

**The Makings of a Movement:
New Beginnings in Canadian Folk Schooling**

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Educational Studies

Devon E. Lee

Faculty of Education, Lakehead University

Supervisors: Dr. Paul Berger and Dr. David Greenwood

May 26, 2025

Abstract

With an emphasis on community, culture, and craft, folk schools offer poignant insights for those interested in transforming society through education. Folk schools are open enrollment, autonomous, non-competitive (ungraded), non-vocational, nonformal (non-degree granting), (often) rural, cooperative living and learning spaces for adult education conceptualized in the 1830's by Nikolai Severin Grundtvig enacted first in Denmark and, later, Scandinavia (Canfield, 1965; Coe, 2000; K. Totten, personal communication, July 26, 2024; Kavalier, 1962; Kulich, 2002; Pantzar, 1988). They have existed in North America since the turn of the twentieth century, but efforts toward a durable folk schooling movement in Canada (Parsey & Friesen, 1953; Kulich, 1988) have yet to materialize.

A number of folk schools have emerged in Canada over the last decade, and this research seeks to answer the question, “In these still early days, what is the state of folk schooling in Canada?” The study employs a case study approach to research in education (Stake, 1995). Founders of five Canadian folk schools—Annapolis Valley Folk School in Paradise, Nova Scotia; Fireloch Gathering Place and Retreat in North Lochaber, Nova Scotia; Honeybee Folk School in Fredericton, New Brunswick; Life.School.House in Antigonish, Nova Scotia and beyond; and Okanagan Folk School in Peachland, British Columbia—participated in semi-structured interviews for this study—sharing moments of toil, struggle, joy, and success.

This research highlights the collective strengths of folk schools in Canada today in community building, reviving traditional skills and endangered knowledge, creating affluence, and increasing tourism. Likewise, it discusses shared challenges and supports needed around funding, staffing, navigating the unknown, awareness, and space considerations. I argue that folk education—as a tool for community and place-based popular adult education—can help respond to the complex issues faced in Canada today, much as the schools supported the Danish on a path to non-violent modernization (Borish, 1991). Adding to the scant literature on Canadian folk schooling, this study represents a step forward in advancing unique approaches to folk schooling in a Canadian context.

Acknowledgements

To the participants of this research—Jennifer, Anna, Maureen, and Murray—thank you for trusting me with your stories, and for being willing to share them with the world in the name of folk education. Each of you serves as inspiration for finding new and old ways of coming together and working to make our communities, and the world, a better place.

To my family—Levi, Addie, Kay, Mom, and Mark—thank you for the long hours, the travel, the childcare, and the continual source of strength and encouragement. And for believing in me, and in the dream. I love you all.

To David- thank you for walking this long and winding road with me through the best of times and the worst of times. And many seasons of change. Your unwavering support and quiet confidence in me have meant everything. May it be but the beginning of our journey together. And to Jill, Eli, Charlie, and Ivy- thank you for being part of our family and sharing yours with us.

To Paul—thank you for being a mentor long before it was ever written anywhere on paper. You have always been there for any need big or small, and having you in my corner has been such a reassurance. I am especially grateful to you for stepping in during a time of need and helping us to see this through. And to Helle, thank you for supporting me, and Paul.

To my committee members—Paul and Robert—for your patience and guidance in this unfolding journey. You have both contributed so much to me and to this work. Thank you.

To my friends and colleagues in the folk school world- Kelley, Dawn, Chris, Jerry, Terri, Jennifer, Sylvia, Kirsten, Mari, Julie, and Shannon- thank you for opening your arms to me and for all you have each done, and will undoubtedly continue to do, in advancing and preserving the legacy of people's education.

To the good folks at Lakehead University—far too numerous to name—thank you for being the most wonderful teachers, mentors, colleagues, staff, librarians, students, and friends that anyone could ever wish for. You have made this place home and a place to grow and flourish.

To my PhrienDs—Melissa, Lianne, Salsabel, and Jacquana—a group of women so exceptional that they are making the world anew. I am lucky to call you each friend, to learn from and laugh (or cry) with you and to be inspired by your brilliance and tenacity. Thanks for being here for all of it. You are loved and appreciated beyond measure.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	2
Acknowledgements	4
List of Figures	9
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	10
Research Question	10
Definitions	11
Context.....	13
Rationale.....	15
Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks.....	18
Positionality.....	20
Chapter 2: A Review of the Literature—and Other Living Knowledge.....	23
Folk Schools, Conceptually	25
The Beginnings of a Movement in the United States.....	28
Rationale for Examining John C. Campbell and Highlander Folk Schools.....	30
John C. Campbell Folk School	31
The Campbells’ Efforts towards Folk Schooling.....	32
Olive Campbell Continues	34
Early Beginnings and a Foray into Agriculture	35
Handicraft at John C. Campbell Folk School.....	37
Highlander Folk School.....	40
Myles Horton and the Search for “O”.....	40
Horton’s Journey to Denmark	44
The Beginnings of Highlander: Organized Labour and Community Schooling	46
Highlander and the Civil Rights Movement	48
Highlander, Post-Horton.....	51
Criticisms of Folk Schools.....	52
An American Folk Revival.....	55
Values and Pedagogy at John C. Campbell and Highlander Folk Schools.....	58
New Beginnings in Canada	62
Conclusion	68

Chapter 3: Case Study—An Approach to Research	70
The Case—Theta or “ Θ ”	72
Data Collection and Analysis	74
Methods	75
Constructing A Narrative.....	78
Participants	79
Ethical Considerations	81
Research Study Process and Timeline	83
Confidence	86
Limitations	88
Conclusion	89
Chapter 4: A Portrait of Folk Schooling in Canada Today	90
Life.School.House.....	92
Annapolis Valley Folk School	95
Honeybee Folk School.....	99
Okanagan Folk School	104
Fireloch Gathering Place and Retreat.....	106
Conclusion	109
Chapter 5: The Makings of a Movement—Moving Forward	111
Successes.....	111
Community Building	112
Reviving Traditional Skills and Endangered Knowledge	122
Creating Affluence and Increasing Tourism	127
Challenges and Required Supports	132
Funding.....	133
Staffing	135
Navigating the Unknown	139
Awareness.....	143
Space Considerations	145
Recommendations for Future Research	148
Chapter 6: Related Thoughts and Conclusion	152

References.....	165
Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview Guide	175
Appendix B: Interview Information Letter	178
Appendix C: Interview Consent Form	184
Appendix D: Research Ethics Board Approval Letter	186

List of Figures

Figure 1: <i>Folk Schools Included in the Case Study</i>	89
Figure 2: <i>Life.School.House Makers' Swap</i>	91
Figure 3: <i>Annapolis Valley Folk School Program</i>	95
Figure 4: <i>Embodied Practice Interview- Knitted Scarf</i>	98
Figure 5: <i>Honeybee Folk School</i>	99
Figure 6: <i>Okanagan Folk School Building</i>	103
Figure 7: <i>Fireloch Gathering Place and Retreat – Dome</i>	106

Chapter 1: Introduction

Research Question

This research aims to capture a moment in time—when a handful of folk schools have been founded in Canada over the past decade—to harness the potential for a folk school movement to address some of today’s most pressing concerns in Canada. It seeks to understand what it is about this moment that is propelling folk schooling in Canada, how these schools are structured and focused, what is compelling about their offerings, and, critically, to identify what challenges they face and what supports are needed to sustain an upward trajectory. The following research question underpins this case study inquiry and serves as the basis for the semi-structured interviews (Appendix A) and document review that were conducted for the study. A list of definitions follows.

In these still early days, what is the state of folk schooling in Canada?

Sub-Questions:

- 1) What is it about today’s moment that is leading to a push for folk schooling in Canada?
- 2) How are folk schools addressing unmet needs in the community?
- 3) What underlying needs and aspirations prompt folk school founders to undertake the task of starting a folk school?
- 4) What are folk schools offering through their praxis, focus(es), and structure?
- 5) Where are today’s Canadian folk schools finding success and what challenges do they face?

- 6) What would be needed to support a movement in Canada akin to the recent American folk school revival, or the long-standing, widespread tradition of folk schooling in Scandinavia?

Definitions

Folk School: Open, autonomous, non-competitive, non-vocational, nonformal, cooperative living and learning spaces of (often) rural, adult education first conceived by prominent Danish scholar, historian, theologian, and poet Nikolai Severin Grundtvig in the 1830's (Canfield, 1965; Coe, 2000; K. Totten, personal communication, July 26, 2024; Kavalier, 1962; Kulich, 2002; Pantzar, 1988). The term folk school is used throughout this document, but the schools are also known as folk high schools (in Scandinavia); folkehøjskole (in Danish), and folkschools (in North America). All stem from the same tradition of adult education existing outside of 'postsecondary' and 'formal education' and draw upon the interpretation of "folk" as a people rather than a more narrow view of folk culture or folk life. In short, they are people's schools, and they are about the people.

Some folk educators, including Grundtvig who was a Danish Lutheran (Borish, 1991; Kulich, 1964, 1997; Preskill, 2021), have been involved in various form of organized religion. Likewise, some folk schools (especially in the early days of folk schooling) incorporated aspects of religion or spirituality, however the model itself is a secular one and in North America, it is primarily practiced in a secular manner.

Adult Education: This study uses “adult education” to describe folk schooling because folk schools typically offer education to youth and adults 18 and older and were originally envisioned and employed this way. However, it is not uncommon for folk schools to open specific programs to teens, local children or schools, or for intergenerational learning. Due to the flexibility of the format, folk schools can vary widely in their audience and in their praxis.

Canada: So-called “Canada” is a colonial construct. I acknowledge that this Land, and all of Turtle Island, is home to Indigenous Peoples who have lived in relation to the Land since time immemorial. Much of this Land is unceded or occupied under false or deceptive colonial pretences. The reason for using a “Canadian” lens in this study is two-fold: firstly, it provides a geographic demarcation which is useful for distinguishing it from the also colonial nation of the United States of America, and secondly because the histories of folk schooling, their trajectory, and the funding and bureaucratic apparatuses vary considerably in the two countries. The use of this term is not meant to supersede the whole that is Turtle Island nor to ignore the critical work toward reconciliation and decolonization that are underway and must be furthered.

North America: North America is used in this study to frame a particular form of folk schooling that became prevalent across time and place in the United States of America and now, Canada. Mexico is also widely considered to be part of North America—and all these countries are situated on Turtle Island—though Mexican folk education practices have not, to the best of my knowledge, derived from the

Scandinavian folk schools as other popular education practices have been leveraged there. In this study, North American folk schooling refers to the folk school form and practices found in the United States and Canada as they were adapted from Grundvig and the Scandinavian folk schools.

Movement: Here, movement is meant as a revival, a trajectory, or a groundswell. It is intended to capture both a sense of momentum and breadth in folk schooling practices. Folk schooling movements (or waves) in the United States and Canada have primarily been grassroots and community-supported in nature, though there was interest in the early twentieth century from national educational authorities (Foght, 1914; Friend, 1914) in the United States to bring folk schooling to rural America, and in particular, to Appalachia (Shapiro, 1978; Whisnant, 1983).

Context

With an emphasis on community, culture, and craft, folk schools offer poignant insights for those interested in transforming society through education. Folk schools are open enrollment, autonomous, non-competitive (ungraded), non-vocational (non-degree granting), nonformal, cooperative living and learning spaces of (often) rural, adult education first conceived by prominent Danish scholar, historian, theologian, and poet Nikolai Severin Grundtvig in the 1830's (Canfield, 1965; Coe, 2000; K. Totten, personal communication, July 26, 2024; Kavalier, 1962; Kulich, 2002; Pantzar, 1988). They have existed in North America since the turn of the twentieth century, yet their presence here leaves little mark in the larger academic literature on adult and alternative education. Although the

breadth of the folk schooling tradition in North America pales in comparison to other forms of adult education—particularly higher education—this branch of nonformal education has much to offer to contemporary educators and scholars both within and beyond conventional systems of education (Lee, 2017). Markedly different than their formal counterparts in adult education, folk schools practice education rooted in community-based living, learning, and being.

The schools remain popular in Scandinavia today (Kultur Ministeriet, 2025) but their leap to America—facilitated by a handful of American educator-activists such as Philander Claxton, John C. Campbell, Olive Dame Campbell, Marguerite Butler, Myles Horton, and Don West—notably transformed the schools into a new North American model of folk schooling (Folk Education Alliance of America, 2017; Lee, 2017; Spicer, 2009). A review of the literature examines the makings of the movement in the United States of America to provide insight into today's early forays into folk schooling in Canada. This takes the lens of early advocacy for American folk schools at the turn of the twentieth century and, subsequently, the establishment of the first two North American-style folk schools (Lee, 2017): John C. Campbell Folk School and Highlander Folk School, both in the United States. These two folk schools—both of which are still in operation roughly a century later—redefined folk schooling on this continent and paved the way for nearly 60 folk schools and related folk education organizations (Folk Education Association of America, 2017) in the United States today. John C. Campbell and Highlander Folk Schools, as pillars of folk education in the United States, underpin the

makings of the modern American folk school movement which I build upon in this case study research into the early days of a possible folk school movement in contemporary Canada, some one hundred years later. This research examines a group of five Canadian folk schools that may have met their moment at long last and considers their practice in the context of ongoing crises unfolding due to colonialism and capitalism with a view toward reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples and climate action in particular. The review of the literature also describes previous efforts toward folk education in Canada (Parsey & Freisen, 1953), which saw fewer folk schools than in the United States and which have been, to date, less enduring in the long term (Kulich, 1964, 1988; Parsey & Friesen, 1953).

Rationale

This study builds upon my master's thesis work (Lee, 2017)—a comparative, content analysis of folk schools in the United States and Canada—which sought to understand the prevailing forms and structures of folk schooling here. That data, collected between 2014 and 2016, showed a renewed interest in folk schooling in the United States, one which has, almost a decade later, begun in Canada. While folk schooling efforts in both countries are still modest in comparison to the well-established and dominant postsecondary education sector, folk schools offer a sort of education that is clearly resonating with many through times of change and crises. In North America, folk schools are not supported centrally in the way that postsecondary or public schooling are—rather, most exist as non-profit entities offering nonformal education and community engagement

initiatives. My master's thesis (Lee, 2017) argues that folk schools are particularly suited to supporting people and communities in their struggle for progress because they are developed by the people in a grassroots fashion and are localized to the places and contexts of the people. Folk schooling can also be impactful locally and nationally in their support of equitable and just futures as the review of the literature surrounding John C. Campbell and Highlander folk schools will explore in terms of cultural preservation and renewal, co-operative economic development, workers' rights, and civil rights. These seems particularly relevant to the volatile geo-political and economic crises facing Canada today.

This study suggests that there is a strong role for the practitioner-researcher to play in case study research. Qualitative research generally acknowledges the situated nature of the researcher, though specific methods and approaches vary across the field (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013; Stake, 1995). The methodology for this study builds upon Stake's (1995) approach to case study outlined in *The Art of Case Study Research* which relies heavily on the practitioner-researcher to craft the research; therefore, my relationship to the area of research, described below, is important.

Building upon my scholarly and professional activities (see below) in the field of folk schooling, this research considers the potential for folk schools in Canada and aims to understand the benefits, challenges, and limitations of such an approach. Most of today's North American folk schools are nonprofit organizations or registered charities (Lee, 2017) and face inconsistent funding

mechanisms when compared with the Scandinavian folk schools or with the formal education sector in Canada and the United States. This is especially true in Canada where no clear avenue for funding folk schooling has emerged. While there is a surge of efforts toward folk schooling here, it is likely that they are not yet durable, and this research can have a considerable impact in helping to chart a viable path forward for this alternative form of education through its examination of the multiple formats that folk schooling is taking in its early days in Canada and an understanding of their successes, challenges, needs, and potential.

Coming to the field of folk education a decade ago as an environmental educator, I sought a framework for education that could be oriented to the wellness of people in their places. The climate crisis dictates that education simply cannot further the ecological double-bind (Bowers, 1997) wherein more people are able to access unsustainable cultural norms. The supposed social mobility aims of education should be scrutinized and adult education, therefore, must reconceptualize its values and methods. Colleges and universities will undoubtedly continue to serve their purposes—though they too must consider their own roles and responses in the ecological and social crises upon us. Folk schooling is but one avenue of potential to bring learning back in line with life through what is now recognized as the practice of degrowth (Hickel et al., 2022). Seeking to enlighten and uplift the citizenry within their own lives and cultures has long been a tenet of folk schooling. The goal being to enable people to live well, or as coined at John C. Campbell Folk School, to “Sing Behind the Plow” (Davis & Hughes, 2007).

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

Drawing from Marxist Philosophy, critical theory, and feminist theory, knowledge generated through this mode of research is an ideological critique of power, privilege, and oppression in areas of education practice.
(Merriam, 1998, p. 4)

My research primarily incorporates the theoretical framework of critical theory and the conceptual framework of critical pedagogy to investigate the current state of folk schooling in Canada. This section asserts the appropriateness of both critical theory and critical pedagogy to the study of folk schooling and notes some resonances with Indigenous Knowledge Systems while remaining distinct as a practice.

Drawing on the work of Marx and Hegel, the early critical theorists of the Frankfurt School provided a basis for analysing the role of systemic oppression in the life and agency of the individual (Darder et al., 2017; Stirk, 2000). The large body of work produced by Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, Habermas, and the many other influential scholars of the Frankfurt School, addressed the social realities of their time while providing future generations with a malleable tool for deconstructing cultural crises (Stirk, 2000). Freire (1968/2000)—whose groundbreaking work in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* gave rise to the field of critical pedagogy—inspired a legion of followers whose work is ongoing today as they consider the practice of education within the broader context of society.

Myles Horton, founder of Highlander Folk School, has since been recognized as a critical pedagogue (Darder et al., 2023) though he did not write widely on the subject. It was his practice of critical pedagogy, rather, that

compelled Freire to sit together with Horton in the twilight days of their lives to create the spoken-word book, *We Make the Road by Walking* (Horton & Freire, 1990). The book details the parallel approaches of emancipatory folk schooling at Highlander and Freire's scholarly and practical pursuits of critical pedagogy in Brazil. Tracing back to the emancipatory aims of the Danish folk schooling tradition as first articulated by Grundtvig (Kulich, 1964), the similarities of folk schooling to critical pedagogy are clear. Critical pedagogy as a conceptual framework situates the historical and contemporary practice of folk schooling within social contexts and conversations around educational reform.

Likewise, it should be noted that the practice of folk schooling was built around a Danish rural class who lived in close relation to the land and who were primarily agricultural in vocation. They faced linguistic and cultural threats from both within and beyond their country (Begtrup et al. 1929) and the folk school emerged as a powerful form of cultural education in response. As you read through this dissertation, you may note similarities between folk school ideologies and Indigenous Knowledge Systems. While this may be true in practice, I am careful not to conflate these because although they both emerge from a close relationship to Land, community, and culture, their roots are distinct and they must necessarily be practiced in the context in which they arose. In Canada, this means that folk schools are practiced largely as a pedagogy by settlers with its roots from elsewhere, whereas Indigenous Knowledge Systems pre-date colonialism and continue to exist in spite of it. Where there is room for these traditions to work in

tandem toward reconciliation, their paths may meet, however folk schooling draws more directly from other paradigms when considered in the context of colonialism in North America.

Positionality

I come to the field of education after an upbringing in rural Kentucky. I hail from an area adjacent to the more official borders of Appalachia but one that shares very much the same culture that North American folk schools set out to support or address—depending on who you ask (Horton & Jacobs, 2003; Preskill, 2021; Whisnant, 1983).

Public education was available where I grew up, but one that likely would not meet the standards and aims set forth by formal education. Yet here I learned that school is about so much more than academics and that a primary role of a school in rural and remote communities is often one of community-building and as a convening space. In my community, the school was the centre of our community in addition to (or despite) the type of learning that did or did not happen during the school day.

As an educator, later in life, I began to wonder why the formal education system left so many gaps for students (or entire communities) to fall through. My interest in experiential and environmental education sent me on a path for a model of learning that might address some of these perceived shortcomings of formal education which I felt often did not value people, place, or environment in ways that were life-giving. Folk schooling is one approach to education—one that feels

authentic to me—based on who I am and my personal and professional experiences with schooling and education.

My positionality in the scholarship and practice of folk schooling is multi-dimensional. From within the university, I am a scholar of the North American folk schools both past and present, and a (hopeful) reformer who employs pedagogies of folk education in my teaching at the university. Despite the tensions present between formal and nonformal education, it is important to me to bear in mind the distinction between education as it is and as we think it ought to be (Horton & Jacobs, 2003; Klein, 2018). Although there are many challenges to bringing the ethos of folk schooling into my role as a university instructor, the university—as a wide-reaching form of adult education prevalent today—provides a broader platform to support and often implement some of these ideas around democratic and cultural education in folk schooling, and given my role in teacher education, the possibility for some of these to emerge in public schooling as well.

It is also true that the time and space in which to conduct this research and compile these histories would not have been possible for me if not for working within the existing system of post-secondary education. In the nonformal education sphere, I am an enactor and practitioner of folk schools through my leadership in bringing the barter and home-based Life.School.House folk schooling practices to Thunder Bay and through the founding of Antiquary Folk School in the Ottawa and Thunder Bay areas. Both projects are on hiatus as I work to complete my dissertation research, however offering Canadian folk schooling in various forms

offers a window into both the potential and the problems facing folk schools in Canada today. My role as President and Board Member of the Folk Education Association of America (FEAA) offers insights into how we can support and further peoples' education across North America. The FEAA's Folk School Alliance Community of Practice offers an open invitation to folk school practitioners and leaders with virtual convening each month.

As the founder of Antiquary Folk School (founded in 2022), I led a regional knowledge-sharing visit with Duluth Folk School and Ely Folk School in 2023 via the Lake Superior Living Labs Network where we collectively shared about our institutions, their beginnings and present contexts, and their strengths and challenges. We learned from what each other are doing well and from the shared (and sometimes unique) challenges that we each faced. A research report (Bateman & Lee, 2023) based on our knowledge exchange captured context from within our Lake Superior/Gichigami watershed but is both strengthened and limited by its cross-border approach. What is needed as folk schools increasingly spring to life within Canada, is a dialogue that can help support capacity building nationally as the movement here is just now seeing a revival, well after this has occurred stateside. There is much to learn from our colleagues south of the border, but the Canadian context and frameworks remain distinct, necessitating the current research.

Chapter 2: A Review of the Literature—and Other Living Knowledge

This dissertation research, entitled “The Makings of a Movement: New Beginnings in Canadian Folk Schooling” seeks to understand today’s Canadian folk schools—their forms, functions, pedagogies, and practices—through the lens of the North American folk schooling tradition. The review of the literature examines the historical trajectory of two influential folk schools, as they apply to the beginnings of American folk schooling, collaboration with social and cultural movements, and the laying of groundwork for a nascent network of folk schools across the continent. It provides context for the modern examination of Canadian folk schools and provides an informed, scholarly foundation upon which to situate this dissertation research and to theorize on the pedagogical and practical implications of the makings of a movement toward folk schooling here in Canada.

Today’s folk schools in Canada share characteristics of both John C. Campbell Folk School and Highlander Folk School (now Highlander Research and Education Center). These two schools provide the foundation that the rest of the North American folk schools are built upon—thus giving a solid basis for understanding the tenets of North American folk schooling as they are being stretched and shifted in today’s adaptations of the tradition (Lee, 2017). Founded in 1925 and 1932 respectively, John C. Campbell and Highlander folk schools have withstood the Great Depression, the Second World War, and an ever-changing policy environment around education and poverty in America. Although they represent the first two American-operated folk schools in North America, John C.

Campbell and Highlander folk schools can be viewed as pedagogical bookends to the burgeoning folk school movement in the United States and Canada today that draws heavily upon the model put forward by John C. Campbell Folk School with room remaining to incorporate the sort of collective, activist education at Highlander.

Contemporary folk schools incorporate elements of craft and cultural preservation and renewal as embodied by John C. Campbell Folk School (Lee, 2017), while Highlander continues to remake the conversation around what it means to be a folk school by educating movement leaders in the Southern United States and across the world. The vast differences between the two schools are not an unintentional flaw in the model; instead, they demonstrate the inherent flexibility of folk schooling to be adapted to varying circumstances in different places by different people.

First, this literature review explains folk schooling from a conceptual standpoint before travelling back to the early twentieth century where information on the Danish folk high schools was amassing in the United States, resulting in a concerted push to bring folk schools to the Appalachian South. From there, it examines the historical arc of John C. Campbell Folk School and Highlander Folk School, now nearing a century in operation, and uses these as a springboard to examine the American Folk Revival taking place today through the proliferation of folk schools there. Lastly, it addresses the history of folk school efforts in Canada in light of this research, which looks at the makings of a movement here today.

Folk Schools, Conceptually

I....maintain that if the school, as an educational institution, is to realize its potentialities for benefiting life, then this school, first of all, should not give the highest priority purely to intellectual activity or to its own institutional status, but set as its chief educational goal the task of helping to solve life's problems. Secondly, the school should take a realistic approach to life, it should strive to teach about life and promote purposeful living.

