

Master of Arts in Cultural Sustainability Capstone:

Immigrant and Refugee Teens as Cultural Leaders

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Introduction

My research focuses on adolescent immigrants and refugees in diverse American communities, and examines potential avenues to strengthen these communities by engaging immigrant teens in cultural programs at Children's Museums. In the following thesis, I explore the historical and social context of immigration in the United States to provide a better understanding of contemporary immigration issues. While comprehensive, this academic research left some of my questions unanswered, so I proceeded to conduct a series of interviews with adolescent immigrants and refugees in the Portland, Maine community. These interviews gave me further insight into the experiences of immigrant teens in a specific community, though many points mentioned are certainly relevant universally. These interviews are followed by a Case Study and Analysis of Culture Scholars, an educational program for immigrant teens at the Children's Museum & Theatre of Maine. This Case Study serves as an excellent example of a program designed to engage immigrant teens in a museum setting. Following the Case Study is a replicable model created for Children's Museums to use in their development of a similar program for immigrant teens. This work has great implications for the field of Cultural Sustainability, and so I have also included the relevance of my study and its practical application for use in the field.

Key components of this work are race, ethnicity, and culture – which can be controversial and sensitive subjects. Transparency is essential in order to maintain integrity and respect when discussing and working with diverse groups of people. Therefore, I disclose that I write as a white, middle-class woman with an advanced

college education. I have the luxury of cultural invisibility, and have for the majority of my life. Growing up with supportive parents in a largely white, affluent community allowed me to choose to see myself as different. I attended a Quaker school where differences were celebrated (though the school was racially homogenous) and mainstream ideas often questioned. It was at the Friends School that I developed an inclination toward inclusion and acceptance of others -- not simply for the sake of inclusion and goodwill, but with the rationale that every individual has something unique to offer. By dismissing another person for fault of social incongruence, that person's potential to greatly enhance one's life is lost. This is one of the greatest threats present in the face of racial, ethnic, and cultural intolerance, and it is from this perspective that I conduct my research. Perhaps it is selfish, but it is honest.

While I aim to maintain awareness of my particular position in the social hierarchy of my work and community, there is always ample opportunity to be reminded of my own ignorance. Perhaps the greatest personal gain in my work with my community is simply to be repeatedly reminded of my own positioning -- and repositioning -- in relation to others around me. My goal is to increase this visibility of self-awareness in both myself and others, and to use it as a tool in public spaces to strengthen connectivity and mitigate social isolationism.

As I work full-time at a Children's Museum, I focus on youth and family-centered programs and their particular role in shaping communities. My scope is specific, with the intention of discovering widely applicable insights. It is my hope that this thesis will provide further understanding and development of strong

relationships between diverse community members, looking to adolescent immigrants specifically as cultural leaders in this essential work.

Section I: Literature Review and Analysis

In order to understand how museums can more effectively engage diverse populations, I conducted academic research on immigration and its effects on communities. I begin with the historical contexts of immigration in the United States and how these have influenced attitudes, perceptions and experiences of contemporary immigrants, as well as concepts of race and ethnicity in American society. I then shift my focus to immigrant youth, including experiences of upheaval, acclimation, translation, and exclusion. The final component of my academic research focuses on community organizations, specifically Children's Museums, and their capacities to engage with diverse groups. I am particularly interested in the role of teenagers and their role as potential cultural leaders within their communities.

The United States has, from its inception, a history of immigration. Presently, the only citizens who do not have immigrant ancestry are fully indigenous peoples belonging to native nations existing within the borders of the US. And yet, there are many different perceptions of "belonging" in this country, based on a variety of factors. While these views seem -- and, indeed, are -- contemporary, they are deeply rooted in hundreds of years of national immigration policy and politic.

America was created with the sense that it was a new type of nation -- deliberately designed to be better than other nations by its founders in the name of

their god. This alone demonstrates an inherent aspiration towards civic idealism; it also points to an extreme sense of self-exaltation and evangelism. In this case, the initial leaders happened to be largely European, White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant men. While there is no intrinsic positive or negative value to these racial and social attributes, the socio-cultural context of history nevertheless assigns tremendous implications. This context and its consequences are thoroughly outlined and analyzed in Peter Schrag's book, "Not Fit for Our Society: Immigration and Nativism in America."

Schrag provides a detailed history of immigration over the course of the last several hundred years, revealing some of the original roots of contemporary attitudes and policy. Particularly noteworthy is a key theme that Schrag points out early: "To be that special creature, an American, there always had to be the other." (Schrag, 26) An essential component, then, to being American was to compare oneself to another; this historically manifested in terms of race and ethnicity. In the beginning, this smallish group of Northern European founders were comfortable in their racial and cultural similarities. But when other Europeans got wind of the great opportunities that existed across the Atlantic, these new "Americans" found themselves inundated with Irish, Italian, and Jewish countrymen (to name a few). Presently, these cultures are generally associated with the dominant paradigm (except, perhaps, for the Jews), but in the early 1800s they were deemed threateningly foreign. And, seeing as a natural human inclination is fear of the unknown, many of the Anglo-Saxons living in America designed as many rules and regulations as possible to restrict immigration of individuals from these "other"

nations. Schrag argues that these initial laws, largely created out of fear and cultural distrust, are the subtext "of the immigration restriction movement and policies to this day." (Schrag, 50)

A bitter irony reveals that this pattern of social judgment -- that is, the rejection of unfamiliar cultures and their incorporation into American society -- exists presently. While pizza, Irish pubs, and even Asian cuisine like sushi have become accepted as normative, the newest and most unfamiliar immigrant culture is often received with as little tolerance as the Italians were years ago. Schrag concludes his book acknowledging the reality of this cycle of intolerance. "All those inassimilable aliens, the inferior races from eastern and southern Europe, were whitened and became Americans and in many cases first certified their Americanness by directing the ethnic prejudices and language of their predecessors at those who came after them." (Schrag, 212). He challenges the reader -- and the nation -- with the responsibility to both understand and learn from the complicated history he describes in detail. However, the logistics of *how* to create social change are not addressed; Schrag supplies only the historical tools with which to arm oneself to take next steps.

Cultivating an awareness of these prejudices and their histories allows us to recognize this cycle of discrimination and forced assimilation. In this awareness, perhaps we can also realize what is lost in the process of assimilation: cultural identities, culinary traditions, a sophistication of linguistic diversity, art and folklife traditions, and perhaps most importantly, multiple perspectives and perceptions of life. Our global social reality is intricately complex, and in order to thrive, we must

be able to approach multifaceted challenges with a variety of lenses. The more we encourage assimilation and homogenize human perception, the more simplistic (and less effective) our problem solving will be.

However, the course of population evolution is presenting significant challenges to maintaining a homogenous racial order. While racial and ethnic prejudice distinctly exists within the scaffolding of American society, there is also growing evidence of social change towards integration. The book, "Creating a New Racial Order: How Immigration, multiracism, genomics and the young can remake race in America" by Jennifer Hochschild, Vesla Weaver, and Traci Burch primarily addresses this issue. The authors draw a largely contemporary framework of American demographics and analyze the effects of factors like racial homogeneity, age, and social context. They lay the premise that "Demographic shifts do not themselves create social or political transformation, but in conjunction with changes in attitudes, behaviors, laws, and policies, demography is a powerful source for change." (Hochschild, Weaver, and Burch, 9) This is demonstrated through a set of statistics revealing a shift in opinions of black and white Americans: young whites are more likely than their older counterparts to believe that blacks should have more power in society, while young blacks are more likely than their older counterparts to believe that society is increasingly egalitarian. This shift can be attributed to many factors, but certainly include the growing racial and ethnic diversity of the US and our necessary adaptation to this diversity.

The fact that young people have a more flexible perception of race than their elders creates the premise that a "new racial order" can be established, given the

right conditions. Young adults challenge the concrete racial and ethnic boundaries of previous generations. "Although not ignoring race, a generation that sees their own and their friends' racial labels as an object of play has moved a long way from one-drop-of-blood rules, blood quanta, or the policing of group authenticity... For many young adults, group membership is more contextual, controllable, idiosyncratic, and normatively relaxed than it has been for their parents." (Hochschild, Weaver, and Burch, 171-175) Race is still very much a pertinent social issue for young Americans, but is seen in shades of gray rather than black and white. While this does not eliminate social friction around race, it does provide increased potential for plasticity around the subject and an opportunity to redefine race; a "new racial order," of sorts.

But what is this "new racial order," exactly? It is clear what it is *not*: our existing white, hegemonic patriarchy that rewards homogeneity over diversity and, consequently, perpetuates cycles of prejudice, disadvantage, and misrepresentation. But, to the authors, it is unclear what the deconstruction of this system could become -- save for an improved, more egalitarian alternative to the present state of American society.

A challenge to the preexisting order could bring an opportunity for self-awareness -- as individuals, as groups, as a larger collective. So much of our daily lives remains invisible to so many; we take for granted the fact that Band-Aids are vaguely the color of white skin, for example. If racial groups are deconstructed -- particularly the white, dominant paradigm -- seemingly trivial details may begin to reveal monumentally important conceptual markers about how our society

assembles itself and what we value (and do not). If we can begin to approach this deconstruction, our resultant awareness will allow us to reassemble the way our society functions into a framework that is more considered, equitable, and consequently more productive, successful, and peaceful. However, as we will see in the following examples, this positive deconstruction and reframing are not easy goals to achieve. Social assimilation and adaptation often take the place of deconstruction.

The pressure to assimilate is one of the most dominant messages communicated to immigrants in the US. "Immigrant Stories: Ethnicity and Academics in Middle Childhood," by Cynthia Garcia Coll and Amy Kerivan Marks explores the effects of assimilation and institutional misunderstanding on immigrant children. They provide anecdotal and statistical documentation of these children, pointing to a correspondence of social understanding to academic and financial success. However, American methods of social engagement are often not the same as those from other cultures and this can create a barrier to immigrant families' success. While Coll and Marks stress the importance of "showing ethnic pride" and the sense of confidence it brings to children, they also underscore the importance of acclimating to the academic and social world of their new communities, becoming "culturally competent and financially secure." (Coll and Marks, 174) While their research is thorough, the authors offer little in terms of the larger social implications of this competency and how it might be valuable to anyone other than the immigrants themselves.

In "Children of Immigration," authors Carola and Marcelo Suarez-Orozco also examine the effects of this pressure to assimilate on immigrant families, particularly children. Their psychological analysis of the process of immigration illuminates what families are mentally and emotionally processing during and after relocation -- something usually neglected in political discourse and policy implementation. Immigration is hugely stressful, and without familiar cultural norms to structure daily life, many children (and their families) are left scrambling to reassemble a new identity that makes sense to them. The reflected image of oneself becomes of utmost importance to forming this new identity, particularly for youth -- who are negotiating their new culture and their family's culture every day when they go to school. The tone of this identity reflection is key in the formation of one's new cultural identity. "When the reflected image is positive, the individual (adult or child) will be able to feel that she is worthwhile and competent. When the reflection is generally negative, it is extremely difficult to maintain an unblemished sense of self-worth." (Suarez-Orozco, 98)

And yet, the most compelling argument in "Children of Immigration" is found in the final portion of the book, exploring where the ideal balance between adaptation and identity retention lies. Here, Suarez-Orozco pick up where Coll and Marks left off. They argue that global diversity and the prevalence of transcultural interaction renders singular acculturation obsolete. Prized instead is codeswitching -- the ability to "operate in multiple cultural codes." Suarez-Orozco elaborate, "There are social, economic, cognitive and aesthetic advantages to being able to transverse cultural spaces. Immigrant children are poised to maximize that unique advantage.

While many view these children's cultural -- including linguistic -- skills as a threat, we see them as precious assets to be cultivated." (Suarez-Orozco, 160) The idea that immigrant youth are poised to be valuable contributors to society runs counter to the common perception that they are, instead, a source of danger or, at the least, a burden. But this perception of danger is a product of the old racial paradigm, and is incongruent with the current contemporary global order. Indeed, the flexibility of youth puts immigrant teens in an ideal situation to act as cultural mediators and begin to reconstruct the collective idea of what is socially -- and racially -- normative. This gives them the potential to become leaders to change the existing structures that reinforce assimilation -- and to act in places where cultural work happens, much like a children's museum.

As the US is a geographically and demographically complex nation, there are many ways this type of cultural identity negotiation can manifest in communities across the country. A good example of one community is described in Elizabeth Chacko's article, "Identity and Assimilation among Young Ethiopian Immigrants in Metropolitan Washington." Focusing specifically on children of first-generation Ethiopian immigrants, Chacko explores the relationship between racial and ethnic identity of her subjects. As mentioned earlier, the US has a particularly rigid perception of race, which is often incongruent with racial perceptions of other cultures. This was clear in the ambiguous responses of Chacko's interviewees when asked about their race. However, similar questions asked about ethnicity provided a definite response, identifying strongly with their native culture in Ethiopia.

However, this does not mean that identity negotiation strictly adhered to all things Ethiopian. To the contrary, "At home, young immigrants' daily lives incorporated elements of both home- and host-country cultures. Conversations took place in both English and native languages; home-cooked meals included dishes from a wide variety of American and ethnic cuisines... In the broader public spaces, Ethiopian culture was not usually expressed overtly, although the lives of the young immigrants were anchored by a keen awareness of being Ethiopian." (Chacko, 500) Again, we are presented with a delicate balance of multiple cultures and the ability to codeswitch. Her subjects were able to participate in the dominant culture of their new community, but remained aware of the cultural norms that shaped their personal identities growing up and within their home. This balance is subtly but consistently demanded of immigrants, particularly immigrant youth, as they participate in their larger community while simultaneously belonging to their family unit. These children develop a unique skill: the ability to create spaces in their life with room for both the cultural heritage of their families and the incorporation of the society they find themselves in. Both values are critical for the sustainable well-being of the individual, though these values often conflict with one another.

Of course, arriving at a feeling of social "belonging" is a complicated task, one with both political and social obstacles. Often the ultimate goal of immigration is to become a citizen -- an officially recognized member of one's new community. This process can be arduous, however, and becoming a citizen does not automatically ensure sociocultural "belonging" as initially expected. Aihwa Ong deconstructs notions of citizenship in the US -- and the implications of race in relationship to

citizenry -- in her article, "Cultural Citizenship as Subject-Making: Immigrants Negotiate Racial and Cultural Boundaries in the United States." Ong begins by exploring the hegemonic nature inherent in the practice of citizenship, which quickly becomes entangled with cultural expectations and accepted norms. A coherence with American "values" is a requirement to achieving citizenship -- an expectation superficially without racial bias, but upon closer scrutiny revealing an entrenchment in whiteness. "Attaining success through self-reliant struggle, while not inherently limited to any cultural group, is a process of self-development that in Western democracies becomes inseparable from the process of 'whitening.' ...Because human capital, self-discipline, and consumer power are associated with whiteness, these attributes are important criteria of nonwhite citizenship in Western democracies." (Ong, 739) In other words, new, non-white citizens must adhere to ways of being that are seen as 'white' by those who are in power. While a subtle -- nearly invisible -- set of cultural expectations, this sets the stage for the rejection of those immigrants who are deemed non-white, or "blackened," based on their non-dominant cultural practices.

