The Education of the Folk: Peasant Schools and Folklore Scholarship

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The Education of the Folk
Peasant Schools and Folklore Scholarship

The history of intellectual interaction in the 19th and early 20th centuries between scholars of vernacular culture and educational reformers remains a lacuna in the discipline of folklore. This examination of educational reforms brought on by the introduction and spread of schooling for peasant children raises issues of how folklorists should intervene and how to judge the complicated effects of those interventions.

Although there has been a critical appraisal within the discipline of folklore about the political role folklore scholarship has played in nationalist movements of the 19th and 20th centuries (Abrahams 1993; Alver 1989; Falnes 1933; Herzfeld 1982; Kamenetsky 1972, 1977; Lixfeld 1994; Mieder 1982; Oinas 1975; Simeone 1978; Wilson 1975, 1976), very little has been said about the accompanying relationship between folklore scholarship and the romantic nationalists’ efforts to reform education. One reason for this lack of attention is that folklore and schools are seen as polar opposites on the scale of traditional to modern: while folklore stands for the unofficial, the informal, and the past, schools call to mind the bureaucratic processes of the state and the progress of the nation.

Yet it was precisely because schools seemed to be destroying what folklorists (and those influenced by them) held dear that they became involved in education. After the publication of Rousseau’s Emile, young people began to be seen as crucial to the political and social welfare of the nation, and educational reform became one of the kinds of cultural interventions 19th-century folklorists engaged in or advocated, along with publishing books for popular audiences, organizing clubs whose meetings featured folkloric entertainment, and writing articles in newspapers (Karpeles 1967; Wilson 1975). This article will map out some of the effects folklore scholarship had on educational processes in 19th-century Europe.

David Whisnant (1983) is one of the few to have paid attention to schooling as part of the history of the discipline of folklore. The creation of a folk school by Olive Dame Campbell and its teaching of Danish culture to Appalachians was a cultural intervention in which a northern reformer, because of her higher status and credibility,

Cati Coe is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Folklore and Folklife at the University of Pennsylvania

was able to delimit Appalachian folk culture to the wider society, a definition that was even adopted by some Appalachians. Whisnant makes a distinction between cultural intervention, which presupposes a selection, arrangement, and objectification of cultural elements, and the everyday tradition, in which people “resist and accommodate, keep and let go” (1983:262; see also Nora 1989). Education is a particular kind of cultural intervention: in the curriculum, cultural practices are frozen, stripped of their political and social context, and sanitized for the ears of children.

Whisnant’s study raises issues about the relationship between the representation of tradition and the tradition itself and between applied and academic folklore. Although one could come away from Whisnant’s depiction thinking that only applied folklorists engage in the freezing and fixing of tradition, academic folklorists are also engaged in attempting to affect cultural practices, through their teaching, scholarship, and advocacy for institutional support of their work. These acts force academic folklorists to justify the importance of their ideas and practices—to students, administrators, and each other. As Regina Bendix (1988) and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1992) show, applied and academic folklorists have a common intellectual heritage.

Furthermore, the reflexive critique within the disciplines of anthropology and folklore has revealed how our representations of people and cultural practices in our scholarship have fed processes of nation building and colonial governance (Asad 1973; see Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1992). At the same time we are learning that representations may not be as powerful in generating sentiments as we believe or they may generate sentiments that do not correspond to the ideologies that created those representations (Bendix 1992). It is also true that dominant groups are not the only ones engaged in cultural objectification. Although the fixing of culture is often portrayed as being done by outside elites to marginal groups, “peasants” and “ primitives” also engage in representation: they fill their houses with memory objects (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1989) and objectify their traditions for tourists to maintain economic viability (Bausinger 1990) or to ward off elite incursions (Noyes and Abrahams 1994). Interventions and representations cannot be critiqued simply on the basis that they are interventions and representations, despite their freezing of living, everyday culture. They also cannot be critiqued according to who is doing the objectifying; identities are too complicated, and insider-outsider positions shift according to particular contexts (Narayan 1993). Instead, I would agree with Whisnant, who writes, in a later article on public sector folklore, that because all engagement in public issues involves cultural intervention, “the question is not whether we shall intervene, but how and with what effects, amid what particular set of historical, cultural, and political circumstances, and in the service of what values and social vision” (1988:233). We are being asked here not only to examine the ideological baggage folklorists carry with them but also to scrutinize the effects of those ideologies, a much harder step. Whisnant’s (1983) argument in All that Is Native and Fine that the interest in culture by northern reformers directed attention away from the exploitation of Appalachian resources is, thus, much stronger than his argument that the cultural intervention of northern reformers highlighted particular cultural practices (folklorism) and was, thus, not true to people’s daily habits (folklore).

The focus on effects is more complicated than it at first seems, however. Whisnant’s critique of the mountain folk schools is based on their effect on people’s awareness of
structural inequalities rather than students' experiences of participating in the folk schools' activities, which seemed quite positive. In my own applied work in Philadelphia-area schools, as with Whisnant's study of folk schools, the effects on the structural and the personal levels do not match up: while individuals are excited and inspired by the interventions (teachers are rejuvenated and want to continue teaching, for instance), the interventions simultaneously mask and divert attention from larger structural inequalities (maybe teachers should quit in protest). In his study of antimodernism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, T. J. Jackson Lears (1981) describes a similar situation in which the romantic impulse of the antimodernists created alternatives to modernity at a time of crisis in social authority, while at the same time antimodernism helped people adjust to the secularism and corporateness of modern life because these alternatives were perceived as therapeutic mechanisms for individual self-realization. ² Like other social and cultural processes, effects have to be interpreted from a particular position and in a particular context. Interventions can be contradictory and complex (people will be affected differently, and immediate effects may be different from long-term, historical effects, for instance); they may not be readily apparent; and one may have to make decisions about which effects are most important within that social and political environment, according to a particular set of values and visions. For instance, folklorists who do applied work on medical issues pay attention primarily to the personal experience of patients rather than to structural issues; and, unlike much other public sector folklore work, their arguments are generally not based on preservation of tradition. Their advocacy work based on patients' personal experiences has strong justifications because they are dealing with human life and death, pain and suffering. But whether this experiential level is the most important effect in other situations is less clear.

The 19th-century folklorists' involvement in education reveals that the current dichotomy between applied and academic folklore does not make sense of 19th-century folklore collectors' efforts: under the impetus of romantic nationalism, they hoped their scholarly work would influence public opinion and generate love for the nation. Some spoke directly about education and influenced others; some became involved in reforming education themselves; and some wrote schoolroom materials (Dorson 1968; Falnes 1933; Karpeles 1967; Wilson 1975). Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1802) himself preached on the reform of German elementary education, and at Weimar, he functioned as the duke's minister of education and was able to put into practice some of his ideas. He replaced the Latin curriculum with instruction in the mother tongue and relegated Latin to the upper school (Hayes 1927). In the early 20th century, Cecil Sharp, the English folksong and dance collector, persuaded the Board of Education to include "genuine" folksongs in its musical education curriculum and published collections of folksongs for schoolchildren. He became involved in teaching Morris dancing outside the public schools as an act of cultural preservation (Karpeles 1967). These activities were driven by the same romantic nationalist ideologies that motivated the collection of and admiration for folktales, ballads, and folksongs.