(Grundtvig, in Grundtvig & Knudsen, 1838/1976, p. 153)

Folk schools vary greatly in focus but share many defining characteristics. Scholars have described folk schools as open, autonomous, non-credentialing, non-competitive, non-vocational, nonformal, centres of cooperative living and learning in adult education (Canfield, 1965; Coe, 2000; K. Totten, personal communication, July 26, 2024; Kavalier, 1962; Kulich, 2002; Pantzar, 1988). These attributes provide a sufficient explanation of folk schooling generally but are devoid of the sensory aspects better captured by a group of folk school practitioners who described them as being “Rooted in Struggle, Built by the Hands, Nurtured by Community, Borne by the Spirit, Lifted by the Heart” (Spicer, 2009, p. 24).

Like Illich's (1970) vision for education in a deschooled society, folk schools represent a convivial institution where students engage in learning willingly, without obligation. A folk school education is not quantified or credentialed, and students have access to peers and mentors to learn with as well as the requisite tools and educational materials for learning. Because folk schools are adapted to local needs and interests and operated with a great degree of autonomy, they are more responsive and dynamic than formal institutions of education (Horton & Jacobs, 2003; Klein, 2018) which Illich (1970) described as manipulative institutions

interested in maintaining and justifying their continued presence through coercion. The immersive, and often cooperative living, nature of folk schooling forges bonds between members of the learning community that yield both personal and societal benefits (Borish, 1991). Despite their many forms, folk schools stem from the ideas of Nikolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig and the Danish folk high school principals who enacted Grundtvig's philosophies (Kulich, 1997).

Using Grundtvig's framework for folk schooling, budding educators such as Christen Kold swiftly brought Grundtvig's ideas to fruition in mid-nineteenth-century Denmark (Kulich, 1997). Grundtvig envisioned young children being best educated by their family and in their community through participation in daily life.

Adolescents—Grundtvig suggested—were apt to learn with their bodies and would often engage most authentically with mentors or as apprentices (Kavalier, 1962; Kulich, 1997). Young adults, then, were ready and able to turn to the intellectual and inner self and could do this work at the folk schools. The early Danish folk schools were rural and residential and often embraced narrow aims that were reflective of the needs of the community and the character of their leader (Bledsoe, 1969). Scholars such as Begtrup et al. (1929) and Borish (1991) claim that the folk schools were instrumental in preserving the Danish character amidst national struggle and territorial loss and indicate that the folk schools played a large role in nurturing the co-operative movements resulting in a prosperous Danish rural class. The success of Denmark's folk schools, numbered today at approximately 65 folk

schools (Kultur Ministeriet, 2025) led to the adoption of the model across Scandinavia, where they remain prevalent.

However, folk schools hit their stride in Denmark in the mid-to-late nineteenth century (Borish, 1991) under circumstances not at all unlike those in Canada today. A populist turn gave the people new and meaningful inroads into holding political power and helped to chart a path forward for Denmark (Borish, 1991). Territorial concerns also loomed large for the Danish: In the north, Sweden and Norway—both vastly larger in landmass than Denmark—had become sovereign nations, no longer under Danish rule. On the southern border, Germanification crept in through language, culture, and concerns over their shared border (Borish, 1991). Rather than double down on territorial occupation or colonial expansion, Denmark instead looked to folk schools—as well as the associated agricultural schools and co-operatives—to strengthen the Danish culture and language and elevate democratic participation and living standards for the Danish people (Begtrup et al., 1929, Borish, 1991). Smith (2011) credits Grundtvig’s vision for folk schools and his broad conceptualization of *folkelighed*—loosely translated by Manniche (1971) as an inclusive community life that embraces everyone equally—for helping Denmark to resist fascism. Likewise, Klein (2018), notes the role of folk schools in Denmark and elsewhere in democratic peacebuilding.

Given the outsized impact of folk schools on Danish culture, sovereignty, and economic development—particularly in rural Denmark—it is perhaps unsurprising that educators and policy makers elsewhere became intrigued by the

idea and its possibilities for adaptation abroad. The following section details the roots of the North American folk schooling movement as it was influenced by the folk schools of Denmark and Scandinavia.

The Beginnings of a Movement in the United States

The folk school idea made its way to North America in the late nineteenth century. The first wave was brought by Danish immigrants who implemented Danish-style folk schools in their settlements. These schools operated in relative isolation from the broader American educational landscape and most survived only one generation of Danish immigrants (Kulich, 1964). Although the Danish folk school in its exact form did not endure here, this did not mark the end of folk schooling in North America. Rather, it was the beginning of new, North American adaptations to the folk school model.

A number of American educators and benevolent workers became intrigued by the idea of adapting—rather than transplanting—the folk school model to rural America. Several Americans subsequently made voyages to Denmark and other Scandinavian countries to learn about and experience folk schooling firsthand (Shapiro, 1978). This section traces key actors in these efforts before examining John C. Campbell Folk School and Highlander Folk School as the two most prominent examples to come from this second wave of North American folk schooling.

The birth of the contemporary folk school tradition in North America begins, in part, with Philander Claxton. As head of the United States Bureau of Education

from 1912-1921, Claxton disseminated knowledge about the Scandinavian folk schools to educators and government officials in the United States (Shapiro, 1978). Having visited Denmark and Sweden in 1895 to attend a meeting of the Pan-Scandinavian Educational Association at Askov Folk High School, Claxton became convinced that the folk high schools could be leveraged to address the problem of rural education in America (Whisnant, 1983). Through his position of leadership at the US Bureau of Education, Claxton prompted several officials and educators to take up the work of bringing folk schools to rural America. His associates L.L. Friend and H.W. Foght spearheaded these efforts by visiting the Danish folk high schools (Foght, 1914; Friend, 1914). In addition, the two examined the conditions in rural America as they might apply to the folk schooling model and appraised the prior efforts toward Danish-style folk schooling by Danish-American immigrants.

Friend and Foght were encouraged by the successful implementation of the Danish folk school model in Norway, Sweden, and Finland but the failure of some of the early Danish American schools convinced them that pedagogical and structural changes were necessary for the American context (Shapiro, 1798). In 1914, Foght published a United States Bureau of Education Bulletin detailing information on three Danish American folk schools that he thought might be of interest to American educators. The schools in Elkhorn and Nysted, Nebraska and Tyler, Minnesota provided insight as to how folk schooling might be adapted both to the English language and rural American life (Foght, 1914).

Concerned that it would be untenable to use national funding bodies for an independent network of folk schools in the United States, as was often the case in Scandinavia, Friend (1914) proposed a governmental model for American folk schools akin to American public education. He envisioned folk schools as public institutions funded through taxation at the county or district level (Friend, 1914). The early American folk school scholars also believed that efforts to adapt the Danish folk school were most likely to be successful in the American agrarian communities that most resembled rural Denmark (Shapiro, 1978). The scholarship of Foght and Friend, under the leadership of Claxton, paved the way for a new type of North American folk schooling—one that would first take shape in the southern reaches of the Appalachian Mountains.

Rationale for Examining John C. Campbell and Highlander Folk Schools

This literature review examines two of Appalachia's first folk schools, to make sense of their lasting impact on the course of folk schooling in North America in the following century. One may rightly question the significance of tracing, in detail, the efforts of individuals and their corresponding institutions dating back nearly one hundred years but as Spicer (2009), former director of John C. Campbell Folk School, suggests:

Despite the deepening of our human experience over time, we still live with deep pain in our communities, in our nations, in ourselves. And our political and educational leaders tinker with old, narrow, and often ineffective ways to “fix” those woes. (p. 24)

These two schools are a bold attempt by visionary educators searching for a new form of education to meet the needs in their communities. I argue in this literature review that the contributions that these institutions have made—and still make through their efforts and their influence—are not insignificant.

Secondly, the choice of John C. Campbell Folk School and Highlander Folk School is purposeful in that it demonstrates the direct linkages to the folk schooling tradition in Denmark while illustrating the versatility of this educational model which has resulted in a spectrum of adaptations in North America. John C. Campbell Folk School, and its emphasis on craft, culture, and connectedness, and Highlander Folk School with its work in activism, advocacy, and community, provide a variety of avenues for the contemporary folk school leader, scholar, or educator to explore.

Today's folk schools, as they are emerging here in Canada, draw upon the histories, philosophies, and pedagogies of these two schools and what they represent for North American folk schooling. All are descendants of the early Danish folk high school idea (which themselves have transformed and adapted over time) but more so represent the North American type of folk schooling in their form and function. That being the case, an underpinning in these two longstanding schools helps to provide a genealogy (Foucault, 2021) for this modern take on North American folk schooling.

John C. Campbell Folk School

John C. Campbell was one of those men so right for his time as to seem almost the creation of the ideas and events which he influenced.

(Shapiro, in Campbell, 1921/2004, p. xxii)

The Campbells' Efforts towards Folk Schooling

John Campbell was an early proponent of Appalachian regionalism (Davis & Hughes, 2007; Fariello, 2006; Shapiro, 1978). Having worked in the mountains all his adult life as a preacher and then educator at Piedmont College in Georgia, Campbell saw firsthand the disorganization of charitable and educational efforts in the mountains. Some of these divisions, no doubt, stemmed from the harsh topography of the Appalachian Mountains with its rugged terrain and relative isolation from communities both within and beyond the mountains. But Shapiro (1978) suggests that it was also a result of competing religious ideologies in the region and their proponents' reluctance to combine their efforts toward progress.

In response, Campbell proposed a comprehensive survey of the mountains and their people to provide a basis for strategic efforts aimed at improving conditions in the region (Davis & Hughes, 2007). The Russell Sage Foundation approved Campbell's request, and in 1908, Campbell and his wife Olive began travelling extensively throughout the region to document the culture and present circumstances in the mountains (Campbell, 1921/2004; Fariello, 2006; John C. Campbell Folk School, 2021).

Through his study, John defined the region and studied its population demographics, lifestyles and attitudes, religious affiliations, health and living conditions, natural resources, and educational practices (Campbell, 1921/2004). Olive was interested in the culture of the region and began collecting ballads (Davis & Hughes, 2007; Fariello, 2007; JCCFS, 2021; Whisnant, 1983). Appalachia

was home to many English-style ballads, but also homegrown music such as the Appalachian ballad and fiddle music (Oldtime Central, 2020). Unsurprisingly, music in Appalachia was not well-preserved and existed primarily in the oral record (Davis & Hughes, 2007). Whisnant (1983) conveys that singers would often recall songs after great pause that they had not sung in twenty or more years as singing culture in the region declined. Olive felt that the ballads were worth preserving and this was the beginning of her lifelong efforts toward cultural renewal in Appalachia.

By 1912, John's work in the region on behalf of the Russell Sage Foundation, which had been extended annually to that point, became formalized by the creation of the Southern Highland Division of the Russell Sage Foundation (Shapiro, 1978). Headquartered in Asheville, North Carolina, the Southern Highland Division and John Campbell were mostly one and the same until John's death in 1919 (Shapiro, 1978; Whisnant, 1983). Through John's work at the Southern Highland Division, he and Olive became interested in Claxton's proposition for adapting the Danish folk school to Appalachian life. The Campbells were twice forced to delay trips to Denmark on behalf of the Russell Sage Foundation. First, because John fell ill and later due to the outbreak of World War I (Shapiro, 1978). Leaders at the Russell Sage Foundation implored that between Claxton and his associates, and the Campbells through their own study of the schools, enough ought to be known about the folk schools to get started on adapting them to the American South (Whisnant, 1983). However, John's death in 1919 set these efforts back considerably.

Olive Campbell Continues

After John died, Olive worked to publish John's survey of the Appalachian region entitled *The Southern Highlander and His Homeland* (1921/2004) before making her journey to the folk schools of Scandinavia. In 1922, Olive was at last able to visit the folk schools on an 18-month journey to Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Finland through the support of the American Scandinavian Foundation and the Russell Sage Foundation (Davis & Hughes, 2007; Fariello, 2007). Marguerite Butler of the Pine Mountain Settlement School journeyed to Denmark with Olive and upon their return, the two travelled around the Southern Highlands searching for a site on which to locate a folk school (Davis & Hughes, 2007; John C. Campbell Folk School, 2017).

Whisnant (1983) suggests that Olive had already determined that Western North Carolina would be the most suitable place for a folk school and so their efforts were concentrated primarily in this part of the region. It is thought that Olive selected this region for two reasons: it closely resembled the Danish rural peasantry in that it was comprised of small, family homesteads that were agricultural in nature and it was a part of Appalachia that was largely devoid of industrial resource extraction, urbanization, and unionization (Whisnant, 1983).

Olive hoped to uphold what she felt were some of the more virtuous aspects of mountain culture and thought that efforts toward agricultural improvement and cooperation, as well as the commodification and commercialization of mountain handicraft, might provide a better standard of living for the mountaineers (Davis &

Hughes, 2007). She sought young adults who might “throw in their lot in with soil” instead of moving from the region entirely (Whisnant, 1983, p. 136). Through her careful analysis of the impacts of folk schooling in Denmark, Olive believed that folk schooling offered the promise of a strengthened culture in the mountains that might preserve the legacy of the mountain people.

Early Beginnings and a Foray into Agriculture

Olive Campbell and Marguerite Butler found a home for their envisioned folk school in Brasstown, North Carolina where Lucien Scroggs offered to donate land and Fred O. Scroggs rallied the townspeople to provide materials and labour for the school (Davis & Hughes, 2007). The folk school opened its doors in 1925 under the name of Olive’s late husband. Initially, it offered four main types of programs: shorter and four-month courses for youth (much like the Danish folk high schools), a model and experimental farm led by Danishman George Bidstrup, farm cooperatives such as the Mountain creamery, credit union, cannery, and courses on Appalachian handicrafts (Fariello, 2007; Whisnant, 1983). The school included a mix of elements directly from the Danish folk high schools—such as Danish song, dance, and gymnastics—as well as aspects of traditional mountain culture. The Danish-style residential folk school courses, which began in the winter of 1926, enjoyed moderate participation from mountain youth though the program never reached its aspirations of having one-hundred or more youth (Whisnant, 1983). It continued with small numbers over the next few decades before it became

apparent that the program in its original format was not to be viable in the mountains.

This most iterative version of the Danish folk school program proved to be ill-adapted to its new home in North America. So too did other aspects of the Danish folk high school—the agricultural components of the school likewise received lukewarm reception over the long term (Whisnant, 1983). Modelled after the farm cooperatives and agricultural schools in Denmark where students often sought agricultural vocational training after attending the folk high schools, the agricultural aspects of John C. Campbell Folk School held great potential for improving both economic and living conditions in mountain regions that consisted mainly of subsistence agriculture. In Brasstown, and even into Cherokee and Clay counties, the farm cooperatives offered a glimmer of hope for creating a more prosperous livelihood for local farmers (Davis & Hughes, 2007). These included the Brasstown Savings and Loan Association, the Mountain Valley Creamery, and the folk school's model farm and herd which was the heart of the school's agricultural programs. These programs were designed to help young, aspiring mountain farmers learn best practices and obtain the tools and land necessary to begin farming in the mountains. Despite some initial success with the co-ops and agricultural programs, the Great Depression had a lasting impact on their viability as commodity prices crashed and incomes stagnated (Davis & Hughes, 2007).

By the time Olive Campbell retired in 1946, the school's agricultural programs and co-ops had folded entirely and the school was struggling to survive

(Whisnant, 1983). The folk school then cycled through several directors in short succession—Dr. D.F. Folger and Rev. Howard Kester both lasted no more than a few years in a struggle for the heart and soul of the school before coming full circle. George Bidstrup—long-time employee, husband of Marguerite Butler, and a Dane—was named as the school’s director in 1952 and served in that capacity until 1969 (Whisnant, 1983). Although Bidstrup had been responsible for many of the school’s agricultural efforts, the folk school had given up those programs by the time he came to lead the school (Davis & Hughes, 2007). With the demise of the agricultural programs, co-ops, and four-month courses, the Danish folk school was not able to be replicated in the mountains in its exact form; however, its survival demonstrated that the folk school idea could be modified and applied to address local needs. It was the school’s handicrafts program that would come to dominate the school’s future from the 1950s to the present. John C. Campbell Folk School is well known today for its celebration of mountain craft and culture and thus the following section addresses the long-running handicrafts program at John C. Campbell.

Handicraft at John C. Campbell Folk School

Although the handicrafts programs had long been the school’s most well-attended and profitable endeavour, handicrafts were linked less directly to Olive’s studies of the Scandinavian folk schools (Whisnant, 1983). Rather, her earlier travels through the mountains with John had intrigued her as to the possibility for mountain handicrafts and folk culture as a basis for social reconstruction (Davis &

Hughes, 2007). Doris Ulmann's famous black and white photos of the school also communicated the idea to the outside world that the folk school programs were cultural rather than agricultural in nature (Whisnant, 1983).

For many years in the school's beginnings, the profitable and well-attended handicrafts program kept the school afloat and allowed it to continue its at times money-losing ventures into mountain agricultural efforts. As the agricultural programs ceased and the school risked closing its doors altogether, folk school activities were consolidated to offer mainly the handicrafts portion of their programming. As only one of the school's four original types of programming, the folk school became acutely focused on the idea of teaching and promoting mountain craft and culture in the region and beyond. These efforts were thought to both preserve and strengthen the culture for mountaineers and provide them with an economic outlet for their wares (Davis & Hughes, 2007).

John C. Campbell Folk School played a large role in establishing the Southern Highland Handicrafts Guild and supporting it for many decades. In doing so, the school and its leaders exerted broad influence over the emerging commercialization and commodification, as well as preservation, of Appalachian handicrafts—which were traditional but also handpicked for their perceived worth to affluent Americans outside the region (Whisnant, 1983). Through their interactions in the Southern Highland Handicraft Guild, the folk school model and philosophies seemed to spread across Appalachia into the rural settlement schools and other

handicraft programs, many of which now resemble John C. Campbell and other folk schools, but do not derive directly from Grundtvig or Denmark.

John C. Campbell Folk School provides a missing link that describes the lineage of much of today's North American folk schooling movement and its predominance of craft programming. Whisnant (1983)—Appalachian raised and an early scholar in the field of Appalachian Studies—levels harsh critiques against Olive Campbell indicating that she was not radical enough, that she was more well-intentioned than some Appalachian workers but still a cultural appropriator or interventionist, and he questions how she got “stuck” at the Southern Highland Handicraft Guild instead of pushing for systemic change in Appalachia. These concerns appear justified in some ways, but perhaps also obscure the idea that folk schools are not meant to be everything all at once. They have always been highly localized. They have often been rather specialized. And they are intended to take on the characteristics of their leaders, students, and communities (Parsey & Friesen, 1953). Because folk schooling has never reached scale here in North America, it is possible to ask too much of these schools to carry the burden of great need for alternative, adult education opportunities in communities.

Today, John C. Campbell Folk School remains a regional leader in craft preservation and education—drawing instructors and students from across the country. They offer some 860 weekend and weeklong courses in over 45 subjects from basketry to blacksmithing, weaving, woodworking, and more at their mountain campus each year, weekly contra dances and morningsong, and annual events

(JCCFS, 2021). As the school reaches a century in operation in 2025, it appears well positioned to uphold Appalachian handicraft and traditions for generations to come. The school's perseverance and success in craft education is an excellent example of the intertwining of craft with folk culture in North America that is now reflected in most folk schools here (Lee, 2017). Highlander's tale, which follows, provides an equally compelling, albeit markedly different, direction for folk schooling on this continent. It also follows nearly one hundred years of impactful education, yet it remains somewhat of an untapped resource amongst the North American folk schooling community. Thus, Highlander is vital to this examination for its sheer potential, and its influences on some of today's Canadian folk schools, which are the subject of this research.

Highlander Folk School

This is what Myles Horton has always been, a unique human voice, speaking out of our wilderness in the direction of hope.

(Bledsoe, 1969, p. 51)

Myles Horton and the Search for "O"

Myles Horton (1905-1990) was at home in the Southern Highlands—born and raised in Appalachia by a family that felt the weight of poverty and precarity in one of America's most underserved regions (Horton et al., 1990). Yet, Horton developed an ethic of love and care for his community (Horton & Jacobs, 2003). His mother Elsie taught him to give graciously and live modestly through her community work with the church, and to accept responsibility not just for one's self but for the plight of one's people (Glen, 1988; Preskill, 2021). It is a practice that

Horton carried as a youth organizer on through his decades of work at Highlander and his subsequent influence as a globally-sought-after educator. The folk school idea would eventually help him to reconcile these values in a way that shaped an impactful and action-oriented agenda for democratic education at Highlander.

Horton knew something of suffering, to be sure, but he also saw the effects of resiliency in his own family and in the strong ties forged by a community that looked after one another. His parents had often struggled to find gainful employment (Horton et al., 1990), and Horton would later make sense of this through the lens of Marx and others as they criticized the capitalist exploitation of labour and resources (Horton & Jacobs, 2003; Preskill, 2021). In rural Tennessee, Horton also encountered a lack of educational opportunities that were typically necessary for social mobility. Both Horton and his family sacrificed a great deal for Myles to get a “proper” education (Glen, 1988)—his family would move around the mountains depending on where jobs and decent schooling were available and eventually Myles would leave from to complete his high school education (Adams & Horton, 1975; Preskill, 2021). Having experienced hunger, wage labour exploitation, and a lack of formal education and opportunities in his community, Horton was primed to eventually see in the Danish folk school model set forth by Grundtvig a sort of education that might work to address these issues.

The beginnings of Highlander Folk School, while rooted in Horton’s biography, rise to the surface in Horton’s summer as a youth leader in Ozone, Tennessee. Horton was hired to work with children in the area at a vacation Bible

school (Adams & Horton, 1975) but soon delegated the bulk of these responsibilities and focused on building community through adult education (Preskill, 2021). When Horton invited the parents to a meeting, it was most unusual. Some of them walked from miles around through the hills to be there and Horton described it as an awkward, new experience for most of them—himself included (Adams & Horton, 1975; Preskill, 2021). He wanted to hear about their lives and their problems. Initially, folks weren't keen to share these with an outsider, and even when they did, nobody knew what to do about them, least of all Horton. They looked to him for answers that he did not have, but slowly, they started to share their experiences amongst themselves in ways that built upon their collective capacity to aid what ailed them.

In Ozone, Horton had stumbled across something that would propel him forward for the rest of his life. This peer-led, community-based adult education, he felt, was the key to alleviating some of the suffering in the mountains. He didn't have a handle yet on how this ought to transpire and was left with more questions than answers (Glen, 1988; Preskill, 2021). The community wanted him to stay, and he had the provisions to do so through his job and offers of room and board, but Horton knew that he did not know enough yet to execute this sort of education responsibly (Preskill, 2021). And so, he began a years' long journey that he signified as "O" in his notebook, in search of a model of education that might address his experiences in Ozone (Bledsoe, 1969).

This journey took him to Union Theological Seminary in New York and to the University of Chicago to study under some of the country's most progressive educators and clergy. Horton was not concerned with the religious aspects of the seminary (even though it must be acknowledged that this is the context for his introduction into the Danish folk schools) or even with getting a degree but instead obtaining the right sort of knowledge and direction to bring him back to his teaching in the mountains (Preskill, 2021). In graduate school, he immersed himself in literature about economic injustice and moral progressivism. He sat in on lectures and stretched himself to learn anything that could prove useful in his singular pursuit of "O". Frank Adams (1975) quotes Abbott Kaplan in describing Horton's experiences in New York at the onset of the Great Depression:

This little hillbilly fellow, and that's what Myles was, wandered up to New York to Union Theological Seminary to get the Word of the Lord. Instead, he ran into Reinhold Niebuhr, who was speaking with almost as much authority as the Lord, and apparently had a greater social conscious. (p. 11)

Through mentorship and guidance from Niebuhr and Danish Lutheran ministers Aage Møller and Enok Mortensen, his ideas began to coalesce around the Danish folk school model as an appropriate basis for his future school in the mountains (Horton et al., 1990; Horton & Jacobs, 2003). However, Horton struggled to reconcile what he read about folk schooling with the difficulties of Danish-Americans in their efforts to transplant folk schools to the United States, the enactment of the living word through lecture, and the romanticism of the Campbells

regarding the possibilities for cultural renewal in the mountains through folk schooling (Bledsoe, 1969, Horton & Jacobs, 2003). In the end, Horton rejected other opportunities to work as a research assistant or pursue a PhD and instead decided to travel to Denmark and see the folk schools firsthand (Preskill, 2021).

Horton's Journey to Denmark

While in Denmark in 1931, Horton travelled across the country studying the schools through his own experiences and interviews with others. First, he learned the language, which he figured would help him to get at the heart of these schools and what they were intended to be. In some of the schools that Myles visited and attended, he found a lacklustre sense of inspiration in their modern form (Horton & Jacobs, 2003). He felt they were no longer on the cutting edge of change, though some of that probably had to do with the fact that Denmark was no longer in the sort of vast upheaval that saw the birth of its nascent folk schooling movement. Instead, Horton worked on tracking down elders who told him of the early folk schools and, fortunately, he experienced a few schools where he found a glimmer of their earlier potential.