Ong explores a range of Asian immigrant cultures -- from Khmer refugees to the Hong Kong money elite -- and their adaptation to American expectations, particularly in the use of the label "Asian-American." She argues that multiple factors influence the oversimplified racialization of these different cultural groups. "Cambodian refugees and Chinese business people did not arrive as ready-made ethnics... [they are] dialectically positioned at different ends of the black-white spectrum. The racialization of class, as well as the differential othering of

immigrants, constitutes immigrants as the racialized embodiments of different kinds of social capital." (Ong, 751) These pan-ethnic labels mask the complexity and specific cultural identity of the individuals represented; moreover, less visible factors like economics can also influence a people's proximity to "whiteness" on the perceived racial spectrum.

It is worth examining more closely additional factors common to immigrant families upon acclimation to their new community. "Children of Immigrant Families: Analysis and Recommendations," by Margie K. Shields and Richard E. Behrman, provides a comprehensive set of data illuminating the strengths, challenges, and variations among immigrant families with young to adolescent children. Shields and Behrman cite the overall strength of immigrant families -- they are often more devoted to caring for each other and "more likely to live with a large extended family that can help provide child care and other household support." (Shields and Behrman, 5) Additionally, since immigrants uproot their families often with the hope of creating a better life, they frequently have a strong work ethic and sense of purpose. Consequently, children of these families "typically are imbued with a strong sense of family obligation and ethnic pride, and with the importance of education." (Shields and Behrman, 6) However, children of immigrants are also typically faced with the challenges of having less-educated parents with lower-paying jobs, language barriers, racism, poverty, and lack of a social support system in their new home. (Shields and Behrman, 7)

Facing these significant obstacles, how can we begin to foster a sense of inclusion among immigrant community members? In "Ritualizing the Routine:

Collective Identity Affirmation," authors Joseph C. Hermanowicz and Harriet P. Morgan argue that rituals can be used to both include and exclude members from a group -- either way, reinforcing a sense of belonging and collective understanding. "For group members, they reward group identification... Rituals also can promote values or behavior among observers. They can be used to claim legitimacy. In all these instances, groups use rituals to define for themselves and their observers what they believe is valuable and right. In doing so, they promote and protect a collective self-image." (Hermanowicz and Morgan, 199) Not only, then, can the act of displaying or sharing rituals facilitate understanding of a group's identity within a larger context, the creation of a community ritual also affirms all participants' sense of belonging. An example of the former could be a public Diwali (Hindu Festival of Lights) celebration in a Children's Museum, led by Hindu volunteers who celebrate the holiday. Museum visitors who are unaware of the holiday and its rituals are now invited to learn about them -- to be included, but also to learn with depth about a people's identity. An example of the latter could be the development of an annual Community Festival of Lights, designed and implemented by many diverse members of the community, celebrating a common theme in a multifaceted way.

While both the public display of ritual and the collective creation of ritual are excellent ideas in theory, they can be significantly challenging to successfully implement; not to mention that when they are performed publicly, they are often removed from their original cultural context. A primary challenge to the incorporation of immigrants into their new communities is often language. If one cannot communicate, it is virtually impossible to participate. However, children in

immigrant families tend to be much more adept at learning a new language than their parents. Not only are their brains developmentally suited to absorbing new linguistic skills, they spend the majority of their day in English-speaking schools immersed in mainstream American culture. Marjorie Faulstich Orellana provides in-depth research on this topic in her book, "Translating Childhoods: Immigrant Youth, Language, and Culture." Children of immigrant parents take on the role of translator through tutoring siblings, answering phone calls, translating movies and television shows, reading mail and writing official documents for their parents. Overall, children have positive feelings associated with this mediator role. Says Orellana, "Too often children (and others) are not given opportunities to feel needed, useful and appreciated. Indeed, the world might be a better place if all people had opportunities to be needed and valued by others." (Orellana, 120) Translation is not without its stresses -- children can feel uncomfortable when asked to translate during their own parent-teacher conference at school, for example -- but overall, can greatly empower immigrant children and positively transform the way in which they are viewed by society.

Indeed, immigrant children -- particularly adolescents -- are uniquely poised to bridge cultural gaps in their communities, whether through linguistic translation or other, less obvious, means. However, their position is no less complex than that of an immigrant adult. It is perhaps even more so, for they are dealing with the sociocultural expectations of their families, school, and peers -- three notably different and sometimes conflicting groups. Natasha Warikoo researches this cultural tension immigrant teens experience in her book "Balancing Acts: Youth

Culture in the Global City." Focusing on two diverse inner city schools -- one in New York City and one in London -- Warikoo examines the ways high school students negotiate their racial and cultural identities in relationship to their status as a young adult, a high school student, and an individual. She discovers the differences between cultural survival among peers and adult perceptions of success, noting "The respect associated with defending one's pride does not always represent what youth *aspire* to, but rather serves as a *cultural resource for survival*." (Warikoo, 105) She stresses the importance of peer status and acceptance prevailing among all of her student interviewees, and how this status is not congruent with school success - - though it is not oppositional, either.

An example of the intricacy of this cultural negotiation by immigrant teens is described in Sunaina Maira's article, "Desis in and out of the House: South Asian Youth Culture in the United States Before and After 9/11." Maira researches sociocultural practices of South Asian high school students in a New England town, particularly around identity and cultural negotiation. She discovers a tendency of students towards rap and hip-hop culture, even if it means rejecting elements of one's native dress, traditions, and rituals. "I witnessed the gravitation of some of the girls... to the style of their peers in the high school rather than the salwar kameez (traditional dress) of the immigrant girls. So for many of these youth, integrating into the high school culture, which is a proxy for the larger society, is integrating into local, urban youth culture." (Maira, 100) Again, we witness these young adults weighing the social demands before them: peer acceptance, school approval, and family obligation. Being adolescents, peer acceptance often takes first priority. The

key, however, is determining how to allow these young adults to garner respect from their peers but also from the rest of the community.

As a solution, Warikoo suggests that schools equip students with more code-switching skills; that is, the ability to recognize different cultural situations and how to act appropriately for maximum social gain. A complex lesson, code-switching is one of the most valuable skills of the 21st century. Should we be able to teach immigrant teens -- ideally, all teens -- how to culturally adapt to a number of situations, we will arm them with the ability to maximize their personal success. This increased ability to communicate will also lead to the greater success, then, of our communities at large.

However, code-switching as an isolated skill is not sufficient for facilitating full community participation. Meira Levinson, author of "No Citizen Left Behind," states the case for the importance of comprehensive civic engagement programs for all children. While Levinson asserts the need for civic engagement across *all* demographics, she stresses the importance in particular of community engagement programs in diverse, inner city communities. In both this demographic and conceptual diversity she acknowledges the potential lack of cohesion and identity, as well as the challenges these kinds of diversities can present -- particularly if we are unwilling to critically examine the identity we take for granted as a nation. In fact, Levinson suggests that "there is no unified American national identity," dismissing the need to seek a unified Truth but, rather, identifying multiple truths and their relevance to the different cultures that comprise the nation. (Levinson, 56) Children and adolescents need to develop critical thinking skills that allow them to

reflect on their own experiences and place in society. "Young people should be taught to recognize the particularity of their own perspective, including the ways in which their ethnoracial and cultural identities help shape those perspectives." (Levinson, 84) It is in this deep self-awareness that young adults can begin to understand their personal relationship to their community and how they may contribute to it -- regardless, or, perhaps, *because* of their unique cultural skill set. Allowing immigrant students in particular to identify and value their cultural attributes empowers them to become increasingly dynamic participants in the greater community, as well as generally feel more accepted and connected to the people around them. This will only strengthen our towns and cities, augmenting social capital and strengthening connections between citizens. Local organizations, however, need to support such initiatives with sustainable measures -- another challenge to address.

One way organizations can support this kind of work is through after-school programming. Recreational programs provide children with a playful, flexible space in which to learn and navigate many of the cultural and identity-based issues noted previously. In "After-School Programs for Low-Income Children: Promise and Challenges," author Robert Halpern provides in-depth profiles of said programs and articulates the needs and logistics to support them in the future. He points to the multifaceted importance of these programs: providing a safe space for children to play and learn beyond the school day; keeping students out of the "streets" and, therefore, out of trouble; and supplying additional academic support, particularly to students who do not have access to this at home. (Halpern, 81) Key elements of a

successful program need to include a "warm and supportive staff," as well as a "predictable environment, opportunity to explore ideas, feelings, and identities, avenues for self-expression, exposure to both one's own heritage and the larger culture, and time for unstructured play and simple fun." (Halpern, 86) Clearly programs equipped with these deliverables would be positive and beneficial to any child -- particularly if the child was lacking one or more of these elements in their own life.

However, these after-school programs are usually lacking the resources and support to fully deliver the attributes listed above. Staff salaries are low, operating budgets are not large enough, and are often not supported by schools. This is where larger, more established institutions and organizations can step in, providing the support these kinds of resources after-school programs need. In "Neighborhood Institutions as Resource Brokers: Childcare Centers, Interorganizational Ties, and Resource Access among the Poor," author Mario Luis Small emphasizes the importance of networking and consequent resource distribution from community organizations among those living without access to key resources. He analyzes examples like childcare centers that "provide a space for both formal and informal interaction among neighborhood residents." (Small, 276) Small explains that these organizations actually serve as forums not only for conversation and social connection, but also as avenues to access resources, information, and services that otherwise would go unknown to community residents. Nonprofit organizations in particular hold the largest wealth of resources; these organizations can target small neighborhood institutions -- like childcare centers -- as a way to connect with low-

income audiences they are otherwise unable to reach. (Small, 280) Effectiveness of these non-profit neighborhood relationships is determined by "*stability* over time, *resilience* to political or economic shifts, and *capacity* to broker resources related to sensitive issues." (Small, 287) Larger nonprofits need to establish long-term relationships with these smaller neighborhood institutions and approach resource brokerage with specific sensitivity to the communities they are serving. The longer and more sustainable the relationship, the more successful the resource brokerage will be.

An excellent example of a successful resource brokerage in this way is described in Arlene Goldbard's "New Creative Community: The Art of Cultural Development." Under a section titled "Organizing," Goldbard describes a community theater project funded by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, organized by Project COAL (Communities Organized against Asthma & Lead), and hosted by a neighborhood group called Madres a Madres, "a movement of mothers and their children in Houston's near north side that offers prenatal education and mentoring, job assistance, a food bank and social-services assistance." The theater troupe consists of ten community members and facilitates neighborhood learning and conversation around environmental information and safety; they are planning a future project focused on obesity and diabetes prevention. (Goldbard, 76) In this example, we can see the relationships between the larger, well-funded nonprofit organizations and the local neighborhood community to create a collaborative, effective program facilitating learning and growth in the community.

As Halpern states in the research cited above, after-school programs are largely beneficial to supporting immigrant children and teens outside of the classroom. It is also clear that immigrant teens in particular are uniquely poised, with appropriate reinforcement, to maneuver complex transcultural situations with agility -- a valuable ability with the potential to strengthen diverse communities. By speaking these different social "languages," teens can perceive actions with, at times, more clarity and understanding than many adults. Because of this, they can act as translators and peacemakers between groups of people who may otherwise have social friction with one another. As a largely unexplored space for this kind of transcultural exchange, children's museums offer immense potential to provide programs that allow immigrant teens to both negotiate and explore their own identity while being cultural mediators between community members.

It is important to examine the existing culture and audience of children's museums presently to better understand the context within which these potential programs might operate. EunJung Chang provides an excellent overview in her article, "Interactive Experiences and Contextual Learning in Museums." In addition to determining common characteristics of museum visitors, Chang also attempts to understand how visitors learn and find meaning in museums -- something extremely relevant to the creation of immigrant youth programs in these spaces. Chang's findings reveal that family groups are the "largest single category of visitors," while adolescents between 15 and 19 visited the least. In terms of race, Whites were twice as likely to visit museums than all other racial groups, and that higher education and income closely correspond with a higher attendance rate.

Urban residents are also more likely to visit museums than rural, and white-collar jobs dominated over blue-collar jobs. Notably, comfort with the "museum code" was a major factor in visitation; if an individual felt they hadn't been educated in the culture of the museum, they were far less likely to visit. Relatedly, personal and cultural history largely influenced museum visitation, particularly among immigrant families. Says Chang, "...minority groups, recent immigrants, and socioeconomic under classes often had fewer opportunities to visit museums as children as compared to middle classes and tended not to visit museums as adults." (Chang, 172-174) In my experience as a museum professional, this is overwhelmingly true.

Chang goes on to discuss several different methods of interactive learning in museums, suggesting that the most successful exhibits and programs allow people to actively participate in their museum experience and establish connections with the content in the museum to their personal lives. She also recommends that museum educators remain aware and sensitive to cultural diversity in visitors and "use educational examples not only from one culture, but from various cultures in museum programs and activities." Chang concludes that museum experiences need to be designed to meet the needs of visitors personally, facilitating active participation to be successful and engaging. (Chang, 184) Her call for museums to "be better listeners" echoes the need for our communities to also "be better listeners" to immigrant youth, a typically marginalized group. Her findings also illuminate some salient characteristics of museums (and their visitors) that demand consideration regarding the creation of immigrant youth programs within museums.

Chang focuses on museums generally; in Stephanie Shine and Teresa Y. Acosta's article, "Parent-Child Social Play in a Children's Museum" they pay particular attention to family learning dynamics at child-centered museums. Children's museums are ripe with opportunity for both child learning but also parent learning. Usually focused on play-based learning, children's museums nurture a sense of general acceptance and accessibility that many "adult" museums do not. Interestingly, Shine and Acosta's research in a reconstructed grocery store exhibit reveals the immediate immersion of children in pretend play, while parents support their child's play but do not engage in the same way. "Consequently, parent-child play was brief, that is, parents and children engaged in no more than one conversational turn at a time instead of engaging in an extended sequence of interactions." (Shine and Acosta, 47) Parents were, however, present and active; they were simply not engaging in the same level of imaginative play as the children. They preferred to take a guiding, teaching role in an attempt to facilitate learning (asking children to name a tomato, for example, or count a specific number of apples). Shine and Acosta suggest that creating more intimate, comfortable spaces, enforcing less structure, and providing educators to model pretend play would help adults engage in a deeper level of pretend play with children. (Shine and Acosta, 51).

This suggested model -- creating a safe, engaged, unstructured space for parents to play *with* their child -- is also well-suited for facilitating transcultural interaction. Children are naturally curious and without value judgment, and so are excellent role models for their adults in a culturally unfamiliar space. By creating cultural education programs in Children's Museums, we can create situations where

parents subconsciously model their child's behavior. This is particularly successful if museum educators and program staff encourage the more curious, childlike, play-based behavior in all visitors. Often, a slight majority of visitors at children's museums are, indeed, adults, and their family visit is a prime opportunity to teach a sense of tolerance and open-mindedness -- a sense of *play* -- in the realm of cross-cultural interaction. How to successfully create and implement these cultural programs is the subject of the Case Study and Replicable Model sections of my work.