Furthermore, most collectors of folklore had other identities and positions with which they interacted with the public and engaged in public discourse. Many of the Norwegian folklore collectors were pastors (Falnes 1933). Some Scandinavian folklore
collectors were teachers in elementary or secondary schools or tutors for upper-class families before or while they collected folklore; this was one of the ways they earned a living or put themselves through school.\textsuperscript{3} Others were ministers in the government (Falnes 1933; Strömbäck 1971). Folklorists' interest in influencing events around them was not unusual for intellectuals at the time: philosophers G. W. F. Hegel, T. H. Green, and Johann Gottlieb Fichte also wrote about the role of education in the nation and heavily influenced educational reformers in the United States and England (Gordon and White 1979).

\textit{The Romantic Roots of Folklore and "Child-Centered" Education}

At the same time as the "folk" and the "primitive" were romanticized as the keepers of national values (Abrahams 1993), children were also viewed as innocent, natural, and crucial to the welfare of the nation. Children and the "folk" occupied the same position in relation to the contemporary urban elite: both were portrayed as closer to nature and more attuned to their emotions and instincts. Within an evolutionary framework, the folk embodied the childhood of the nation or race, in that their customs contained survivals from the nation's heroic past, from which the nation had declined into artificiality and spiritual decay in its old age. Theories about children's growth took into account evolutionary theories about the hierarchical progress of people: children embodied the primitive, and it was natural and developmentally sound for them to engage in activities labeled as "primitive" and "folk." Folklore collection and efforts to reform education in 19th-century Europe were inspired by the national romantic thinkers, primarily Rousseau, Herder, and Fichte. They felt that the current age was in decay as a result of the adoption of alien customs and that the way toward national rejuvenation was through admiration of the customs that best embodied the national character, those of the folk.

Studies of the history of folklore and the history of education generally do not overlap: neither discipline considers the other important, although they both recognize the influence of romantic nationalism on their histories. Yet it is clear that there was a flow of ideas between important figures in the history of education and those in the history of folklore studies. I will take as an example Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746–1827), the Swiss educational reformer. At university, Pestalozzi came in contact with Johann Jacob Bodmer, who taught Swiss history and politics there; Bodmer gave generations of students over a half century of teaching "a passionate love for their country and an enthusiastic interest in their past" (Silber 1965:7). Pestalozzi joined Bodmer's Helvetische Gesellschaft, a society of national history that aimed to raise the country's moral standards. Bodmer believed that historians should pay attention to the life and history of peasants and attempted to study folklore and antiquities through archival documents. He also saw poetry as an integral part of the nation's history: it was a sacred heritage of the nation that reflected its customs (Cocchiara 1981:154–159).

Pestalozzi's fame comes from the schools that he started in Switzerland and France. He was especially interested in the education of poor children, and he wanted to combine the teaching of reading and writing with training for future employment. He said that his model of education, which he outlines in his influential book \textit{Wie Gertrud}
*Pestalozzi* started a school in Neuhof (1773) to teach poor, neglected children to earn their living by their own work as cotton spinners or weavers while also teaching them the catechism and arithmetic, and he was actively connected with the Swiss cotton industry. In 1804, he opened a school for middle-class boys at Yverdon, and this school became famous in German and English educational circles. Pestalozzi’s methods spread all over Europe and to America. In his schools, he wanted to awaken children’s latent faculties: their steadfastness, will to work, and desire for an independent and honorable adult life. Pestalozzi taught middle-class and poor children differently: he believed that children should be taught skills for their station in life so that they could do their work intelligently and willingly. At Yverdon, the boys conducted nature observations and had woodworking, gymnastics, and games. As Silber (1965) points out, although Pestalozzi is regarded as an educator who raised the status of elementary education, he was also a social reformer and philosopher who wrote tracts on political and social issues as well as on education.

Pestalozzi felt that although nature was unalterable and eternal, people tended to deviate from the course of nature, and thus nature was in need of assistance, through art or education. Art, in its imitation of nature, would restore the original goodness of nature. Education involved guiding the child to the realization of his or her natural potential. Like other idealist thinkers, Pestalozzi believed that realizing oneself as an individual was the same as realizing the organic whole of which one was a member: the family, the community, and the nation (Gordon and White 1979). The good of the nation was dependent on the self-fulfillment of the individuals who constituted it. Pestalozzi imitated nature in his teaching by reducing instruction to the simplest units of speaking, arithmetic, and writing and in balancing all parts of the person: body, mind, and spirit.

Pestalozzi and idealist philosopher Fichte (1762–1814) had mutual admiration for one another. Fichte saw nationality as the divinely given task or role that the nation was meant to accomplish in the drama of human history (Simon 1960). For Fichte, everything had a moral purpose. In his “Reden an die deutsche Nation” (“Addresses to the German Nation”), delivered in 1807–08 after Prussia’s defeat at Jena, he launched an appeal to the German people to build a new nation through a national education system for all social classes, based on German language and literature, whose aim would be the development of moral citizens who would work to promote the good of the whole community (Gordon and White 1979). Fichte’s call influenced the Prussian minister Wilhelm von Humboldt, who initiated a reform of the German educational system in 1809, introducing Pestalozzian methods into Prussia’s teacher-training colleges and elementary schools (Gordon and White 1979). Partly as a result of his respect
for Pestalozzi, Fichte argued that it was imperative that young people grow up in close contact with the land and remove themselves from commercial society in order to become moral beings (Shirley 1992).

These ideas were important for educationalists; for folklorists, Fichte is more important for his inspiration of Freidrich L. Jahn (1778–1852), who coined the word *Volkstum*, by which he meant the folk spirit (Cocchiara 1981:210–215). It was this folk spirit that determined the historical role the nation had to play. Jahn saw folk productions as expressions of the folk spirit and felt that these productions could be an instrument of education to unify the whole nation. He promoted nationalism and athletic associations, the free ownership of land, and public elementary education for children of all social classes. During meetings of the athletic society, he read to young people from the *Nibelungenlied* and said that anthologies for young people should contain German Lieder, Märchen, and legends of German heroes.

Friedrich Frechel (1782–1852), the founder of the kindergarten movement, was also influenced by Pestalozzi. He taught at Pestalozzi’s school in Yverdon for a few years. Frechel, like Pestalozzi, saw the origin of all moral and social consciousness in the child’s relationship with the mother, and he published a collection of songs and games that promoted sensory and motor skills and emotional bonding between mother and child, *Mutter und Koseliede: Dichtung und Bilder zur edlen Pflege des Kinderheitlebens* (*Mother and Nursery Songs*). These songs were based on the traditional culture of peasant mothers because he felt that the middle class’s separation from craft work and agriculture created too limited an environment for children to develop optimally (Allen 1991:35–40).

Frechel and Pestalozzi did not collect folklore and are not considered to be part of the history of our discipline. Yet they clearly based their educational philosophies and practices on their idealistic and sentimentalized view of how knowledge was transmitted within a peasant environment. They interacted and influenced people in our intellectual lines of descent and were simultaneously influenced by them.