In a speech that Horton would give many decades later at a Grundtvigian conference in Denmark, he listed the influences of Grundtvig and the Danish folk schools on his eventual work at Highlander as “students and teachers living together, peer learning, group singing, freedom from state regulation, nonvocational education, freedom from examinations, social interaction in nonformal setting, a highly motivating purpose, and clarity in what for and what

against” (Horton & Jacobs, 2003, p. 31). The latter item—a values declaration—was especially important in his conception of Highlander. The earliest folk schools all had a distinct purpose—Danish nationalism against German encroachment, peasant against nobility as Danish landholders were conferred new power, and darkness against light in Danish Lutheran folk schools. Highlander would come to look something like “democracy against oppression” and this was based directly on Horton’s encounters in Denmark (Horton & Jacobs, 2003).

While Horton was inspired by the community-driven education that arose from the peoples’ problems in the early Danish folk schools, he was never entirely convinced by the pedagogy of “the living word.” In the early Danish folk schools, lecture was used as a primary mechanism of teaching and learning, and educators strived to convey the living word—or language with the purpose of arousing, inspiring, and empowering students. To him, the living word was but an excuse for teachers to lecture on and on about whatever they wanted, and Horton opined that the folk schools had been successful not because of those methods, but in spite of them (Bledsoe, 1969). Horton vowed to do things differently from a pedagogical standpoint even though the folk school model and its educational philosophies were largely in line with his visions for a school in the mountains. Although Horton had not found a model per se, his voyage to the Danish folk schools put an end to his quest for “O” at long last. He scrolled a note in his diary on Christmas night, 1931 in Copenhagen (Horton et al., 1990):

I can't sleep, but there are dreams. What you must do is go back, get a simple place, move in and you are there. The situation is there. You start with this and let it grow. You know your goal. It will build its own structure and take its own form. You can go to school all your life, you'll never figure it out because you are trying to get an answer that can only come from the people in the life situation. (p. 55)

When Horton returned to the mountains of Tennessee from Denmark, he began a campaign to build support for his proposed folk school. He was careful to note, however, that he was not attempting to replicate the Danish folk school model so much as draw inspiration from it (Horton & Jacobs, 2003). Through his vast network of connections in academia and the church, Horton reached out to anyone who might make provisions for funds or infrastructure for his school (S. Preskill, personal communication, July 19, 2019). Although Horton faced seemingly insurmountable obstacles in bringing his vision to life, he knew the time was nigh to implement his long-held desires for a school in the mountains.

The Beginnings of Highlander: Organized Labour and Community Schooling

In Don West, Horton found a partner who also aspired to open a folk school in the Southern United States and Dr. Lilian Johnston granted Horton and West the use of her property in Monteagle, Tennessee to operate the folk school on a one-year trial basis (Preskill, 2021). When Highlander opened its doors in 1932, the Appalachian South was still reeling from the Great Depression. Across the region, workers were suffering at the hands of employers who exploited their labour and

the land to line their own pockets. Highlander initially found a home within organized labour struggles in the area from coal miners to textile workers and woodcutters, and it coordinated efforts with the Congress of Industrial Organizations (Glen, 1988). The Labour Movement in the Southern United States also helped Horton to shape Highlander's approach to education that would guide it for decades.

As tempting as it was for Horton and Highlander to get pulled into strikes and labour disputes, Horton quickly realized a few things: it was not beneficial to shape labour struggles around a central figure (especially not Horton himself); Highlander could do more by supporting the development of leaders who would subsequently work in their communities than by fighting their battles for them and leaving communities vulnerable to future injustices (Preskill, 2021). Highlander's education program worked to train union leaders and support their efforts at striking and negotiating fair wages and working conditions, and for its first few decades, Highlander was largely known as an unofficial labour school (Adams, 1975).

Yet, in Highlander's quest for true democracy, it also involved itself in the local level as a community school. Horton writes about his desire—not dissimilar to Grundtvig's—to shape the lifelong learning process in Grundy County through a vast network of educational opportunities and programming that might extend through one's life and across a number of activities (Horton & Jacobs, 2003). Although Highlander was always intended to be the adult education arm of such an

effort, the organization helped to support parallel efforts in the community such as a nursery school, co-ops, and credit unions. These efforts draw, in part, from the relation of the Danish folk schools to the co-ops and agricultural schools in Denmark, and mirror some of John C. Campbell Folk School's earlier efforts toward the same ends. Ultimately, Highlander's emergence as part of a community school was upended by many of the larger-scale efforts that Highlander participated in via the Labour Movement and later, the Civil Rights Movement.

Highlander and the Civil Rights Movement

Highlander's push to support Civil Rights leaders was, perhaps, inevitable based on Highlander's longstanding commitment to racial integration in its workshops (D. Jacobs, personal communication, July 12, 2017; S. Preskill, personal communication, July 19, 2019). When the Civil Rights Movement gained strength across the Southern United States, Highlander was already well positioned to become a hub of education and training for emerging Civil Rights Leaders. Highlander's stance on racial integration was a direct product of Horton's value system—refined over his youth and executed with increasing success in Highlander's early years.

While attending Cumberland University as an undergraduate student, Horton had met a young Chinese woman whom he hoped to ask out on a date. This was impeded, however, by the fact that interracial dating was not widely accepted, and restaurants would not serve such a duo. Although the experience was admittedly self-serving, Myles puzzled over why he should not be able to have

dinner or a romantic relationship with someone from another race (Bledsoe, 1969). He took this experience one step further as a student organizer when he planned an integrated conference at a banquet hall—when the attendees arrived, the venue declined to serve the group per the existing rules around segregation in the Jim Crow South. Horton eventually persuaded the servers that if they did not serve the group, the food prepared for 120 people would simply go to waste (Preskill, 2021). This episode demonstrates Horton’s brazen nature and his often-haphazard early brushes with the struggle for racial justice. His former professor Dr. Robert Park at the University of Chicago offered that although Horton was not the best sociology student that he had ever taught, he was the “damned most notorious” (cited in Preskill, 2021, p. 57).

In later years, Horton was more intentional about Highlander’s involvement in the struggle for civil rights and cognizant of the very real dangers posed to the racialized members amongst them. Horton continued to use his privilege as an educated white man in the pursuit of democracy. Owing to their effective advocacy for overturning the status quo, Horton and Highlander were a constant target of authorities and other violent factions. Over decades, Highlander was repeatedly persecuted—sometimes the charges were petty, sometimes accurate, and other times vitriolic—but Horton maintained that the group was pursued not because of their actions but because of the ideals they stood for (Preskill, 2021).

After a sustained effort to bring Highlander down—one that resulted in Highlander leaders pleading guilty to the charge of hosting a racially integrated

workshop (as they always had, and fiercely defended)—in 1961 they were ultimately charged with operating without a liquor license due to the presence of a collection plate next to a cooler of beer (Horton & Jacobs, 2003; Preskill, 2021). There were few lengths that authorities would not go to in order to stomp out the threat to capitalism and racial integration that Highlander posed. Although Highlander largely enjoyed community and regional support (Horton & Jacobs, 2003), those in power were highly affronted by Horton and Highlander—they ran billboards calling the school, and Horton himself, communist, put Highlander leaders on trial, and even began covert burnings at the school to try to bring them to submission (Horton & Freire, 1990; Preskill, 2021). When they were at last able to shutter the school due to the alcohol infraction, Horton merely chuckled as they locked the school's doors in Monteagle. He said little but, "Highlander is an idea—you can't padlock an idea" (Horton & Jacobs, 2003, p. 119). Then, he re-opened Highlander under the new name of Highlander Research and Education Center (2014).

Horton never seemed to give the power and satisfaction to his opponents that they so clearly desired—he was jailed and beaten many times, but it did not deter him or Highlander from their march toward justice. When Horton was doing work in Mississippi, the FBI put out a memo stating that he must not be killed (Horton & Jacobs, 2003). Authorities postulated that his death would only inflame tensions and give further cause for the activists to rebel. Horton was acutely aware of the privilege he operated from and felt a sense of responsibility toward those he

worked with, particularly his Black colleagues and students whose lives authorities gave little to no regard for.

Over several decades in the heart of the Civil Rights Movement, Highlander welcomed influential movement leaders such as Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks, Septima Clark, and Esau Jenkins (Preskill, 2021). And Horton was a leader in this sphere in his own right—a decade after his passing, activist and intellectual Dr. Cornel West named Horton as the single most impactful white person in the United States in the struggle for civil rights (Horton & Jacobs, 2003). Highlander’s involvement spanned from the development and deployment of the Citizenship Schools that taught Black Americans the skills required to pass the literacy test granting voting rights, to the non-violent student activism and sit-ins that took place all across the South, to the strikes and marches for racial justice, and support for the civil rights legislation that was eventually enacted in the mid-to-late 1960s (Horton & Jacobs, 2003; Preskill, 2021).

Highlander, Post-Horton

In the years following the Civil Rights Movement, Highlander again shifted its focus to Appalachian workers and eventually to the rest of the Southern United States (Preskill, 2021). When Horton stepped down as director in 1973, he travelled worldwide sharing the experiences of Highlander through what he hoped would be a “yeasty self-multiplying process” (Horton & Jacobs, 2003, p. 27). Horton was never naïve enough to believe that Highlander alone would bring about the revolution needed to create an economic democracy in America, instead of merely

a (supposed) political one, but as ever, Horton and Highlander continued to build the capacity necessary to undertake that endeavour when the time comes.

Today, Highlander has once more found a home in the racial justice struggle in the Southern United States, and with the uprising that followed the murder of George Floyd in 2020, the whole of the United States and the world. The organization boasts a proven history of action-oriented and impactful education and the powerful leadership to bring that vision to life. The school remains at the forefront of activism for economic and racial justice. As ever, Highlander is unwavering in its aim for democracy against oppression, no matter the current form that vision reflects.

Criticisms of Folk Schools

The body of folk school scholarship in the English language (or translated into English) is rather limited. Folk schooling—over time—has lent itself to other forms of knowledge dissemination in the oral and communal traditions much more so (Lee, 2017). It is likewise true that their impacts have often been difficult to measure (Borish, 1991) as the sort of changemaking work that arises from a folk education is neither instantaneous nor linear. Like any form of education, folk schooling does not escape pedagogical and cultural critiques.

The work of John and Olive Campell has been roundly critiqued by Whisnant, as suggested earlier in this literature review. Despite living in Appalachia for much of their adult lives, Whisnant—an Appalachian himself—notes the Campbells' status as outsiders and benevolent workers. He critiques the handicraft

model that emerged at John C. Campbell over time as the prevailing programming and which was ultimately adopted widely by folk schools in North America. He argues that pushing for systemic change through folk schooling would have been more effective and that instead, the handicrafts program exploited Appalachian culture and traditions toward capitalistic ends (Whisnant, 1983).

Meanwhile, at Highlander, folk schooling was indeed used to call for systemic change in Appalachia with—certainly—a measure of success but also at great cost to Highlander as an organization and at personal cost to many of the people with the Highlander locus. Highlander was shuttered, burned, forced to relocate, brought to court, and faced the imprisonment of many of its key figures over decades of impactful efforts for Labour and Civil Rights (Preskill, 2021). The government took out billboards accusing Highlander of being a Communist training school—which from their perspective was a forceful critique of the folk school (Horton & Jacobs, 2003).

Horton himself levelled criticism at the folk school model. During his visits to the Danish folk schools, he critiqued their departure from what he saw as their original, radical aims and likewise dismissed the pedagogy of lecture and reliance on the living word in the folk schools to inspire personal enlightenment and social change (Horton & Jacobs, 2003; Preskill, 2021). Horton was sceptical of the role of the charismatic leader in the folk school (Preskill, 2021) and attempted—though I would argue not entirely successfully given his outsized influence—to reject this model at Highlander.

Additionally, cultural education at-large, and folk schools specifically, face a delicate task of building culture without sowing division. The early folk schools in Denmark did not lead to a dangerous sense of nationalism, but similar forms of cultural education in Germany did preface Nazism (Fain, 1971). Cultural educators must bear in mind these distinctions as well as the lessons from the past in order to build culture and community in positive ways without further dividing peoples.

In most of today's folk schools, I think it would be easy to relegate the work to craft education if one looks only at the surface of the content instead of considering its goals and methods. More will be said about this in discussing the research findings, but the aim of building community may be less apparent to some onlookers, and in the future, it would be enlightening to learn more from folk school students about how they perceive their education in the folk schools and if the schools are achieving their stated aims.

Furthermore, a critique of folk schooling from my position in both the folk school sphere and within the sector of postsecondary education, is to consider their ultimate impact here in North America and how that may be limited by the values of the prevailing culture and its education systems which are better equipped to train workers or to teach skills and vocations. Without shared institutional aims and values, folk schools could continue to be marginalized within the larger field of education. This research, and subsequent research, should aim to uncover the goals that are shared with formal education systems and aspects of

folk schooling that may be complementary to existing educational spaces, in addition to consideration of folk schooling as its own standing educational tradition.

And lastly, owing to the point above, the lack of broad governmental support for folk schooling in North America means that the financialization of folk schooling in North America—as a sometimes-necessary means of operating—can inhibit equitable access to folk education as it was originally intended. This is, of course, not always the case; however, the precarious financial position of folk schooling is a primary barrier to the delivery of broad, impactful, and sustainable folk education.

An American Folk Revival

Today, folk schools across the United States continue to grow and innovate, offering great promise for the future of folk education (Lee, 2017). At the time of my master's thesis in 2017, I identified 26 organizations across the United States and Canada that met the inclusion criteria for my study as: currently operating in the United States or Canada, autonomous, non-competitive, non-credentialing, youth/adult education, and inspired by Grundtvig's ideals or by folk schools modelled after those ideals. Later that year, the Folk Education Alliance of America (FEAA) released a Survey of Interest to organizations in the Folk School Alliance—a larger catchment than my study—which represented 49 organizations in the United States and two in Canada (Jackman Murphy, 2018). They ultimately received 18 responses for analysis. In the intervening years, the FEAA has been revived after a period of inactivity and its folk education directory now lists nearly 60 organizations in the United States (Folk School Alliance, 2020).

While the exact numbers are difficult to capture with any kind of certainty due to the decentralized nature of folk schooling and some nuanced distinctions between folk schools and craft schools, one can clearly see a positive trajectory for folk education in the United States in the past decade. Per the FEAA's 2017 survey (Jackman Murphy, 2018), some 62% of folk schools surveyed were less than 10 years in operation—with 39% of all responding schools being less than four years old. Another 10% were of unknown age, but a clear majority of folk schools, at that time, were emergent organizations.

These organizations are varied in their structures, aims, audiences, and pedagogical approaches—and not all would necessarily fall under the narrower category of folk schooling as I have defined it—but in them we see a profound support for education arising from the people. They reach from Florida to Alaska and many places in between, with a significant concentration of folk school start-ups in America's Midwest where folk schools such as the Clearing Folk School (founded in 1935), Danebod Folk School (founded in 1888 and revived in 1946) and North House Folk School (founded in 1997) have helped to inspire a new wave of folk schooling in the region. At the time of the FEAA's survey in 2017, a full 41% of American folk schools were located in the Midwest (Jackman Murphy, 2018). While a number of these folk schools draw upon Scandinavian-American traditions and heritage, in practice the schools also carry a distinct lineage of craft and cultural education derived from John C. Campbell Folk School (Lee, 2017).

American folk schools today are more often operated in urban areas (though the exact definition of this can be debated) than in the past, with more than half in mostly urban counties (Jackman Murphy, 2018). Some are partnered with state parks, colleges or universities, museums or cultural heritage organizations, or churches, and most work closely with their local communities and municipalities to deliver grassroots education (Lee, 2017). A majority of folk schools in the FEAA's 2017 survey indicate offerings in traditional skills, lifelong learning, arts and crafts, personal development, community development, music, nature, environment, and ecology, and regional cultural/historic preservation. Other topics cited less often, but present in some American folk schools, were economic development, dance, community organizing, Grundtvigian, and religious or spiritual teachings (Jackman Murphy, 2018). In these approaches to learning, there is clear influence from John C. Campbell Folk School, and to an extent, Highlander Folk School.

The Folk School Alliance's monthly Community of Practice meetings, which are run by the FEAA under the direction of Dawn Jackman Murphy, regularly draw 30 or more folk school leaders from across the United States and Canada (and sometimes beyond!) who work collaboratively to support folk schools in their growth and development and to make folk schooling sustainable and equitable in their North American interpretations. Though there is a Canadian contingent within the FEAA, its numbers are much fewer and the organizations, on the whole, are much younger. The next section will draw upon the history of folk schooling here in

Canada and provide a brief overview of its modern makeup, which is the proposed topic of research.

Values and Pedagogy at John C. Campbell and Highlander Folk Schools

Examination of the historical and educational roots of John C. Campbell and Highlander folk schools through the literature and their current positioning in the educational landscape of North American folk schooling affords the opportunity to consider what they share and what they might offer to emergent folk schools.

Some of the lessons can also be applied more broadly in the field of education, yet as this is not the focus of this review or the research study, it is perhaps a topic for further exploration. In this section, I raise several pedagogical possibilities shared by the two institutions that underpin the case study research of modern folk schooling in Canada. I posit that these are: education for social change, the value of peoples' knowledge and skills, a focus on collective, community education, questions over answers, and multimodal expression to deepen learning.

John C. Campbell and Highlander folk schools have emphasized the folk schooling model as one for folks (Davis & Hughes, 2007, Horton & Jacobs, 2003). They are not necessarily about folk culture, although this is increasingly present in contemporary North American folk schools. In these people's schools, numerous philosophical and pedagogical values link the Danish folk schools of yore to the North American folk schools of today. Both schools offer short-term cooperative living and learning as a convening point for modern folks. Highlander has been described as a circle of learners on an island of decency (Horton & Jacobs, 2003;

Preskill, 2021) where the world existed not as it was, but as it ought to be. John C. Campbell Folk School also sought to support a more sustainable and equitable society through its various streams of programming from agriculture to traditional Appalachian handicrafts. What this means today is a respite from disconnected, fast-paced lifestyles and a common aim of working together for a better society. This takes the form of democratic education at Highlander and craft and cultural education at John C. Campbell. In these schools, we see a grassroots approach to education where the empowerment of people is the agent for societal change (Borish, 1991).

Highlander and John C. Campbell folk schools also exhibit a deep value for the skills and experiences that come from the people. The schools reject the banking model of education (Freire, 1968/2000), where students must be filled up by education—instead recognizing that there is strength, value, and beauty in what the people already know about their circumstances. Providing folks with the resources to build something together (whether tangible or not), and the setting in which to do so, offers a unique platform for cooperative adult education today. In these folk schools, one experiences an appreciation for the cultural capital of marginalized peoples as well as an opportunity to work together for collective progress in a setting that is neither individually focused nor competitive.

In Highlander and John C. Campbell folk schools, educators learn to ask the right questions rather than provide the right answers (Preskill, 2021). Through their extensive survey of Appalachia, John and Olive Campbell took their questions

straight to the people and the result was an expressed need for education, but the Campbells did not have an answer as to what form that education should take (Whisnant, 1983). Horton experienced the same conundrum in Ozone where mountain peoples' needs and desires necessitated a new way of doing education. He also did not have the answer (Preskill, 2021). But by listening to the peoples' experiences and hopes for the future, both the Campbells and Horton were led to the Danish folk school model and were successful in implementing programs that would address the needs of rural Americans. Horton noted that even once Highlander was established, he was always keen to help students clarify their thinking through asking questions or playing devil's advocate, instead of giving people answers or even assuming he knew what those answers were (Preskill, 2021).

John C. Campbell and Highlander folk schools both display an unwavering commitment to education for and by the people. This is distinct from most formal education where curriculum is dictated in a top-down manner, and it is assumed that people need to gain knowledge—rather than understanding that they already possess it and instead require opportunities to work together toward advancement (Preskill, 2021).

The employment of multimodal expression to deepen learning is probably the most overlooked commonality between Highlander and John C. Campbell folk schools (and other craft-oriented folk schools). Horton's wife Zilphia is credited with the proliferation of a robust "cultural program" at Highlander which included song,

dance, and drama. Zilphia's insistence that multimodal expression could shed light on peoples' own experiences and thoughts, and instil learnings in new ways, cemented arts and cultural education in Highlander's educative process (Preskill, 2021). Yet when people think about Highlander, these creative and cultural practices are all too often forgotten. They are readily apparent in John C. Campbell and other craft schools, but they are also vital to Highlander and folk schooling at large.

In these folk schools, people learn through making things with their hands, and through engaging their minds and hearts in other forms of expression such as song, dance, theatre, and more. Although these programmatic aspects are often obscured by Highlander's activist roots, they are critical and have been a consistent fixture of the school (Preskill, 2021). John C. Campbell Folk School holds a daily morningsong that derives directly from the Danish folk schools and upholds the values of song, expression, and togetherness as a tenet of folk schooling—regardless of the specific course one is enrolled in at the school.

In Highlander and John C. Campbell folk schools we see two distinct interpretations of the Danish folk schooling tradition in their North American forms. These two schools underpin the modern interpretations of folk schooling in North America and the current research examines those folk schools located in Canada. The following section examines the folk education revival that has taken place in the United States over the past few decades (Lee, 2017) and has spread prolifically during the past 10 years alone. As the American folk schooling

movement is almost a decade ahead of their expansion in Canada, there is much that can be gleaned from this examination.

New Beginnings in Canada

Folk schooling has never had the scalability anywhere in North America that it enjoys in Scandinavia but efforts in Canada are particularly few and far between. Canadian folk school scholars (Kulich, 1988; Parsey & Friesen, 1953) have long pondered the possibility of a successful folk school movement here—one that has yet to materialize. The limited efforts and incremental successes of folk schooling in this country make its newest folk school entrants all the more encouraging.

The earliest folk schooling manifestations in Canada date back to Danish-Canadian immigrants in the prairies. In 1921, they opened a folk school in the Danish-Canadian settlement of Dalum, Alberta (Kulich, 1964, 1988, Stubblefield, 1990). The school served the Danish-Canadian settlement community—formed in part by N.F.S. Grundtvig's son (Rasmussen, 1990)—and operated in a manner consistent with early folk schools in Denmark. However, like the Danish-American folk schools, these efforts did not prove long-lasting (Kulich, 1964, 1988). Kulich (1964, 1988) credits the practice of acculturation of immigrants in Canada to the demise of the Danish-Canadian folk school which sought to teach Danish culture and language, while Stubblefield (1990) points to broader socioeconomic factors such as the Great Depression.

As in the United States, others in Canada built upon the Danish tradition of folk schools with significant adaptations for the Canadian context. Like Denmark,

Canadian folk school programs were primarily rural in nature and closely intertwined with agricultural efforts and organizations. Efforts were made toward establishing folk schools alongside other Scandinavian adult education and cooperative practices such as Danish book clubs, Swedish study circles, Swedish travelling schools, and agricultural cooperatives (Coady, 1939; Kulich, 1964, 1988; Parsey & Friesen, 1953). Largely a response to the economic suffering and disenfranchisement of rural youth after the Great Depression and World War II period (Parsey & Friesen, 1953), the folk school practices here took a distinctly Canadian form. Where larger standalone folk schools such as John C. Campbell and Highlander were established and successful in the United States, the Canadian folk school groundswell was more agricultural in nature. Here, short-term folk school programs were hosted on and near local farms where youth from the region attended programs that were immersive and similar to Danish folk schools in their programming and structure, covering many areas of rural life including social and economic, cultural, physical, and practical topics (Parsey & Friesen, 1953). These short-term folk school programs were often directly linked to local cooperatives and typically supported by provincial folk school councils such as those that existed in Ontario, Manitoba, and Nova Scotia (Kulich, 1988) and a similar organization in Saskatchewan (Parsey & Friesen, 1953). Colleges and universities were sometimes involved in these efforts, though most frequently they did not take place on campus but instead in the community (Parsey & Friesen, 1953).

Of these, St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, Nova Scotia and Memorial University in St. John's, Newfoundland were particularly notable in their support for folk schooling in Canada. In Nova Scotia, St. Francis Xavier University's Extension Office and provincial adult education authorities lent their support to the Antigonish Movement. Flourishing through the 1920's and 1930's, the Antigonish Movement utilized Danish folk school and Swedish study circle principles, along with cooperatives and credit unions, to improve the economic and intellectual lives of rural Nova Scotians through roughly 1,000 study clubs provincewide (Coady, 1939). Like the Danish folk schools, it is difficult to measure the impacts that these educational ideas and practices had on the conditions of rural life in Nova Scotia, but we see vestiges of people's education in the work of the Coady Institute at St. Francis Xavier University today and the robust folk schooling efforts of Jennifer DeCoste in Antigonish County (and across Nova Scotia)—herself a granddaughter of an Antigonish Movement leader.