Section II: Field Interview Summary and Analysis

As mentioned in the previous section, immigrant teens are faced with a milieu of challenges upon joining a new community. Local institutions like museums can provide valuable resources, but are often inaccessible to immigrants for various reasons. Because of this, I conducted a series of in-depth interviews to further reveal the social context around immigrant populations in an urban setting. When examining culture, no individual is without context; nor is a community. My research is based in Portland, Maine, a small New England city with a nascent (but sizable) immigrant population. My field-based research consisted of three interview groups: non-profit and academic leaders; local immigrant and refugee high school students; and non-immigrant community members living in Portland for five years or more. Through interviews with these three groups of individuals, I examined both the context and sets of experiences of the participants. The information I acquired deeply informs the potential further development and success of a

replicable immigrant youth program, from the perspectives of organization practitioner to program participant to the engagement of the broader community.

It is noted that my interviews represent a small sample of the groups described; further research would provide a wider breadth of understanding of the topics explored here. My interviews included six non-profit practitioners and/or university professors; eight high school students; and five community members. All interviewees were of varying backgrounds and sets of experiences. The practitioners all work with immigrant and/or refugee youth in some capacity, providing first-hand experience on what it means to be a cultural mediator. All of the high school students moved to the U.S. within the last ten years (many of them with the last several years), making them the target population of the museum programs discussed. The community members are either formal or informal educators who work with elementary-school-aged children or parents of young children themselves. These interviewees provide insight to working with both young children and their families, the primary audience of children's museums.

Non-profit and Academic Leaders

A varied group of practitioners and professors presented a diverse array of ideas and insights; however, there were salient conceptual threads present across interviews. Several themes occurred throughout the conversations, namely around transcultural understanding, various methods of support for teens, and the role of schools and other institutions in the acclimation of immigrant families in their transition to the US.

Teens and children are particularly resilient in their ability to adapt to new situations, languages, and cultural contexts. Glenn Nerbak is the director of the Portland Mentoring Alliance, a mentoring program for students at Portland High School. He elaborates, "The amazing thing I see... is the resiliency of these kids. There are kids here, now, who have lost their parents because of the strife in their country through no fault of their own... And yet, these kids, after going through the initial culture shock, seem to rebound and adjust and accept the fact that this is their new life." (Nerbak, 9/21/12) It is nothing new that children are resilient, but in the context of immigration, they potentially have the capacity to teach their parents how to adjust to their new life. Cultivating Community, an agricultural non-profit in Portland, is directed by Craig Lapine. Says Lapine, "[Immigrant teens] just have a stronger foot in the new culture [than their parents]. They're in school, they have the language... They really have got a strong sense of the new culture and a strong sense of the old culture, because they're living it every day. It's just what I see." (Lapine, 11/1/12)

According to Hakim Rodi, Multilingual Program Assistant at the Telling Room -- a creative writing nonprofit in Portland -- one of the most challenging obstacles for new immigrants is the ability to communicate, and children tend to developmentally be better suited to quickly learn English than their parents. "As a young student, you tend to grasp onto language much faster than your parents," says Rodi. However, being naturally agile at cultural adaptation isn't enough for young immigrants to thrive in a new home. They are caught between the culture of their families, their upbringing, and the new social situations they find themselves

in. "That's the toughest thing, to try to transition, which one you want to hold on to - your culture, the one that brought you here." (Rodi, 11/1/12)

This disconnect often manifests between parents and schools, putting immense pressure on teens not only to perform well but also to navigate the gap between dramatically different cultural understandings between their home and school lives. Third parties like mentors or program coordinators can provide essential support for navigating unfamiliar social systems like SAT testing and understanding US job culture. Says Nerbak, "The independent data... that I can give you is from English Language Learner teachers, who have told me -- almost universally -- that they can always tell which students have a mentor. They're more serious, they realize they're being held accountable to someone who knows the American school system and how important it is to achieve good grades. And they just seem to be kids who aspire more... they seem to work harder." (Nerbak, 9/21/12) Simply having someone *explain* sociocultural nuances of everyday life is the first step to becoming integrated into an unfamiliar social system. In an interview with the author, Sarah Dryden-Peterson, professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, asks the question, "...How do newcomers enter into relationships in their community? ...Often times that process of building relationships is really hard... Issues of language, or culture, or stereotypes are so salient that it's really hard to do that." Mentoring and employment programs can become the source of not only essential cultural information but also meaningful relationships themselves. Mentors and program coordinators can answer the questions, "How do you make friends? How do you build relationships that just

matter in your day to day life?" (Dryden-Peterson, 10/30/12) Mentors facilitate this not only by talking about these issues with students, but by leading by example -- establishing meaningful relationships with the students themselves.

An additional benefit to mentorship and youth programs is the creation of a safe social space in which to discuss cultural differences and ask questions that otherwise might feel inappropriate. A trusted adult like a mentor is the ideal person to be able to ask these questions. Rodi says, "With a mentor, I feel safe." Dryden-Peterson spent significant time working with diverse communities in New England churches, of which she said, "The churches were a kind of place where people felt they could have that sort of open space... And I wonder if museums could play a similar sort of role. ...There [are] not that many safe spaces to have these kinds of conversations, where you can ask the kinds of questions that you're not really sure if they're OK to ask." (Dryden-Peterson, 10/30/12) The ability to ask these kinds of questions is critical to facilitating cross-cultural communication between community members, particularly in places with a high number of recent immigrants. A very challenging and often awkward first step to understanding, the ability to ask these questions emerges out of a highly considered, nurturing environment that must be purposefully created: an environment like a teen program at a Children's Museum, for example, or a sustained relationship between an adult mentor and student mentee.

The cross-cultural understanding fostered by this initial type of conversation is absolutely critical to ensuring the prosperity of new immigrants and long-term community members alike. Often there is social friction between immigrants and

"natives," (using that term to describe native-born and/or long-term residents of an area) due to a lack of social understanding on both ends of the relationship. Says Nerbak, who works largely with asylum-seeking and refugee students, "These [refugee] kids are in this country, not because they chose to be, but because the situation is so dangerous in the country where they were living. And so I think that if more of the student population understood that, there'd be a greater understanding and appreciation and maybe assistance offered to these kids who have gone through really tough times." He goes on to acknowledge that "there is integration but I think it could be better; I think there could be more of an effort to understand the different cultures... I think there could be... more things for students to get to know one another at a deeper level." (Nerbak, 9/21/12) At Cultivating Community, Lapine describes how student participants exchange cultural stories by cooking food for one another. They grow the ingredients themselves and then are asked to procure recipes from their parents and families to share with the group. Says Lapine, "Everybody is made up of parts, and they're all important in who we are." (Lapine, 11/1/12) Fostering these kinds of cultural exchanges helps establish and reinforce a sense of identity -- not only in the teens, but in any person participating in the exchange, whether it's an adult mentor or an American high school student.

Lastly, the opportunity for teens to simultaneously engage in meaningful work *and* learn essential professional life skills is huge in the development of any teenager; it is especially helpful for an immigrant teen. Natasha Warikoo, professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, describes the Youth Participatory Action Research project, in which students develop their own research project on

various topics based on the world around them. Says Warikoo, "[This is] a way of empowering kids to see the world around them as not something that's happening to them but rather as agents in the world. And where they see injustice and whether there's something they can do about it rather than just be observers to it." (Warikoo, 10/30/12) This feeling of becoming an "agent" is incredibly powerful for a teen, particularly if they feel disenfranchised to begin with (as many immigrant youths do).

Dryden-Peterson stresses the importance of teens having "a range of portable kinds of skills and abilities that can help you to live and be -- lead the kind of life you'd like to live in whatever context you end up in." Not only needing to act as active agents in the world, immigrant teens in particular have to skillfully be able to maneuver between wildly different cultural contexts, armed with an arsenal of social and professional skills that will serve them in an incredibly wide variety of situations. Perhaps one of the most valuable skills, however, is a profound understanding of the dominant culture one finds oneself in. Dryden-Peterson explains, "The newcomers who are able to take on the role of cultural mediator with the greatest efficacy seem to be people who have tried to really deeply understand American culture, whatever that is. ...And so the more reflection you can do on the place in which you find yourself -- it may be the more effective you can be in sharing something that is different." (Dryden-Peterson, 10/30/12)

Immigrant Teens

The students I interviewed all attend school in the Portland, Maine area. Most go to Portland High School; several also attend Casco Bay High School. Portland High has a very diverse student population, of almost 40% non-white; of the minority students, most are first-generation immigrants. Casco Bay High School, an expeditionary learning school, is largely white with a significantly smaller minority student population. Students ranged in age from 16 to 20 years; some were male, some were female. All were Muslim (the majority of recent immigrants to the Portland area are Muslim, coming from East African and Middle Eastern countries). Their responses to interview questions varied by the individual, though there were many common threads across interviews.

Perhaps the most striking commonality across high school interviewees was not culturally specific, but rather based on being, simply, a teenager: every student interviewed was clearly concerned with peer acceptance, academic success, and identity establishment -- all concerns common to any teenager, regardless of cultural background or ethnicity. Granted, psychological concerns of cultural adaptation and immigration largely played into the teens' responses, but their identity as an adolescent was, discernibly, the primary element affecting their answers.

An expected challenge for immigrants, the students' relationship to language was complicated and heavily tied to family, cultural identity and assimilation. Said Suzan Ali, "[My native language] -- I feel like I'm home when I speak it." Safiyo Hashi, a Somali student, said, "My favorite [language] is Somali. It's my home language, and it's like -- I'm more connected with my culture when I speak my language. And it

makes me feel like I have a better communication with my grandma, who doesn't speak English." However, while some students valued the ability of their native tongue to strengthen associations with their home culture and families, other students valued English for what it represented. Said Alias Nasrat, a high school student originally from Afghanistan, "English is becoming my favorite [language]. Just because I feel now I need to learn English, because I feel I need to... speak better English. Because we moved in here, I am to be studying my college here and work here. And besides that, English is becoming popular in most countries, now it is the international language." Most students felt an affinity for their native language, but clearly valued the ability to speak English and the opportunities that ability represents for their future. This pressure to learn English also clearly makes Alias anxious. He goes on, "Sometimes I don't feel comfortable because of the language. When, for example, I'm in class and I know the answers but I don't know how to put the words together. Or when I want to talk to someone, teachers, students, but I don't know how to say it. It makes me uncomfortable." For anyone, but perhaps for teens in particular, the ability to articulate oneself is key in sustaining confidence and a sense of successful participation in the world around them. Communication is hugely important in both individual success and peer acceptance. Said Nilab Nasrat, Alias's sister, "Language is so important because if you don't know it, you don't know how to do anything else. If you can learn the language, you can find friends, and everything."

Family also plays an essential role for many students; in fact, several students noted the lack of community in the U.S. compared to their home countries.

Said Suzan Ali, a student originally from Sudan, "People here -- they think... 'me, myself, and I.' You know? That's all what I want -- I'm OK -- my family are fine -- that's all that I should care about." Samar Ahmed, also from Sudan, agreed, "I think everybody's so self-centered. They just think of their own family... they don't think of the community as a whole." Safiyo Hashi, a Somali student, also agreed, "People just -- they don't... [have] time for their family and stuff. But if you're in a Muslim country, you always have time for your family." Clearly, students value family and the tight-knit bonds that result from a strong connection with extended family and the larger community. Many interviewees enjoyed helping their parents, particularly with the translation -- a task they fulfilled often. Every student recalled translating for an older family member; many associated this experience with positive emotions. "It's funny sometimes, but I like it. Because mostly I'm relying on [my grandmother], so it's good she's relying on me. That's why I like it," explained Safiyo Hashi. Faiza Ali translates for her aunt when "she goes to the doctor and she needs some help... I feel happy, because I'm helping her and she's proud that I'm helping her, and it's good." Not every association was positive, however -- Kidayer Aljubyly, a student from Iraq, said that translating for his family is "sometimes good, sometimes not." He explained that sometimes he was busy with something else, and a request for translation was an interruption to the task he was engaged in. Largely, however, teens enjoyed feeling useful to their family members and relished the opportunity to be helpful.

This desire to be helpful is an essential need -- not just for teens, but for children and adults as well. Although teens, in particular, often flourish when given

the opportunity to do meaningful work. Suzan exclaimed, "When I see people happy, that makes me happy... I'll do anything to make you happy." For immigrant teens in a diverse community, this can often mean acting as a cultural teacher to those around them. Samar Ahmed, a Senior at Casco Bay High School, described her school as largely white, explaining that she often feels different from her classmates. But, after reflection, she concluded, "I don't know, I think it's a good thing, actually, because they get to learn stuff and I get to learn stuff from them."

Employment programs at local museums serve as an excellent source of both a source of meaning as well as job training and a place to learn essential skills for higher education and future employment -- something every single high school interviewee was openly concerned about. Samar, who participates in a youth employment program at the Children's Museum & Theatre of Maine, said, "I think the skills we learn [at the museum] are, like, being independent; knowing what you're talking about; being flexible and stuff -- you have to communicate with people, which is good. I think... what I want is to just get used to working with people. ...Sometimes I get shy or something. So just getting out there, talking to people [is very important]."

When asked if they considered themselves American, and how they would describe themselves, all of the students became visibly indecisive and, often, uncomfortable. A few played with the idea of calling themselves "Somali-American," or "African-American," but most opted with the identification of their native born country. This uncertainty -- and discomfort -- indicates an unresolved understanding of the students' cultural identities, which is a natural predicament for

an adolescent immigrant to find her/himself in. A student employment program that provides a safe space to explore issues of cultural identity, to learn essential job skills, and to engage with the community appears to be a unique and ideal solution for the challenges facing immigrant teens living in the US today.

Community Context

The cultural context of non-immigrant city residents largely dictates the reception and success of any attempted community based program. Because of this, it was essential to conduct a series of interviews with local residents who have resided in the area for at least five years to get a sense of their perception of the community. Because my focus includes programs for families and children, the interviewees either had children themselves or spent a significant amount of their professional life working with young children.

There were several factors that were uniformly popular across all interviewees. People favored its size -- a small city of approximately 70,000 -- because of the familiarity cultivated around town. Nicole Jacobsen, a single mother who works from home, said, "It's a small enough town -- there's enough of seeing the same faces that there's a rapport that I have with strangers, you know, just from seeing their face over and over again." As Sabina Freedman, mother of three, said, "It feels big, but it's actually small... it's not overwhelming." There is a palpable sense of conviviality here, as demonstrated by a subtle familiarity between many residents.