These educational reforms based on romantic nationalism influenced what was known as progressive education or “the New Education” that occurred in both Europe and the United States in the late 19th century and early 20th century. Schools such as the Odenwaldschule of Paul Geheeb (founded in 1910) and Abbotsholme School of Cecil Reddie (founded in 1889) emphasized the development of the child’s personality rather than the inculcation of knowledge (Oelkers 1995; Searby 1989; Shirley 1992). For this education movement, preurban and preindustrial societies seemed to exemplify ideals of character and community that were disintegrating under the forces of city and factory (Ross 1972; Strickland 1967). Progressive educators in America began teaching history through the lens of cultural epochs: they felt children would delight in studying the past because their simplicity and character was like that of the “primitive.” Charles McMurray, who was a student at the University of Jena in Germany in 1887–88, proposed that children begin by reading or hearing fables, fairy tales, and myths, which represented the childhood of humanity, and slowly work their way up through successive stages of human development. He felt that producing good citizens was a matter of reinvigorating the traditional U.S. character. John Dewey also believed that the growing child imitated the past activities of the race (Boris 1986). At
his Laboratory School in Chicago, children at the age of seven studied primitive life, making brush fires, spindles, and carding by hand, and moved successively through the various stages of civilization, so that by age 12 they were making chests of drawers and studying technological changes in cloth manufacturing (Boris 1986).

Coinciding with and influenced by the arts and crafts movement, which idealized the medieval craftsman who combined manual and intellectual labor, the “New Education” focused on the development of the “whole person,” including manual skills (Boris 1986; Stansky 1985). Unlike Pestalozzi’s and the 19th-century working-class schools in England, training in carpentry, gardening, masonry, and animal husbandry was not aimed at giving students skills necessary for future employment but, rather, to develop the body and the soul in a developmentally appropriate manner so that the child would grow into a productive and hard-working adult (Hurt 1971; McCann 1977; Purvis 1989; Ross 1972; Schupf 1972; Silver 1983). As Lears (1981) suggests, while these reform efforts came from the desire to give children “authentic” and emotionally rich experiences, ultimately they helped students better adjust to their later work in factories or offices.

Educational reforms that sought to bring education more in line with nature, learning in the peasant home, and the child’s “natural” development ironically took place at the same time as movements to make education mandatory for all children. This especially influenced peasant and poor urban children who had previously learned to read and write from a variety of adults who had those skills, either in their homes or during apprenticeships (Frith 1977). Elementary education became compulsory for rural children in Norway in 1739 and in Prussia in 1763; it became compulsory and universal in 1814 in Denmark, in 1842 in Sweden, and between 1870 and 1880 in England. Just as the peasant way of life was sentimentalized after peasants were displaced from the land (Abrahams 1993), so too did educational reformers sentimentalize learning in the home—especially the rural peasant or artisan home—just as urban working-class and rural children were being sent to school and their families’ ways of making a living changed so that adults were more likely to work outside the home. Dorothy Ross further suggests that the sentimentalization of the mother–child bond was a response to the feminization of the teaching profession (1972:117). I will turn now to a particular manifestation of the connection between folklore scholarship and education in the 19th century: the folk high school movement of Scandinavia, which began in the early 19th century in Denmark and has continued to this day as a model of adult education. I will especially concentrate on its intellectual beginnings and growth in the 19th century.

The Folk High School Movement in Scandinavia

Most studies of the folk high school movement in Denmark have examined its contribution to Denmark’s peaceful transition from a feudal monarchy to a democracy with farmers owning their own land (Begtrup and Lund 1980; Borish 1991; Paulston and LeRoy 1980; Rordam 1980). Because of this accomplishment, “the folk high schools are periodically rediscovered and heralded as a panacea for social and educational problems” (Paulston 1980:257), and calls are made for the United States and
“developing” countries to adopt this kind of schooling and follow an alternative route to a stable, prosperous democracy (Borish 1991; Davis 1980; Rordam 1980). The folk high school movement even gives Denmark prominence as a particular creation of the Danish people: “It must never be forgotten that it is through the Folk High Schools that Denmark can make its contribution to international adult education and that foreigners envy Denmark her special type of adult education” (Rordam 1980:179). As with other social science research on nationalism, most of the scholarship on the folk high schools has rationalized the nationalist ideologies that undergirded the creation of the schools. Handler (1988) argues that nationalist ideologies and social science theory developed in the same historical context, with scholarly writing rationalizing “native” ideology and nationalists borrowing from the scientific elaborations of their own more commonsensical notions. Popular articulations do not simply adapt scholarly theories to a particular context; rather, the two continually feed into one another. Likewise, the folk high school movement was not simply an applied extension of folklore scholarship; rather, those in the folk high school movement and in folklore collecting inhabited the same historical context and shared the same social milieu. Folklorists and the folk high school leaders interacted with and influenced one another.

The folk high school movement in Scandinavia occurred at the same time as peasants began to participate more in political life as a result of the extension of the franchise to those who owned land in the mid–19th century (Begtrup and Lund 1980; Borish 1991; Simon 1960; Wåhlin 1980). This caused a greater stratification within the peasantry among those who owned a lot of land, those who owned a little, and those who owned none at all.

The folk high schools were founded both by peasants who demanded education and by intellectuals who believed that peasants needed to be educated. They were part of a whole movement to extend formal schooling to peasants, at the same time as it was recognized that peasants required a different kind of schooling than the elite. Romantic nationalism sharpened the antagonism between the city and the countryside: the peasants were seen as descendants of the original inhabitants of the nation, and the urban elite was viewed as representative of foreign and alien cultures. This division was a threat to national unity. Although folk high schools were meant to be open to everyone (and thus unite the social classes), generally their students were the sons of peasants, especially peasants who owned large plots of land (as opposed to the small-holders and tenant farmers). The elite in Scandinavia usually were tutored at home and then attended what were known as Latin schools, where they received a classical education. Thus, while the folk high school was part of the apparatus for extending schooling to peasants, the division between the education of elites and peasants was maintained (Larson 1980). However, the emphasis on the use of folklore, history, and mythology within the folk high school gradually did extend to the Latin schools; in Norway, for instance, the educational reform of 1896 virtually abolished the classical curriculum (Rust 1989).

The goals of a folk high school education varied: some tended toward educating peasants to be political leaders and deputies to parliament (“civic education”); some focused more on giving farmers improved agricultural skills (“vocational education”); and others were interested in “awakening” young people to the spirit of the people
"historical-poetic education"). But in many schools, these goals were intertwined, and the teaching methods were often similar: the teaching of mythology and history, the focus on orality and narrative rather than books, the use of the mother tongue, the prominent use of song, and communal eating and living by teachers and students.

**N. F. S. Grundtvig: The Living Word and the Awakening of the Nation**

> Only words that pass in story and song
> from mouth to mouth where people throng
> sustain the life of the people;
> Only in their own and ancient words
> is education to be found
> given by the spirit of the people

—N. F. S. Grundtvig, *Tidings in the High North*, 1864

The founder of the folk high school movement is considered to be N. S. F. Grundtvig (1783–1872), who shared many of the romantic nationalist ideas of Fichte and Herder (Fain 1980; Simon 1960; Thodberg and Thyssen 1983). He was not interested in creating an educational system, nor was he ever able to set up a school according to his ideas, unlike Pestalozzi (Bugge 1983). But his lectures on national education inspired others to found folk high schools.