At Memorial University of Newfoundland, faculty members recommended bringing folk schooling to St. John's through the university's extension services. It was thought that the character, pedagogy, and observed outcomes of folk schools in Scandinavia were particularly well suited to the isolated conditions and needs of Newfoundland's fishing communities (Newton, 1952). This proposal was included in a sweeping review commissioned by the Board of Regents as Memorial transitioned to a degree-granting institution. Robert Newton—a former President of

the University of Alberta where extension services had also adopted folk education practices—led this review and recommended to the Board of Regents the establishment of an Extension Service to bring folk schooling first to St. John's and later to rural parts of the province (Newton, 1952). To the best of my knowledge, this aspect of the proposal never came to fruition though interest and efforts remain at Memorial through Dr. Kelley Totten—a pre-eminent North American folk schooling scholar—who is today part of their Department of Folklore and through cultural organizations such as Heritage NL under the direction of Dale Jarvis.

Similarly, efforts outside the universities were somewhat successful in adapting the folk school to Canada, with some folk schools operating for several decades in the mid-century. In Bruce County, Ontario, annual folk schools three to four days in length were hosted (or co-hosted with neighbouring counties) from 1939 until the 1980's (Bruce County Museum and Cultural Centre, n.d.). One program of note, given some similarities in the pedagogies of folk schooling to Indigenous knowledge systems and ways of learning, is the 1967 folk school program held in Parry Sound (Bruce County Museum and Cultural Centre, n.d.) where settlers in Bruce County met alongside First Nations Peoples for the annual program—though the exact make up of this and the topics covered are not available in the online archive. The Ontario Folk School Council, formed in 1950 with support from the United Cooperative of Ontario and the Community Programmes Branch of the Department of Education, helped to coordinate folk school efforts throughout Ontario before merging into the Rural Learning

Association in 1965 (Bruce County Museum and Cultural Centre, n.d.). Despite the existence of folk school efforts at the provincial level across Canada, these were not enduring and to the best of my knowledge, none have continued into the twenty-first century.

Contemporary efforts to support folk schooling in Canada have been mostly decentralized and highly varied in their forms. Heartwood Folk School on British Columbia's Pender Island was an organization started in 2011 offering a wide array of folk school courses through their local community centre, though organizers at the school previously shared with me that the project was shuttered, with some hopes for future revival. Cloverdale Forge in Selkirk, Manitoba is run by artisans with experience teaching at John C. Campbell Folk School. It currently operates as a blacksmith forge and Bed and Breakfast, rather than explicitly as a folk school. Similarly, my former neighbours in Lanark County, the Homewood Studio, identify with some elements of the folk schools and through our previous offerings at nearby Antiquary Folk School, became interested in the idea. Future efforts to coordinate with some of these organizations under the umbrella of folk schooling might build capacity within the movement here and would reflect the practice in the United States of recognizing folk education beyond the boundaries of folk schools specifically. There, this includes the newly-aligned African American Craft Alliance and other cultural and community organizations. In Canada, this might also include craft schools, continuing education programs, adult education clubs, retreats, camps, and recreation and leisure organizations, where they are aligned

sufficiently with the philosophies and pedagogies of folk schooling and where cooperation is desired.

However, we do see, just in the past few years, the makings of a specific folk school movement here. Folk Camp is likely the earliest entrant in this category beginning around 2010 and receiving non-profit status in 2016 (Folk Camp, n.d.). As its namesake suggests, the organization runs summer folk camps (and other activities throughout the year) in Toronto and Southern Ontario which support Eastern European cultural heritage. Life.School.House (n.d.), founded in 2018 by Jennifer DeCoste, is based in Nova Scotia and organizes localized chapters of barter-based folk schooling in the form of workshops and maker's swaps. Operated by local hosts from their homes, these folk school networks are largely reminiscent of a modern take on the Antigonish Movement. Annapolis Valley Folk School is derived from a former Life.School.House host who is now operating a standalone folk school offering programming through community and barter-based folk schooling practices (MacInnis, 2024).

Life.School.House Founder DeCoste has also opened a residential retreat centre named Fireloch Gathering Place and Retreat in Antigonish County's North Lochaber, Nova Scotia which offers programming inspired by the cooperative living and learning ideas of Danish folk schooling (Fireloch, 2024). Likewise, there is an encouraging revival of university extension services through folk schooling as reflected in the New Brunswick College of Craft and Design's 2021 rebranding of its continuing education program under the umbrella of Honeybee Folk School

(2024). The folk school's program—non-vocational and non-competitive in nature—sets it apart from the more formal, vocational curriculum of the college and brings arts and cultural education to the people in new ways (A. Mathis, personal communication, May 4, 2023; Honeybee Folk School, 2024). Additionally, in Peachland, British Columbia, the Okanagan Folk School (2024), founded by Murray Wood in 2021, hosts short-term classes in hands-on learning and conducts community outreach in the Okanagan Valley.

Conclusion

Folk schools have existed in Denmark since the mid-1800's as sites of open, autonomous, non-competitive, non-vocational, non-credentialing, nonformal, sites of rural and residential education (Canfield, 1965; Coe, 2000; K. Totten, personal communication, July 26, 2024; Kavalier, 1962; Kulich, 2002; Pantzar, 1988). In the 1920's and 1930's, folk schooling took a new form in North America as evidenced by John C. Campbell and Highlander folk schools, which are still in operation today and have influenced a new wave of modern folk schools, first in the United States and now in Canada. These newest Canadian folk schools form the basis of the current research study which seeks to learn more about their forms, functions, structures, successes, and challenges to support the makings of a Canadian folk schooling movement which may ultimately prove very timely given the upheaval currently being experienced in Canada with regard to political, geopolitical, economic, and environmental instability. Chapter 6 will weave together lessons from the folk schooling literature, the findings from this case study, and the

contemporary context in Canada to consider the state of folk schooling now and in the future. The following section details the methodological approach to this program of research.

Chapter 3: Case Study—An Approach to Research

The intention of research is to inform, to sophisticate, to assist the increase of competence and maturity, to socialize, and to liberate. These also are responsibilities of the teacher.

(Stake, 1995, p. 91)

There is some debate as to whether case study exists as a research methodology, research genre, or an approach to research (Elliott & Lukes, 2008; Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013; Stake, 1995; Swales, 2004). The ambiguity surrounding case study research likely results from its ubiquity in many disciplines and the varying ways it is leveraged by researchers and practitioners in those fields. Case studies may be quantitative or qualitative in nature and the requisite methods adapt to the varying circumstances of a specific study.

My FEAA colleague Dawn Jackman Murphy likens folk schools to a fuzzy set (Grand, 2023)—a term borrowed from the field of mathematics indicating an array of loosely related items that change depending on time and context. I think that this is true too of case studies. Without one clear way to conduct a case study or essential methods or steps, case studies are perhaps better understood as a fuzzy set of approaches to research. I find this perceived elbow room to be an asset of folk schooling, though it undoubtedly makes what they do harder to communicate. This is no different with the choice to employ case study in my dissertation research. Drawing upon Horton's (Horton & Jacobs, 2003) encouragement to state our values declarations upfront, I will share how I am conceptualizing case study—what this study is and what it is not. More precisely, I

offer insights into the portions of the case study literature I am picking up, and those I am setting down for the present study.

Case study has been widely used in the field of education since at least the 1970's (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013). Viewed as a response to the prevailing positivist approach—where measurement and statistical analysis were upheld as the most effective means of capturing valuable insights within education—case study provides a deep exploration of the unit of study with all the itinerant details and description that a focused inquiry offers (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013; Merriam, 1998; Smith, 1978). Scholars as disparate as Yin (2014) and Stake (1995) agree that case study is an impactful research tool in education, and in the social sciences generally. Even within the field of education, approaches to case study vary widely.

A qualitative approach centring the human experience and narrative is a natural fit for this research topic as folk schools have eschewed quantification and evaluation in their pedagogical approaches since their inception in the 1830's. *The Art of the Case Study* (Stake, 1995) details a compelling research style that suits this exploration of Canadian folk schooling today. Stake's approach—tailored to research on educational programs—is qualitative in nature and gives attention to narrating stories both firsthand and observational, capturing vignettes that provide context for the reader, and developing assertions based both on participant input and researcher expertise. Stake (1995) advocates for trading some traditional research methods such as audiovisual recording and transcription for more

researcher and participant-centric methods such as intensive notetaking and description, reflective journaling, and member checking. In this approach to case study, capturing meaning becomes more important than recording verbatim and allows for participants to improve and clarify their intended responses in ways that strengthen the final research report. Of course, Stake (1995) contends that researchers have a responsibility to ensure the integrity of their research and it remains the obligation of the researcher to determine what to convey to readers.

Stake's (1995) work is largely influential in my design of this research study and, according to Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2013), is utilized by many authors in the field of case study research in education. The subsequent sections will detail the research design with respect to the case and participants, data collection methods, narrative construction, and ethical considerations.

The Case—Theta or “Θ”

Part of the genius of the folk-school movement is that they weren't imitative, they had a creativity about them. They re-invented education every time one started. But they were all tied together by having been inspired by Grundtvig, and being rooted in a people.

(Horton, in Spicer, 2009, p. 97)

Cases are widely understood as a bounded unit of study (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013; Merriam, 1998; Smith, 1978; Stake, 1995). In order to constitute a case, one must clearly be able to articulate what is included within the case and what lies beyond the boundary of the case. To do this, Stake (1995) uses the Greek symbol theta or θ . This is meant to depict the bounded nature of the case with the interior representing the case and the boundary and exterior

capturing that which is beyond the case. In a sense, this is a useful visual representation for the case study researcher to keep in mind and a practical way for the reader to conceptualize the scope of the work. I find it particularly appropriate for this study as a companion to Horton's symbolic "O" for Ozone, which referred to bringing folk schooling to the Appalachian Mountains. This study, therefore, shall use theta as the indicator of the case.

Within case study discourse, there are a number of ways of approaching the case and the case study. A case study can be said to be intrinsic, instrumental, or collective in its design and purpose (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013; Hancock & Algozzine, 2011; Stake, 1995). Other case study researchers (Thomas, 2021; Yin, 2014) assign different approaches and purposes to possible case study research designs. This study will use the approach set forward by Stake (1995) and subsequently utilized by other researchers in the field of education. Case study scholars (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011; Stake, 1995) acknowledge that considerable overlap can exist between these distinctions of intrinsic, instrumental, and collective case studies with some research designs fitting a number of these criteria. This is true of my proposed case, or theta, and the overall design itself.

One must consider the purpose(s) of the study to determine the type of case study at hand. An intrinsic case study, ideally, captures the entire phenomenon and therefore, the interest in the case is intrinsic in nature—for what can be learned about the case itself and not what it may imply for other cases or the larger field (Stake, 1995). Alternatively, an instrumental study carefully selects a

representative case for what it might tell us about other cases or the phenomenon as a whole. And a collective case study leverages multiple cases to help provide a more generalized understanding of the problem at-hand (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013; Stake, 1995). This case study research, I would suggest, is primarily intrinsic in nature while also serving some instrumental purposes.

The folk schools that make up our case—folk schools currently operating in Canada—are the primary interest of this study. I wanted to know about their form and function and their successes and challenges to understand folk schooling here in its infancy. In that way, this case study is intrinsic in nature. And yet, I also wanted to know about these aspects of the case, in order to consider the makings of a possible movement here in the future. Viewed through that lens, the case is also instrumental.

Data Collection and Analysis

Stake (1995) suggests that data collection commences long before a researcher begins with formal data collection. In education especially, researchers often arrive with a strong familiarity of the case at hand or the phenomenon under study, and that being the case, these pre-existing impressions and knowledge can also be considered part of the process of data collection—or coming to know a case. Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2013) suggest that a case study needs to utilize two or more methods of data collection in order to showcase different points of view and to help triangulate the data. Drawing from Stake (1995), my research used primary methods of data collection: interviews, document review, and a

reflective journal. Each of these methods will be shared in a general sense first, as grounded in the qualitative and case study research literature and will be followed up in a subsequent section entitled “Research Study Process and Timeline” with greater detail as to the employment of the methods in this study.

Methods

Interviews are a method for capturing multiple realities in order to share them in the final research report (Stake, 1995). Although it is true of all research studies, graduate student research is particularly limited in terms of the amount of time and budget available (Fusch et al., 2017). Interviews address these constraints by helping the researcher to collect data through the descriptions and interpretations of those who are intimately involved in the case that we are unable to observe first-hand (Stake, 1995). Drawing from the research questions and the aims of the study, a semi-structured interview guide (Appendix A) allowed for focused interviews with room to account for the participants’ unique experiences and stories.

In this research, I opted to offer participants a choice to undertake an embodied practice while we spoke. This arose upon discussion with committee about the proposed research study and how it could better reflect the folk school ethos of engaging hands, heart, and mind (Spicer, 2009). Upon considering a “folk school methodology” and how the interviews might be more like a folk school class or activity, we decided to move forward with the option for the interviewee to undertake an embodied practice of their choosing or to recommend one for both of

us. Of course, we wanted this to be invitational and not a directive (as compulsive learning is not what folk schools are about!), and only one participant took me up on this offer, suggesting that both of us knit during our interview. This will be discussed in more detail elsewhere in this research.

Conducting semi-structured interviews presents both challenges and opportunities and requires the researcher to be experienced in the art of interviewing—from active listening to real-time examination and extensions of the knowledge being shared. In one instance in this study, it also required leading the interview while engaging in an embodied practice of the participant (in this case, knitting). Having conducted semi-structured interviews for three previous research projects where I served either as a researcher or a research assistant, I had experience in collecting key information across interviews within the case and probing further into each unique account to highlight the nuanced and complex realities of each.

The interview protocol set out by Stake (1995) is somewhat unique and worth highlighting here. I followed it in spirit—but not to the letter—and I will explain this further below. There are many ways of going about conducting, capturing, and evaluating interviews, but Stake suggests that the researcher must keep a detailed record of interpretations and impressions—akin to field notes—from each interview as the primary method of data collection. This diverges from approaches that rely on transcription or audio-visual recording of interviews. In his interview protocol, Stake (1995) recommends crafting a written account of the interview within hours

of the interview's completion, striving to capture the respondent's meaning and intention, and submitting this to the respondent in short order through a process of member checking for accuracy, clarification, and stylistic improvement. This interview protocol, Stake argues, allows the researcher to listen actively and participate in the interview fully, and insists upon creating time in the immediate aftermath to provide a snapshot of the interview while it is still fresh in the mind of the interviewer and the interviewee. Interview analysis that is bounded in time also affords the researcher the chance to capture their own impressions from the interview long before they are lost to time.

Just as researchers receive firsthand information via interviewees, they can also learn much about the case through analysing documents pertaining to the case. Document review serves as another method for learning more about our case. It can stand for those observations that we cannot make firsthand and that are beyond the scope of our interviews (Stake, 1995). Documents are also imperative for the case study researcher as the author(s) may have even greater familiarity with the case—or particular aspects of the case—than the researcher (Stake, 1995). Stake contends that researchers should plan in advance for locating key documents and allowing ample time to review them, as well as alerting stakeholders of your desire to obtain relevant documentation. Interviewees, colleagues, mentors, and community members are all be helpful in pursuit of critical documents pertaining to the case. In this study, documents of importance primarily consisted of organizational websites, organizational social media pages,

reports published by folk schools, and articles written by journalists about the folk schools.

Lastly, to triangulate the data collection methods and help to form assertions and narratives about the case, this case study leveraged reflective journaling.

Reflective journals are used across qualitative research methods (Fusch et al., 2017; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2008) and are helpful in making sense of the researcher's overall impressions and interpretations of the case. Distinct from field notes which pertain to direct observations, the reflective journal is more about the researcher's own lens and is synthesized from all of the data in the study.

Reflective journals can contain opinions, thoughts and musings, discussion, reflections and more (Fusch et al., 2017). These are ultimately used to support the primary methods of interviews and document review in triangulating the data and constructing a narrative but should be understood as being inextricably linked to the researcher themselves and their own positionality (Fusch et al., 2017).

Constructing A Narrative

Finishing a case study is the consummation of a work of art ... it is an exercise in such depth, the study is an opportunity to see what others have not yet seen, to reflect the uniqueness of our own lives, to engage the best of our interpretive powers, and to make, even by its integrity alone, an advocacy for those things we cherish.

(Stake, 1995, p. 136)

In Stake's (1995) approach to case study research—which I largely employed for this study due to its aligning values and methods—the researcher collects data and then works to ensure their validity through member checking of interview data and the process of triangulation. Stake places great significance on

capturing the meaning and intentions of the interviewees and using additional information collected through document review and the researcher's own assertions in constructing a narrative.

Although interpretation (Erickson, 1986) and assertions are central to qualitative research, and to this case study, Stake (1995) indicates that the researcher has a responsibility to portray data that are more descriptive and of an uncontested nature to the reader first before sharing one's own assertions about the case. Though Stake's (1995) approach integrates the case study researcher to a significant extent, he insists upon responsible practices of professional discretion and disclosure, while leveraging the researcher's subject expertise.

Participants

To further define theta for the purposes of this study, I will offer both the inclusion criteria as well as a list of the organizations currently known to meet the threshold for inclusion. Subsequently, I will describe the participants who ultimately engaged in this study. The participants constituting the case (theta) are folk schools currently operating in Canada as told through the lens of the folk schools' leaders. The unit of analysis is the individual folk school, but together they represent the case. It will also be important to understand how I am defining folk schools for the purposes of this research, given the wide variety of ways in which folk schools manifest themselves.

For the purposes of this study, a folk school must be clearly grounded in the ideals of Grundtvig—non-competitive, non-vocational, adult education rooted in a

people or their folk culture. An organization also needs to either self-identify as a folk school or have an ongoing relationship to the Folk School Alliance Community of Practice, as supported by the Folk Education Alliance of America. Because folk schools can take many forms, being guided by the ideals of Grundtvig and having a clear tie to folk schooling becomes necessary to define theta and draw boundaries around the case.

Six organizations were known to meet the inclusion criteria at the time of this research including Annapolis Valley Folk School in Paradise, Nova Scotia; Fireloch Gathering Place and Retreat in North Lochaber, Nova Scotia; Folk Camp in Toronto and Southern Ontario; Honeybee Folk School in Fredericton, New Brunswick; Life.School.House in Antigonish, Nova Scotia (and beyond), and Okanagan Folk School in Peachland, British Columbia. Through four distinct interviews (Fireloch and Life.School.House share the same founder), I spoke with the leaders of five of these six folk schools for this study.

I was unable to connect with the leaders of Folk Camp, which is, to the best of my knowledge, Canada's longest running folk school still active today. Folk Camp is deeply tied to the Ukrainian community in Canada and at this moment in time, Ukrainian peoples and culture are under existential threat. This makes the activities of this organization especially imperative from a cultural perspective and their work important to a complete understanding of folk schooling in Canada today and its potentialities for cultures under duress. However, it also likely is constraining the capacity of its leadership in ways that may have prevented their

ability to participate in this study at this time. I want to note their vital cultural work, and their unique folk camp annual summer camp offering, and hope to continue to engage with them in efforts to move folk schooling forward in Canada. However, a discussion of Folk Camp will not be further included in this case study research.

It is true that many organizations in Canada are comparable to folk schools through their structure or their aims, but do not meet the inclusion set forth here including several craft schools, community and continuing education centres, and retreat spaces. In this study, participants make very clear what they think ought to define Canadian folk schooling and this will be discussed further in Chapters 5 and 6. I recognize that folk education turns up in many ways and in many places—as it rightly should—but this study uses a strict inclusion criteria to engage with folk schools directly and centrally. Possible future research might aim to widen this circle to include folk school-adjacent or folk school-interested organizations. Chapter 5 will introduce participants and their folk schools in greater detail.

Ethical Considerations

This case study includes research with people through interviews that were conducted as a primary data source. That being the case, approval from the Research Ethics Board (REB) at Lakehead University was obtained prior to the commencement of this research study. Appendices B and C of this document contain the information letter and consent form that were distributed to potential participants informing them of the purpose of the study, research methods, what was being asked of them, and any risks involved (which were minimal as the

objectives of this study are to support the folk schools' educational and community efforts overall). Please refer to Appendices B and C for further information on participant anonymity, safe data storage, and more. Appendix D contains the REB approval letter. Note that the names of interviewees and the folk schools that they represent have not been changed and that the participants agreed to this.

In addition, it should be acknowledged that ethical considerations exist both from an institutional standpoint (as is noted above) and from a relational standpoint. This is true whether the researcher is close to the research subject or an "outsider." As I noted at the outset of this research, my position is very close to and entangled with the folk schooling community. I have worked with other folk schools, on my own folk school project, as a folk school scholar, and as a supporter of folk education through my work with the FEAA. Although this involves some complex navigation around ethical responsibilities, it is my belief that communities are best researched together with instead of upon. The use of member-checking and Stake's methods of transcription for meaning in this study are intended to uphold my ethical duty to participants and members of the folk schooling community. Likewise, this study employs established and accepted practices for qualitative research in education in light of my institutional and academic obligations for ethical research.

Certainly, I want to note that my approach to this research is not one of a deficit mindset. I come from the sort of impoverished (by money anyway), rural community that folk schools were intended to serve and which are not always best

served by the aims of formal education—which was an initial instigation for folk schooling in the first place. However, despite perceiving pedagogical value in the folk school model today, I also have interests in considering if we can deepen the impact of folk schooling both within and beyond folk schooling and create space for more types of learning to exist side by side. So, I come to this research not as a neutral observer but as someone with broad experience inside nonformal and formal education traditions and with an understanding of how these relate to one another and what might be learned from this.

Research Study Process and Timeline

I commenced reflective journaling for the research study upon approval of this study by my dissertation committee in early fall, 2024. My plan was to complete bi-weekly journal entries that coincided with my involvement in FEAA Board Meetings and the FSA Community of Practice meetings—as these are my usual touchpoints with the folk schooling community—and to add further entries after interviews or other relevant and significant experiences occurred. In practice, I completed reflective journal entries when I felt that there was something compelling to note or after a folk schooling touchpoint. These, however, were my own thoughts and interpretations on folk schooling and on the research rather than a reporting on the content of these ongoingings.

What surprised me most was the way cultural overtones and current events played into these journal entries. When I completed my dissertation proposal in August of 2024, Democrats in the United States looked poised to secure another

term under the leadership of then Vice President Kamala Harris. Ultimately, Donald Trump won a second term in November of 2024, and after his Inauguration in late January 2025, directives started raining down on equity-focused organizations. Organizations such as the FEAA were suddenly forced to consider their aims, values, and activities in existential terms. Similarly, the focus on “Canadian” folk schools in this research acquired unintended significance. Initially, this demarcation from American folk schools—I thought—was useful due to differing structural mechanisms of our government, education systems, and funding programs. At that time, the sight of an errant Canadian flag flying was usually attached to a vehicle with a “Fuck Trudeau” bumper sticker and an association with the occupation of Ottawa against COVID restrictions or opposition to the carbon tax. Today, there is a whole other swath of folks engaging with the notion of Canada as a democratic and sovereign nation, distinct from its southern neighbour. This stems from threats to the existence of Canada as a sovereign nation, musings about redrawing the Canadian-American border, imposition of economic warfare via tariffs and the effective ripping up of the recently revised free trade agreement in North America, planned geopolitical advances in the Arctic, and more. While I think that we need to be careful of our embrace of the notion of Canada—it is still, after all, a colonial nation with extensive reconciliation and decolonial work to do—being Canadian today, or the Canadian identity, means something different altogether for many people than when this research was first planned. Chapter 6 will discuss the implications of this in further detail.

The interviews conducted for this research all took place virtually in December of 2024. On my co-supervisor Paul Berger's advice, I audio-recorded interviews as a backup but followed Stake's (1995) protocol for active listening while interviewing, resisting the urge for extensive notetaking during the interview. As Stake (1995) suggested, I made time in the immediate aftermath for collecting impressions and circulating the data for member checking in short order. One departure from Stake's methods occurred early on in the study: I recognized, after my first interview with Maureen, the specificity and value that were present in the stories being told about folk schooling. I wanted to retain, and ultimately be able to share with you, both the spirit and the detail of those stories through their own voices. Therefore, I used Stake's protocol for capturing meaning, and in some cases clarifying or lightly editing responses, but also leveraged the audio transcription I had captured to share their stories with you.

With the exception of Murray's interview, which took longer to circulate back, interview transcripts were available for member checking shortly after the interviews took place. This was in January 2025 after Donald Trump had won a second term, but before he was inaugurated and before much of the tensions with Canada became evident. Therefore, the interviews do not necessarily speak to these broader cultural currents in a prominent way, but my reflective journals as well as analysis from the interviews and historical comparisons with the plight of the Danish through folk schooling do offer something of a window into the role that folk schools can play through tumultuous times like these.

In fact, the comparisons are disturbingly similar in ways in which I would not have envisioned, nor ever hoped to be true. Nonetheless, as researchers, educators, and community members, we must meet the moment we find ourselves in. In a previous dissertation committee meeting, I recall my committee member Paul Cormier asking me if I might take an opportunity through this analysis to consider what the history of folk schooling—as it existed in the broader culture—might tell us about the moment we are in and where we are going. At the time, I was not quite sure where that would take me but kept it at heart as I moved through the research process. Chapter 6 will detail this further, but since then, it has become abundantly clear what the history of folk schooling might have to offer for others working in adult or cultural education and community engagement in Canada today.