Another common theme was an intense value and interest in the arts -- the gallery and music scenes, as well as writing and creative "types" generally. Words like "creative," "artists," "writers," "open-minded" and "value the arts a lot" were all used to describe common attributes of close friends. Liberal thinking and the arts often accompany each other; open-mindedness was a theme as well. However, Louisa Donelson, an arts and science educator, was quick to point out, "I think it's fairly conservative still; as open-minded as people are, it would still be shocking to see a drag queen or a transvestite walk down the street." This, indeed, appears to be a subtle paradox of this New England town: a combination of friendly open-mindedness combined with a deep-rooted sense of practicality and an acute work ethic. The result is a peaceful hospitality; though not always welcome integration, with incumbent cultural and ethnic diversity.

As is common of many mainstream American communities, not one of the interviewees mentioned their extended families while describing their personal "community." Close friends were the primary people noted, and these close friends often took on the role of support systems and people who interviewees felt they were "growing up with." Many interviewees' parents and family members lived in another state or country; spouses, children, and very close friends were the primary individuals mentioned when describing one's chosen community.

Although Portland's diversity was acknowledged, many interviewees also noted they felt integration between sociocultural communities was, indeed, rare. Said Jacobsen, "I've realized there's much more diversity here than I originally recognized." While Maine is perhaps one of the whitest states in the nation, growing

pockets of immigrants and minority groups are quickly changing the demographics in many communities across the state. Among Portland residents, this is largely seen as a positive thing. "I find that really fascinating, that it's such a mix of people," said Freedman. Donelson reflected, "I don't like... that I'm not exposed to that much diversity in my direct social group. ...I don't feel like I see diversity in the arts, or just -- integrated into the things that I do. The restaurants I go to, the parties I go to, the music that I see." But she goes on to describe her desire for this integration, "I think sometimes you need an entrance into that [unfamiliarity], because you wouldn't come across it on your own... It's really refreshing to me when there are things that are new to me in my community, and when things surprise me in a good way, I find that incredibly exciting and reassuring." The reticence is not one-sided; said Anne Dalphin, an elementary school teacher who works with many immigrant and refugee students and families, "The Somali community... the adults don't really seem to interact with other Mainers." While there is no conflict, there is also very little cross-cultural interaction.

However, individuals appeared open and eager for opportunities to connect more with their community. Said Jacobsen, mother of a seven-year-old, "I don't think I do feel connected to the larger community of Portland. I feel open to being connected... [But] what would be the medium for that connection? ...Extending myself into the community would require something more that I don't currently have." Young motherhood appeared to be a potential source of community disconnectedness; Billie Libby, a stay-at-home mother of two young children, when asked how connected she felt, replied, "Not very. ...That's something I've been

feeling... Just thinking, oh, I wish I could get out... there are some volunteer things I've been dying to do. ...I will someday." Caring for young children is incredibly time consuming and tends to make social engagement in a larger sphere challenging.

Individuals who had full-time jobs in the public sector, however, found intense social and community fulfillment through their careers. Anne Dalphin, a third-grade teacher, said, "I feel really connected through my students." She reflected on a friend who did not work in such a position, and consequently had very little contact with diverse communities. "My friend who works in the restaurant industry never has any Somalis come into his restaurant, never sees them in his neighborhood, only sees them at the grocery store... [He is] very curious about who this person is and how many Somalis live here... [Being a teacher] I know more Muslims than Christians at this point, in Maine. ...One year I had a student who just really wanted to tell me about it. She just liked having that conversation with me. ...I learned a lot from her." Donelson, who works at the local Children's Museum as well as volunteers for several local non-profits, said, "I feel like because of my work I'm kind of in tune with the familial structure that I see at the museum, and so I've got a pulse on the kids in Portland... I love doing fun stuff with strangers, and adding to the vibrant community of Portland... if you show up, that means you're welcome."

Clearly an occupation that demands civic engagement adds to a sense of being connected to one's community, whether it is non-profit or educational work. It also appears that having young children can be a potential challenge to "find the time" to volunteer or engage in other ways with one's community. But it is worthy to note that the two professionals interviewed worked directly with children and,

because of this, felt more connected to their community than others interviewed. It is therefore plausible to consider children as a potential source for this cross-cultural engagement, particularly targeting young families who are often *less* engaged than other community members. Children's Museums are opportune locations for this kind of interaction. Adults and teens can work or volunteer; children and adults can visit and participate in programs offered. The next step is to create educational programs that involve all members of the community to facilitate the kind of meaningful cross-cultural interaction community members desire. I will explore this in my case study of such a program at the Children's Museum & Theatre of Maine, located in the Arts District of downtown Portland.

Section III: Case Study: Culture Scholars

Overview

To provide further insight to the potential of Children's Museums to act as "safe spaces" for the kind of positive interaction described previously, I've conducted a case study of the Culture Scholars program at the Children's Museum & Theatre of Maine. This employment program for immigrant and refugee high school students addresses several extant needs in the community of Portland: essential job training and professional mentoring for immigrant and refugee high school students, as well as culturally sensitive educational programming for the Museum & Theatre. This Case Study provides the opportunity to analyze the logistics, failures, and successes of the program and provides a starting point from which to develop and launch similar youth employment programs at museums across the country.

The Culture Scholars program started in January 2012 and has grown significantly to its present state (spring 2013, at the time of writing). It is essential to note that this growth process was rapid at some points while extremely slow much of the time. The cultural acclimation process (on behalf of both the high school students and the museum) is delicate and takes time to unfold; this is not the type of program one can rush into and expect to do well. Being the director of the program, I've found the lessons I've learned developed more as a "course correction" happening simultaneously to the program itself, rather than an evaluation following the program. The following is a detailed report of the Culture Scholars program over the 2012-13 school year.

Purpose of Case Study

As stated in my literary review, Levinson underscores the uniqueness of individual teens' perspectives; Hochschild, Weaver, and Burch describe the flexibility of racial perception of youth; and Suarez-Orozco point out the universal value of immigrant teens' ability to translate and codeswitch. These are several reasons of many that make immigrant teens an ideal group to partner with in the development and facilitation of cultural programs at museums. These teens are often deeply entrenched in their family's home culture, and yet are remarkably proficient at adapting to a new sociocultural space in a very short amount of time. They spend every day at school, learning English and absorbing mainstream American culture from their native-born peers -- whether it's food in the cafeteria, music from their friends, or content they read in textbooks. They also often speak

several languages, their brains adept from a young age at changing lenses of perception at a moment's notice. Teens are also naturally hungry to establish a sense of identity and meaning in their lives; providing them with the opportunity to work and be useful in a socially respected setting such as a museum strengthens their confidence and sense of self-worth. This is essential for any teen, but in particular for immigrant teens who often have a very difficult time navigating the world of American adolescent culture and finding a sense of belonging. The pressures to assimilate are many, including English language fluency; said Nilab Nasrat, an interviewee from the previous section, "Language is so important because if you don't know it, you don't know how to do anything else. If you can learn the language, you can find friends, and everything."

Immigrant teens hold immense resources for diverse communities, from the ability to codeswitch between cultures to translate languages in social situations. Community organizations like children's museums are ideal spaces to both serve and reap the benefits of engaging immigrant teens, as well as to engage large numbers of community residents in cross-cultural social events. Elements of race, ethnic identity, language, familial culture, and value systems all contribute to the complexity of an immigrant teen's sense of self, and these are all elements program directors (and their museums) must take into consideration when developing such programs. Additionally, program coordinators often act as cultural mediators between teens and the museum; this relationship is not without challenges and must be thoroughly considered throughout. Cultural mediators hold a discreet, yet very significant amount of social power -- both with museum visitors and the teens

who participate in the program. The race and culture of the program coordinator is not to be ignored, particularly if the coordinator is white. The social implications of whiteness are vastly influential, particularly in a position of leadership.

Transparency, sensitivity, and self-awareness must be practiced constantly, as well as the willingness to appear vulnerable. If these qualities are not maintained, it will be difficult to establish or maintain a trusting relationship with program participants -- and this is integral for the success and authenticity of the program.

The role of a white cultural mediator, in my experience, is both extremely influential and extremely delicate. My intentions are to provide a positive professional experience of personal growth to the teens participating in the program; it is also important that the program I run supports the organization's mission and benefits the museum. These two priorities can sometimes be at odds with each other, particularly when there are significant cultural differences and misunderstandings. Another goal is to successfully reach and engage museum visitors, the majority of whom are white and middle-class. An important factor is that, at children's museums, a large portion of the audience is extremely young and without judgment about many topics. Often their exposure to foreign cultures at a museum is their first encounter with such a subject; first impressions are indelible, for better and for worse. The weight of the first impression is not something an educator or cultural mediator should take lightly; they are often setting the baseline to which all other cultural encounters may be compared. And while this is more prevalent with children, adults are also quick to give museum professionals a significant amount of authority on the topic presented. They are employed by the

museum: a well-respected community organization that people associate with academic authority within the dominant culture frame. Because of this, museum professionals are usually seen as experts on the subject they present (or mediate). It is essential to share this space of academic authority with program collaborators -- in my specific example, with the immigrant teens who are leading cultural programs. If the mediator does not share this authority vested in them, they are reinforcing the dominance of whiteness, completely failing to give a voice to the participating teens (a primary purpose of the program). It can be uncomfortable to relegate oneself to the status of a non-expert, but this is essential to challenging the paradigm of whiteness and its unseen authority.

As long as program staff practice self-awareness and are thoughtful of power relationships, children's museums are socially safe spaces where tolerance and open-mindedness are nurtured, making them ideal for engaging immigrant teens. Their visitor base also tends to be relatively homogenous, often lacking participation from immigrant populations, thus providing immigrant teens with the opportunity to act as cultural leaders or "icebreakers" in their communities. This is, however, a complex role with many personal and social variables that must be considered – both by the teen doing the work and the program coordinator who is acting as a mentor. In order to further investigate some of these variables and their implications, the following Case Study of the Culture Scholars program in Portland, Maine reveals further sociocultural nuances that both inform and support the need for programs such as these.

Organization Overview

The Children's Museum & Theatre of Maine (CMTM) is located in the Arts District in downtown Portland, Maine. It is a mid-sized Children's Museum with an operating budget of \$1 million and an annual count of about 100,000 visitors. Areas of educational focus include the Arts, Culture, Science, and Early Childhood Education. Approximately half of the visitors are children, the remaining their adult caregivers, family members, or friends. Children's Museums are often thought of as being exclusively for children; to the contrary, much of the exhibit, educational, and visitor experience work is geared towards adults as well. The Museum & Theatre has grown substantially since its inception in 1976, from its initial space in a residential home to a mid-sized museum in a downtown historic building.

I have been the Community Engagement Coordinator and a lead Educator at the Children's Museum & Theatre of Maine for four and a half years. In this role, I manage the volunteer, internship, and youth employment programs; I also develop and lead education programs for museum visitors, school groups, and outreach. A significant portion of my time is spent cultivating and strengthening relationships with various people in the community with the goal of enhancing our education programs as well as increasing overall community engagement with the Museum & Theatre.

Origins of the Culture Scholars Program

The Culture Scholars program, which employs four immigrant high school students to work at CMTM, began as a volunteer program, called the Youth Imagine

Project, in January 2011. The program goal was to engage a more diverse group of volunteers at CMTM while also providing culturally sensitive programming with depth for museum visitors. I visited the Portland Mentoring Alliance, a mentoring program for immigrant and refugee students at Portland High School, in an attempt to recruit students to volunteer at the museum. The program was extremely popular and had a regular attendance of ten students. These high school volunteers were asked to create and lead programs in the museum and were encouraged to share an aspect of their personal culture, if they chose to do so. As an initial trial, the program was successful, but had significant unforeseen challenges. The ratio of ten students to one program staff member was ineffective, leaving not enough time for one-on-one interaction between myself and the students (an integral contributor to success in the program). Students also needed significantly more time and training to acclimate to the cultural space of the museum itself. Most, if not all, of the students were unfamiliar with the concept of a children's museum and needed further explanation than I was able to give as the sole staff member supporting the program. A few relationships with core participating students were maintained, though at the end of the school year I lost touch with many.

However, the idea of the Youth Imagine Project grew into a grant proposal for a new program, now called Culture Scholars, adjusted to better fit my capacity as the sole program coordinator. CMTM received partial funding for the Culture Scholars program in January 2012, providing enough money for a pilot program employing two high school students for five months. Again, I worked with the Portland Mentoring Alliance at the High School to recruit program participants; out

of five interviewees, I had space to employ two. These two students were both juniors at Portland High School, and one of them, Suzan Ali, had previously participated in the Youth Imagine Project. Suzan is originally from the Darfur region of Sudan, but also spent seven years living in Egypt before moving to Maine. The second Culture Scholar, Faiza Ali, is from Somalia but also spent years living in New Delhi, India. Both students had lived in Maine for about a year at the time they became Culture Scholars. Though they are both English Language Learners, they both have an excellent understanding of English and can communicate well with museum visitors and staff. While fluency is not a requirement to participate in the program, the ability to communicate well is essential as the bulk of the Culture Scholars' time is spent teaching and conversing with visitor families.

Since the initial grant was for partial funding, the scale of the Culture Scholars program was modest. Faiza and Suzan each worked, on average, four to six hours per month, largely on weekends and usually for major cultural events like Holi, the Hindu festival of spring and color. Their role was to help facilitate the success of these events by staffing programs like art projects, food sampling, and dance performances. They also created and led several cooking programs in which they developed and drafted a sample recipe from their personal cultural experiences, then shared this recipe by cooking and eating with museum visitors in our public kitchen. The Scholars spent several paid sessions with my support to develop their recipe ideas and supplemental materials like laminated photographs and maps. Visitor reception of the cooking programs was very positive; cooking and eating food proved both an initial draw and also an excellent social catalyst for

cultural conversations. After playing with dough and making a Somali *sambosa*, both child and adult visitors would begin to ask Suzan and Faiza questions such as, "Where are you from?" "When do people usually eat *sambosas*?" "How long have you lived in the United States?" The shared food experience created a safe social space where visitors began to feel comfortable asking questions about potentially sensitive subjects.

The modest success of the pilot program provided the leverage to apply for additional funding from the Sam L. Cohen Foundation, which funded the proposal for an eight-month Culture Scholars program in full. The funding received in May 2012 supports the employment of four Culture Scholars from October 2012 through May 2013, program material costs and staff time for the program coordinator. This funding reinforced the legitimacy and success of the work of the Culture Scholars program and kept the program from terminating in May 2012.

Program Goals

As in the original Youth Imagine Project and Culture Scholars pilot program, the existing Culture Scholars program employs four immigrant teens in Portland, Maine to assist with cultural events and lead a variety of programming at the Children's Museum & Theatre of Maine. As written in the proposal submitted to the Sam L. Cohen Foundation, "Culture Scholars is a skill-building program for immigrant and refugee teens, helping them to develop and lead early childhood programs about their own cultural traditions. This project will enhance public understanding of international culture and develop a replicable model for

community-based education while providing disadvantaged youth with vital educational training and work experience, empowering them to succeed academically and professionally and take on leadership roles within their communities." There are several evaluation periods built into the year-long program, with questions designed to gauge students' progress. The three main goals of the program, also stated in the Cohen grant proposal, are as follows.