Like Herder, Grundtvig was interested in popular ballads and folksongs and believed that the oral word—the living word—was the key to the nation’s revival. Grundtvig considered the numerous hymns that he wrote (about three hundred) to be reworkings of folksongs, and some were adaptations of Anglo-Saxon hymns from the early Middle Ages (Thodberg 1983). He translated the Norwegian royal sagas written in Old Norse by Snorri Sturlason and the history of Denmark written in Latin by Saxo into “the simple, oral style of a Zealand peasant,” as well as translating *Beowulf* into verse (Lundgreen-Nielsen 1983:36; see also Haarder 1983). Like other romantic writers, he wrote romantic poetry and rewrote Norse legends until he became a vicar and turned his energies to church politics in the 1810s.\(^5\)

In *Nordens Mythologi* (*Norse Mythology* or the *Language of Myth*) (1832), Grundtvig divides both the individual and humankind into three ages: that of childhood, youth, and old age or the ages of imagination, feeling, and intellect. Grundtvig felt that his era was in its old age, and the heroic spirit of the North needed to be awakened in order for rebirth to occur. Grundtvig felt that myths were the prophetic visions of a people: conceived in the youth stage of a people, myths predicted what the people would be like in their old age. People must look at their image in mythology as in a mirror, not in order to exalt paganism or return to the past but to spark a new life, conceived by the ancient spirit of the North, in a form that corresponded to present demands.

Grundtvig saw the Spirit of the People (*folkeand*) as an invisible and powerful force that acted in the community and could only be expressed through the mother tongue. *Folkeand* created a unity that was a living organism, surpassing the mass of individuals who made it up (i.e., *folkeligheid*, corresponding to Jahn’s sense of Volkstum and the French term *nationalité*, an essential national character). For Grundtvig, the North’s
folkelighed could resolve without revolution the problem of equality posed by the French Revolution: equality was naturally a part of the people of the North as a result of their history.

His other massive scholarly work is Haandbog i Verdenshistorien (Handbook of Universal History) (vols. 1–3, 1833–43), in which he divides up human history into three stages corresponding to antiquity, the Middle Ages, and modern times. Grundtvig, like Fichte, felt that each people had a function or mission in the unfolding of world history. The vocation of the North was manifest in the barbarian invasions that gave vitality to Europe: from Norway came the Normans, from Denmark the Anglo-Saxons, and from Sweden the Goths. By “universal history,” he meant this focus on peoples’ missions or roles within the drama of history, according to God’s plan.

Grundtvig added a Christian element to his sense of national character. He felt that the Jewish people were the archetype of a nationality and that the Christian message had been addressed to a people whose nationality was strongly developed. From this historical event, he took the lesson that only a people with a strong and intense national character could become Christian. The people of the North had a strong national character between the eighth and 13th centuries, before they became Christian. But the culture of the North died in the same century in which Dante was born, and the Renaissance suppressed national culture. The Renaissance exercised its tyranny in what Grundtvig called the School of Death or the Black School, devoted to books and a universalistic and cosmopolitan culture. In Norse Mythology, he calls for a “reform of the school grave into a seed-school for life” (quoted in Bugge 1983:214).

Grundtvig outlined his thoughts on “a seed-school for life” at a series of lectures at Borch’s College given during the summer and fall of 1838 which were open to the public; the hall was usually packed. Grundtvig wanted to found “a folk or patriotic high school . . . open to all the young of the populace, in which the mother tongue will have absolute power, and in which the uncomplicated but magnificent task is to enlighten the people as to their own natural temperament and their fatherland” (quoted in Fain 1980:66). He thought that the state-sponsored Soro Academy could be converted into such a school, where classes would be given in the native language, folksong, the history of the country, and the nation’s literature.

Grundtvig placed emphasis on the spoken word because he felt that this was the only way that the divine Spirit could be made manifest in the visible world. “The mouth is to the pen what life is to death,” Grundtvig wrote (quoted in Fain 1980:66). Teaching would be oral: stimulating lectures would animate and awaken the students to the Spirit of the People. Happy songs would be the sign of life at a school. Grundtvig also felt that students should be between the ages of 18 and 25, for youth is the creative hour of the Spirit. The school would not prepare students for professions, and there would be no exams or diplomas.

**Folk Schools and Folklorists in Denmark**

Grundtvig’s dream of a folk high school at Soro Academy never came to fruition. Instead, folk high schools were begun by people inspired by his ideas: these were small, private schools rather than the government-sponsored school Grundtvig imagined. In
the 1830s and 1840s, some of the young theologians whom Grundtvig had taught became pastors, and Grundtvig’s ideas began to spread in the countryside. Some of the schools were founded by peasants who demanded education; others were founded by pastors and intellectuals influenced by Grundtvig. The Danish “folk high school man” was generally urban, university-educated, and frequently a theologian by training (Borish 1991). The schools were usually residential, with students staying at them for a term of three to five months when they could be spared from farm labor. Most folk high schools admitted only men, although a few gradually opened programs for women.

Scandinavian folklorists and those in the folk school movement shared several assumptions: that peasants were the most faithful to the national character, and the elite had adopted alien customs; that the national language was the most important characteristic of the nation; and that the divide between the elite and the peasantry threatened the unity of the nation. At moments of high nationalism, and in times of “national crisis,” the interest in folklore collecting and the enrollment in and founding of folk high schools peaked. The folk high school movement, like folklore, was often associated with linguistic nationalism. The language of the peasant was considered to be descended from Old Norse, and only it could be used to express and revive the national character. Alver (1989) argues that an important element in the interest in folklore collecting in Scandinavia was its use to philologists: folklore materials were considered to contain survivals of older language forms.

The first folk high school was founded to preserve “Danishness” in the duchy of Slesvig. In the 1830s, people in the duchies of Holstein and Slesvig began to agitate for the two provinces to be united and freed from the Danish monarchy (Simon 1960; Skovmand 1983; Wåhlin 1980). In both duchies, the language of the church, towns, bourgeoisie, and administration was German. By 1848 this agitation had developed into the vanguard of German nationalism within the Danish nation, and Scandinavianists—who wanted the Scandinavian countries to unite in federation—spoke of Slesvig as the common frontier of the North. Slesvig and Holstein were lost to Germany in the war of 1864.

During the early 1840s, a Danish lecturer at Kiel University, Professor Christian Flor (1792–1875), tried to rouse the peasantry in Slesvig to their “Danishness.” He persuaded a member of the Slesvig Assembly to use Danish in a speech, for instance. Flor had been heavily influenced by Grundtvig and had reviewed his Norse Mythology. He founded Rødding Folk High School based on Grundtvig’s ideas in 1844, starting with 22 students who were all sons of farmers and aged 16 to 27 (Rørdam 1980). In the program for the school, he writes that there

peasants andburghers can receive such knowledge and skills as can be of use and for pleasure, not so much with regard to the individual’s particular occupation and business as to his position as a son of the nation and a citizen of the state. . . . We call it a folk high school because members of every trade and profession can gain entry into it, even if it is to be established mainly for the peasantry and expects to draw its pupils mainly from that class. [quoted in Skovmand 1983:324]
The director, young theologian Johan Wegener, gave an inaugural speech in which he said that peasants must regain their freedom and strength for Denmark to revive. Peasants were the foundation of the nation, but they needed to remain peasants. At school they would learn to reflect on the problems of the nation, and their civic education would inspire the Spirit of the People. The goals of Rødding were to awaken and to further intellectual life; to kindle love of the fatherland through the study of history, literature, and nature; to make students pursue farming intelligently; to develop students' emotional life and will rather than their memory and intelligence; and to develop their personal lives.