Confidence

Stake (1995) places significant responsibility on the researcher to conduct ethical and transparent research. I have outlined his suggested methods which involve introducing one's self and one's own positionality, as I am a folk school scholar and researcher, a founder of a folk school, and a leader within the folk schooling movement today through my involvement with the Folk Education Association of America. I have also employed Stake's (1995) method of triangulation using semi-structured interviews to document firsthand accounts from leaders of Canadian folk schools, document analysis to add context and detail, and

reflective journaling to capture my own thinking and experiences throughout the process of collecting and analysing the data.

Likewise, I have followed Stake's (1995) suggestion for first presenting information which is more factual in nature and less speculative in Chapter 4 through the folk school portraits. Chapter 5 leverages participant accounts mainly to construct an overarching narrative of Canadian folk schooling today, which is mixed with my own perceptions as the researcher and linked to the folk schooling literature in Denmark and the United States. Chapter 6 dives further into my own assertions as the researcher as to what folk schools might mean for this moment and what role they could play going forward. Stake suggests that portraying information in this sequence helps the reader to understand the information both as it was told to me, and to help one judge whether or not my assertions are ultimately supported.

Similarly, I employed member checking which is also recommended by Stake (1995) to ensure that meaning is captured through the interview transcripts that were ultimately analysed to construct the narrative in this research study. All interviewees replied to my email with the transcript included, and some provided missing demographic information in that email such as preferred pronouns to be used in this narrative. Only one offered a minor change to the transcript, correcting the spelling of a program name. And lastly, speaking to leaders at five of the six Canadian folk schools known to meet the inclusion criteria, provides a level of

confidence about the findings as they apply broadly to Canadian folk schooling today.

Limitations

Conversely, including the last remaining of the six folk schools, Folk Camp, in this study, would have provided a more robust picture and added its own interesting cultural and structural aspects to the research. Despite efforts to reach leaders there, it was not feasible in the timeframe of this research. Following ethical considerations for this research which require it to be voluntary, not including this organization in the research is one limitation.

In Stake's (1995) conceptualization of case study research, interviews stand as one method for capturing first hand accounts that the researcher is unable to experience for themselves by leveraging the narratives of those close to the research subject. In this research, that meant relying on the accounts of folk school leaders to share about their organizations. Further research might employ field visits or expand the scope of interviews to include employees, teachers, students, and community members.

Each interview was conducted virtually and was intended to last one hour. The interviews ranged from 59:17 to 1:10:30 and interviewees were given the opportunity to add information on any questions or anything else they would like to add that they felt was significant in the member checking process, though none did.

This research faced similar constraints in time, scope, and budget which are common to graduate theses and dissertations. Yet, methodological considerations were taken, I was well positioned to conduct the research, and I have endeavoured to share it with you in a way that I hope does justice to the participants' accounts while suggesting that you make up your own mind as to the assertions that I make in the final portions of this study.

Conclusion

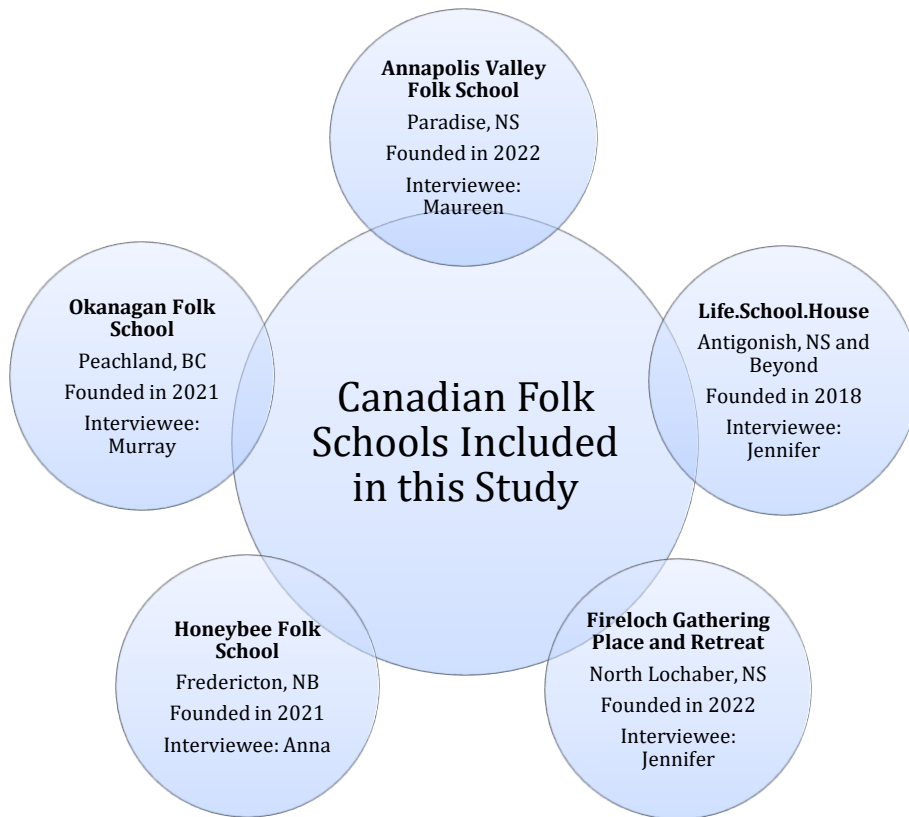
Using Stake's (1995) approach to case study, this case study research takes the form of an intrinsic and instrumental case study with Canadian folk schools leveraging the methods of interviews, document review, and reflective journaling, along with the processes of member checking and data triangulation, to form assertions and construct a narrative about the case. These practices enabled me to answer the research questions set forth for this study with the hopes of bolstering a folk schooling movement that has been long pondered here in Canada. What results is a report on how this alternative form of education is showing up in Canada, how it is challenged, and what it can contribute to the educational and cultural landscape.

Chapter 4: A Portrait of Folk Schooling in Canada Today

The idea of folk Schooling in Canada has a (relatively) long, but narrow history. Efforts to establish folk schools here—either through co-operatives or as extensions to higher education—have ebbed and flowed, since at least the turn of the twentieth century. These portraits represent a snapshot, taken at this particular moment in time, of folk schooling in Canada and are represented in Figure 1. If I

Figure 1

Folk Schools Included in the Case Study



were to rewind five years, it would look completely different. Fast forward another five, and I expect the same is true. This research, in line with critical theory and its

consideration of complex social and cultural systems, is best situated in its time and context as we embark on what feels like a whole new world altogether given the rapid changes to governance and culture globally and nationally.

Wherever possible, I aim to convey the folk schools' stories through the words of the people most intimately connected to them. I interviewed the founders of five Canadian folk schools: Maureen at Annapolis Valley Folk School, Jennifer of Life.School.House and Fireloch Gathering Place and Retreat, Anna at Honeybee Folk School, and Murray at Okanagan Folk School. In my interviews I first asked them "What is the story of this place?" and I am happy to report, they did not disappoint. I hope that you will find their stories—their moments of toil, struggle, joy, and success—as informative, inspirational, and illuminating as I do. Throughout the rest of this dissertation, I weave together their stories in their own words and my own analysis and discussion, with the research questions as guideposts.

This chapter offers a portrait of these five folk schools including organizational and structural information about each folk school, information on their background and context, and the people and places involved, as well as their areas of focus. These characteristics primarily address Research Sub-Questions #1-4, which ask:

- 1) What is it about today's moment that is leading to a push for folk schooling in Canada?
- 2) How are folk schools addressing unmet needs in the community?

3) What underlying needs and aspirations prompt folk school founders to undertake the task of starting a folk school?

4) What are folk schools offering through their praxis, focus(es), and structure?

Life.School.House

Started in 2018 in founder Jennifer's living room in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, Life.School.House (Figure 2) offers barter-based folk schooling through

Figure 2

Life.School.House Makers' Swap



Note. By Maclsaac, 2024

pedagogies of hosting. Based in Nova Scotia, Life.School.House practices have been enacted across Canada and even internationally—including a chapter in my own home and community here in Thunder Bay during and just after the pandemic.

Life.School.House first began as an effort by Jennifer and her family to be directly involved in the sort of changemaking work they wanted to see in the world and in their new community, and as settlers who owned a home on unceded territory, in consideration of their role as treaty peoples in Nova Scotia. Jennifer was drawn to hosting as a practice due to its feminine and caretaking approach to changemaking and by engaging her neighbours around community issues and shared possibilities:

We had a home that we had purchased. It was an opportunity to think together with our neighbors and others about what more we wanted to see in our communities, or what should be happening differently than what we were currently seeing. We held an open house on a couple of nights, but the primary evening was an open house with a focus on that kind of calling question: What do we want to see happening more of or differently in our community? We called it a post-it note party.

A bunch of people came together and had ideas for all kinds of different things. I even still have that poster and all of those sticky notes. We were talking about childcare. We were talking about loneliness. We were talking about sharing tools and sharing things that we had in the community and making the most of things. We were talking about meeting newcomers because the face of our community was changing a lot. But the thing we kept circling around and around was this idea of all of the skills that existed in our community and sharing them.

Jennifer leveraged her extensive professional background in human resources and community engagement, and her familiarity with the Trade School International movement, to turn these aspirations into a folk school. At first, it was just a school for folks, and not built on a foundation of the Danish Grundtvigian folk schools. As the organization grew, however, they integrated with folk schooling in the more literal sense of the definition and provided inspiration for other folk schools worldwide to consider a barter-based, accessible approach.

Today, Life.School.House is governed by a board of directors and has grown to support a part-time Executive Director position despite challenges to sustaining and supporting the model due to its non-monetized nature (which will be discussed further in Chapter 5). Life.School.House communities are hosted in any location where a host feels comfortable enough to welcome folks in, and primarily these are in home spaces, community spaces, and outdoor spaces. This model of folk schooling requires little to no overhead as hosts volunteer their time and instructors are compensated on a barter-basis with participants bringing requested items, or whatever else they can offer.

Hosting a Life.School.House chapter or participating in Life.School.House programming are both low barrier acts and expand the scope of who can show up in these communities and how they can show up. Courses are usually short-format and last a few hours. Recent course topics include sourdough bread-baking, kimchi-making, blanket-making, knitting, crochet, cross stitch, macrame, terrarium-building, and yoga. The communities that gather around Life.School.House are

often mercurial, but students tend to return repeatedly as they gain comfort with the model and new offerings are shared. In addition to courses, Life.School.House chapters also offer Makers' Swaps (pictured above) with the aim of sharing in abundance and community, and honouring the unique talents, skills, and interests embedded in each community. Life.School.House continues to have a stronghold in Nova Scotia but is practiced in other provinces and has been trialed in other countries through direct participation and through the inspiration of this newer model of folk schooling.

Annapolis Valley Folk School

Annapolis Valley Folk School (Figure 3) draws upon founder Maureen's experiences at the initial Life.School.House Chapter in Dartmouth. Located in Paradise, Nova Scotia, the Annapolis Valley Folk School conducts barter-based folk school courses and Makers' Swaps, as well as hosts community initiatives and events, in and around Maureen's home. Maureen and her family serve as the hosts for this folk schooling community, which is not incorporated nor an organization or business in a formal sense. They also plan and support the folk school's initiatives on a volunteer basis.

Maureen came to folk schooling with a long track record of organizing homeschooling co-ops and initiatives for her children and community, and folk schooling was a way to embody some of that community work in an intergenerational manner. Raised in rural Alberta where the homeplace was a

Figure 3*Annapolis Valley Folk School Program*

Note. By MacInnis, 2022

common gathering place, Maureen wanted to find a way to bring her neighbours together in the face of crumbling social supports. Their community church, which had long been a pillar of the community and the social glue that brought together and supported community members, had closed and there was a feeling that the sense of community was slipping away—along with the community’s capacity to care for one another without those frequent interactions:

If we live in our castles that we’ve been told we need to be completely self-sufficient and not borrow or be a part of anything outside of our own doors, then we really lose that sense of community. There’s a church here on

Clarence Road that hasn't been in operation at least in the 7 years that we've been here. And so that's a big break in the community too because before, if someone didn't come to church, you knew something was up and that you needed to check on them. And now, you drive past and maybe you don't have that instantaneous link anymore, even though I do make it a point to know my neighbours. That link, unfortunately, is gone in many communities, and that's something that the folk school can pick up on.

Maureen found that her direct community as well as others within an hour or so driving distance, really resonated with the idea of community-based folk schooling. Although she notes that participants often get a (free) ticket to a course two or three times before actually giving it a try, she has excellent reach within her community and their folk school programming of 55-65 courses annually, plus swaps and events, are very well-attended. Noticing other needs in her community, Maureen began a food pantry in Lawrencetown where she notes that the public school has the highest rate of child poverty in Atlantic Canada:

This little pantry on the side of the road provided over 700 lunches to the school. They would tell us how many they needed the night before. We would prepare them, and someone would come over and get them in the morning for the kids. And that is solely provided by the people who attend the folk school.

Now in its fourth year, Maureen finds that the need for the food pantry is greater than ever. Based on the type of items in demand, she anticipates that its

usage has grown to include more families that were not likely food insecure in the past.

Annapolis Valley Folk School hosts courses on a wide range of topics from solar energy retrofitting to herbalism to animal husbandry (as new families move to the area's homesteads) and even night-time paddling. Maureen offers that there is always more to learn and so it is difficult to offer the same course more than once. Much as in Horton's community education efforts in Ozone, TN (Preskill, 2021), when a community member identifies a need for a course, it never takes more than a day or two to find someone local who is well-versed and willing to come teach it at the folk school on a barter-basis suggesting that most of the knowledge needed in a community already exists if connections can merely be facilitated.

An avid knitter, Maureen took me up on my offer of embodied practice during our interview and suggested that we knit together. Maureen worked on a holiday gift and I, on my loom, endeavoured to complete a rainbow-coloured cowl as a request from my son. Our act of knitting together made me feel as if we might be taking part in a folk school class with one another and provided an instant point of connection between the two of us. It is possible that Maureen and I may have participated in a shared meeting about Life.School.House several years ago, but neither of us could recall for sure and Maureen was the only participant with whom I was not already connected. Knitting together set the stage for us to relax and just have a conversation while our hands were busy. I believe that, as the first interview for this study, it set the stage for a study full of stories and richness. After

Maureen's interview, I knew that I needed to be able to more of the story in detail, and in her own words than suggested by Stake (1995). I credit the embodied experience of knitting as a folk school methodology, in part, for eliciting this detail.

Figure 4 is a picture of my work-in-progress.

Figure 4

Embodied Practice Interview- Knitted Scarf



Note. By Lee, 2025

Honeybee Folk School

Honeybee Folk School (Figure 5) was founded in Fredericton, New Brunswick in 2021 and is the continuing education arm of the New Brunswick

College of Craft and Design (NBCCD). Earlier efforts by both the college and the local tourism board at continuing, adult education had presented some challenges

Figure 5

Honeybee Folk School



Note. Honeybee Folk School, 2022

and confusion. An earlier continuing education program of night classes at NBCCD faced issues with the perception that the courses needed to be a microcosm of the college's programs. Faculty at the college felt very invested in its image and the quality and offerings of the continuing program in ways that were at times challenging to navigate. Similarly, Fredericton Tourism was offering summer workshops and programming at the NBCCD campus.

Distinguishing the college's continuing education program from the city's tourism offerings was difficult for the public and in 2019, the college took over the

summer programs completely. When the pandemic began, Anna began working with her colleagues to consider how they might meet the moment, and how their continuing education programming could play a role. A colleague, Carrie Nolan, had previously lived in Thunder Bay near the North House Folk School in Grand Marais, Minnesota and introduced the model to Anna who was then NBCCD's Manager of Innovation and Learning Design and has recently moved into a new role as Dean of the college:

I was also, at the time, doing quite a bit of historic research into the origins of NBCCD itself. And, interestingly enough, discovered that our humble beginnings were very much, like, aligned with folk schools in that we were teaching out of a national park, we were teaching hands-on courses to tourists. We had an offering where you could pay a dollar and drop in to do a workshop with an artist for a day back in the 1930s. Our programs really grew out of that...We were at this beautiful location but then we ended up growing into the New Brunswick College of Craft and Design, and that's kind of the direction that we took.

In 2021, NBCCD rebranded their continuing education program as the Honeybee Folk School, with some reservations but with a great sense of hope for the work to come and the potential of the model to suit continuing education and extension programs in colleges and universities:

I think that to enter in, there is some trepidation in staking a claim that "this is a folk school" without a distinct background. Because we talk a lot in

Canada about cultural appropriation. Even when we were considering it, the thing that sold me was our origins. It was the way that NBCCD started out with a mindset and belief that aligns so closely to what was happening in folk schools that were popping up at the same time all across America.

And so I was able to assert that and say, 'you know, we didn't know this at the time, and we didn't say that, but that's what we were'. I do believe there is an alignment with this ideology, and that's where I've been able to say that we are a folk school. But when I even first started coming to those Community of Practice meetings with the Folk School Alliance, I was concerned about being called out like, "What if my roots aren't deep enough? What if I'm standing on something could be seen as cultural appropriation?" So I think that that is also a barrier that people face. And I mean as Canadians with our history, it's something we tiptoe around.

The timing of Honeybee's launch also coincided with a once-in-a-lifetime global pandemic. Building atop the folk school foundations that had been laid at NBCCD nearly a century before, Honeybee sought to address contemporary issues that were thrust into the spotlight when the world shut its doors to keep the virus out:

Maybe the more obvious thing that came out of COVID was how much we needed each other. The striving to find your community. You know, we all realized how much connection we had on our virtual platforms but also the actual limitations of those online engagements versus getting into a class

with a bunch of like-minded people. It's just something that has been much more soul-feeding. We understand the value of that better now.

The folk school—as the rebranded continuing education arm of NBCCD—has been immensely successful and has addressed not only this issue, but several others. The distinctions between the folk school and the college's program are now much clearer for the public. The folk school has been able to expand its offerings beyond the scope of what is offered through the college's full-time programs. Today, college faculty members serve as formal mentors for folk school instructors (they can take the classes at no-cost in exchange for their mentorship) and part-time instructors and alumni can top up their work by teaching folk school classes.

The folk school has also showcased some existing nonformal education offerings in the community by giving them a platform at the folk school and the ability to build out their own practice beyond the school. It has offered many folks their first teaching opportunities, and shared an average of 65-70 courses each year that help support homesteading, regenerative living, and traditional skills, all while building a stronger community.

Some of the programs, especially the weeklong summer courses, cater to regional tourists while others are aimed toward local residents with a 7-week, one night per week format. Workshops—which are shorter in duration than the folk school's course—range from a half-day to 2.5 days with a variety of audiences. There are no lodgings offered through the folk school or college itself, but as it is located in an urban area, lodging is available throughout the city.

Okanagan Folk School

Okanagan Folk School (Figure 6) is a non-profit organization led by a board of directors in Peachland, British Columbia in the Okanagan Valley. Founded in 2021 by Murray, the folk school—also inspired by a colleague’s mention of North

Figure 6

Okanagan Folk School Building



Note. Okanagan Folk School, 2024

House Folk School—sought to create affluence in the community and strengthen social ties. At the time, Murray was the Director of the local Chamber of Commerce and was looking for ways to bring business to their tourist town during the winter off-season. Upon discovering North House:

I was fascinated. They are, as you know, a small town on a lake like us, not really close to a large center—although we're close to Kelowna. And it just fascinated me. I spent that night—I didn't sleep much—watching Youtube.

Of course it was all US-based. But there's so much talent in the valley that I thought, well, you know, this could work.

The school uses a four-pillar approach which informs their purpose and their areas of focus:

1) To bring off-season revenue to the town of Peachland and area. 2) To create more employment for our artisans/instructors. 3) To create community amongst the students and the town of Peachland (through courses, community hosts and events). 4) Establish Peachland as the craft/art/applied skills educational Centre of Western Canada. (Okanagan Folk School, 2024)

What began with classes offered in a shared boardroom space at the local Chamber of Commerce has now grown into a partnership with the city and with other local organizations to utilize the historic schoolhouse space in Peachland for folk school classes and a folk-school-run gift shop showcasing the wares of folk school instructors and local artisans. The folk school offers as many as 75 classes each year and the gift shop, open five days a week, helps to publicize the folk school's programs: "When people come to the gift shop, we always tell them, 'These things are all from here. You can buy these things, or you can learn to make them!'"

Okanagan Folk School is primarily a craft-based organization focused on subjects such as stained glass, fiber art, felting, and sourdough breadmaking, but also holds courses in topics from canoeing to geocaching, hiking, forest bathing,

and more. Their students are primarily women from the ages of 50 to 75 from the West Bank and Kelowna, and instructors are mostly local, with some coming from the greater region. Courses are held at the historic schoolhouse, and in the community and outdoors as needed. Some instructors have home studios and open these up for folk school instruction. Recently, the folk school received funding to host afterschool programs for local elementary school students and are looking to continue and expand those efforts citing their importance:

We've all had different experiences with our schooling system. Some good, some not so good. At an early stage we can help a child sort of colour outside the box, to use the cliché, as well as gain a little bit more self confidence. And you know I'll be happy if we can do that, or provide that, because they need all the confidence and individuality they can maintain through that system.

Murray notes that there have also been requests for programs with local homeschooling groups and that the school is only limited by their own human and financial resources in growing out their involvement for youth-oriented folk education. Building upon the existing paradigm of intergenerational learning in North American folk schools, Okanagan has plenty of room to increase their reach within the community.

Fireloch Gathering Place and Retreat

Fireloch Gathering Place and Retreat (Figure 7) is an extension of Life.School.House founder Jennifer's folk schooling journey. It came about as

Figure 7*Fireloch Gathering Place and Retreat - Dome*

Note. By Fireloch, 2025

Jennifer's children grew older and expressed a desire to continue their community-building work, but in ways that were less embedded in their home space. Jennifer and family relocated to North Lochaber, Nova Scotia to a home with a small meeting space and land for convening. Situated in Antigonish County, both Jennifer (through her grandfather) and the local area have ties to the Antigonish Movement in the 1920's and 1930's which built upon Scandinavian folk and adult education ideas and practices (Coady, 1939).

Starting with a workshop space in an outbuilding on their new property, Jennifer and her husband Scott built a sauna, an axe-throwing range, a wood-fired pizza oven, a pavilion, and eventually, a large geodesic dome to serve as a gathering and teaching space. Billed as a retreat where folks can come together to build community, do team-building, and recharge from care work, Fireloch functions as a social enterprise. According to Jennifer, the folk school is the “social” part, and the retreat space is the “enterprise” which is needed to keep the lights on. The folk school is embedded in the larger organization of Fireloch, which uses and manages the space. Part of what inspired the model of folk schooling at Fireloch is conversations that the Folk School Alliance Community of Practice has been having for years around fair wages and instructor compensation:

I love what Life.School.House does, but it could never be something that sustains somebody. We can do good work of connecting humans across differences with Life.School.House but the permanency is not in place there. And change—like real change—if we're using the folk schools to be part of real social change, we need longevity because change takes time. So we need the consistency.

And we want people to understand that being part of a folk school is a larger, a longer journey. To the question of, “What is Fireloch offering?” I would say, it's a home base that is sustainable, that can be counted on to be here for a longer period of time. With some consistency, it becomes a bit of

a home for the people that come here. They want to keep coming back here.

In 2025, they plan to add accommodations in order to lengthen programs and extend the types of things that can be taught there, reinforcing their social and community impact. As it stands today, the folk school offers half-day and daylong classes in areas such as bushcraft, soapmaking, drum making, and more. They also hold open session such as crafternoons and singer-songwriter circles. Instructors are engaged as external contractors and user fees cover the cost of compensating instructors, procuring supplies, and reserving the space. The larger organization of Fireloch employs Jennifer full-time to run the social enterprise and Scott, now part-time, to build infrastructure and manage facilities.

Conclusion

Canada's folk schools are independent, decentralized organizations. Though there are linkages between Annapolis Valley Folk School, Life.School.House, and Fireloch, folk schools in Canada range widely in structure and format as presented in this chapter. All have the idea of the "folk" at the heart of the folk school (Horton & Jacobs, 2003).

I find myself inspired by the flexibility of the folk school model to be taken up in the varied settings and in diverse ways as are described in this chapter and that exist in Canada today. Where folk schools can create space for pedagogical possibilities to emerge, we might not meet only today's needs but be confident about our ability to create relevant educational spaces in the future as new needs

arise. Chapter 5 examines the folk school movement in Canada in relation to one another and in Chapters 5 and 6, within the cultural moment they find themselves in.