The Culture Scholars program will train and employ four immigrant teens in the skills needed to research, develop, and present original educational programs about cultural traditions (their own and others'). Many recent immigrants to the United States are increasingly from countries like Afghanistan, Sudan, Somalia, and others with cultural and religious expectations that are markedly different from that of contemporary America. Immigrant teens often do not have the cultural vocabulary or tools to apply for and maintain a job in the US; therefore, a component of the Culture Scholars program is teaching these students the cultural values of professionalism in the US in order to prepare them for future successful employment. Examples include concepts of time and punctuality, display of motivation and commitment; respect for authority; independence and creativity, et cetera. These values are often assumed in native-born Americans; however, cultural nuances like concepts of time vary widely across cultures and are often significant obstacles for new immigrants acquiring a job.

The Scholars will deliver a series of public programs exploring cultural, national or religious traditions from an authentic, personal point of view. In May of 2012, the Education Department of CMTM adopted a cultural policy enforcing the

requirement of a cultural collaborator in the creation and facilitation of any cultural program at the Museum & Theatre. This was an attempt to address ethical issues of representation, voice, and authenticity when teaching visitors about a culture. Recognizing the limitations of Education staff's cultural knowledge, this policy makes it more challenging to create cultural programs but ensures that said programs are created in a self-aware and respectful way. For example, a program about *Dia de los Muertos*, Day of the Dead, requires a cultural collaborator of Mexican origin *or* an individual with extensive experience in Mexico, both of whom would have substantial experience celebrating the holiday. The Culture Scholars program allows the individual Scholars to develop cultural programs in their own voice, based on their own experiences in different cultures across the world. They are asked to teach visitors based on personal experience, providing a first-person learning opportunity for visitors.

The Culture Scholars program forges new relationships with young leaders and their families in Portland's immigrant and refugee communities, developing a new, collaborative model for cultural programming. Unfortunately, museums tend to be culturally inaccessible for those outside of the white middle class, and CMTM's visitor base does reflect this. The Culture Scholars, however, do not fall into this category and can act as liaisons between the museum and their cultural communities. Each Scholar is given a 15-pass punch card and may bring friends and family to the museum for free. Scholars are also asked to consider relationships they have with members of their cultural communities as potential partners for programs. An example of this occurred in January 2013 when a group of children

from a local mosque attended a program led by a Culture Scholar, Suzan, who used to volunteer at the mosque. Suzan's personal connection with this organization was instrumental in facilitating CMTM's first ever group visit from a mosque; she also used eight of her passes to support the attendance of the group.

The Culture Scholars program aims to act as an employment training program for immigrant teens, a constructive forum for cultural education and exchange, and an innovative social catalyst that integrates currently disparate sociocultural groups in Portland.

Program Coordinator as Cultural Mediator

Before delving too deeply into the Culture Scholars program itself, I am going to describe my position as the program coordinator and a white, female, museum employee. As the only museum staff member directly involved in the supervision and support of the Culture Scholars on a regular basis, my position is one of significant influence of the success -- or failure -- of the program. It is important to note that, having created and proposed the Culture Scholars program, my level of personal investment and commitment to its success is extremely high. As the program is based largely on the idea of cultural authenticity and transparency, it is important that I disclose my personal cultural lens and my motivations for creating the Culture Scholars program.

Coming from a white, middle-class family and community in central Pennsylvania, I have long had the luxury of not needing to explain or defend my cultural decisions. As a member of the dominant culture in the Northeastern US, my

habits, appearance, and means of communicating are both created by and help to create the mainstream; with rare exceptions, I do not find myself in the position of the "other." This is also true in my work at CMTM; our staff and visitor base is largely white, upper middle class, with formal education. It is incredibly easy to accept the way things are done, institutionally, as "normal"; there is little pressure from our current audience to rethink or address the cultural accessibility of our organization.

Community Specificity

It is precisely for this reason that I am driven to pursue programs like Culture Scholars. As a resident of Portland, I see diversity everywhere: my daily walk to work takes me past a gourmet American cafe; a Japanese noodle bar; the city's original gay bar; a French patisserie; two Korean restaurants; a Somali grocery store; a smoke shop; an East Asian grocery store; and a Thai restaurant -- all in the course of about six blocks. Walking through Portland High School, one hears snippets of Arabic, Farsi, Cambodian, and Spanish languages; use a computer at the library and one finds incredibly diverse company, both culturally and economically. However, this diversity is not reflected in many spaces: most music venues, for example, feature either rock or folk music, and have a largely, though not exclusively, white audience. Museums like the Portland Museum of Art, Maine Historical Society, and the Children's Museum & Theatre of Maine largely have white audience bases. These spaces, while products of white culture, hold tremendous resources for those who engage with them. For largely cultural reasons, they remain

spaces accessed mostly by the mainstream. To know that such diversity exists yet remains separate is a devastating loss of potential social capital. This separation also cultivates a sense of quiet oppression and sense of "the other," although in Portland this rarely manifests as violence. It does, however, contribute to an overall sense of social fragmentation and isolationism -- potentially weakening our community.

Reconciling Differences

The task of effective integration is a daunting challenge. To reconcile our subconscious notions of the Other, those of us who find ourselves in the dominant culture must cultivate a sense of self awareness that can be difficult, and at times, harrowing. We also must be willing to make ourselves vulnerable and abdicate our position of power: to relinquish social control in situations where this control, often unknowingly, excludes others. A prevalent example of this is the value of punctuality. Americans value time above most other things, and feel deeply disrespected when others do not honor the punctuality of previously agreed upon scheduled meetings or events. However, other cultures do not always share this same value of time, and may appear disrespectful when that is not the intention at all.

However, part of the Culture Scholars program includes the education of teen participants in this American professional value system. The program coordinator, then, is placed in the delicate space of both respecting and understanding Scholars' native culture but also helping them to understand what is expected of them as an American employee. An example of this occurred when Suzan, a Culture Scholar

originally from Sudan, was 15 to 20 minutes late for three consecutive shifts. Her attitude was always intensely positive; she was extremely motivated to do the work; and did her job very well. However, I had to explain to her that consistently being 20 minutes late for a shift at a job in American culture was unacceptable. I was not going to fire her for this, but told her if she didn't improve her punctuality, would have to reconsider her as an employee. After this conversation, Suzan usually appeared ten minutes before her shift began. As punctuality is not valued in the same way in Sudan, she was unaware of the cultural weight of her tardiness, and simply needed this to be explained to her. However, since this conversation, I've also maintained a practice in cultural awareness to her reasons for being late. Recently she did not show up for a shift but followed up with a phone call, explaining that her father was in an emergency and needed her to be with him. The assumption of the institution was that she was careless and neglected to honor her shift commitment; however, time revealed that an important demand surfaced in her life to which she needed to tend. The negotiation of time and punctuality must be a mutually respectful, two-way street on behalf of both participating cultures.

Trust and Transparency

Crossing cultural boundaries and establishing positive relationships requires time and trust. To be an effective leader with the Culture Scholars, I found it necessary to be as transparent as possible with both myself and the needs of the institution. Explaining things like the operating cost of the museum per visitor (\$13) helps Scholars to understand why paying admission (\$9) is so important. Disclosing

my awareness of my own cultural ignorance -- not knowing the intricacies of fasting during Ramadan, for example -- opened up the Scholars to trust and teach me things I admitted to not knowing. This not only empowers them to act as teachers, but also allows them to feel they can admit to not knowing cultural nuances as well.

Practicing transparency, particularly as a cultural mediator, is essential in creating a healthy environment that is free from judgment. When people fear judgment from others, they are not as likely to share and exchange their personal experiences. The program coordinator sets the tone for the Scholars as employees at the institution, and if the coordinator cultivates a work space of tolerance and transparency, the program ends up far more effective.

From the other side, the program coordinator also needs to act as a mediator between museum staff and the Culture Scholars. In my experience, this has largely manifested in terms of scheduling and reconciling understandings of punctuality. Intervention as described before, as well as explanation to museum staff, is essential in maintaining positive relationships between the Scholars and the rest of the institution. This can require advocacy on the Scholars' behalf, as cultural values are often interpreted as respect (or lack thereof). I've needed to explain the lack of cultural literacy as reason for behaviors other staff members may find unacceptable. Again, transparency is hugely effective in this situation as well, particularly if the coordinator clearly is being proactive about the situation. It is a challenging balancing act and the coordinator must be able to quickly socially maneuver between teen, immigrant, museum, professional, American, and other ethnic cultures.

Summary of Program

The Culture Scholars program has gone through several stages since September 2012: recruitment and screening; hiring of each Culture Scholar; training and orientation; planning meetings and program development; program implementation; and evaluation. Of course, several of these stages have repeated over the last six months, particularly program planning, implementation, and evaluation (as each Scholar develops new programs).

Beginning Stages: Recruitment

Recruitment for Culture Scholars was primarily conducted through the Portland Mentoring Alliance, the previously mentioned mentoring program based at Portland High School. Glenn Nerbak, the mentoring program director, distributed applications to interested students. Suzan Ali and Faiza Ali (no relation) had already been hired as Culture Scholars in January 2012 and continued their employment through the fall; this left two new spots for applicants. I conducted interviews with four students, and selected Nilab Nasrat and Kidayer Aljubyly based on their ideal fit for the program. With greater resources, recruitment could expand to having informational sessions at several local schools and thus bring in a wider range of applicants. While each Culture Scholar is from a different country, they are from either Central/East Africa or the Middle East, and everyone is Muslim. The religious consistency was not a deliberate decision; all of the applicants to the program happened to be Muslim. While this is representative of Portland's immigrant

population, a more diverse geographic range of origin would be ideal for a fully rounded program.

A key component of the recruitment process included significant support for the applicants from the program coordinator (myself). Many of these teens had never applied for a job, and didn't always understand the nuances of terms like "reference," or "previous experience." It was integral for me to make myself available to help students apply and answer any questions they might have about the application process. Much of this was also explained in the interviews, which were most applicants' first experiences with the interview process as well. A thorough explanation of the museum and the work the Scholars would be doing was also needed, as most of the applicants were culturally unfamiliar with the concept of a children's museum.

Training and Orientation

After the final four Culture Scholars were selected, the month of October was spent learning about the museum, getting to know each other, and planning Scholar programs for the winter. Initial meetings also consisted of program planning, which was a largely trial-and-error based process. Seeing as this is the first time I have officially run the program, many of my initial strategies and methods have come under heavy revision for better future effectiveness. At the inception of the program, I created a series of worksheets to assist Scholars in their development of programs (see Appendix A). They had five worksheets (and, subsequently, five program types) to choose from: language, dance, art, storytelling, and cooking. As they tried to make

their way through the worksheets, it became clear that they had different ideas for programs and the worksheets were rendered mostly useless. Scholars were also not trained on "regular" museum programming -- simple activities like face painting, story time, play-doh, art studio, et cetera. Over time, Scholars learned these programs and enjoyed them just as much as their personal programs. In retrospect, Scholars should have been trained on these simple museum programs initially, and then asked to develop their own programs based on cultural learning. After learning and leading several of the aforementioned activities, their institutional knowledge would have helped them create more effective cultural programs from the beginning.

Program Development and Implementation

Over time, each Scholar developed 1-3 personal programs that they led with regularity during their shifts at the museum. These included Learning Language: Arabic, Farsi, and Somali (three separate programs); Middle Eastern Hip Hop; Somali Flag and Star Art; Henna Art; and several different cooking workshops featuring *Bulani* (Afghan fried dough pockets), *Aloo ke paratha* (Indian spiced potato flatbread), and *Bodanjom* (Sudanese eggplant). Suzan also led a very successful *Mawlid al-Nabi* (birth and death of the Muslim prophet Muhammad) celebration in January, and Nilab a *Nowruz* (Persian New Year) celebration in March. Often the Scholars work in pairs, particularly during these larger-scale events; they are often able to share insights on cultural similarities and differences, as well as offer museum visitors a wider range of perspectives on the featured topic.

In addition to leading programs, Scholars also help with larger cultural events that are perhaps unfamiliar to them. Examples include the Tree Lighting Ceremony over Thanksgiving weekend; a Diwali celebration in November; a New Year's Eve pajama party on December 31; and a Brazilian Carnival celebration in February. Scholars greatly enjoy helping with these events, as it gives them the opportunity to learn more about an unfamiliar culture -- something they appreciate as much as sharing their own culture. Many of the Scholars had never tasted hot cocoa or heard of Charlie Brown until the Tree Lighting Ceremony; now they are familiar with these two extremely common features of American holiday culture.

Individual Growth

As we move into the third quarter of the program, the Culture Scholars are getting noticeably more comfortable with their role as youth staff at CMTM. They are increasingly recognized by museum staff and visitors, are familiar with the process of filling out time sheets, and are gaining confidence in their ability to lead high-quality programs independently. From the perspective of their supervisor, I have observed great improvements in each individual's growth over the last five months. All four students entered the program with enthusiasm, but not without insecurities. When asked in her October entrance interview if she was nervous about anything, Nilab replied, "I am nervous because I know it is a little hard to talk about my culture and I don't know how people here will react, will they like it or no." After leading multiple programs independently, including henna art, different craft projects, face painting, language learning, and cooking workshops, Nilab has

obviously gained an immense amount of confidence. In a recent cooking program, she taught visitors how to make *Bulani*, a traditional Afghan food consisting of a fried pocket of dough filled with potatoes, vegetables, and spices. While Faiza assisted her with the program, I did not -- I only observed periodically, and was deeply impressed to see Nilab greeting every visitor with a smile, asking if they would like to taste or try making some *Bulani*, introducing herself, and showing visitors where to find Afghanistan on a globe. After five months in the program, when asked how visitors react to her programs, Nilab said, "Since I have started working here I think they like the programs that I have done... they were nice to me. ...I liked the way they pay attention to me and supported me." Visitor reception of the programs is extremely positive; an anonymous visitor noted in a short survey of a cooking program, "It was a wonderful interactive project that pertains to everyday life." Another visitor, in response to the same program, said, "It was excellent, my daughter loved making her food and trying Indian for the first time!" This positive reinforcement from visitors helps Culture Scholars gain confidence and feel valued by their community, strengthening both their professional skills and sense of belonging.

In addition to interactions with visitors, Scholars have also been expected to meet certain professional standards that, initially, were challenging for some. Students cannot be expected to understand the American professional value system without experience. The more the coordinator communicates with the Culture Scholars, the more quickly they will learn what is important and improve as employees. When asked at his mid-year evaluation what he had learned so far about

having a job, Kidayer replied, "Work hard at your job. And have fun doing programs, have fun with the kids." He has learned that a strong work ethic is very important, but also that having fun remains an important component in the balance -- an essential part of working at a children's museum.