Wegener left the school after the first winter, and Flor became the new principal. The weekly schedule emphasized Danish as the most important subject (six hours per week), with gymnastics, drawing, and comprehension exercises (each four hours per week), Danish history, geography, and German (each three hours per week), and arithmetic, geometry, and singing (each two hours per week) also being taught. In the Danish classes, the teachers often read from a poetical work and commented on it, and the emphasis was on experiencing literature rather than analyzing it (Rørdam 1980). One of the teachers at the school wanted to emphasize agriculture, but Flor objected, saying that the most important thing was to awaken students to a spiritual life. Between 1844 and 1864, the school was attended by 522 people in all, the majority coming from landowning and independent farming families (Rørdam 1980). After 1864, Rødding Folk High School moved to Askov, just across the border from German-held Jutland. Askov Folk High School was seen as a spiritual fortification, providing support for the folk spirit of Danes under German rule.

Hindholm Folk High School, on the other hand, was created by farmers who wanted to use the school as an instrument in their political struggle against landowners. During the 1840s, a smallholder named Peder Hansen traveled from village to village in Zealand, urging farmers to free themselves from the oppression of landowners. In 1852, he proposed at a well-attended meeting that they begin a folk school for adult sons of peasants and smallholders to educate them to be “leaders and protectors of our class in every area” (quoted in Skovmand 1983:326). Hindholm aimed at preparing students to be “peasant-deputies.” It became a large school, in which history was the principal subject. Danish geography, statistics, and law were also taught, and, in the spirit of Grundtvig, there were no examinations (Rørdam 1980).

After the defeat by Germany in 1864, there was an explosion of folk high schools in the Danish countryside. Many were started by farmers with fairly large properties and tried to combine practical agricultural training with introspective self-development. The folk high schools were generally marked by the use of song and the importance of history. Grundtvig’s Handbook of Universal History, Norse Mythology, and The River of Time, or Outline of Universal History (1829) were favorite references of folk high school teachers for their lectures, but books were rarely the method of teaching. Instead, folk high schools were characterized by the use of the “living word” through lectures and discussions and by a lack of examinations. Lectures usually began with community singing of songs about Nordic legends or Bible history. The folk high schools also held public meetings and lectures open to the surrounding communities. At Askov Folk
High School, for instance, the topics of the lectures included Old Norse myths, German influences on Denmark, and spavin in horses (Begtrup and Lund 1980).

Christen Kold, the son of a cobbler, was one of the most influential of the folk high school leaders, opening a series of schools in the 1850s. Kold’s teaching strategy was based on the revivalist movement in the Danish countryside, and revivalist schools were opened by his pupils or inspired by Kold (Thyssen 1983). Kold’s teaching consisted primarily of lecturing, storytelling, and reading aloud, especially of the Norse myths and sagas, Bible stories, and historical material. His plan of instruction was oral lecture on world history as the foundation (world history in the Grundtvigian sense), oral narrative of Bible history, a selection of church history, Nordic mythology and Danish history, global geography, selected Danish writers to be read in the evenings three days a week, and song, especially the long ballads (Borish 1991). One of his students, Ludvig Schroder, who later directed Askov High School, wrote in a letter in the 1860s about Kold and his school:

It is a kind of Socrates, who sits in his chair surrounded by a crowd of boys and girls from the farms. They have come a long way to be at the school, and the whole day he talks with all these people in such a way that he always awakens something in them. When he holds an hour or an hour and a half lecture every morning, the school’s living room is filled with students and guests. It is usually World History that he is discussing a chapter from, but the main thing is its practical application for life, and he has a really good grip on this. What he wants to awaken is “a heart for the spirit,” that we may open our hearts to the spiritual, so that it can come to use as willing instruments to advance the task that belongs to our people and to all of humanity. [quoted in Borish 1991:190]

Kold’s school was simple and sparse. He limited the school session to five winter months, the best time to take students from farmwork, and the short term also allowed the sons and daughters of less prosperous farmers to attend (Borish 1991).

Kold’s folk high school students, like Schroder, went on to found other schools—both folk high schools and agricultural schools (Begtrup and Lund 1980). At first the agricultural schools taught Norse mythology and history, but gradually they concentrated on more technical subjects. While children of landholding families could afford to go to both folk high school and agricultural school, the children of smallholders could generally afford only one term of either a folk high school or an agricultural school (Begtrup and Lund 1980).

The Danish folklorists were in contact with the leaders of the folk high school movement. Svend Grundtvig (1824–83), who helped make folklore an academic discipline in Denmark, was the son of N. F. S. Grundtvig, and his scholarly interests were clearly influenced by his father (Pia 1971). N. F. S. Grundtvig read ballads, sagas, Saxo, and Snorri to his children, although he generally left their education to their tutors. Svend Grundtvig, like his father, was particularly interested in the connection between Danish and Anglo-Saxon ballads, and his first book was an annotated translation of several English and Scottish ballads. Svend’s brother Johan (1822–1907) became a historian; his half brother Frederick Lange (1854–1903) became a folklorist and clergyman in America (Thyssen and Thodberg 1983).

Svend Grundtvig also used country schoolteachers to collect ballad material for his compilations. One of these teachers who became a folklorist in his own right was Evald
Tang Kristensen (1843–1929). Kristensen felt that “folklore is mainly in the keeping of poor people; it is as though the comforts of life displace the cultural traditions” (Holbek and Knudsen 1971:249), and he believed that peasant narratives revealed the Danish national character (Borish 1991).

Henning Frederik Feilberg (1831–1921) was another important Danish folklorist: with Axel Olrik, he founded the Danish Society for the Collecting of Folklore in 1883 and the Danish Folklore Archives in 1904 (Alver 1971). He worked as a teacher for a year and a half before becoming a parish clergyman in Jutland. He was also a minister in Central Slesvig, where he constantly faced language issues. In 1892, he retired to Askov, where he had a circle of friends in the folk high school. It was partly during these last 30 years that his contribution to folklore scholarship appeared, although he had been in contact with Svend Grundtvig in the 1850s and had published studies of community customs as well as the Dictionary of the Vernacular Language of Jutland (vols. 1–3, 1886–1914). Like Svend Grundtvig, his collaborators in collecting language material for the dictionary were usually student teachers. In his Dansk Bondeliv, saaledes som det i Mands Minde førtes, navnlig i Vestjylland (Danish Peasant Life, according to Living Memory, Mainly in West Jutland) (1889), he discusses the beneficial influence of folk high schools on peasant life—old people said that while peasants used to talk of trade, ghosts, and omens, they currently talked of topical events:

An elderly, intelligent farmer on the heath once declared to me that the young put the old to shame. There had recently taken place a festive gathering of young people in which there was no drunkenness or quarrelling, nor was there rough play and swearing; everything went well, everyone behaving decently and decorously. “What happens when we old people come together?” he continued. “We get drunk, and then old grievances revive; we curse like wild heathens, and often end with blows and broken heads!” [quoted in Begtrup and Lund 1980:100–101]

Through Feilberg, Axel Olrik became acquainted with the leaders of the folk high school movement. Olrik gave a lecture on the different characteristics of Scandinavian nationalities in 1898, which Holbek sees as “one of Olrik’s first attempts at the popularization of folklore research, in the spirit of the folk high schools” (1971:269). In Om Detydningen af Åventyr (On the Meaning of Folktales), Olrik argues against the allegorical interpretations of folktales which were common in schools and folk high schools, saying that folktales were the nursery versions of an ancient myth common to all peoples.

