agree on basic facts, like where the president was born and what his religion is. We cannot agree on basic science. We have trouble with the relationship between text and context: I recently heard an argument that the inclusion of life among the inalienable rights listed in the Declaration of Independence shows that the Founding Fathers were concerned about abortion. (And no doubt observers from a different political perspective could find some blind spots in my own thinking...)

Folklorists deal with facts in the rhetorical sense of the word--phenomena out there in the world to which we can point.. And also in the hard sense of the word: facts resist us when we push at them, or intervene to disrupt our representations. Both lay and academic disputes begin as soon as we start putting names to facts or telling stories about them. But that exercise of telling stories *in company*--the more mixed the better-, debating names and connections,sharing differential observations, coming up with mutually acceptable descriptions, gets us farther than agreeing or disagreeing on abstract values ever will. Both as students of primary representations and producers of secondary representations that will be assessed and revised by both colleagues and community members, folklorists understand the push and pull, the give and take, involved in the collective attempt to say what is happening. This is a professional knowledge that both the public and the academy can use.

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[2] Of course it is different for the career military: the catastrophic failure of U.S. political leadership and expertise in these recent conflicts spurred a huge number of remedial and alternative knowledge projects coming from within the military itself.

[3] Margaret Mills and I organized a conference on this subject at the Mershon Center for International Security Studies of the Ohio State University: "Making Sense in Afghanistan: Interaction and Uncertainty in International Interventions," April 9-10, 2010. http://hdl.handle.net/1811/45701)