Program Development

Culture Scholars began by developing their own programs: Henna Art, Middle Eastern Hip Hop, Learning Language, and Somali Flag and Star Art. As they developed confidence, I was able to let them lead their programs independently. They expressed interest in leading other museum programs, including Face Painting, Play-Doh, and Open Art Studio. As they learned these programs as well, they began to find connections between a program like Face Painting and Henna, drawing parallels between cultures. Faiza and Nilab both report liking the Henna program the most, Faiza saying, "I love Play-Doh and Henna. Every program I do is fun but these two are my favorite since kids enjoy them." When asked how visitors react to her programs, Faiza continued, "It depends what the program is. If it is not something that is not entertaining they won't enjoy and if it is good they will stay and enjoy." She makes a good point -- that visitors are more receptive to programs if they are entertained. While this is not the goal of the Culture Scholars' programs, it is an important tool to consider in the sustained engagement of visitors. Scholars report that the Learning Language program is the least effective in this. Said Faiza, "The language learning program is not working at all. We can improve if we add more interesting ways to learn." Nilab agrees, "I think [the] language program was

kind of boring to kids and there were not many kids to come and join this program."

The approach to this program has been largely conversational with little active participation other than talking. If the program had a stronger interactive, action-based component, visitors likely would have sustained interest.

Alternatively, the cooking programs have been extremely well received both by visitors and the Culture Scholars. Said Suzan, "My favorite program is cooking because I enjoy learning new food from new culture and I like seeing a lot of people in the program. People love food and they also enjoy the program with me and that makes me happy!" Kidayer agrees, "Cooking [is my favorite] because I love cooking food." Food is an incredibly powerful common denominator across cultures, which provides a social situation in which people can begin to comfortably communicate. Culture Scholars have the added benefit of working in pairs, particularly for the cooking classes, and can learn how to make different dishes from each other -- adding to the depth of the experience. Visitors leave the program having tasted a new food, as well as a printed recipe to take home and try if they like. I administered surveys to some of the cooking program participants; overall, the feedback was very positive. One visitor did note that she would have liked more information about the food, "It was excellent! My daughter loved making the food. More information about what they are making may be nice... [I] learned how to make an Indian dish, yet [it's] unknown what it is." Another visitor wrote, "Would love more cooking programs." Overall, this visitor feedback is very encouraging -- not only did people enjoy participating in the program, they would like to know more information about the featured food. This indicates a deeper level of interest other than entertainment or

free food; participating in the activity incited a desire to *learn* more about the cultural meanings of the particular dish. This is something that I need to bring up to the Culture Scholars and coach them to include in their future programs.

Special Events

In addition to their personal programs, Culture Scholars also assisted with special cultural events throughout the year, working with various community members and volunteers. In November 2012, we held our annual Diwali celebration, a Hindu festival of light held in the beginning of winter. This event included a children's dance performance, clay *diya* (candle) making, food samples cooked by volunteers, and body art (henna and bindis for anyone who wanted them). Culture Scholars Nilab and Suzan worked during the Diwali event, being ushers for the dance performance, assisting with the *diya* making, and leading the henna art station. Nilab previously lived in India for four years and Suzan helped with another Hindu festival earlier in the year; both were extremely enthusiastic and effective in their roles. A substantial group of Indian volunteers -- adults and children -- made the event happen, and were all friendly towards Nilab and Suzan. Having the Culture Scholars present at an event like this added a sophisticated cultural dimension to what otherwise would have been a homogenous group of Indian volunteers. Seeing non-Indian employees staffing the event also perhaps made visitors feel they could participate in the activities even though they themselves were not Indian. In this particular role, the Culture Scholars were adding to the layers of cultural diversity in the program, emphasizing the fact that the activities were open to everyone.

This added layer of diversity comes through in every major cultural event the Culture Scholars assist with. Another example is Brazilian Carnival, a recent program led in February 2013. A local family, the American mother and Brazilian father having originally met in Brazil, volunteered for the afternoon and brought different Brazilian foods for visitors to sample. The mother, a professionally trained dancer, also led a dance program in which she taught several easy Brazilian dance steps to visitors. Culture Scholars Nilab and Suzan led a mask-making program and assisted with the dance class. Suzan proudly wore a colorful feathered headdress (traditional to Carnival festivities), which encouraged young visitors to try something new and wear a mask themselves. Suzan also enthusiastically participated in the dance class, again encouraging visitors to participate as well. Suzan was learning the dance steps with them, allowing visitors to feel comfortable to make mistakes together.

A final component not to be ignored is the Culture Scholars' assistance with more mainstream, "American" cultural programs. During the last weekend of November, we held our annual Tree Lighting Ceremony, at which visitors could make simple Christmas tree ornaments, drink hot cocoa, and count down the lighting of our museum tree. Culture Scholars Kidayer and Nilab assisted with this event; neither of them had ever been to a Christmas tree lighting ceremony, nor knew what one entailed. Neither had tasted hot cocoa or heard of Charlie Brown (the soundtrack to the event was A Charlie Brown Christmas, incredibly familiar to most native-born Americans). And yet both reacted very positively to the program. Said Nilab, "I have never been to a tree lighting ceremony before. Before I had

different thinking about the tree lighting ceremony. And I didn't know it include[s] Christmas festival. Anyway, it was a lot of fun." It is important that the Culture Scholars not only have a chance to share their personal cultural experiences with visitors, but to also have new ones that provide them with insight into their new home culture. Having Culture Scholars staff events like the Christmas Tree Lighting or the New Year's Pajama Party also gives visitors a chance to talk about -- and make visible -- their own culture to individuals who may be unfamiliar with it. This reminder -- that not everyone recognizes the Charlie Brown Christmas soundtrack -- is deeply important and an integral learning component for visitors as they interact with Culture Scholars.

Documentation

A secondary component to the Culture Scholars program is the development of a short documentary of their year's work. Initially, I had planned on having each of the Scholars contribute and shape the documentary, but as the year progresses it has become clear to me that I need to direct the majority of the production. The Culture Scholars are largely consumed with learning museum programs, developing their own personal programs, and assisting with larger cultural events that it leaves inadequate time for them to have a meaningful role in the vision of the documentary. Over time they have warmed up to the idea of being featured in the documentary, although Nilab is still not comfortable being focused on by the camera for more than a few seconds. It has been very challenging to collect as much footage as I'd like during the programs, as I also have to act as the program coordinator.

This involves organizing schedules and materials, answering visitor and volunteer questions, spontaneous troubleshooting various challenges as they arise, and facilitating interaction between visitors and volunteers as needed. Between these responsibilities of the coordinator, it can be very challenging to collect a substantial amount of video footage. If possible, in future programs it would be hugely helpful to have an additional cameraperson to capture the action of the events; however, in this case, the most efficient use of funding called for me to take on the job myself.

Increased Awareness

The Culture Scholars have also begun to increase the diversity of community members participating in cultural programs at the museum. An excellent example was during our Mawlid al-Nabi program, led by Suzan with Nilab's help. This Muslim holiday celebrates the birth and death of the prophet Muhammad, and is a rather stoic, education-based holiday. Suzan's personal connection to a local mosque led to their Sunday group of children attending the program as a group visit. This was the first time a group from a mosque had ever visited the museum, and the fact that many of the participating children knew Suzan was instrumental in creating a sense of belonging at the museum. The children in the group were from a variety of countries, including Somalia, Iraq, and other East African countries, and at one point Suzan said, "Why do we not speak in Arabic when we explain things?" Several Somali children who did not speak Arabic raised their hands; Suzan nodded and said, "Yes, because of you and you and you," (she pointed at me and several other Caucasian visitors) "and you and you! It is important that everyone understands

what we are talking about, so we will speak mostly in English." Suzan noticed this subtle but incredibly sophisticated nuance of sociocultural interaction and transparently explained it in an understandable way to visitors, immediately acknowledging our cultural differences but dealing with them in a positive way. She is clearly on her way to becoming a highly skilled cultural mediator.

Evaluation and Assessment

As the Culture Scholars program comes to a close on its first year of operation, some form of overall evaluation is needed to determine its success (or lack thereof). However, the program will continue through the summer and following school year. Because of this, and the relatively short duration of the program thus far, a distanced and objective evaluation is challenging to assess. A worthy strategy would be to examine the previously stated goals of the program and identify key successes and failures of each.

- *The Culture Scholars program will train and employ four immigrant teens in the skills needed to research, develop, and present original educational programs about cultural traditions (their own and others').*

Over the course of the year, the four teens in the program underwent orientation and training to become successful employees at the Children's Museum & Theatre of Maine. I define "successful" as exceeding the expectations of the job given to them, as well as being able to thrive independently in a work environment such as a museum. I also consider "success" to include the Scholars' ability to perform their jobs without having the program coordinator – myself – present. This reveals a true

understanding of what is generally expected at the workplace, as well as how to function within the particular museum cultural code as an employee.

- *The Scholars will deliver a series of public programs exploring cultural, national or religious traditions from an authentic, personal point of view.*

Beyond the basic functions of their job, the Culture Scholars have developed their own individual programs reflecting cultural practices and traditions that are important to them. Examples include a Nowruz (Persian Spring Festival) celebration; activities teaching about the Muslim holiday Mawlid al-Nabi; an urban gardening program based on family traditions from Iraq; and cooking Somali sambosas. Each of these programs required the Scholars to consider a cultural practice important to them; create an outline and plan for the program, as well as list any materials needed; identify and define what about that practice was meaningful to them; and actually execute the program with museum visitors. Each Scholar has done this many times, and continues to develop new programs unique to his or herself. This kind of program development demands a high level of cultural awareness, and the ability to gauge value without necessarily making a value judgment – an incredibly nuanced task that each Scholar is now able to do.

- *The Culture Scholars program forges new relationships with young leaders and their families in Portland's immigrant and refugee communities, developing a new, collaborative model for cultural programming.*

The best example of “forging new relationships” among the community is the Mawlid al-Nabi celebration organized and planned by Suzan. This program brought a paid group visit from a local mosque to the museum for the first time – largely

based on Suzan's relationship to the mosque and the community there. Suzan knew many of the children in the group and was able to make them feel comfortable immediately upon arrival. However, this example is somewhat rare and this could be a targeted area for improvement. The teens in this program undoubtedly have wide-reaching social circles and calling upon them to engage more of their community members is key to the successful growth of the program.

Relatedly, the Culture Scholars' family members rarely (if ever) visited the museum, which can be seen as a weakness of the program to be addressed. Further work should be done on how to engage Scholars' families, regardless of class and leisure capital – the ability to even visit a museum during non-working or school hours. Possible initiatives to address this would be to require the Scholars to develop a “family history” project in which they work with their parents and/or grandparents to create an educational program based on a familial cultural practice. The program could be scheduled for a day when one or both of the parents are able to attend and participate in the program, bridging the gap between the museum and the home. This is one small example; the greater notion of including the parents (and other family members) in the development process of the job is key to greater engagement.

Lessons Learned

There are many components to the Culture Scholars program; as this is a pilot program that is still currently underway, there are numerous changes and improvements that could increase the effectiveness and quality of the program for

everyone involved. The main categories include Training and Orientation; Program development and implementation; Learning of and acclimation to Museum culture; and Program Evaluation.

Initially, I started the program by asking Culture Scholars to create their own programs. I would now recommend having them learn basic museum programs (examples include Face Painting, Story Time, and Play-Doh) -- or perhaps the principles of museum programs -- before asking them to develop new programs without much precedent. By having them lead basic programs that have a predetermined structure, Culture Scholars would quickly learn how to simply interact with visitors, make announcements for their programs, follow the daily schedule, and work with other museum staff. This is such a significant part of the learning curve and essential for them to understand as soon as possible in order to be successful employees at the museum. Once they've mastered these simple programs *and* the nuances of being a museum employee, *then* they should be given time to begin thinking about developing their own programs based on personal culture.

Scholars should then be asked to develop one cultural program at a time, slowly incorporating it into their weekly shifts along with basic museum programs and floor checks. At the end of each cultural program, Scholars should fill out a feedback/evaluation sheet, allowing them to reflect on the success or challenges of their program. This reflection should then inform any changes to implement to improve the program's effectiveness in the future. Once they feel strongly positive about the program, they may begin to think about adding a second.

Monthly schedules should be distributed a minimum of one week prior to the following calendar month to give Scholars enough time to determine their availability to work all of their assigned shifts. Copies of the monthly schedule should be both emailed and given a hard copy, either in person or via mail. Weekly work reminders are extremely helpful for high school students and can prevent confusion over shifts.

Inevitably, unforeseen challenges arise and must be dealt with on an individual basis. These must be taken with flexibility, fluidity, and transparency on behalf of the coordinator; it is important to maintain a firm sense of authority but to also create a safe space for learning and growth. Scholars need to learn valuable lessons about punctuality and appropriate behavior, but also cannot feel as though they aren't able to make mistakes. An example would be when Faiza brought her younger sister to the museum during one of her shifts over Vacation Week, an extremely busy time in terms of attendance. Initially, as I was under a lot of pressure that day, I told Faiza she shouldn't bring her sister to her shift without asking me first. After I told her this, she apologized profusely and said she could ask her sister to leave; I assured her that wasn't necessary, that it was fine for that day, but in the future it would be a good idea to check with me to see if that was appropriate. I could not have foreseen Faiza bringing her sister to work, but it needed to be addressed immediately in the moment in a positive but constructive way. This is an excellent example of navigating the cultural values of the museum – namely, honoring them – but also maintaining an awareness of existing values about whiteness and success. In “museum terms,” bringing a younger sibling to work as an

unpaid visitor may signify a lack of seriousness in the job and an abuse of the admission policy. In the Scholar's terms, however, the situation could have been perceived as a positive opportunity to engage a younger sibling in the exciting work that she was very proud of. It is essential to be sensitive to both perceptions and respect them equally – no simple task for the coordinator.

The following section, Replicable Model Design, will incorporate these and more lessons learned in the explication of a model any Children's Museum could implement in order to create a Culture Scholars program of their own.

Section IV: Replicable Program Model

Overview

In the previous section, I outlined my first-hand experience in creating, developing, and implementing the Culture Scholars program specifically at the Children's Museum & Theatre of Maine. While a specific example, this Case Study provides insight into what it takes to create a cultural youth engagement program and can inform future related work in the field. As museums across the country choose to engage in this work, an informational program guide will prove invaluable and potentially save significant time and resources used for project planning and testing. As an attempt to provide this kind of program guide, in this section I will present a replicable program model for the use of any Children's Museum interested in cultivating a program similar to Culture Scholars. What I have developed here is a framework, based on extensive research, experience, and corrected mistakes. Many lessons have been learned in the process, and I aim to arm program coordinators

with a far more developed toolkit than I initially had at the beginning of the program. Program coordinators should feel free to adapt the program to fit the needs and culture of the specific institution.

I created the following model for program coordinators looking to organize a cultural youth program at his or her museum. I recognize that my specific demographic is one of many potential variations, and that coordinators may be culturally very similar to my position or perhaps very different, as will the participating students. Consider the context of my experiences and adjust my suggestions to fit particular situations accordingly.

- **Is my museum the right museum for a Culture Scholars program?** The following is a series of hypothetical questions one might ask throughout the development of a program like Culture Scholars, followed by action steps in response to the questions. This framework is designed for practical use by program coordinators in any type of museum setting, though children's museums are the primary target.
- **What relationships does my organization have with local youth?**
 - *Consider:* the Culture Scholars program is integrally linked with a local high school; if you are unable to partner with a high school in your community, your access to teens will be significantly limited.