Having examined the folk high school movement and its participants’ interaction with folklore scholarship, I will turn to the manifestations of the folk high school movement elsewhere in Scandinavia. While the practices of the folk high schools spread, the ideological justification was generally slightly different.

**Folk Schools and Folklorists in Norway**

Romanticism in Norway rose to a high pitch in the second half of the 1840s and again in the later 1850s. During the 1840s, romantic nationalism dominated the work of scholars and collectors; in its second period of ascendancy, romantic nationalism
manifested itself as linguistic nationalism. The folk high school movement in Norway was associated with the later romanticism of linguistic nationalism and the struggle for *landsmål*, or Norwegian dialects. *Landsmål*, like folklore, was seen as descended from ancient times and a manifestation of the Norse national spirit, and folklore materials were seen as containing survivals of older language forms. For instance, Jørgen Moe, the folklorist, referred to the connection between Old Norse and dialects in his ballad collection (1840), which helped to stimulate interest in rural speech. Several of those involved in the folk high school movement were also involved in the *landsmål* movement and the volunteer rifle leagues.

As peasants began to participate in political life, especially with the introduction of peasant-deputies to parliament in the 1830s, urban intellectuals began to wonder whether the peasantry was prepared for these political responsibilities. Henrik Wergeland (1808–45), a patriotic poet and publicist, launched an appeal in 1834 for an association to be founded that would teach peasants spelling, arithmetic, geography, and history. Wergeland, a rationalist and deist, was not particularly interested in Grundtvig because of Grundtvig’s Christian orientation. The organization was founded in 1852, under the initiative of Hartvig Nissen and 26 other worthies (including historians Rudolf Keyser and P. A. Munch and sociologist Eilert Sundt), and called Selskabet for Folkeoplysningens Fremme (the Society for the Promotion of Popular Enlightenment). The organization had diverse aims: some wanted education to banish peasants’ traditional ignorance and encourage them to take a more active role in public life; others wanted education to counteract the peasants’ subversive political participation. The association’s motto was “Our aim should be to develop self-consciousness and to stimulate national feeling” (Rust 1989:74). It put out a popular journal called *Folkevennen* (Friend of the People), whose goal was to guide and awaken “the Spirit of the People.” Ole Vig (1824–57) was its first editor, and during the same time he edited *Den Norske Folkeskole* (The Norwegian Folk School) with Knud Knudsen, a journal that was immensely popular with rural schoolteachers and clergymen. Vig thought that, in the ideal society, children should get their education solely from their parents. His writings stress an opposition between peasants and bureaucrats and between the city and the country. Vig was very much influenced by Grundtvig: he wanted to transform the elementary school for lower-class children into the folk school, a common elementary school for Norwegians of all social classes. He wanted this school to use *landsmål*. He campaigned for better texts: a reader filled with stories, fables, myths, proverbs, history, geography and nature study selections, and literary selections in Norwegian and Swedish folk dialects and in Old Norwegian and Old Danish. He published a series of articles by Grundtvig in 1853 in *Folkevennen* and organized a fund drive to allow Grundtvig to found a school in Denmark. Ivar Aasen (1813–96), the famous dialect collector, contributed articles to *Folkevennen*, including one called “Of the Culture and of Norwegianness,” in which he says that the peasants descended from the ancient inhabitants of the land whereas the bureaucrats were strangers and outsiders.

Many of those involved in the movement to give greater prominence to *landsmål* were teachers. Aasen, for instance, was a peasant who became the local schoolmaster. While serving as a tutor for a rich man’s son, he read the books in the library and
conducted a study of his own dialect. He wanted to bring peasant speech into repute, and he believed that all the Norwegian dialects contained the core of a single language. He also arranged a book of proverbs. Knud Knudsen (1812–95), son of a smallholder who also did some primary teaching, became a teacher in a Latin school in Drammen (1840–46) and in the Cathedral school in Christiania (1846). He sought to remove Latin from its place in the secondary school curriculum and wanted the written language to conform to its spoken form. A. O. Vinje (1818–70) was from a cottar family and, like Aasen, became a schoolteacher. He launched a newspaper named Dolen (The Dalesman) written in landsmål. In Christiania, a little circle met with Vinje beginning in 1859 which devoted itself to publishing in landsmål. In Bergen, another informal club met to read and discuss Old Norse, beginning in 1862. This club formed a society to provide entertainment and to stimulate national feeling. Meetings were given over to entertainment of folk dances, folksongs, popular readings, and storytelling, and the club’s primary beneficiaries were meant to be the country folk. Schoolteaching, for these sons of peasant families, seemed to be one way to move up the social ladder and gain cultural capital (becoming a peasant-deputy seemed to be another); the position then became a platform for launching cultural interventions around the issue of landsmål.

Eilert Sundt was the second editor (1857–66) of Folkevennen. Sundt was a sociologist who published a number of studies on the poor and gypsies in the 1850s and was committed to Grundtvigian ideas. Bente Alver (1971) says that the Norwegian folklorist Feilberg’s visit with Sundt in 1872 was influential on his study Dansk Bondeliv. As a result of his conversations with Sundt, Feilberg became convinced that the peasants were the repository of culture, for their customs were handed down from generation to generation.

Ole Arveson and Herman Anker founded a folk high school in 1864 called Sagatun under the inspiration of Ole Vig. Arveson was the son of tenant farmers, who had made contact with Vig; and Anker was a member of one of the most illustrious families in Norway in whose house folkloric music and songs were always being played. They wanted to continue the work of Vig, and they felt that only the elite knew the elements of national culture, which the peasants were ignoring. They also decided that the school’s language would be the language of the urban elite. Busts of Grundtvig and the romantic writer Bjørnemønsterne Bjørnson adorned the entryway of the school, as well as a tapestry representing all the gods of Norse mythology. The school also contained a copy of a painting by Constantin Hansen of the banquet of Ægir and portraits of Ole Vig, Henrik Wergeland, A. O. Vinje, and Ivar Asen.

Christopher Bruun (1839–1901), a young theologian, opened another folk high school in 1873 called Vonheim. The romantic writer Bjørnson joined him for a while but found that the peasants did not follow his orders, rejected his attacks against the church, and feared his radicalism. Bruun, on the other hand, like Christen Kold in Denmark, wore peasant dress, lived a peasant life, and was a pietist. Their differences caused Bjørnson to quit the enterprise. Bruun saw a relationship between the folk high school movement and growing peasant political power. In 1865, Søren Jaabek organized assemblies among the peasantry, and, as a result of this agitation, the 1868 elections to the parliament gave a majority to the peasant representatives. Bruun said that in
order for the peasants to become adequate deputies, they must be able to fulfill certain tasks; the folk high school would enable them to do so. He advocated for the use of landsmål rather than the language of the urban elite: landsmål, as the language of the peasant, would help the democratic cause and sustain the battle for equality. He found Sagatun too Danish and wanted to unite those working in the linguistic movement with those working for peasant political power.\textsuperscript{7} Bruun felt that Norway could not create its own philosophy or intellectual traditions because it formed its youth in schools that taught Latin, German science, and Danish-language literature. He wanted to create a school that would be the headquarters of a general superior culture founded on original Norse elements: the teaching of poetry, history, and Norwegian folktales would occupy center stage.