Chapter 5: The Makings of a Movement—Moving Forward

As previous research on folk schools in Denmark (Begtrup et al., 1929; Borish, 1991) and the United States (Lee, 2017; Preskill, 2021; Whisnant, 1983) sought to document the impact and legacy of folk schooling there, this study aims to consolidate learnings from each school to understand the state of folk schooling in Canada today and consider how folk education might be strengthened now and in the future. This chapter corresponds closely to Research Sub-Questions #5 and 6 which ask:

- 1) Where are today's Canadian folk schools finding success and what challenges do they face?
- 2) What would be needed to support a movement in Canada akin to the recent American folk school revival, or the long-standing, widespread tradition of folk schooling in Scandinavia?

Successes

The folk schools represented in this case study have much to celebrate. Despite challenges and early growing pains, much is going well. Some of these shared successes and opportunities are community-building, reviving traditional skills and endangered knowledge, and creating affluence and increasing tourism. Community building has been and remains a longstanding aim of folk schools in Denmark, Scandinavia, and the United States (Borish, 1991; Horton & Jacobs, 2003; Kulich, 1964; Preskill, 2021; Whisnant, 1983), so it is heartening to see it remain at the centre of the work transpiring in folk schools in Canada today. Other

successes such as reviving traditional skills and endangered knowledge were reflected in cultural and linguistic aspects of the Danish folk schools (Borish, 1991) but not as much as in the material sense, which is much more reflective of the American folk schools (Lee, 2017; Whisnant, 1983). And lastly, creating affluence and increasing tourism draws upon American folk schooling models from John C. Campell and Highlander folk schools (Preskill, 2021; Whisnant, 1983) but also from more recent entrants such as North House Folk School (North House Folk School, 2017). Seeing Canadian folk schools' perceived success situated within the broader folk schooling tradition offers an encouraging starting point for a potential lasting movement here. It should be noted that success depends largely on one's values and that the perspectives in this section are those of folk school founders and leaders, and is based upon what they view is going well in their folk schools along with my analysis of the relationship of their narratives of success.

Community Building

All four folk school founders spoke to both the idea that needs in their community were the basis for starting their folk school and that their overarching aims were toward building community. In fact, the interviews bear this out in a way that makes it difficult to talk about what is happening in Canadian folk schools without reference to community-building. In nearly every story, anecdote, example, and sentiment, the sense of "community" pervades every aspect of this case study and builds upon a foundation of critical theory as an underpinning to contemporary folk schooling through the examination of the role of the person in society and in

democratic (or undemocratic) systems. In my experience in the folk school world for over a decade now, a common perception from outsiders is that these schools are about craft. All of Canada's folk school leaders that I spoke to for this case study say it runs much deeper than that. Where craft is present in the folk schools, it is a means to an end—to build community. Jennifer, of Life.School.House and Fireloch, supports this notion when we discussed what folk schooling means in Canada:

I think it would be really important to ensure that folk schooling centers the community connection. From my perspective, the community connection over the skill development. To be able to say: "If we're going to have an identity—Canadian identity to folk schooling—then the folks that gather to connect across the divide need to be the primary focus." The identity of those who gather around folk schooling in Canada. I think that's really important work for the next 100 years....

The culture that's being taught is really connected with the hosting movement that I've identified as being the key differentiating factor between taking a class at a public library or paying to participate in something through an art school or an academic arts school versus coming to a Life.School.House event or a Fireloch event. You will be well hosted—there is a person there whose role it is simply to convene the connection in community versus to teach you....Because what we're trying to share, or what we're trying to build towards, is a sense of building these bridges

between people and how they show up in community. And while they're here, we're also taking care of their spirit and their heart. We're connecting them with others in the room who can help do that lifting too. It's not that it's all dependent on the host to be that, but I think that what the host's role is in both of those venues is to ensure that people can leave feeling connected to each other. And that's the real gift that they're walking away with. The skill is secondary.

This is important for two reasons. The first being that all five of these folk schools have community and culture as a basis of all the work they do, and this is very much aligned with folk school theory and its practice in Denmark (Borish, 1991; Kulich, 1964) and in the United States (Preskill, 2021; Whisnant, 1983). This foundation necessitates peeling the layers of their work back a bit to understand their philosophy and their aims. One cannot take it at face value... it is not so much what they are doing but why they are doing it. The second reason is that community-building as the primary driver behind folk schooling is the main differentiating factor from today's craft schools and arts schools (as is also true in the United States). At first glance, craft schools and arts schools may appear nearly identical in their structure and their coursework, but their purposes and pedagogies centre the material product instead of the people creating it. It is the "folk" in folk school that is non-negotiable (Horton & Jacobs, 2003). While it is true that some arts or craft schools also have people-focused aims and could be

brought into the fold of the growing folk school community, others really are about craft and art primarily and therefore are folk school-adjacent.

When I think about each of the folk schools in this case study, I am reminded of Horton's search for "O" (Preskill, 2021). Their founders were all searching for a model to help them address needs that they saw in their communities. Looking around at modern systems and institutions, each of them found the prevailing options lacking in their ability to address these deep-seated concerns. Jennifer speaks to this when she references both the deficiencies in our present-day community engagement and the context of crumbling systems:

There's a misalignment on a lot of levels: misalignment with systems, misalignment with politics, misalignment with economy, and how we relate to each other. And I really feel like there's misalignment for how we live together in community period—like how we're organizing ourselves as community.

And with folk schools, it can be a really light touch, and you can just go and learn how to make sourdough bread and not have it be a political statement. But also, folk schools really do seem good for doing things in different ways, and perhaps people are craving that right now as we feel the demise of some pretty large systems. And it's so hopeful this idea of people sharing skills, the idea of people coming together who might have all kinds of differences. But this interest in this skill development is something that they share and so they find each other. It's just hopeful. And I would say it's

the kind of that spark that people are looking for right now. There are so many bad news stories that are being shared. This is a good news story.

In Dartmouth, Nova Scotia much as with Horton in Ozone, TN (Preskill, 2021), neighbours came together to think through their own problems and devise solutions from existing knowledge and assets in their community. For Life.School.House, this was in the form of the “post-it party” but the pedagogy and aims were no different than Horton’s a century ago (Preskill, 2021). For Jennifer, the folk schooling model at both Life.School.House and Fireloch, provided a new way of bringing folks together and embracing connection and community. She offers:

Life.School.House, the fact that it centers with a barter-based approach. It’s key to who shows up and how they’re able to show up. And it is also part of one of the challenges of its sustainability. Of course, it provides absolute barrier-free access for so many people. And therefore blends all kinds of different humans into this mix. They’re all welcome. They feel that when they come through the door....

Specifically, the Life.School.House hosting—as an organizational approach or folk school methodology—what it makes possible is the coming together of differences, because anyone can come in. Fundamentally, it’s the coming together. I think that that offers a lot to the world at a time when we are for many, many reasons, finding ourselves divided. And so there’s no division associated with that.

And there's a lot within Life.School.House that's very subtly shared through community norms. It's not preached or taught but you get a vibe where certain things are not necessary. You don't have to defend your opinions. We're re-learning things through just experimenting with each other in community.

In the Annapolis Valley, Maureen also witnessed the shifting cultural norms and community practices and noted the fraying ties holding the community together. For her, the folk school was a way to re-envision the private homespace and open it to community and to support the skills needed for living a good life in her rural locale, much as Horton's aims in Tennessee (Preskill, 2021) and Campbell's in North Carolina (Whisnant, 1983). Like the early Life.School.House chapter in Dartmouth, Maureen's community was changing rapidly. Lower home and land prices in Nova Scotia were drawing people from other parts of the country—a trend that was exacerbated by the COVID lockdowns.

Part of the allure of the Annapolis Valley, for many, was the ability to live on the land with increased self-sufficiency. But many newcomers to the area lacked the skills and experience to do this. As Horton did in Ozone and later at Highlander (Preskill, 2021), Maureen sought out the knowledge and skills that already existed in her community to meet the emergent needs of the people. The folk school provided inroads for newcomers to learn and to connect with those already living in the community. Maureen tells of her neighbour—a 77-year-old pig farmer—who showed up for a class on raising pigs and found unexpected friendship:

I was ecstatic that he had come because although he could've taught the class with his eyes closed, he was curious about what was happening in his neighbourhood. He also noted that although he'd been raising pigs for 50 years, you never know when you can learn something from someone else. At the next community supper I hosted up the street, I went to see how folks were enjoying their supper and one of them said to me that they'd met at the pig class and now they're close friends and help each other with things like mending fences. To me, that's what the folk school is about. That's the culture that we're trying to create.

In fact, Maureen notes that the culture of folk schooling has become like second nature to her and it's only when outsiders come to visit, that she is reminded that this sort of work is not taking place everywhere:

We were hosting an apple pie making class and two travellers from Ontario attended. One of them came and said to me, 'this is a master class. This is amazing that you're doing this. And it's in your house, and so open and lovely.' It was really interesting to see that outside perspective. When you live it, you don't realize that it's not "normal."

Anna offers that differing cultures in different parts of Canada may be a strategic advantage for Canadian folk schools. Much as Highlander adopted racial integration as an underpinning to its early programs (Horton & Jacobs, 2003), Anna suggests that the longstanding practice of multi-culturalism in this country might be celebrated through folk schooling in ways that are unique to Canada:

Depending on the philosophy of the folk school, with our diverse population, if there was, for example, a folk school able to spring up in Toronto, there might be some ability to draw on that multicultural aspect. And making that a place for those different backgrounds, which might be an advantage that Canada would have, is celebrating that.

Like Friend (1914) and Foght (1914) in their early visualizations on American folk schooling and its required adaptations, Maureen also sheds some light on this sense of possibility for the community-building work of folk schools to come in this country. Noting the large geographical expanse of Canada and the differing cultural norms and needs, Maureen envisions a need for regional folk schools to support communities nationwide:

Canada is so big that the folk schools here would always have to be community-based. Like someone from Ontario is not usually going to come to my classes out here. Within an hour of where I live, there are maybe 50,000 people and I have 3,000 people following our Facebook page. So, our reach is pretty strong and really goes even further afield, up to even Cape Breton. I think there's a place for a folk school every 100 miles where they could support each other.

In the Okanagan Valley, Murray also wanted to enhance regional cooperation and awareness of the unique assets that existed in and around Peachland, much as John C. Campbell Folk School showcased Appalachian culture (Whisnant, 1983) and North House Folk School (2017) celebrates the

Scandinavian connections of their Midwest locale. Murray hoped to promote economic welfare in the Peachland community which was highly dependent on seasonal summer tourism revenue. In addition, he sought to share the talent of his community and build bridges between members of his community and their neighbours across the region:

When you combine it with the original Danish folk school philosophy about just learning skills, without judgment, without tests. Again, community building was and is important for us....

From the feedback I get from students as well as the instructors, they have a good time. They really enjoy it. The camaraderie amongst the students, you know, like looking over your shoulder and one's helping another one and some are really serious about, others are just there for something to do. I would say, overall, the experience is one that you could describe as fun. You know, it's not something that they can put on their resume. It's just for fun.

In Fredericton, the NBCCD was already offering non-vocational, continuing education. But like earlier attempts at Canadian folk schooling through university extension offices (Parsey & Friesen, 1953), Anna wanted to invite the community to the college in ways that were mutually beneficial to the college and to the community. She hoped that the work could expand beyond a craft focus to tackle isolation and build skills for a sustainable and healthy future, aligning with Horton's stated aims a century earlier in Ozone (Preskill, 2021). Honeybee has found

resounding success with their students who, despite some shorter-format sessions, return again and again to take part in the folk schooling community:

I think that our returning customers are a real positive. That we have people that come back again and again to take courses. They are bought in to the experience that we are providing and want to be a part of it whenever they can. We have people who take courses with us three times a year. We have people who take courses with us twice a year. And that sort of gives us some stability....

We often have folks that will do a beginner course, and then they'll ask for an intermediate. They want to keep the group together. They want to keep that learning happening. And so then we'll be able to offer another iteration. And it's a lot of the same folks coming back again and again.

Anna, and all the folk school founders in this case study, speak to the intrinsic desire of students for this sort of learning, which in many places is unique to other offerings in the community. The idea of being part of something new, or a new way of doing things, is reflected in Horton's experiences in the mountains and the community's embrace of this type of collective, community learning (Horton & Jacobs, 2003; Preskill, 2021). Students come to feel like they are a part of the folk school, and that a piece of it is theirs as well, and these people provide the foundation for the programming and outreach that sustains the folk schools. Their talents, skills, and interests shape the schools, and they are likewise engaged with

and shaped by their participation in the folk schools—providing more possibilities for what it can look like to be in community with one another in a precarious world.

Reviving Traditional Skills and Endangered Knowledge

All four folk school founders spoke in our interviews to the idea that along with a collapse of community over the past several decades, we have also seen a great decline in the sort of traditional skills that connected us to each other and to our environments. Few people today possess the skills to be self-sustaining, and reclaiming some of these skills can be life-affirming in the context of the climate crisis, health crises such as the COVID pandemic, and economic hardship brought on by industrialization, capitalism, and extractivism in many communities.

There is good reason why folks yearned to connect with one another during the COVID shutdowns, and they sought out traditional skills such as sourdough breadmaking and vegetable gardening (Lindsay et al., 2022). When we were able to remove some of the hurriedness of modern life that strains our capacity to pay attention to what matters, we can consider what is truly important to us and what is necessary for our survival and the living of a good life. In the early Danish folk schools, students who attended the schools were largely farmers and many continued to work on the farm at the folk school—these skills were not yet lost, but more formal learning opportunities were less common and so folk school lessons then might instead focus on history, mythology, civic engagement, or Danish language (Borish, 1991). However, the adaptation to folk schooling put forth by Campbell (Whisnant, 1983) through the handicraft program at John C. Campbell

Folk School, offers an inroad to reviving traditional skills through folk schooling—an avenue picked up broadly in the Canadian folk schools. The interviews indicate that folk schools in Canada have a role to play in reviving and sharing these traditional skills and this endangered knowledge going forward. At Annapolis Valley Folk School, Maureen notes:

I'm really passionate about teaching people how to forage, garden, process meat, can, ferment, and figure out how to sustain themselves....For me folk schooling is about knowledge and sustaining this. We don't want to lose crucial knowledge as older generations pass away and they may be the last ones who know how to do some of these things. I think that it's a fantastic way to build community because it's like-minded people who are being drawn to it. If you could communicate through folk schooling to show how important community is, that's a big part.

We are barter-based and teach many different items from traditional trades, crafts, animal husbandry, arts, food, knowledge, gardening, computer classes, budgeting, and more. Anything that you can think of, we'll try to find a facilitator! We celebrate our local talent together with concerts, potlucks, and many other gatherings. We strive to be an inclusive place of learning while building community together.

Maureen is embedded in a rural, agrarian community where many of these traditional skills are still alive today, though she indicates that they are becoming increasingly rare. What is hopeful, in a way, is the influx of folks to her region in

pursuit of lives that are more in line with their values and more congruent with the capacities of the planet. This surge in interest may well propel many of these endangered skills and ways of living into the future. Like in Brasstown, where the John C. Campbell folk school became a regional centre for learning in Appalachian craft, agriculture, and co-operative living (Whisnant, 1983), the Annapolis Valley Folk School serves as a linchpin in the community for sharing this knowledge and these traditional practices.

In Fredericton, Honeybee Folk School is in a more urban setting but within a greater region still supporting rural and traditional lifestyles. This was a motivating factor for Anna when considering both what their continuing education program (and ultimately, folk school) ought to teach and how this learning ought to be structured and offered:

My passion really comes from those keeping traditional skills alive and you know, I weave, I spin my own yarn, I make my own wine, I homestead, so we have chickens, and I keep honeybees. So, I guess I'm a bit of a "back to the land"er....

One of the things that COVID really highlighted, especially in my province, was our lack of growing our own food. At the time, it was something like 3% of the food that we were consuming was made here in New Brunswick... And I think that our lack of self-sufficiency sort of shocked our community and so a return and revival of traditional skills is something

that I think has come a bit naturally out of that—a recognition that these things do still matter and should be kept alive.

The timing of the launch of Honeybee with the COVID pandemic brought synergies around the school's wishes to offer traditional skills for regenerative learning—showcasing this knowledge as it already existed in their community—along with a demand from their students to learn these topics. This resonates with Horton's early community learning experiences in the mountains that likewise prompted him to search out the folk schooling model as inspiration (Horton & Jacobs, 2003; Preskill, 2021). The folk school model at NBCCD helped to differentiate the folk school's programming from the college's formal offerings in a way that expanded the scope and reach of the organization.

Anna noted in our interview that the folk school is bringing in people who have never taught before—offering their first opportunity to teach what they know—and that many of them continue teaching successfully at the folk school or find the ability to teach and share their skills independently going forward. Offering students the platform to teach and helping them to gain confidence in their ability to do so, builds capacity in the community which was an aim at both John C. Campbell and Highlander folk schools (Davis & Hughes, 2007; Fariello, 2007; Horton & Jacobs; 2003; Preskill, 2021; Whisnant, 1983). The folk school serves as a platform to support traditional skill-sharing and instructor development in ways that help to bolster their capacity to teach them.

Though it is challenging to quantify this impact, and Jennifer referred to this too as the difficulty of trying to measure “ripples in a pond,” there is little doubt that the folk schools are adding community capacity around traditional skills. Jennifer also looked to fill these voids in knowledge in organic ways. In the early days of Life.School.House, she would use whatever she was already doing such as fermenting and making sauerkraut for her family or doing carpentry work at their home, as a chance to offer this knowledge to their community members:

In 2018, I had some context for this idea of sharing skills (from involvement in Trade School International). I figured, what if we thought about this as a kind of a class environment as opposed to say hiring a carpenter because I need a carpenter? And I thought, let's call it a folk school. Folks coming together and teaching each other things sounds like a folk school to me.

Jennifer’s neighbours, like those in Ozone, TN (Preskill, 2021), were clear that there was already so much knowledge existing in their community, but they needed to find new ways to share it, and to share tools and support in order to reduce barriers to participation. The folk school was one way to do this.

They have offered hundreds—maybe even thousands—of classes within Nova Scotia and beyond through their small-scale chapters (of which there are currently five—all located in Nova Scotia) to teach whatever it is that people in a community want to learn and where there are community members able to share their gifts, knowledge, and experience. Like the early Danish folk schools that gave rise to an outpouring of democratic and co-operative participation (Begtrup et al.,

1929; Borish, 1991), it is difficult to track the implications of this knowledge across time and place. But very clearly, it is bolstering community capacity within the communities and regions where folk schools are thriving today.

Creating Affluence and Increasing Tourism

If we look to the early efforts of John C. Campbell Folk School to create affluence in rural North Carolina through agricultural education and through the monetization of the area's cultural assets such as woodcarving, we see a history of folk schooling as a means to increase the standard of living in primarily rural communities (Fariello, 2007; Whisnant, 1983). North American folk school leaders have, for over a century, looked around them and wondered how to improve circumstances for people in their places (Campbell, 1921/2004; Coe, 2000; Horton & Freire, 1990; Preskill, 2021; Shapiro, 1978).

Even the Danish folk schools of yore sought to do this by educating people in their place and teaching skills needed for empowerment. Notably, they did not seek to remove people from their communities to do this as universities often did, but instead to educate them wherever they found themselves (Borish, 1991). This resonates today with trends toward urbanization (Government of Canada, 2024) increasing greatly since then and exacerbating the need to support rural and traditional lifestyles in Canada. In the Canadian communities where folk schools exist today, education offered through the folk schools is one way of continuing to make rural living viable.

Today, both urban and rural communities see precarious employment increasing across many sectors (Salter et al., 2024), meaning that it is not just those in sectors who were traditionally underemployed or inconsistently employed that are affected. Contemporary Canadian folk schools are lean in their staffing but where they extend their ability to create employment and affluence in their community is in their engagement of instructors as external contractors. In most cases, the folk schools offer opportunity for employment that previously did not exist within their communities, or not at the scale available through the folk school. This was also characteristic of employment at John C. Campbell Folk School as Campbell sought to monetize Appalachian handicraft through reselling and direct instruction (Whisnant, 1983).

Both Anna and Murray, in their interviews, described the ability to create employment and the opportunity to bolster tourism to their community as motivating factors behind deciding on the folk school model as a good fit. They both indicated that they drew upon the American model put forward at North House Folk School to do so. Jennifer also addressed creating employment and increasing tourism as a key distinction between the model at Fireloch, which draws upon these aspects, versus the barter-based, low-barrier folk schooling model at Life.School.House.

Initially, Anna at Honeybee Folk School wanted to find ways to help the part-time faculty at the college round out their employment. This did, and still does happen, but the folk school also created extended employment opportunities for

community members, artisans, and even alumni who see the folk school as a valuable contributor to their financial security post-graduation:

It used to very much be the part-time instructors from the college [teaching at the folk school]. These days, there's much less of that. And so, it's often alumni, as well as artists in the community that are getting themselves established. We do an open application process and typically reach out to our regular instructors that teach with us cyclically to get in touch with them individually.

But then we always open it up as a call and review applications, and some folks get in and some folks don't, but we typically have about one-third of our instructors each season that are new instructors that haven't taught with us before. Most of them are coming from New Brunswick. We do in the summer sometimes have folks from Nova Scotia, typically Halifax....

We have also expanded to offer some courses like foraging courses or permaculture courses, and I think that one of the benefits of our folk school is that, although small, our size and reputation does give folks an opportunity to see those courses when they wouldn't normally.

In Murray's search to bring economic stability and opportunity to Peachland, he saw folk schooling as a way to create jobs in his community and support tourism on year-round basis, like at North House Folk School (2017) in Minnesota, while also forging ties between community members:

Doing crafts is certainly a good way for people to meet and form new relationships. And that was part of it too. It seemed like, well, maybe we can create some more affluence for the instructors. We can build community. We can have fun doing this.

Murray notes that while most instructors are from the immediate community, and certainly some of their students as well, the folk school extends their reach across the region enhancing tourism opportunities for the town. He indicates that students “are more from West Bank and Kelowna. It's like in Vancouver; people go to White Rock to have the seaside experience there. Here, people from Kelowna come to Peachland for the lakeside experience.”

At Life.School.House and Fireloch, Jennifer has a solid background of community work as a foundation to folk schooling, as was the case with adult education efforts during the Antigonish Movement (Coady, 1939; Parsey & Friesen, 1953). But as Fireloch evolves and expands, Jennifer is considering what the added employment can mean for their community members and how tourism can support both the folk school and the community:

It changes when people can identify that space as partially their own.

Facilitators, in particular, want to come back because teaching at Fireloch is something that they do on a semi-regular basis. They store some of their supplies here and when they come back, they know that it's going to be here....

We very much focused on community first and the nonprofit side of what we're doing. The folk school side of what we're doing, that has been foundational for us as we move into the future to think about things like alignment with tourism and building up cabins where we'll have more infrastructure that needs to be able to pay itself off. It is building on that super solid foundation of being a community-centered initiative....I'm really proud that that's the foundation that we built and that everything builds off of that.

I hope that what is clear through this research is that despite aims to support traditional skills, protect endangered knowledge, create affluence, and increase tourism in their communities, the folk schools in Canada today are about folks. They are fundamentally about people in their places and in my view, that is what all education ought to be about, no matter the form it takes.

Where today's folk schools are finding success, we can take inspiration and apply it via the folk school model and through other means of education and community engagement. These successes are linked to benefits of folk schools seen in Denmark and the United States as described in this section, but in these still early days of finding a footing for folk schools in Canada, many challenges remain. Some of these can be addressed by sharing the collective learning of these five folk schools through this research and collaborating with one another in the future to address these issues. Other challenges call for extended or structural supports. Thus, the remainder of this chapter will examine these two topics—

challenges faced and supports needed—in order to amplify the successes noted above.

Challenges and Required Supports

A number of shared challenges, and a corresponding need for supports, have come into focus through this study. Some of these are unique to Canada and the recent push of folk schooling efforts here, and others are characteristic of folk schools across North America today (Lee, 2017). Depending on their interpretation of the model, folk schools require varying levels of infrastructure, funding, and staffing. Generally speaking—in this study at least—the smaller the scale of the operation, the less supports are needed because the barriers are fewer.

Throughout the interviews, the leaders of Canadian folk schools share a collective sentiment that most things are going pretty well. They all seem optimistic about the future of their folk schools, while noting the challenges that exist, and offering guidance on the supports needed to enact their visions or to sustain their operations. Since this is in the early days of what may very well turn out to be a nascent folk school movement in Canada, insight into these difficulties and required supports can identify threats to the durability of folk schooling in Canada and work to mitigate them in the name of supporting this form of popular education in these, and more, communities across the country. Much can also be learned by drawing up the trajectory of folk schooling in the United States over the past century, but especially in the last several decades. Through our interviews, folk

school leaders express these challenges as: funding, staffing, navigating the unknown, a lack of awareness, and physical space considerations.