However, if you have strong connections to teens in the community, you may be able to get around this.
- **Do we have enough resources?**

- *Size:* Small and emerging children's museums often have more tasks and organizational challenges to meet than well-established museums, and should carefully weigh the benefits of a cultural youth program to the burden it may put on a small staff.
- *Personnel:* If your museum can afford to designate a staff person as coordinator of the program and find resources to pay small salaries to high school students, return is high. (High school students cost significantly less than adult employees.)
- *Scale:* Create your program depending on the capacity of your museum. Two scholars provide a partner and collaborator for each other; if a museum was able to designate a staff member to spend the majority of his or her time on the program, there is no reason why ten or fifteen scholars couldn't be accommodated.
- **How will we pay for a cultural youth program?**
 - *Funding:* Many foundations seek to support programs that provide professional and learning opportunities to underserved communities. Alternatively, consider allocating floor staff funds for a cultural youth program and consider the volunteer or program staff manager for the coordinator of a cultural youth program.
 - *Calculate:* Consider minimum wage in your state (at the time of writing, most hover around \$7.50 per hour) and calculate the cost per month to accommodate two scholars, the minimum I would recommend. If each scholar worked eight hours per month, that

would result in a monthly cost of \$120 in wages. Museums can add scholars and shifts as they are able. Food and cooking programs tend to be extremely popular, and considering a small budget for cooking materials is strongly recommended.

What is the context of my museum?

- **How does my community's geographic location affect our behavior?**
 - *Consider location:* Is your location urban, suburban, rural, or somewhere in-between? Every community is geographically situated in a place of specificity; it is essential to consider the implications of your location when creating a program centered on culture. For example, the urban design and consequent social patterns of a Midwestern town will likely differ greatly from a New England coastal city. Ease of transport to and from a community dictates the influx of new people, products, languages, and ideas; even factors like weather can deeply influence the way a community perceives time and punctuality. Consider the fast pace of the cold Northeast with the slower pace of the warmer South. All of these will be factors that shape the way a community functions and constructs their value system.
- **What social and cultural groups exist within my community? What are their stories?**

- *Consider culture:* Take time to research the different neighborhoods, cultural groups, and religious affiliations in your area. Some communities have large populations of immigrants and/or refugees from a particular region of the world; other communities may have many different types of people living closely together.
- *Consider social conflicts:* “Do your homework” on cultural histories of your community. This will save you potential strife in the future. A good example is the social friction between Sudanese and South Sudanese immigrants and refugees in Portland, Maine. Because of political unrest in Sudan, many Sudanese residents conflict with South Sudanese residents – despite (rather, because of) their geographic proximity.
- **How does the socioeconomic structure of my community influence civic engagement?**
 - *Consider socioeconomics:* How do factors like annual income, college education, and single parents affect your museum visitation? How do these factors affect the harmony of your community generally? What major economic drivers exist in your community (or do not), and how does this influence the way visitors and program participants interact with each other?

What is the culture of my museum?

- **What does my organization value? What are some "unwritten rules" at my museum?**

- *Analyze:* The culture of an organization tends to be largely invisible to its employees. It includes things like:
 - Sense of time (how punctual are staff meetings?)
 - The value of socializing (how important are relationships among peers?)
 - Industriousness (do employees take lunch breaks?)
- *Support:* Help new employees acclimate to the culture of a workplace, particularly the Culture Scholars. They will likely be unfamiliar with the seemingly obvious but unspoken "rules" of the workplace. It's extremely important for you to become aware of these "rules" in order to clearly explain them to teens.
- *Organize:* Hold a series of cultural conversation groups among employees at your museum. These small group conversations are 1-2 hour opportunities for employees to learn more about each other and develop an awareness of the cohesive culture at the museum. By conducting these conversations, an organization can work towards developing a cohesive set of cultural policies created by the entire team of employees. This will increase the level of ownership and, therefore, adherence to said policies over time.
 - *Obtain administrative support:* approach your museum director with a proposed timeline and, if you have a staff larger than

five, selected group leaders to facilitate and guide conversation.

- *Meet with the group leaders:* Evaluate progress and to collect data, which you can then transform into relevant information to your youth program participants.
- *For a set of worksheets with sample questions for these exercises, see Appendix B.*

- **What are my own cultural values and priorities? How do these affect my relationships with others?**

- *Examine* your own cultural identity and sets of expectations. Spend some time reflecting on the context of your own upbringing.
 - Where did you grow up?
 - Who did you spend time with?
 - What do you value?
 - What languages do you speak?
- *Identify* these priorities and inclinations; this will reveal important factors about relationships to others -- essential knowledge in leading people who may have different cultural values than you.

- **How does my museum represent culture? Are there problematics that need to be addressed?**

- *Consider* any previous cultural programs. Example programs include Hanukkah, Chinese New Year, Dia de los Muertos, and Diwali.

- Was there a cultural collaborator or volunteer "expert" guiding the content of the programs?
 - Did the lead facilitator have a deep learned knowledge about the culture being explored? If so, determine where that knowledge came from and how to use it in the future. If not, brainstorm a list of potential community partners who could support the deep understanding of the topic.
- *Work* with the Education department to implement cultural partners for programs at your museum. This shows respect and sensitivity to the fact that you and/or your museum staff may not understand what it means to be Jewish, Chinese, Mexican, or Hindu.
- *Involve* community members of the featured culture; honor the integrity and potential belief systems embedded within that culture -- values museum staff may or may not know about.

How do I recruit for and staff a Culture Scholars program?

- **Where do I find potential participants?**
 - *Establish* a relationship with a local high school. The school will be your conduit for finding teens to participate in your program.
 - *Find* an individual school employee who is strongly engaged with the desired youth population; seek out volunteer and/or Key Club advisors, multicultural club leaders, and even ELL teachers.

- *Initiate* contact via email, which you can usually find on the school's website, or try calling the front desk of the school. Front desk staff often know many, if not all, of the employees at a school and can often locate the appropriate person.
- *Meet* in person with the school contact, explaining goals and proposed timeline for the program. Ask for their input and suggestions; they will know their students well, and likely have very helpful feedback.
- **How do I explain the opportunity to potential participants?**
 - *Organize* an information session where you can informally present both the work of your museum and your youth program to students.
 - *Explain* what exactly a children's museum is and what happens there. A Powerpoint slide show of photographs showing the museum is a hugely helpful visual explanation of the work your organization does, and supplements an informative conversation extremely well.
 - *Distribute* job applications, being sure to allow time to help students complete the form and answer questions they may have.
 - *Create* a modified version of your museum's standard application for employment; use simplified language and include appropriate instructions for parental consent when the applicants are under 18 years of age. *For a sample application, see Appendix A.*
- **How do I establish trust?**
 - *Bring* students in attendance from the school to your museum. If walking or public transportation is not an option, try to provide

transportation to the museum. Physically making the journey from the school to the museum with the students shows that you are willing to support students in their understanding of both what and where the museum is.

- *Give* students a full tour, taking the time to explain your exhibits, major programs, and answer any questions they may have. Chances are good that many students haven't visited the museum previously -- they will likely be extremely excited, their "inner child" showing itself.
- *Communicate* with the school contact to set a deadline for application and a way for students to get their applications delivered. Ask students to mail the application to you at the museum or have them give applications to the school liaison who then mails them to you collectively by your predetermined date.

- **What do I do with the applications?**

- *Remember* that many students are likely English Language Learners and may not be accurately represented by their written responses.
- *Identify* a top applicant pool and request that they come to the museum for an interview. Explain this does not mean they *have* the job, it means they are being *considered* for the job -- and you would like to take some time to ask them some questions.
- *Be* patient, speak slowly and clearly and eventually you will be understood. Familiarize yourself with the public transportation; the more information you can provide, the better.

- **How should I conduct the interviews?**
 - *Be* conscious of language learners and sensitive to cultural nuances (a lack of eye contact, for example, is considered a sign of respect for authority in many countries).
 - *Explain* that this is a time for you to get to know each other a little bit and ask each other questions. Give your candidates time to think of and ask their own questions during your interview; do not rush the conversation.
 - *Focus* on relevant topics (previous experiences working with children; thoughts and perceptions of culture; motivations for being in the program) but *do not* ask specifically about race, religion, ethnicity, or legal status. If the candidate wants to share with you that s/he is Muslim, s/he will do so -- but you should never specifically ask this of them. *See Appendix A for sample interview questions.*

- **How do I choose?**
 - *Consider* that, if you plan to run your program for longer than one year, you want to favor underclassmen over seniors – they may stay on as employees throughout their high school career.
 - *Notify* applicants either by phone or mailed letter; be sure to notify *every* applicant, whether they are accepted or rejected.
 - *Consider* factors in your team like gender, cultural and religious balance, assuming those are known to you.

- **How do I get Culture Scholars ready to work?**

- *Bring* Scholars to the museum for a series of training and orientation sessions. Two hours per week is adequate; after school works well.
- *Provide* ample time for introductions, icebreakers, and getting to know each other. Participate in these initial activities as well.
- *Complete* any and all necessary employment paperwork with the Scholars and introduce students to workplace logistics such as time sheets, scheduling protocol, methods of communication, and general expectations in the workplace.
- *Give* students time to ask you questions at every meeting. You may need to help them correctly fill out their W-2 forms, as well as determining the appropriate type of identification verification needed, et cetera.
- *Develop* initial interview questions for program participants to complete during their first or second orientation session. This is an effective way to gauge participants' skill and confidence levels in various areas at the onset of the program; periodic similar assessments will be able to reveal growth over the course of the year.

Questions should address:

- Professional experience and job skills
- Feelings and perceptions about cultural identity in relationship to the community
- General concerns and expectations of the program ahead. *For sample intake questions, see Appendix A.*

- **How do I encourage team building and collaboration?**
 - *Include* a series of group cultural discussions. Get students thinking more critically about the definition of "culture": a recent news article can serve as an excellent starting point for a conversation; worksheets with several questions around culture are also useful tools.
 - *Keep* conversations respectful and constructive at all times; if you sense conflict and/or misunderstanding, it is up to the coordinator to diffuse and mediate as soon as possible.
 - *State* that the goal of this work is to strive towards tolerance, open-mindedness, and understanding. If this is clear, there should be no issues with compliance. *For cultural conversation resources and worksheets, see Appendix B.*

- **We have four Culture Scholars. How do we get them leading programs?**
 - *Introduce* participants to pre-existing museum programs and/or floor responsibilities. In more program-based museums, this could include simple activities like:
 - Face painting
 - Play-doh
 - Games
 - Art projects
 - *Staff* Culture Scholars in different exhibit spaces on the floor to interact and play with visitors. This introduces Scholars to the

operations of the museum in a gradual way and allows them to see themselves as a museum employee.

- *Schedule* participants for two-hour shifts, either after school or on weekends. Work with scheduling staff to find the best days and times for both the students and the organization.
 - Initially limit scheduled shifts to days when the coordinator is present at the museum; as the participants get increasingly comfortable in their role, they will be able to work independently.
- *Work* with colleagues who interact with participants directly, coaching them on potential areas of cultural misunderstanding (punctuality, time sheets, general museum rules).
 - If an issue arises (a participant shows up 20 minutes late, for example), *do not delay* in communicating the issue at hand with the participant. Usually the teen simply doesn't understand that showing up late to a shift is unacceptable; however, they will continue to be unaware unless you bring it to their attention.
- **What does a full year program look like?**
 - *Run* the program through a full school year (September through May).
 - *Establish* your relationship with a local high school the May previous to the school year you'd like to run the program; this will give you ample time over the summer to prepare for the program ahead.

- September is a good month for the recruitment and interview process, as students are often looking for extracurriculars to add to their schedule by the end of the month.
 - October, typically a slower month in terms of museum visitation, is an ideal time for training and orientation. Once museum visitation begins to pick up over the holidays, program participants are well acclimated to the museum and their tasks there.
- *Consider* the year as a whole when devising your program timeline; be sure to set beginning, middle, and end dates for initial, mid, and final self-evaluations of participants.
- *Support* development of Scholars' own ideas for programs after they've been at the museum for 6-8 weeks
 - Supply a general worksheet to help focus their ideas, including questions around the "What, Where, When, Why, and How" of their program, with an emphasis on the "Why."
 - Allow each student to develop their own program, but work in pairs to collaborate and provide feedback to one another.
 - Encourage participants to ask their family members, particularly parents and grandparents, about cultural traditions, recipes, and practices. Family members, even siblings, should be encouraged to volunteer occasionally -- with approval of the program participant, of course.

- *Allow* Scholars to lead programs on their own as they are ready. Over time, they learn nuances of museum education, ways to "hook" and engage visitors, ask and answer insightful questions, and speak publicly without anxiety.
- *Complete* mid-evaluations in February; these measure improvement and reveal room for growth. *For a sample program worksheet, as well as evaluation questions, see Appendix A.*
- **How do I measure success and increase engagement?**
 - *Schedule* an observation of each participant's program monthly.
 - Be casual yet constructive; do not "test" them, but instead just "hang out," give them feedback on what they're doing well and what they might improve.
 - Include both positive reinforcement as well as constructive criticism; positive feedback increases confidence and positivity, while constructive criticism encourages improvement and growth.
 - *Continue* meeting at least once per month for two hours with the group as a whole.
 - Share stories, observations, and challenges from previous programs.
 - Incorporate something fun, such as a movie, playing music, and cooking or eating food. These activities foster relationship

building and are an excellent starting point for conversations about cultural phenomena.

- **How do I keep everything organized?**
 - *Create* a universally accessible spreadsheet with detailed information on what each participant is able to do during his or her regular two-hour shift.
 - *Share* this information with staff; the more they know about the program, the more likely they are to engage with participants on a regular basis -- making participants feel incorporated to the staff of the museum.

- **How do I support and celebrate Culture Scholars?**
 - *Have* Scholars collect observations in a journal or private blog; this can be a good way to informally take notes about the program's development.
 - *Conduct* formal evaluations at the beginning, middle, and end of the year. This provides concrete measurements of improved social skills, program development, cultural adaptation and critical thinking.
 - *Share* this growth known to your participants; nothing empowers teens like knowing they've improved themselves and made a difference in their community.
 - *Organize* a group meeting with the purpose of planning an end-of-year celebration in honor of their achievement. This can be a private or

public party at your museum; consider allowing participants to invite family members and friends.