Folk high schools were one strategy within a larger movement to extend schooling to the peasantry and to make schooling more appropriate for a national revival. In 1863, a government-sponsored text was developed by a parish priest which had five major sections—“The Home,” “The Fatherland,” “The World,” “The Church,” and a miscellaneous section—and included “a romantic display of the old Norwegian tales, folk songs, and poems” (Rust 1989:91). Similarly, the \textit{Kalevala} became incorporated into the secondary school curriculum in Finland because, as one prominent educator said, “one of the most important tasks of the secondary school is to acquaint the student[s] with their own nation” (quoted in Wilson 1976:130).

\textit{Folk Schools and Folklorists in Sweden}

Brynjulf Alver (1989) argues that imperialist countries like Sweden, Denmark, and England have relatively underdeveloped folklore archives and studies. Yet nationalism can easily turn into imperialism (Wilson 1975), and folklore scholarship can serve imperialist causes as well as nationalist ones (Dorson 1968). In Sweden, the first folk high schools were founded by the Scandinavianists, who wanted the Scandinavian countries to join in federation. Yet Scandinavianism, like nationalism, relied on a similar image of the past: whereas nationalism used Norse mythology to glorify the nation, Scandinavianism used Norse mythology to show the unity of the Scandinavian people. Hans Christian Anderson wrote a poem in 1839 that became a symbol of the Scandinavianist movement: “We are formed of only one people, which we call Scandinavian” was the famous line (Simon 1960). Scandinavianism began among Danish university students in the 1830s as a result of the tension in Slesvig and Holstein, but it quickly spread to university students all over the North.

As in Norway, the election of peasant representatives to parliamentary assembly prompted attention to the education of peasants in Sweden. Per Sahlström published a brochure in 1833 called “Of the Instruction of the People: Dedicated to Enlightened Public Opinion and to the Order of Peasants.” He says that only instruction can give back to the peasant class its primitive role: to be the base of the state and its support. Oral teaching—hearing legends and myths—would exercise the peasants’ memories, nourishing their imaginations and intelligence. He says that if all peasants went to college, Sweden would have a nation of bureaucrats, and so he demands that schools be adapted to the needs of the peasant. This brochure had great influence on the
projects peasants presented to the Riksdag in 1834–35. Peasant representatives to the Riksdag also wanted public instruction because they felt that their lack of education was a permanent cause of embarrassment and inferiority. In 1842, they helped pass a law that made primary school obligatory.

The first three folk high schools were founded by a Scandinavianist organization, a peasant association that wanted a school, and a pastor (Simon 1960). In 1865, Nordiska Nationalföreningen (National Northern Association) was founded in Sweden with the goal of preparing for a federalist state of Scandinavia. Under the initiative of August Sohlman, Nordiska Nationalföreningen came to discuss the founding of a folk high school in 1867. One member, Dr. Ålund, was sent to study the folk high schools in Denmark. The association was interested in the least Grundtvigian and most Scandinavianist of the schools, Hindholm. The goal of the folk high school they wanted to create would be to give peasants a foundation that would help them be citizens desiring liberal democracy and the union of the North. The students at the Swedish folk high schools were generally sons of the peasant aristocracy who were actively involved in political life.

In Hvilan, farmers had founded an agricultural club in 1867 to inform members about agricultural issues and issues of more general interest. Ola Andersson i Nordanå, a Scandinavianist and peasant-deputy, asked the members if they wanted a school for rural youth. A committee was formed that decided that their rural youth needed to acquire general culture, be aware of their role in society, learn to like and respect their work, and realize that one did not need to be a bureaucrat to use one’s abilities for the greater good of society. The committee ended up running the school, which opened in 1868, and they retained the conception of the living word. Poet A. U. Båth was a professor at Hvilan between 1875 and 1879. He had studied Old Icelandic in 1874 and was a specialist on the sagas. The presence of Båth on the faculty at Hvilan gave it a more Nordic orientation. He later went to Copenhagen to continue his Icelandic studies and to continue translating the Saga of Niel.

Song had a prominent place in the Hvilan school. The school had a communal assembly, with an elected council, in order to mimic real political life. Hvilan’s program of learning was primarily devoted to awakening students’ human conscience and national sentiment: mother tongue instruction and history were each given six to seven hours a week. Then, in order to create good citizens, constitutional history, political economy, geography, natural sciences, and arithmetic were taught. And finally, to teach students to be competent farmers, applied geometry, practical exercises of drainage and land measurement, drawing (reproduction of buildings, tools, maps, dams, etc.), and accounting were taught. One evening a week, a public discussion was organized by the students, generally on practical or general subjects, for instance, how to augment the harvest from a vegetable garden, whether rock or wood was a better material with which to construct stables, how to practice camaraderie at the school, and why popular merrymaking diminished in the countryside. Conferences open to the public at Hvilan during the winter of 1868–69 included “Hero-Kings,” “The Introduction of Reformation in Sweden,” “The Solar System,” “Geological Formations in Sweden,” “Heat: Its Qualities and Manifestations,” “The Origin and Extension of Islam,” and “Royalty and Nobility until 1680” (Simon 1960).
Pastor Carl Abrahams Bergman founded Önnestad Folk High School, which opened on the same day as Hvilan. He did not know about Danish schools when he began exploring the idea of an education suited to peasant life. However, after reading Dr. Ålund’s articles on the Danish folk high schools, Bergman began corresponding with the director of Hindholm and visited Hindholm in 1868. He wanted his school to be an instrument of Scandinavianism, liberalism, and practical and personal Christianity.

Military exercises took place at most of the schools. Later, physical exercise took on a more peaceful character through the use of gymnastics. Public discussions were often organized. The Stories of Fänrik Stål, the Saga of Frithiof, and Bjørnson’s Peasant Songs were the most widely read works according to the annual reports of the folk high schools. Parents and friends of students often visited the schools: eight to ten visitors a day was the rule at some schools. After leaving the schools, students joined associations of former students who came together for reunions, conferences and dances, discussions, and meals in common. The annual reunions would generally draw 1,500 to 3,000 people (Simon 1960).

Folklorists were often tutors and schoolmasters at both regular schools and folk high schools. A. A. Åfzelius (1785–1871), son of a clergyman, taught at the Freemasons’ Orphanage in Stockholm (1809–15) and as a private tutor to aristocratic children. In 1815, he took over a private secondary school founded by his older brother, and in 1820 he became a vicar. In 1811, he had begun collecting folksongs and ballads and became a member of Götiska forbundet, which held meetings at the Freemasons’ Orphanage (Jonsson 1971). C. W. von Sydow (1878–1952), like many other budding scholars of the humanities, taught at folk high schools to finance his university studies. He taught at Ronneby Folk High School and traveled to Askov Folk High School to improve his teaching skills. There he met Feilberg, the Danish folklorist. As soon as he returned to Ronneby school, he began a collection of traditional material among his pupils, as well as in his native village of Småland (Berg 1971).

