This course is designed to examine how knowledge and community are intertwined in many cultures. The course is also designed around a community service project, providing an opportunity for a “hands on” learning experience. This project will help to extend your understanding of cross-cultural knowledge as well as show first-hand how oral traditions, like storytelling, help strengthen a sense of what it means to be a community member. (See H228 home page on mypage.iu.edu/~eder.) In short, storytelling will be the vehicle through which we will be learning about a variety of themes including ethical explorations, holistic teaching, and cross-cultural values.

We will begin by contrasting a mainstream approach to learning with models of local knowledge. We will then examine models of learning from specific non-Western cultures including Mexican, Native American, and African cultures. This will be followed by a focus on the role of storytelling as a means of teaching both ethical and social beliefs, emphasizing the role of oral practices. We will then look at how children can learn about different cultures through storytelling. This section will end by considering how START (Storytelling as Reflecting Time) provides a vehicle for strengthening communities and the cross-cultural lessons to be gained.

The second half of the course will focus on learning outside of the classroom. At this point all students will be actively engaged in START, either telling stories to young children or facilitating storytelling activities. During this half we will also be looking more closely at Bloomington as a source of local and cross-cultural knowledge as well as at learning practices that emphasize process drama as well as forming caring connections with others. By the end of the course you should understand the way oral traditions pass on life lessons and help children explore ethical issues. You should also have a conceptual and real-life understanding of the importance of storytelling for building community.

Course Requirements
We will be using the city of Bloomington as a site for learning, service, and research throughout this course. All students will do a service learning project which will take an average of 2 hours per week. Because of the extensive service component, there will be fewer readings during the second half of the course and the main written assignments will be a series of journal reflections, culminating in a final report.

The class will be divided into three groups, each of which will focus on two cultural traditions (e.g. Nigerian, Korean, Afghan, Irish, Russian, American, etc.). After researching stories and storytelling practices of this tradition, students will either prepare to tell stories to elementary students or prepare to facilitate community-building activities based on the stories told. (See the START Project description and Students’ comments about the course and project—both on the web page.) Students write journal reflections (2-3 double-spaced pages per reflection), give a group class presentation, and write a final report (8-10 pages) on these projects. Students are also expected to attend all class sessions and do all reading prior to class. There will be one take-home essay covering the readings, discussions, and guest speakers.