- *Invite* the entire museum staff and encourage attendance; they will likely be very interested in learning about all of the ways participants contributed to the museum in the previous year.
- *Make* a "memory book" for participants with pictures, recipes, and other documentation of their year of work at your museum.
- *Designate* returning participants as leaders, mentoring new participants in the fall.
- **How do I effectively assess the program overall?**
 - *Ask* visitors questions about the Culture Scholars programs and events they attend. Did they learn something? Were their perceptions changed in some way? If possible, measure repeat attendance: are visitors returning specifically to attend Culture Scholars programs? This indicates substantial public interest and could garner funding support.
 - *Survey* museum employees at the onset of the Culture Scholars program, and then incrementally as it evolves. Ask questions that may reveal reactions to and enthusiasm for working with immigrant youth and track these over time.
 - *Measure* demographics in museum attendance, specifically as related to Culture Scholars programs. Has the existence of the Culture

Scholars program increased attendance in ethnic and religious minority groups previously underrepresented at the museum?

- *Incorporate* the Culture Scholars program into the staff cultural conversations and policy development mentioned previously. By making an immigrant youth employment program a part of institutional practice, it becomes a sustainable component of the organization rather than a temporary program led by an individual.

Surely there are more elements to consider when designing and implementing a program like Culture Scholars at a museum, but these guidelines should provide ample structure initially. A program like Culture Scholars not only has great implications for an individual museum, but also for museums generally and the field of Cultural Sustainability. The following section will indicate how teens can act as leaders and promote Cultural Sustainability on a larger scale.

Section V: Implications for the Field

A cultural youth engagement program as I have described, examined, and suggested in my work is extremely relevant to the field of Cultural Sustainability. In terms of Cultural Sustainability, a program like Culture Scholars supports immigrant teens and the communities within which they live on many levels. To further elaborate, a definition of Cultural Sustainability is needed.

Cultural Sustainability

The field of Cultural Sustainability supports the maintenance and celebration of humans' traditional practices and ways of life while finding their contemporary cultural relevance for facilitating peaceful coexistence and synergy in communities worldwide. While this encompasses much, I see four major components which relate directly to the Culture Scholars program.

Acknowledgement of value in human traditions and practices. While impossible to learn and sustain every human tradition practiced in the past, people have developed incredible skill sets and ingenious ways of dealing with challenges over time. It is to the clear benefit of contemporary life to learn as much as possible from our elders about ways they handled difficult situations -- and what kinds of creative practices kept value and meaning in their lives. As it is simply inefficient to start solving problems with a "tabula rasa," it is also a waste to discard the cultural capital of the people who came before us. Unfortunately, much of this historic cultural capital exists only in the form of consciousness, particularly in oral tradition or physical practice, often making accessibility limited.

Working towards finding traditional culture's contemporary relevance. Humans have always been quick to adapt; the introduction of modern technology in the last 25 years has accelerated this process tenfold. People today find ourselves in a markedly different situation than our grandparents' -- even our parents' -- generation. The world has become increasingly interconnected; communication has become instantaneous and widely accessible. Certain cultures have emerged as dominant globally and threaten the continued existence of other cultures. As we find value in all cultures, it becomes a challenge of the field to find ways for threatened

cultures to become relevant in the contemporary sphere. Perhaps there are useful tools, ways of perceiving social challenges, unique art forms, et cetera that, when framed appropriately, take on significant relevance and value in new ways. It is precisely by finding and illuminating this relevance that the field can continue to support the lifespan of as diverse a range of cultural traditions as possible.

Respecting differences between cultural practices. Notably, a significant amount of strength lies in the diversity of human culture across the world. Diversity provides multiple perspectives, toolkits, and a greater richness to the modalities of living. It prevents over saturation and consumption and contributes to the complexity of the human ecosystem we've created over time. However, every person naturally has their own set of values and biases; Cultural Sustainability practitioners are often charged with the difficult task of navigating culture and value sets that are different than their own. Withholding personal judgments is essential to being able to access and participate in cultural territory different than your own; if people sense judgment, they will make themselves socially inaccessible.

Facilitating social peace, coexistence, and synergy in communities through culture. Cultural practices are an incredible tool for facilitating empathy and understanding between people. If social friction exists, thoughtful communication and empathy are often by-products of positively sharing a cultural practice with another. Examples include sharing food or a special meal; playing music as a group; learning different languages, and so on. Culture is a manifestation of a people's belief system, perceptions of the world, and particular habits. It is only natural that by cultivating a deeper understanding of a people's culture, one cultivates a deeper

understanding of that people's behavior. Understanding of behavior leads to increased empathy and the likelihood of reduced conflict. This is an essential component of Cultural Sustainability, one that makes it incredibly pragmatic in our contemporary global community.

Across the initial year of the Culture Scholars program at the Children's Museum & Theatre of Maine, I witnessed an exponential amount of growth in the participating teens' confidence in their own cultural identities, understanding of complex cultural concepts, and level of professional knowledge about museums. As Levinson revealed the importance – and power – of developing a unique identity, the Culture Scholars now think of themselves as empowered individuals who have something to teach others in their community, who feel their culture is valued by their community, and that it is *important* to practice and share their culture with others. The input to the program (museum resources, time, and personnel) significantly outweighed the output (the empowerment of participating teens, high quality cultural education programs, and increased community engagement with the museum).

Culture Scholars and Cultural Sustainability: The Culture Scholars program is one solution to the challenges Cultural Sustainability raises. A salient feature of Culture Scholars is its focus on adolescent youth as the core of the program. As noted earlier, the research of Hochschild, Weaver, and Burch reveals that younger generations are significantly more tolerant to the idea of race and ethnicity as flexible. This flexibility, combined with the ability to “operate in multiple cultural

codes” (Suarez-Orozco, 160) and the desire to contribute in a meaningful way means that teens have great potential to generate positive social change. In public learning situations such as Children's Museums, teens can appear less intimidating and more accessible than adults (particularly to children). Their ability to codeswitch quickly and understand multiple cultures simultaneously makes them approachable to a wider range of people, and thus more effective in certain types of educator roles.

The Culture Scholars program, as described in my work, takes place exclusively within a Children's Museum. The influence of the museum setting is significant; considerable sociocultural associations are attached to the institution of the museum. The challenge of accessibility is certainly present, as many people feel they do not have the ability to culturally understand museums and, therefore, do not attend. However, museums are quite prominent and respected, generally, in communities and therefore maintain a level of educational authority and legitimacy in the eyes of visitors. This means that the visitors who *do* make it in the door generally believe and respect what is presented to them within the walls of the institution -- a significant responsibility for the museum staff to consider. Museums are also well-connected to many community organizations and leaders, having a high level of social visibility within a community. Despite the unfortunate exclusivity of museums (a concern a program like Culture Scholars can begin to mitigate), their benefits prove them to be positive sites to develop and cultivate Cultural Sustainability-based projects and programs.

Promoting interaction between culturally disparate communities is another result of the Culture Scholars program. As it employs a high school demographic largely unfamiliar with Children's Museums -- immigrant and refugee teens -- a cultural gap of understanding is bridged. In their work, these teens bring a new set of values and cultural practices both to museum visitors *and* to the museum itself. Hopefully, this begins to incite a bit of cultural awareness among staff, potentially causing a slight (or significant) cultural shift to the institution. These institutional changes, along with the presence of the teens themselves, ideally results in an increased engagement of immigrant and refugee community members at the museum -- and a new level of self-awareness on behalf of the institution.

All of these factors contribute to a significant amount of positive change resultant from a program like Culture Scholars. By being given a space that honors and shares their ways of life, participating students feel that the museum and the visitors who attend their programs value their culture. This perception of value encourages the students to continue practicing their family's cultural traditions with enthusiasm, as they feel it has a place in their new community. Additionally, museum visitors who attend Culture Scholars programs have a positive experience of an unfamiliar culture, something that can otherwise feel threatening in a different context. This positive experience will encourage them to support that same culture elsewhere in their community when they might otherwise have not. This increased community support will lead to a healthier, stronger sense of cultural identity and empowerment among cultural groups. This sense of positive cultural identity will lead to a stronger confidence to maintain cultural traditions and practices visible --

and, importantly, accessible -- to the larger community. Teens and children will see their community value their family's culture, and because of this, will be more likely to participate in and carry their family's cultural traditions throughout their lives. During an initial interview, Culture Scholar Nilab was asked if she felt that the greater community of Portland valued her culture. After a pause, she replied that yes, she did – because the Children's Museum had the Culture Scholars program where she could share her culture. This is Cultural Sustainability as it exists in the larger context of contemporary society.

The Culture Scholars program at the Children's Museum & Theatre of Maine is a singular example of potential cultural museum programs involving youth. This program alone has generated countless conversations around cultural practices, traditions, ideas, and assumptions. It is operating in one community – Portland, Maine – but certainly affecting a significant number of people. Should other children's museums (and museums in general) choose to adopt programs like Culture Scholars, the multiplicity of influence becomes exponential. Each program in each city would have its individual effects; but should the movement become stronger, collaborations and consortiums could develop between cities, states, and even countries. These relationships, rooted in cultural understanding, could significantly shift the cultural paradigm of museums in this country. An influx of programs like Culture Scholars would not only potentially increase cultural awareness and sustainability, but also could promote general social tolerance and mitigate racial violence.

Examples of museum programs serving diverse youth certainly exist; as of April 26, 2013, Nina Simon listed on her website Museum 2.0 that the St. Louis Science Center runs a program called “Youth Exploring Science,” designed to supply black and economically disadvantaged high school students with science education and professional skills. This program empowers marginalized youth to work on science projects and lead programs for a variety of audiences, developing their confidence and diversifying the audience served by the Science Center. While not focused on cultural education, this program has similar goals in terms of youth empowerment. If a program such as this one collaborated – even if only through internet correspondence – with a program like Culture Scholars in Maine, the potential cross-pollination of idea generation and synergy between the groups of teens could provide for incredible results. This would generate further energy on behalf of the students, who might carry their enthusiasm to their schools, families, and friends.

Implications for the Field: Museum Youth Employment programs like Culture Scholars bring innovative initiatives to the field of Cultural Sustainability. Its emphasis on empowering youth to become leaders in the Cultural Sustainability movement is largely unprecedented; often, adults and elders are the first looked to for cultural knowledge. While these adults are still essential to the ecosystem of Cultural Sustainability, the Culture Scholars program sees teens as the catalysts for the propagation of cultural pride, awareness, and understanding within the larger community. Teens tend to be seen as incomplete developmentally, not yet ready for serious responsibilities that come with adulthood. While they are not capable of

certain adult responsibilities, Suarez-Orozco reveal they are remarkably adept at navigating complexly diverse social circumstances, often with greater ease than adults. Teens thrive with this kind of responsibility and the success of the Culture Scholars program underscores this – and demonstrates what teens can accomplish if given the opportunity. They hold immense potential for the Cultural Sustainability movement.

Programs like Culture Scholars also focus on bringing culturally disparate groups together -- something that is not always a priority when aiming to sustain culture. However, by engaging multiple cultural communities at once, personal cultural identity becomes more visible. When you find yourself among similar people, you tend not to notice the similarities; when you are surrounded by difference, it becomes all you can see. While differences can often feel challenging and uncomfortable initially, we can create safe spaces for these interactions to unfold and ultimately result in understanding and a new sense of self-awareness. Understanding of personal culture is just as important to the field of Cultural Sustainability as learning about the culture of others, for it is only through this sense of self-awareness that we can fully understand the implications of our behavior in relationship to those around us. Without this understanding, cultural work is far less effective.

In this same way, a program like Culture Scholars challenges museums and other community institutions to evaluate their particular cultural paradigm and examine its effectiveness. The more receptive institutions can become to multiple cultural perspectives, the more effective they will be at serving their communities

and embodying values of Cultural Sustainability. Many -- I'd venture to say most -- museums have a stringent dominant paradigm virtually invisible to museum employees. These powerful, yet often subtle, "museum codes" exclude many people and severely limit the cultural capacity of a learning institution. Introducing programs like Culture Scholars begins to open museums to concepts of Cultural Sustainability in a gradual way that can be maintained over time. It becomes visible when museum staff begin to notice small things, like an unfamiliar order of a first and last name, and grows to include altering the afternoon schedule to better accommodate a visitor group from a local mosque. This work also makes the field of Cultural Sustainability increasingly relevant to the world of Museum Education, a significant portion of the non-profit sector and Americans' unstructured leisure activity.

Feasibility and Value: It is important to note that the Culture Scholars program is *not* relevant only in the context of Portland, Maine. Across the country -- and the world -- communities are increasingly diversifying due to immigration, migration, asylum seekers, employment, and a myriad of other reasons. Participants in the Culture Scholars program do not have to be first-generation immigrants from a foreign country; any teen with a vested interest in the cultural doings of their families and communities are qualified to participate. Every community has values, practices, beliefs and traditions unique to them -- a program like Culture Scholars provides the opportunity to illuminate and celebrate what is positive and constructive about those traditions. In doing this, participating teens feel an increased confidence in their cultural identity and comfort in the cultures around

them. Participating in the Culture Scholars program also provides teens with a sense that they are valued for who they are and for their unique contributions to their community. A similar program with these attributes would be universally positive and greatly benefit any community, rural or urban, in any location and with any social composition.

In their research mentioned previously, Hochschild, Weaver, and Burch describe the potential for younger generations to establish a “new racial order.” Programs like Culture Scholars give key youth leaders the tools with which to re-establish this racial order in their communities. Within safe spaces like children’s museums, sociocultural norms and hierarchies can be questioned, explained, and understood simultaneously by diverse groups of people. It is precisely this type of open, meaningful interaction that will challenge preexisting hegemonic structure and create opportunities for the embodiment of a new, more lateral, sociocultural value system. When this value system begins to take form, cultural practices will be considered with increasing equality, thus ensuring their safeguard and universal respect well into the future.

Personal Growth and the Dialogic Effect: If this work is being done with the level of depth and sensitivity it demands, personal transformations are inevitable. In my involvement as the program coordinator throughout this work, I’ve experienced a tremendous shift in the way I perceive others around me – and myself. By constantly mediating significant cultural spaces, I’ve developed an awareness of my own biases and expectations that are a product of dominant culture. It isn’t a fault to have these preconceptions; they are universal to being human. It is what we do with

these biases that matters. If we acknowledge these biases, understand them, and learn where they come from, then we can leave them behind when we work with others who are different than us. We must work to distance ourselves from our preconceived ideas of what people are, or should be. These preconceptions prohibit us from connecting with others in our communities who have the potential to mutually increase our quality of life in many ways.

Meaningful work between people, particularly around the nexus of culture, is always the result of a series of actions. In Hegelian terms, an initial person or situation – the thesis – comes in contact with another person or situation – the antithesis – and together, these forces create a new thesis. If culture is truly being practiced, shared, and exchanged, then this type of Hegelian reaction should take place within every individual involved. By facilitating cultural work at community institutions like museums, we foster this kind of positive individual and collective interaction and growth that are integral for the social and cultural health of a city.

Communities are reflective of the individuals who comprise them – and so when individuals grow, they exponentially expand the capacity of their community to grow. I experienced the power of this individual and group transformation during my work with the Culture Scholars program. It is my hope that, through Culture Scholars and similar youth programs, not only the coordinators but also *all* participants in these programs experience a similar kind of transformation in their own way of thinking. It is through this transformation of perception that human value becomes universally visible – something that will not only sustain culture, but the ability for human communities to thrive in the contemporary world.