Conclusion

In the beginning of this article, I speak about the importance of mapping effects of cultural interventions. What were the effects of the folk high schools? One narrative puts them at the center of the growth in peasant rights and movements; the other shows their connection to romantic nationalism, which led directly to doctrines of racist thought and Nazism (Lixfeld 1994). Fain argues that Grundtvig’s romantic nationalist outlook provides a counter example to the Herder-to-Hitler argument “since the Danes turned out to be quite immune to Nazi ideology” (1980a:53). It is also clear that the folk high school movement was not simply a class struggle to maintain the marginality of the peasant through sentimentalization (cf. Abrahams 1993). Clearly, peasants were demanding education, albeit only those who owned larger plots of land and could engage in political life. Their folk high schools were slightly more civic- or vocationally oriented than the more Grundtvigian schools, and some peasant leaders (Lars Bjørnbak in Denmark and Søren Jaabæk in Norway) were more interested in teaching students in “the language of power” rather than in their
own mother tongue; but generally the schools that peasant leaders founded did not seem very different from those founded by pastors, teachers, and intellectuals. In fact, many schoolteachers, pastors, and peasant–deputies in Scandinavia seem to have come from similar peasant backgrounds: these were the available routes peasants had to higher status. Some from peasant households—such as Ivar Aasen and E. T. Kristensen—after becoming schoolteachers or pastors came in contact with those who were collecting folklore or studying mythology and began to collect it themselves in order to prove that peasant language and culture should be respected.

These intellectual ancestors reveal how their ideas and practices had different effects than they hoped. Pestalozzi’s school for middle-class children received fame, yet his dream was a school for poor children (Silber 1965). Grundtvig felt ambivalent about the folk high schools that were set up because he envisioned a state-sponsored school, not the small, scattered schools founded and run by individuals. The ideologies of Pestalozzi and Grundtvig were often misunderstood or ignored. The teaching methods of Pestalozzi spread, especially the way he broke down teaching into simple units; but the philosophy behind it often did not accompany the spread of the pedagogy. Likewise, folk high school leaders learned about folk high schools not through Grundtvig’s writings, which were often hard to understand, but through the forms inspired by them, the first folk high schools themselves, which were often the products of the interpretations of the schools’ founders of Grundtvigian thought (Simon 1960).

All of this is to say that following effects is difficult and complicated. Much as we might wish otherwise, the history of ideas and practices is not unitary—a straight, clear line of descent—but filled with breaks and ruptures, as Foucault (1972) points out. This raises cautions for both academic and applied folklorists: both cultural interventions and ideas may be picked up for different purposes than those intended by their creators or disseminators.

The history of the folk high school movement and the connections between education and folklore scholarship in the 19th century show how applied work and academic folklore have long been intertwined in the history of folklore studies. When one looks at scholars as participating in different arenas and communities simultaneously and across their life spans, one sees more clearly the ways that academic ideas are disseminated to a more general audience and how commonsensical, everyday ideological constructions influence scholarly ones. Furthermore, the history of the folk high school movement shows that when intellectuals wish to put their ideas into practical use, they often do so by turning to educational reform, for children are seen as more open to change and simultaneously as crucial to society’s welfare. Like the antimodernists that Lears (1981) describes, peasant–deputies, pastors, and folklorists channeled many of their activist and sometimes radical urges into schooling and education, a move that involved drawing back from fundamental social change because the central issue became how to prepare peasant children for their appropriate stations in a hierarchical world: not everyone could become a bureaucrat. Thus, the romantic impulse that turned folklorists and those influenced by folklore studies toward educational reform also blunted the impact of their ideas.

Educationalists continue to make sporadic efforts to include vernacular culture in the school curriculum, and folklorists attempt to assist them in their efforts because the
cultural divide between the school and the home is seen as detrimental to student learning. To make schooling meaningful to students’ everyday lives and to promote ethnic harmony, contemporary folklorists in the United States supervise oral history projects and bring folk artists into the classroom. Postcolonial governments are attempting to decolonize their schools by drawing on “national” cultural traditions, as in Ghana. Educational reformers, both within the United States and elsewhere, continue to grapple with the issue of incorporating “tradition” into the curriculum, although they rarely do so under the auspices of romantic nationalism. This article argues that we should be less worried about the freezing and fixing of everyday forms through representations in the school than about the effects of those representations; at the same time, the study of folk high schools shows how difficult it is to make conclusions about effects and about the relationship between ideas and actual practices.

The folk high school movement raises deeper questions about applied work: In directing our attention toward reforming schools, are we simply making the transition to a new hegemony more bearable? How do we find a way to work through institutions and everyday situations (which are all that we have) without blunting radical ideas? When, if ever, is the experiential level (that teachers and students have a “good experience”) as important as the structural level, and how do we show the relationships between the personal and the structural? That the linkage between folklore scholarship and education of the “primitive” and “peasant”—those labeled “folk”—remains a lacuna in the history of our discipline reveals that we need to consider seriously how the romantic positioning of folklore, which gives us an agenda for social change, is also the reason that our efforts do not result in generating the kind of world in which we wish to live.

Notes

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1Wilson (1975, 1976) and Herzfeld (1982) discuss briefly that materials marked as folkloric—such as the Kalevala—entered the school curriculum and textbooks. Lixfeld (1994) mentions in passing that elementary school teachers were trained to become collectors of folklore.

2In his dissertation, Bill Westerman (1995) also emphasizes the protest and critical qualities of romanticism, in a later era. Lear’s (1981) great contribution is in showing how romantic impulses were generated by psychic struggles within individuals.

3For instance, the following all served as tutors in private homes or as teachers at some point in their lives (Strömbeck 1971): A. A. Kostenjakko of Finland; A. A. Afzelius, Gunnar Olof Hyltén, and C. W. von Sydow of Sweden; E. T. Kristensen of Denmark; and J. K. Qvigstad, Knud Knudsen, A. O. Vinje, and Ivar Aasen of Norway. Cecil Sharp was a music teacher for 17 years (Karpeles 1967).

4For this insight, I am indebted to an e-mail conversation with Regina Bendix (personal communica-
tion, 1998). For an example of this happening, see Dorothy Ross’s (1972) biography of G. Stanley Hall, in which one can see that his lectures and university position provided scientific justification for progressive education at the same time as their concerns influenced what he studied.

5His romantic retellings of Norse myth include Scenes from the Decline of Heroic Life in the North (1809) and Scenes from the Battle of Norns and Aesir (1811).
Another school for peasant-deputies (Viby) was founded by Lars Bjornbak, a country teacher, in 1857. He was as much against the Grundtvigians as he was against the conservatives. The school's goal was to prepare peasants to defend their political position. He taught students the King's Danish, good manners, and practical skills in agriculture.

However, Jaabak himself was against the use of Old Norse and landsmål in the schools. Jaabak was a friend of A. O. Vinje; they had been teachers together.

For a similar argument about progressive education and Nazism, see Shirley 1992.

References Cited