Funding

In Scandinavia, folk schools often enjoy government funding and a more centralized structure (The Association of Folk High Schools in Denmark, n.d.). In the early 1900's, American researcher Friend (1914) projected correctly—at least so far—that folk schools in North America were unlikely to be supported on such a central basis and instead would need to procure funding on a local, or ad hoc, basis. Maureen notes this when she says, “It would be lovely to replicate the model from Denmark, but I can’t imagine that ever happening.” This also turned out to be true in the United States (Coe, 2000; Friend, 1914), but the successful operation of folk schools there for around a century provides guidance for new entrants in America as to what organizations, sectors, and funding programs might apply to their work (Jackman Murphy, 2018).

In Canada, we have no such longstanding folk schools to look to for guidance and therefore must look beyond folk schooling to make some informed guesses about this—or try to gather and share information amongst ourselves about what is working so far in today’s Canadian folk schools. A detailed analysis of funding mechanisms was not the focus of this research but would be a worthwhile next step as part of a collaborative effort or future research into folk schooling in Canada.

The need for funding really depends on the structure of the folk school itself. This is also true in the United States where some folk schools boast extensive campuses at a significant cost, while others operate in donated buildings, park land, or public spaces at little to no cost (Lee, 2017). Annapolis Valley Folk School and the individual chapters of Life.School.House require little capital and thus, funding is less of an obstacle to their work. At the same time, Jennifer indicates that administrative oversight and support is needed for the overarching organization at Life.School.House in order to liaise with the individual chapters and steer the organization. To this point, the funding for this required staffing has been mostly come through private philanthropy, but Jennifer suggests that the ability to partner with or be housed under an existing organization or foundation could move the organization forward in a more sustainable manner.

Murray also shares that funding Okanagan Valley Folk School has come at personal cost to him, with an investment of his time and money to get it going in the first place and then to operate and sustain it. Anna discusses how Honeybee Folk School's status as part of a postsecondary institution rather than a nonprofit corporation provides both sustainability and opportunity to the folk school but also challenges the kinds of external funding and supports they can receive for their programming. These sorts of specific funding challenges exist in American folk schools as well (Lee, 2017), however there is more precedent to draw upon there and very little of it is transferable to Canada given our distinct funding agencies. Many other challenges stem from a lack of solid funding mechanisms for Canadian

folk schools and each of these circumstances will be discussed further in this chapter as they apply more specifically to the needs for staffing, physical infrastructure, and navigating the unknown.

Staffing

My prior research on folk schooling found that folk schools often have a common thread of a very committed founder (Lee, 2021). The centrality of a charismatic leader in many folk schools can also lead to founder's syndrome without proper planning and outreach (Lee, 2021; Preskill, 2021). Because folk schooling anywhere in North America is not supported centrally as it is in Scandinavia (Foght, 1914; The Association of Folk High Schools in Denmark, n.d.), it almost always takes someone with the dream and a vision to bring a folk school to life here. Without these leaders, we would not have folk schooling on this continent, and they are vital to its continued success (Lee 2017, 2021). However, organizations that require the dedication of one person over a long period of time can be unsustainable if succession planning and organizational capacity are not accounted for. My reflective journals corroborate the difficult task of creating sustainable systems of support in terms of involved individuals and notes barriers to ensuring that staff and volunteers have a sound pedagogical basis built upon the aims and tenets of folk education. As I note in my journal, “we have a praxis, but it (often) isn't rooted in a foundation of folk education.”

All four founders noted their passion for creating and sustaining their folk schools, but also the real commitment—and often sacrifices—involved in running a

folk school. This resonates with the early days of Highlander Folk School where the Hortons lived in challenging conditions for several years in order to get the school up and running (Preskill, 2021). Maureen notes that it is her family—just her and her husband—that are behind their significant number of folk schooling and community programs. They offer their home to host classes and their time, on a volunteer-basis, to plan and run the folk school. They often supply materials, food, and whatever is needed to support programming. Jennifer and her family also experienced this in her early and continued involvement in Life.School.House. Fireloch came about as a way to create some boundaries in their personal life while also still utilizing their home space for the good of the community. Today, Fireloch also offers programs that care for caretakers—acknowledging the burnout that many experience in their efforts to do necessary and impactful community work.

Anna likewise notes challenges to sustained staffing and staff capacity as barriers to growth at Honeybee Folk School as she moves into her new role:

Previously, I was the Manager of Innovation and Learning Design and the folk school was a big part of my portfolio. We've now established a position for a coordinator, so somebody who's running the day-to-day. Her role is part folk school and part managing the college gallery...which has been a great fit. I am now Dean of the college so although I oversee the coordinator, the growth of the folk school has not really been prioritized and

has moved into a maintenance mode while I get acquainted with the rest of my role.

I can relate to this as my own academic research on folk schooling has required a dedication of time that impedes my capacity to offer folk schooling in my community at this moment. Jennifer also sought to meet this challenge of staffing and capacity head-on through Life.School.House. Hiring a part-time Executive Director who can support the five volunteer-led Life.School.House chapters has helped to provide some sustainability to the organization from a staffing standpoint, but fiscal challenges may remain in the long-term since the model is not monetized and relies on philanthropy and grant funding for support. While a lack of centralized funding for folk schools in North America (Foght, 1914) is a consistent barrier to all of folk schooling here, Life.School.House faces unique challenges to staffing and organizational supports given the absence of user fees to account for any of these costs.

Murray also described the joys and successes he has experienced with Okanagan Folk School, along with the personal sacrifices and toll of starting an organization from scratch. Since embarking on his folk school journey, Murray has invested a great deal of time and money into the folk school all in pursuit of his belief in the model and its benefits to Peachland. Today, he is transitioning into a more supportive, background role at the organization:

It was a shock to the Board when I announced four months ago that I'd be stepping down at the end of December. It was like, "Oh, we're done! It's

over.” I didn't buy that because I know that things evolve from quarters that you never expect. Most things in life show up that you don't expect. I have no idea how it's going to work out, but generally speaking, cool stuff happens. And I think it'll be the same way with the folk school. I've been really proud of how the directors have taken on the different roles that I was always doing, and that was partly my own fault. I held on to it, you know....

It was unsustainable. So that's why I'm stepping down. I just don't feel I have the creativity or the vision anymore....And that's kind of how I felt is I need to get out of the way now. But to finish answering your question. No, it's still all the directors that are running the folk school as well as the gift shop. We have a board meeting tomorrow, and three people have asked if they can come and sit in because they're interested in school, and they're just like what you said. They're all excited, “This is the most wonderful thing”, and we're all going, “It's so nice to hear that again.” It's something we used to think, you know.

As Anna and Murray take a step back from the daily operations at their folk schools, and as Jennifer has done so in part at Life.School.House in order to support the staffing needs at Fireloch, it remains to be seen whether the folk schools can sustain themselves beyond their founder (Lee, 2021) despite their continued guidance and support. I do not think we will know that just yet, and the history of folk schooling in Canada does not provide much cause for optimism (Kulich, 1988; Parsey & Friesen, 1953). However, the American folk schools

provide many examples—both old and new—of folk schools that continue to exist well after their dedicated founders pass on the reigns (Lee, 2021; Whisnant, 1983). Creating additional leadership capacity at the schools in order to move beyond a model built solely around the charismatic leader, whether through staff, volunteers, or directors, or even mentorship programs, is critical to supporting the people who have started these schools to sustain the schools in the long-term.

Navigating the Unknown

It is no surprise to me that two of the four interviewees mention North House Folk School in Minnesota as a source of inspiration. Through my involvement in North American folk school research and practice, I see there is a groundswell of folk schooling in Minnesota, and the Midwest region generally, that appears to stem from North House's evolution of the North American folk school model. These alterations allow for the residential component of folk schooling to be picked up elsewhere in the community, while remaining focused on delivering folk education at the folk school (Lee, 2017). This has reduced the barriers to starting a folk school, and the shorter format courses also reduce some barriers to participation for students when compared to longer and more expensive programs.

Still, taking a model from Denmark and employing some of the adaptations from the United States, the process of transplanting folk schools into Canada is not a simple act of copy-paste. In Canada, as I noted previously, folk schools have mostly sprung up independently and we have had little opportunity to learn directly from one another to share our collective learnings. As the number of folk schools

here grows, Canadian folk schoolers have begun to talk to one another and see what is going well and what is not, but this study represents a large step forward in this effort. As Myles Horton and Paolo Freire (1990) suggested in their book of the same title, “we make the road by walking,” and today’s folk schools in Canada are forging that path—learning as they go what will work in their own contexts.

From my roles in folk schooling organizations, I know firsthand the challenges of navigating the unknown in an education sector that is not really built to support decentralized and grassroots forms of education. This is corroborated in my reflective journals where I detail my interpretations of ongoing issues of concern within the folk schooling community around digital platforms. As noted in both my journals and in the interviews conducted for this study, the software and enrollment systems used in higher education are often far too comprehensive and cost-prohibitive for the needs of folk schools; meanwhile, events and hospitality-sector platforms often do not account for extended coursework, supply costs, and more. Insurance companies in Canada have not heard of folk schools and do not know where they fit, which can make acquiring board, liability, and event insurance time-consuming and expensive. And funders from community development to the arts to rural economic development to tourism, do not quite know where to place folk schools either.

Collectively, we have not yet found out where folk schools in Canada fit in and although this research provides some insights in this chapter and the next, there is still no consensus on how folk schooling might be sustained economically

over the long-term in this country. Our American counterparts at least have some examples to look to such as John C. Campbell Folk School, Highlander Folk School, The Clearing Folk School, North House Folk School, and more. Several of the founders in this case study expressed challenges around forging this new path in Canada through folk schooling. Once Murray had decided on the folk school as a fitting model for his community's needs, that one answer prompted many more questions and a foray into the unknown:

In in the beginning stages of our folk school, the things we originally talked about were like: "I don't know how to do this. I just like the idea." So, all of the steps that are needed, and some of them you don't even know that you need. And how much to charge, and how to cover overhead, etc....

And then we started to go, "what do we do?" So, we started putting together a website. And that went through four iterations. And you know, all of the hassles getting a Stripe account set up and trying to figure out how we were going to get contracts figured out. A lot of it I just found online or from the other folk schools and modified it to our jurisdiction and objectives. And then also: "How do we charge for this? Is it the same bank accounts?" We had to become a corporate society to be a nonprofit. And you know, all of that kind of stuff was very time consuming.

Murray suggests in his interview that a guide or checklist might make the things that folk schoolers in Canada have learned the hard way—or the long way—easier for those to follow, or even for the existing Canadian folk schooling

community as they navigate their individual challenges. Having this sort of information available could even make the difference between whether folk schooling in Canada goes forward or not. As such, it should likely be picked up in future research or collaborations around Canadian folk schooling.

Jennifer also discusses how Life.School.House and Fireloch have been experimenting with the folk school model and seeking to provide stability to both organizations in the long-term. For Life.School.House, this likely looks like bolstering organizational capacity through partnerships:

Now, I mentioned briefly, but the sustainability piece is the kicker there. It is very much based on the enthusiasm of volunteers to continue to run these types of programs. And we've experimented with lots of different funding options. It is challenged by money because money messes up the system a little bit. Even if we were to receive a large grant, and we could pay Life.School.House coordinators for their efforts, it doesn't have the same kind of invitation.

Life.School.House thrives on engaged volunteers and community members, but as an organization, some administrative and executive support are still required to build and deploy the systems that allow community members to plug into the work of the folk school. Currently, Jennifer, and the board and staff at Life.School.House are still wading through how to make this possible in Canada.

Similarly, at Fireloch, Jennifer is feeling solid in their community work but really beginning to dive into the field of tourism and what role that could play in

supporting the folk school much as it does at John C. Campbell (Whisnant, 1983) and North House folk schools in the United States, or the overall social enterprise that hosts the folk school as with Okanagan Folk School in British Columbia. Canada's folk schools are still in their infancy and challenges abound in terms of what is not yet known and what questions remain unanswered about the path forward.

Awareness

I frequently find myself in educational and professional spaces with people who have no knowledge of folk schools. Jennifer may have started one accidentally and Maureen happened upon it through her. Murray and Anna were so intrigued upon first learning about folk schooling that they immediately set plans in motion to start one. Mirroring the intrigue of the Campbells and Horton upon introduction to the folk school model (Fariello, 2007; Horton & Jacobs, 2003; Preskill, 2021; Whisnant, 1983), Murray shares: "I had never heard of that kind of concept. It never crossed my desk. I just had never heard of anything like that."

All have expressed that they did not previously know about the model, and my experience in education circles seems to back that up. In fact, it is very common when I present scholarly work on folk schooling that people are very enthusiastic about the type of education that folk schools offer or, alternatively, have experience in other forms of community-based education or arts-based education that they feel aligns with the model. Generally speaking, it gets a warm

reception and people seem to resonate with the idea whether they work in education, tourism, community work, or the arts.

A major limitation to a successful folk schooling movement in Canada appears to be even a basic awareness of it as a model for adult or community education, despite scholarly efforts by Parsey & Friesen (1953), Kulich (1988), and Spicer et al. (2009) to communicate possibilities and past efforts toward folk schooling here. Our North American folk schooling community is once again growing, and I would like to think that these efforts are magnifying our impact and helping to get the word out, but distinct challenges to doing so remain. Some of the aspects of folk schooling that make it so effective at place-based, grassroots education—that the form is not restrictive and is shaped differently by different people in different places, that folk schools are decentralized and pop up on an ad hoc or individual basis (Coe, 2000; Kulich, 1964; Lee; 2017)—are also barriers to sustaining a larger movement.

If community leaders and educators are not aware of folk schools, how can they start them? If students have never heard of them, how can they come and learn together? At Fireloch, Jennifer has laid the foundation for the community work and buy-in from their local community, but they are still considering how they might reach students through their foray into tourism at the social enterprise. She says, “We've also just employed a new communications person. She's really only with us for three months. It was more to learn about getting the message out into the world from a sustainability perspective as well.” Broad societal awareness, or

rather the lack of, is a primary obstacle for existing folk schools in Canada as well as future efforts here.

Space Considerations

Of the five folk schools in this case study, none currently offer lodging—a mainstay of Scandinavian folk schooling (Horton & Jacobs, 2003; Kulich, 1964) and a cornerstone in America’s longstanding folk schools such as John C. Campbell and Highlander folk schools (Horton & Jacobs, 2003; Preskill, 2021; Whisnant, 1983). Anna alludes to this challenge in her interview:

The other thing that I see as something that we don't have, that I see a lot in some of the folk schools in the United States, is housing. So that full package experience that you're not just coming to take a course, but you have a mess hall and a dorm room so you don't have to worry about....how you're assembling this trip.

I asked Anna why she thought that was: Was it the cost of real estate in Canada or was it something else? To that, she replied, “Maybe, but also John C. Campbell, and Penland [School of Craft] as well, they were both established so long ago.”

I indicated earlier that North House Folk School has provided a blueprint of sorts for the modern North American folk school movement in that the courses are shorter, and lodging takes place through the accommodations sector in their community. This has increased entry into the folk school space in ways that are largely positive, but one also needs to consider what might be lost in the process

when communal living no longer accompanies cooperative learning in many of today's folk schools. In fact, I first became acquainted with Anna several years ago when I was running Antiquary Folk School. She had emailed me after seeing our name in a Community of Practice meeting and finding out that we had lodging on site at our folk school. Since it is not actively delivering folk school programming today and therefore does not meet the inclusion criteria for this study, I do not want to belabour discussion about Antiquary here, but in our experience, housing seemed to be both an asset and a liability to the organization. Jennifer alluded to this as she works to expand Fireloch: sprawling folk school campuses with housing offer the possibility for longer form classes—for students to live and learn together over an extended period—but they can also come at a greater financial cost to both the organization and to students.

Lodging is but one challenge regarding physical space faced by Canadian folk schools today. Annapolis Valley Folk School and Life.School.House are primarily sharing space in organizers' homes, though other times community spaces or outdoor spaces are utilized. There is little overhead to space usage in this capacity, but it often requires familial support and can take a toll if boundaries are not established and respected. Similarly, Honeybee and Okanagan folk schools share space with their parent organizations. Whether through the donation of space or the sharing of space, this helps to keep costs down for the folk school and for the students who attend (Lee, 2017). Finding a suitable, and affordable space, and often willing partners, can make or break a folk school. Of Okanagan

Folk School's transition from the Chamber of Commerce boardroom to the shared, historic schoolhouse, Murray notes:

When we started in the spring of 2021, we were offering classes in various places but mainly in the Chamber of Commerce Office, in their boardroom. And that was free for a while and then they started charging us an hourly rate, which really started to cripple us in terms of cash flow. So that was that was a real crossroads. Do we just keep going, or do we shut down because this isn't working? And to solve that problem, we actually started canvassing the neighborhood to see if we could use somebody's barn, or, you know, some kind of donation of space, and that sort of started to happen, but none of them were really suitable. And then starting to think about raising millions of dollars to buy a place....

There's a historic schoolhouse here down on the waterfront. Beautiful—a big building and high ceilings. Great, you know, right across the road from the lake. And it was built in 1908 and renovated....It was half empty. Patrick [the mayor] went: "Well, you know what we should do? We should form a new society that manages the building and represents these three groups—the folk school being one of them."

In this case, the move to the new space bought the folk school some time. The gift shop in the schoolhouse provided a stream of revenue to the folk school, increasing the likelihood of their longevity in the space. And funding from the district helped to support the overhead in the building during the transition.

Each of the challenges faced by today's folk schools calls for associated supports to help the folk schools move forward and to, hopefully, create and sustain a movement toward folk schooling here that can help to address some of contemporary society's deficiencies. The issues faced by Canada's folk schools—described as funding, staffing, navigating the unknown, a lack of awareness, and physical space considerations—have been discussed in this chapter, along with the successes of today's folk schools in Canada. These have been characterized as reviving traditional skills and endangered knowledge, creating affluence and increasing tourism, and community-building.

Recommendations for Future Research

This case study research provides an opening foray into understanding the state of folk schooling in Canada today and assessing its implications, strengths, challenges, needs, and possibilities for democratic, adult education. A number of recommendations for future research arise out of this study and others were not able to be taken up in this research but would be worth examining further. In dealing most directly with the subject at hand and the limitations in scope of this research, it would be prudent to expand the case study research to include field visits at each folk school, interviews with other involved parties including folk school staff, volunteers, teachers, students, and community members, as well as to host some focus groups or virtual meet-ups to increase interaction between the schools.

In order to benefit from the collective learnings from this research and to identify others, some centralization of leadership in this grassroots movement would be prudent. Murray suggested this in the form of a checklist or startup guide for those in the early stages of starting or running a folk school in Canada. This might deal with items such as incorporating and running a nonprofit, suggesting possible structures for Canadian folk schooling, finding suitable insurance coverage, leveraging existing software and web platforms, providing sample contracts, and information on possible avenues for funding. I could also envision this support coming in the form of a nonprofit organization or research centre tailored to supporting folk schooling in Canada—or perhaps as an arm of an existing organization such as the FEAA or as a Community of Practice that is Canadian-specific.

Professional development and research initiatives could also explore the role of collective action in folk education such as is offered by Highlander (Horton & Jacobs, 2003; Preskill, 2021), and how that might deepen the impact of Canadian folk schools in their pursuit of community wellbeing.

Within Canada, further research may examine how folk schooling, or folk school pedagogies, could be taken up beneficially within formal education spaces. As Hall (2006) notes, social movements educate not only those directly involved in them, but those who encounter them in other ways. Although folk schools are primarily about building community—an aim not always central to formal education programs—folk schools do share many values of postsecondary education in

terms of their duty to communities, their stated aims of improving student wellbeing, and their desire for relevant and responsive (and culturally responsive) education. Honeybee might be assessed further for its potential as a model for continuing education programs in colleges and universities (and possibly communities), and the non-competitive and non-vocational aspects of folk schooling may hold promise for improving educational and holistic outcomes in postsecondary education. Likewise, public schooling as well may benefit from some of the ideologies behind folk schooling as is seen to more degree in kindergarten and younger grades through activity-based learning with potential for expansion through continued research and implementation.

Further research into the demographics of folk schooling in Canada would paint a fuller picture of who is currently being reached by folk schools here and if or how that reach can be extended in the name of Grundtvig's *folkelighed*—or inclusive community life (Manniche, 1971). Understanding the current leadership, instructor, and student makeup in terms of demographics such as age, race, religious affiliation, socio-economic status, gender, profession, urban-rural, etc., would be an important starting point to considering next steps. This may also benefit an exploration of folk schooling in Canada through a feminist lens as interviews and document analysis seem to point to strong leadership and uptake of folk schooling in Canada by women. Similarly, research into specific community impacts would be salient. Making tangible the effects of folk schooling on community wellbeing, prosperity, resilience, and tourism may help folk schools to

make the case for their utility going forward. In addition, a better understanding of the associated benefits may provide a stronger case for funding avenues—which comes forward in this research as a primary limiting factor to a sustained folk school movement here. So too could such research help to identify potential partnerships that may provide stability in these early days.

And lastly, efforts to undertake scholarly outreach and research to folk school adjacent organizations may broaden the offering of folk education in this country without duplicating efforts that are already benefitting communities. So too could this provide an umbrella for organizations enacting folk education to receive collective support and information by way of naming the educational tradition that they may unknowingly be part of. This outreach should include craft schools, some arts organizations, community education programs and initiatives, retreats, camps, leisure programs, and possibly continuing education or extension services.

As the first organized study into Canadian folk schooling in many decades, this research gives a picture of folk schooling as it exists here today while offering numerous avenues for future exploration.

Chapter 6: Related Thoughts and Conclusion

In Chapters 4 and 5 of this dissertation, I shared insights about the overall research question by way of the six research sub-questions, through the voices of today's folk school founders, along with my own insights and experiences. In this concluding chapter, I want to revisit the overarching research question—In these still early days, what is the state of folk schooling in Canada?—and take a moment to consider what both the past and present of folk schooling might offer on our collective journey.

In terms of the state of folk schooling in Canada today, this study bears out the view from folk school leaders that it is positively impacting communities across the country where the folk schools are located. Folk schools are helping to recapture the spirit of cooperation, collaboration, and community and are re-equipping folks with the tools and skills of yesterday, as they might apply to today and tomorrow. They are reducing barriers to participation in adult education in many cases and are often creating affluence for their people and places. Drawing from the theoretical framework of critical theory (Darder et al., 2017; Stirk, 2000), folk schools in Canada are creating new ways of bringing folks together, giving them agency in deciding what they need to learn in order to live a good life in their places, and strengthening community bonds that help to create cooperative communities that are able to resist oppression. Echoing Hart's (1926, as cited in Westerman, 2005) analysis of the Danish folk schools nearly a century ago, "They

do not tie old forms of culture to those minds in order to make sure that they will be cultured later on. They provide the proper soils for growth” (p. 544).

Although I believe it is too early to say with certainty what a specific Canadian folk school identity would be—and I also think it is critical to leave space for multiple interpretations—the case study participants make clear that community and community-building are at the heart of Canadian folk schooling. I would argue that Canada’s folk schools today leverage the craft pedagogies and cultural education put forward by John C. Campbell Folk School (Whisnant, 1983) and picked up by most of the American folk schools (Lee, 2017), but more room exists to incorporate the sort of collective, activist learning and programming implemented by Highlander Folk School (Horton & Jacobs, 2003; Preskill, 2021). The community learning that happens in Canadian folk schools today appears to be more implicit—from the tone set by the organization and by instructors, to community norms and relationship building. Further explicit training on how to be an active community member and how to advocate for collective needs—in the spirit of Highlander Folk School (Horton & Jacobs, 2003)—would increase students’ learning and folk schools’ societal impact by creating communities ready to withstand current and future challenges. Horton (1990, as cited in Westerman, 2005) once framed this at the pursuit of getting “love and social justice together” (p. 544). This is where education meets the student’s life as it is, exposes them to social processes in action, and provides a view of society and praxis as it “ought” to be (Klein, 2018; Westerman, 2005).

In addition, an examination of the makeup of those involved in folk schooling could help to understand if these spaces are, or could be made, more inclusive in the spirit of *folkelighed* (Manniche, 1971). Interviews seem to indicate middle-aged and senior women as the main participants in most of today's folk schools and document analysis, superficially at least through photographs and social media, seems to indicate that these women are predominantly white.

Canada's folk schools are challenged by the unknown as they chart a new path for folk schooling in this country and their existence remains precarious as they face issues with spreading the word, employing staff and engaging volunteers, finding suitable funding and partnerships, and identifying appropriate spaces for folk education, as identified in this case study research. It also remains to be seen whether folk schools can reach the scale needed to increase their overall impact in the diverse cultural and educational spaces in Canada. While this study demonstrates that folk schools have localized impacts—noting the strong uptake and visibility of the programs within their communities mentioned by all of the study's participants—the fact is that there are still very few folk schools operating in this country that has such a vast geographical expanse. Many Canadians simply do not live in close proximity to a folk school, limiting access even further. However, the literature provides some hope in this regard. Firstly, Horton (1947, as cited in Westerman, 2005) noted that while it is impossible to bring together more than a small fraction of people, this is enough given the aims of empowerment and leadership development wherein folk school students could in turn make societal

change in their own communities, as Rosa Parks' Montgomery Bus Boycott did subsequent to her attendance at Highlander (Preskill, 2021). Folk school pedagogies, when accompanied by leadership training or community capacity-building initiatives, can increase the folk schools' impact in the life of the community broadly as noted by Hall (2006) through those directly involved in the movement, and also those more indirectly involved or impacted. Examples from this case study research include community pantry and food programs at Life.School.House and Fireloch as noted by Jennifer and at Annapolis Valley as described by Maureen and discussed earlier in this paper. At Okanagan and Honeybee, the physical presence of the folk school within the community and the additional partnerships both have formed with other organizations such as the college, municipality, tourism boards, and other non-profit organizations extend the reach of the folk school movement. Future research might also seek to understand how other cultural, community, and education spaces are picking up this sort of education and where folk schools might create, support, or extend educational opportunities in regions and communities noting their—at present—relatively small footprint.

I am in no way certain yet that we are forging a path into the future for a durable and sustainable folk schooling movement in Canada which has long been a challenge here, but I am likewise not at all disheartened from the state of things in terms of the findings of this research. What remains, I think, is a sense of hope—that the work of implementing grassroots, nonformal adult education is incredibly

important, and that folk schoolers can work together to build on what has been learned and tackle new issues as they arise—all while leveraging the ability of folk schools to harness this moment of peril toward progressive ends, much as Denmark did in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Borish, 1991).

An experimental and fluid approach to community development and adult education is what folk schools have always done best (Horton & Jacobs, 2003). Folk school leaders look around them and then figure it out as they go—employing resources and making connections in order to solve the problems faced in their communities. I think this is true of any good teacher, but folk schools seem to provide the structural room needed to actually make these pivots to ensure authentic, timely, impactful education which is evidenced by the many early changes and challenges identified by the folk school leaders in this study, from physical space constraints, funding and staffing limitations, to impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic which made gathering together in our usual ways increasingly challenging and required significant pivots to program delivery based on health and safety considerations. I am reminded of the upcoming 2025 Folk Education Convening that my colleagues and I at the FEAA are planning for summer 2025—the first of its kind in North America since 2018. Our theme is, “stick your finger in the soil.” It draws upon Schroder’s sentiments from 1872 (in Eiben, 2015):

Stick your finger down into the ground and smell where you are! This is where the needs of the people are found, which can be different in different

times and places. Where this meets the abilities of the teacher, there lies the folk school's calling. (para. 9)

Because they stem from the needs of the people in a place at a particular time, matched with community skills and knowledge and organizational support and guidance, folk schools respond to needs with an agility that more formalized and structure-bound institutions simply cannot (Horton & Jacobs, 2003; Klein, 2018). This is reflective of the wide variance in folk school structures here today as documented in this case study. Although I have long considered flexibility a distinct benefit of the folk school model, it seems more pertinent than ever today as the world around us changes rapidly and people in their places identify new needs that are not well addressed in existing educational institutions.

Folk schools, historically, have shined in moments of transition and upheaval and struggle (Borish, 1991). Times like these clarify a shared sense of purpose—which Horton (Horton & Jacobs, 2003) notes that folk schools are especially effective at harnessing—and warrant an action-orientation to our education and to our lives as community members. And importantly, because they empower people and strengthen their impact through cooperation, folk schools have demonstrated a capacity to channel this collective action toward positive ends. Klein (2018), in his consideration of the possible role of folk schooling in democratic peacebuilding, offers that folk schools can aid in the task of cultural peacebuilding wherein we reject the polarization of “authoritarian populism and atavistic nationalism” and accept “the more stable yet still contested democratic

ground of difference” (p. 71). If we look at the case of Denmark over the hundred or so years from the folk schools’ inception in the 1830’s and 1840’s we see their resistance to German territorial, linguistic, and cultural incursions in the southern part of their country, and their path toward progress charted much differently than their southern neighbour. Like in much of Europe, adaptations in Germany drawing from the Danish folk schools existed, but they were picked up later and less broadly there in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and were more industrial and urban in nature (Punke, 1931). Manniche (1971)—an educator and researcher of the Danish folk schools—indicates that the Danish considered the teacher to be the first among equals whereas Germans were more embracing of a leader toward which they could devote themselves. Their education was part of what distinguished the two nations (Manniche, 1971).

So well known is the history of Germany in the twentieth century that I need not repeat it here. However, the past may help to inform our present circumstances and map out possibilities, to the best of our abilities, when facing the unknown. And so, I will draw upon the nonviolent path to cultural renewal that Denmark took (Borish, 1991) as evidenced in the literature review to consider what role the folk schools could similarly play in a Canada facing many of the same challenges nearly two centuries later.

We see a remarkable parallel in Canada today to Denmark and its early folk school movement—one that challenges the future of Canada as a nation in many ways. Firstly, from within this country, anyone who has been paying attention

surely ought to be aware of the dialogue around Truth and Reconciliation (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015)—around Land Back, Indigenous Sovereignty, and meaningful involvement over matters concerning Indigenous Lands and Peoples. These are not trivial. They represent a real need for transference of power and Land—much as the Danish ceded territorial control of Sweden and Norway—and a consideration of what is to be a Canadian. The Danish sense of *folkelighed* (Manniche, 1971; Smith, 2011) fostered in their folk schools as a national identity, and folk schools’ ability to help people and communities determine what they are for and what they are against (Horton & Jacobs, 2003), could prove useful to our collective examination of what being Canadian means and what the future will look like. Folk schools—if paired with training for collective action like at Highlander Folk School (Horton & Jacobs, 2003; Preskill, 2021)—could lay the groundwork for the sort of cultural reckoning that is needed. Denmark’s plight was referred to as “outward loss, inward gain,” (Borish, 1991; Kavalier, 1962) and Canada is facing a similar crossroads today. Klein (2018) notes that “democracy, then, is living together without violence in the midst of our differences while reconciling the injustices of the past” (pp. 72-73) while noting the role that folk schools could play in cultural peacebuilding—one that is highly relevant to the process of reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples in Canada today.

Land is increasingly—though not enough and not fast enough—being restored to Indigenous stewardship whether this leadership is environmental,

institutional, or governmental in nature (Monroe-Kane & King, 2023; Yellowhead Institute, 2022). Modern treaties have—with arguable degrees of success (Monroe-Kane & King, 2023)—helped move toward Indigenous self-governance or nation-to-nation relationships with the settler state, and many more cases regarding Land claims and Indigenous self-governance are working their way through the judicial system, while there is a collective discussion about the future of Crown Land in Canada. Resource extraction in a climate secure future and the correspondent consultation with Indigenous communities are ongoing concerns of national, and international, interest and proper protections could be at risk as various levels of Canadian government seek to expedite infrastructure and extraction projects in the face of American economic and territorial threats (Callan & D'Mello, 2025). Land must be meaningfully returned to Indigenous Peoples and a national dialogue around the future of this country must be embarked upon. Meanwhile, external threats abound in the rapidly changing Arctic North and the present American administration threatens Canadian sovereignty and territory from the south (Zurcher, 2025).

I capture this sentiment in my reflective journals where I grapple with how the state of things today—particularly the American governmental attacks on diversity and equity principles, programs, and research—impacts our role as educators and folk educators and I ponder what it means for folk schooling:

We have less to lose at the moment and will not go one inch further than legally required (and even then, who knows). If we go ahead and do their

work for them, and pre-emptively abandon our core values, then why are we even doing this work? I recall Rebecca Solnit's work that suggests that (when our values are under attack, as they are right now) we will not be able to save everything, but everything we can save is worth saving.

It feels like the times when Highlander was being forced into submission by the Tennessee government and then when they were supporting the citizenship (literacy) schools, roguely. I wonder what people will say about these times, or about us in 25 years? I hope that we will have remained steadfast in our mission and undeterred by the hysteria and upheaval that are prevalent today. I also wonder if this moment might be what sets Canada on a divergent path from the US. Have we seen the dirty underbelly of that side of populism and reject it? Do we grow strong and resilient from within and connected with others across the world who share our values? Or are we next?

From the present American government, we see not a path toward reconciliation or decolonization, but a doubling down of its colonial and expansionist aims and military aggression. We are all aware of the dangerous nationalist turn that gripped Germany in the early-to-mid twentieth century and the world would do well to avoid another repeat of a similar regime. Canada must choose another path—if history tells us anything. The case of Denmark, molded around a different type of education through nonformal, community-based adult

education like that of the folk schools, offers one such pathway for exploration and Canada's current folk schools could provide a starting point

The reach of folk schools in Canada today is not yet broad enough to effect a change in Canada's direction at a national level, as one could argue was supported by folk schooling in the United States' Labour and Civil Rights Movements by Highlander (Horton & Jacobs, 2003; Preskill, 2021). And yet, as people in Canada seem to be choosing, in real time, a future that diverges from that of our southern neighbours, folk schools have much to offer. As folks in Canada look around their communities and contemplate how to increase their cooperation and share their culture and skills to create social cohesion (Borish, 1991; Horton & Jacobs, 2003; Preskill, 2021; Whisnant, 1983), folk schools may be one of many answers to those needs. There also remains potential for folk schooling—as an educational tradition—to work alongside Indigenous Peoples and organizations on the path to reconciliation and sustainability given some of their shared practices and aims.

Given the early days of a potential movement for folk schooling in Canada, and the as yet small number of organizations currently operating, I think it is too early to classify folk schools here by their structure or pedagogies, as I did in my analysis of primarily American folk schools in my master's thesis (Lee, 2017). Instead, I think it would be important to offer resonances and relationalities as they might apply to more established institutions. The diverse structures of Canadian folk schools today mean there are many such ways to plug into this peoples'

education: Postsecondary education and community adult education programs may look to the NBCCD's Honeybee Folk School as a model for continuing education, community education, and nonformal education. Tourism towns might see themselves in the work of Okanagan Valley Folk School in a way that supports the community economically and adds community capacity while increasing cooperation. Retreat and hospitality spaces might consider the addition of a "social" side to their enterprise like Fireloch, in ways that leverage their existing infrastructure to align with community aims and improve mental health, wellness, community bonds, and economic circumstances in their area. And lastly, any single human in this country might look to Life.School.House or Annapolis Valley Folk School and see in them a way to convene community with little needed but their own willpower and a bit of time and space. Where there is a space—any sort of space—where they can welcome others, people who want to learn something, along with people willing to share what they know, this community and barter-based model can meet those needs.

This case study, small in scope but I hope mighty in its implications, provides cross-sectoral and interdisciplinary inroads into popular, adult education through folk schooling in Canada today. The methodology of this study aims to emulate the sort of learning environment that happens in folk schools through conversation and story, and through embodied practice. It may serve as a model for others interested in folk education research and for research into other forms of popular or nonformal education. The avenues of entry are very different depending

on one's position—and the needs and existing assets in their communities—but the potential is vast. As we navigate challenging issues of national significance—both internal and external—folk schools can amplify our capacity live better, together.

References

- Auther, E. (2010). *String. Felt. Thread*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Bateman, S. (2023). (rep.). (D. Lee, Ed.) *Folk School Knowledge Exchange Research Report*.
- Begtrup, H., Lund, H., & Manniche, P. (1929). *The folk high schools of Denmark and the development of a farming community: With an introduction by Michael Sadler*. Oxford University Press Humphrey Milford.
- Bledsoe, T. (1969). *Or we'll all hang separately*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Borish, S. M. (1991). *The land of the living: The Danish folk high schools and Denmark's non-violent path to modernization*. Blue Dolphin Publishing.
- Bowers, C. A. (1997). *The culture of denial: Why the environmental movement needs a strategy for reforming universities and Public Schools*. State University of New York Press.
- Bruce County Museum and Cultural Centre. (n.d.). *Bruce County Folk Schools*. Bruce Museum CA. <https://www.brucemuseum.ca/collection/bruce-county-folk-schools/>
- Callan, I., & D'Mello, C. (2025). *Ontario MPP ejected from debate for claiming Ford is telling "untruths" about bill 5*. Global News. <https://globalnews.ca/news/11208455/ontario-bill-5-legislature-protests/>
- Campbell, J. C. (1921/2004). *The southern Highlander and his homeland*. University Press of Kentucky.
- Canfield, A. (1965). Folk high schools in Denmark and Sweden: A comparative analysis. *Comparative Education Review*, 9(1), 18-24.

- Coady, M. M. (1939). *Masters of their own destiny: The story of The Antigonish Movement of Adult Education Through Economic Cooperation*. Publisher?
- Coe, C. (2000). The education of the folk: Peasant schools and folklore scholarship. *The Journal of American Folklore*, 113(447), 20-43.
- Darder, A., Hernandez, K., Lam, K. D., & Baltodano, M. (Eds.). (2023). *The critical pedagogy reader*. Taylor & Francis.
- Davis, S., & Hughes, B. (Directors). (2007). *Sing behind the plow: John C. Campbell folk school* [Film]. UNC Center for Public Television.
- Eiben, V. (2015). *A brief history of folk schools*. Folk Education Association of America - A Brief History of Folk Schools. <https://www.folkeeducation.org/a-brief-history-of-folk-schools>
- Elliott, J., & Lukeš, D. (2008). Epistemology as ethics in research and policy: The use of case studies. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 42(1 Supplement), 87-119.
- Embodied Practice Interview- Knitted Scarf*. (2025). photograph, Thunder Bay, ON.
- Erickson F. (1986). Qualitative methods in research on teaching. In Wittrock M. (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teaching* (3rd ed., pp. 119-161). New York, NY: Macmillan.
- Fain, E. F. (1971). Nationalist origins of the folk high school: the romantic visions of NFS Grundtvig. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 19(1), 70-90.
- Fariello, M. (2006). *The people: John C. Campbell*. Retrieved from <http://www.wcu.edu/library/DigitalCollections/CraftRevival/people/johnccampbell.html>

- Fariello, M. (2007). *The people: Olive Dame Campbell*. Retrieved from <http://www.wcu.edu/library/DigitalCollections/CraftRevival/people/olivecampbell.html>
- Fireloch Gathering Place and Retreat. (2024). *Our story*. <https://fireloch.com/about-us/>
- Fireloch Gathering Place and Retreat (2025) _A7R1035. Retrieved April 6, 2025, from <https://fireloch.com/venue-rentals/>.
- Foght, H. W. (1914). *The Danish folk high schools*. US Government Printing Office.
- Folk Camp. (n.d.). *Folk camp*. <https://www.folkcamp.ca/>
- Folk School Alliance. (2020). *Folk School Alliance - Directory*. Folk School Alliance. <https://folkschoolalliance.org/>.
- Foucault, M. (2021). Nietzsche, genealogy, history. In *Language, counter-memory, practice* (pp. 139-164). Cornell University Press.
- Freire, P. (1968/2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Friend, L. L. (1914). *The folk high schools of Denmark*. Bulletin, 1914, No. 5. Whole Number 576. United States Bureau of Education, Department of the Interior
- Fusch, P. I., Fusch, G. E., & Ness, L. R. (2017). How to conduct a mini-ethnographic case study: A guide for novice researchers. *The Qualitative Report*, 22(3), 923–941.
- Glen, J. M. (1988). *Highlander: No ordinary school*. University of Tennessee Press.
- Government of Canada, S. C. (2024, October 8). *Canada goes urban*. Government of Canada, Statistics Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-630-x/11-630-x2015004-eng.htm>

- Grand, R. (2023, March 2). *What is a folk school? an interview with Dawn Murphy, vice president of the Folk Education Association of America*. John C. Campbell Folk School. https://www.folkschool.org/2023/02/15/dawn-murphy-folk-education/?fbclid=IwY2xjawEd5YtleHRuA2FibQlxMQABHcBVbWkq5zXWUH_jsmBPBIWr3a9SfFghcDVjnMzErjODRVqdl45fyH1bA_aem_SZR2DvCFBxhMHAUVeZoukA
- Grundtvig, N. F. S., & Knudsen, J. (1976). *Selected writings of N.F.S. Grundtvig*. Fortress Press.
- Hamilton, L., & Corbett-Whittier, C. (2012). *Using case study in education research*. Sage.
- Hancock, D. R., & Algozzine, R. (2011). *Doing case study research: A practical guide for beginning researchers*. Teachers College Press.
- Hall, B. (2006). Social movement learning: Theorizing a Canadian tradition. *Contexts of adult education: Canadian perspectives*, 230-238.
- Hickel, J., Kallis, G., Jackson, T., O'Neill, D. W., Schor, J. B., Steinberger, J. K., Victor, P. A., & Ürge-Vorsatz, D. (2022, December 12). *Degrowth can work - here's how science can help*. Nature News. <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-022-04412-x>
- Highlander Research and Education Center (2014). *Timeline*. Retrieved from <http://highlandercenter.org/media/timeline/>
- Honeybee Folk School. (2022). *Speaker outside of Honeybee Folk School at New Brunswick College of Craft and Design*. Facebook. Retrieved April 13, 2025, from

<https://www.facebook.com/honeybeefolkschool/photos/pb.100064900713511.-2207520000/10166282639180291/?type=3>.

Honeybee Folk School. (2024, April 29). *Home*. <https://honeybeefolkschool.ca/>

Horton, M., & Adams, F. (1975). *Unearthing seeds of fire: The idea of Highlander*. John F. Blair Publisher.

Horton, M., Freire, P., Bell, B., Gaventa, J., & Peters, J. (1990). *We make the road by walking: Conversations on education and social change*. Temple University Press.

Horton, M., & Jacobs, D. (2003). *The Myles Horton reader: Education for social change*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press.

Horton, M., Kohl, J., & Kohl, H. (1990). *The long haul*. Doubleday.

Illich, I. (1970). *Deschooling society*. Marion Boyars Publishers.

Jackman Murphy, D. (2018). (rep.). *Folk School Alliance 2017 survey of interest summary report*. Folk Education Alliance of America.

John C. Campbell Folk School. (2017). *A unique history*. Retrieved from <http://www.folkschool.org/>

Kavalier, H. (1962). The modern Danish folk high schools. *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 21(4), 393-405.

Klein, M. (2018). Folk schools as inspiration for contemporary democratic peacebuilding. *Journal of peacebuilding & development*, 13(3), 70-85.

Kulich, J. (1964). The Danish folk high school: Can it be transplanted? The success and failure of the Danish folk high school at home and abroad. *International Review of Education*, 10(4), 417-430.

- Kulich, J. (1988). Prospects of Folk High Schools: A Canadian Perspective. *Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education*, 2(2), 53-55.
- Kulich, J. (1997). Christen Kold, founder of the Danish folk high school: Myth and reality. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 16(5), 439-453.
- Kulich, J. (2002). *Grundtvig's educational ideas in Central and Eastern Europe and the Baltic States in the twentieth century*. Forlaget Vartov.
- Kultur Ministeriet. (2025). Folkehøjskoler.
<https://slks.dk/omraader/kulturinstitutioner/folkehoejskoler>
- Lee, D. E. (2017). Folk schools: Slow education for fast times (Unpublished master's thesis). Lakehead University.
- Life.School.House. (n.d.). *About*. <https://www.lifeschoolhouse.com/about>
- Lindsay, J., Lane, R., Raven, R., & Reynolds, D. (2022). Bread baking, food growing, and bicycle riding: practice memories and household consumption during the COVID-19 lockdowns in Melbourne. *Sustainability: Science, Practice and Policy*, 18(1), 466–482. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15487733.2022.2088004>
- MacInnis, M. (2022). *People Attending Annapolis Valley Folk School*. Facebook.
<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10159704827576257&set=g.786207628385117>.
- MacInnis, M. (2024). *Annapolis Valley Folk School*. Facebook.
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/786207628385117/>
- Maclsaac, M. (2024). *April 2024 Life.School.House Makers' Swap at Antigonish Farmer's Market*. Facebook.

https://www.facebook.com/events/271868685968765/?acontext=%7B%22event_action_history%22%3A%7B%22mechanism%22%3A%22attachment%22%2C%22surface%22%3A%22newsfeed%22%7D%22ref_notif_type%22%3A%22null%7D.

Manniche, P. (1971) *The International People's College 1921-1971*. Elsinore:

International People's College.

Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*.

Revised and expanded from "case study research in education." Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Monroe-Kane, C., & King, H. (2023, November 13). *How the land back movement is reclaiming land stolen from indigenous people*. To The Best of Our Knowledge.

<https://www.ttbook.org/interview/how-land-back-movement-reclaiming-land-stolen-indigenous-people>

Newton, R. (1952). *Memorial University of Newfoundland- A Survey*. Memorial University of Newfoundland.

North House Folk School. (2017). (rep.). *Economic Impact of the North House Folk School on the Cook County Community*.

Okanagan Folk School. (2024). *About*. Folkschool. <https://www.okfolkschool.ca/about>

Okanagan Folk School. (2024). *School House*. Retrieved April 13, 2025, from <https://www.okfolkschool.ca/post/the-okanagan-folk-school-has-a-home>.

Oldtime Central. (2020, June 23). *Katherine Jackson French: Kentucky's forgotten ballad collector*. Retrieved March 17, 2021, from <https://oldtime-central.com/katherine-jackson-french-kentuckys-forgotten-ballad-collector/>

- Pantzar, E. (1988). Prospects of folk high schools in European countries. *The Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education*, 2(2), 43-50.
- Parsey, J. M., & Friesen, J. K. (1953). Folk schools in Canada. *The School Review*, 61(3), 141-150.
- Preskill, S. (2021). *Education in black and white: Myles Horton and the Highlander Center's vision for social justice*. University of California Press.
- Punke, H. H. (1931). The Folk High School and Other Recently Developed Institutions in German Adult Education. *The School Review*, 39(9), 696–706.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1080139>
- Rasmussen, M. (1990). *Reflections*. Dalum History Book Committee.
- Richardson, L., & St. Pierre, E. (2008). A method of inquiry. *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials*, 3(4), 473.
- Salter, K., McKibbin, E., & Halperin, D. (2024, August 1). *Precarious employment, gig work and gender-based violence in Canada: A knowledge synthesis and recommendations for policy decision-making*. Government of Canada, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/society-societe/community-communite/ifca-iac/evidence_briefs-donnees_probantes/gbv-vfg/salter-eng.aspx
- Shapiro, H. D. (1978). *Appalachia on our mind: The southern mountains and mountaineers in the American consciousness, 1870-1920*. The University of North Carolina Press.

- Smith, L. M. (1978). An evolving logic of participant observation, educational ethnography, and other case studies. *Review of research in education*, 6(1), 316-377.
- Smith, M. (2011). *N. F. S. Grundtvig, folk high schools and popular education*. infed.org. <https://infed.org/mobi/n-f-s-grundtvig-folk-high-schools-and-popular-education/#:~:text=The%20contribution%20of%20folk%20high,Grundtvig's%20vision%20had%20considerable%20power>.
- Spicer, C. (2009). *Lifted by the heart: Writings from Option, journal of the Folk Education Association of America*. Circumstantial Productions.
- Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Sage.
- Stubblefield, H. (1990). The Danish Folk High School and its Reception in the United States: 1870s-1930s In R. W. Rohfeld (ed.), *Breaking New Ground: The Development of Adult and Worker's Education in North America*, 49-73. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University, Kellogg Project.
- Swales, J. M. (2004). *Research genres: Explorations and applications*. Cambridge University Press.
- The Association of Folk High Schools in Denmark. (n.d.). *Danish folk high school*. Danish Folk High schools. <https://danishfolkhighschools.com/>
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Volume One: Summary: Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*. James Lorimer & Company.
- Westerman, W. (2005). Folk schools, popular education, and a pedagogy of community action. In *The Critical Pedagogy Reader*. (Second) (pp. 541-561). New York:

Routledge.

Whisnant, D. E. (1983). *All that is native and fine: The politics of culture in an American region*. The University of North Carolina Press.

Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case study research: Design and methods (applied social research methods)*. Sage.

Zurcher, A. (2025). *What Trump really wants from Canada*. BBC News.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c15vl99dw0do>

Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Open Question *(with follow up questions below as needed)*:

- 1) What is the story of this place?

Societal Context and Community Needs:

- 2) We see a number of folk schools opening in Canada in the past 5 years.
Why do you think there's been push toward folk schooling here recently?
- 3) Is your folk school addressing needs that were previously unmet in your community? If so, how?
- 4) What culture is communicated by the ways that things are taught at your school?

Form and Function of your Folk School:

- 5) Where is the folk school located?
- 6) When was the folk school founded?
- 7) What is your role at the folk school?
- 8) What made you want to create or be involved with a folk school?
- 9) What was your professional background previously?
- 10) What is your educational background? *(This can include formal and nonformal education)*
- 11) What is the philosophy of your folk school?
- 12) What influenced your school's philosophy and how the school is structured and run?
- 13) What is the main focus (or focuses) of your folk school?

- 14) How is your folk school structured? (ex. Nonprofit or social enterprise, governed by a Board or run by founder or staff members)
- 15) Does your folk school employ staff? If so, how many full-time and how many part-time, and what are their job titles?
- 16) How are your programs and staff funded? (ex. Grants, user fees, partnerships, memberships, donations, etc.)
- 17) What type of programs does your school offer?
 - a. Topics:
 - b. Duration of Courses:
 - c. Residential Option?
- 18) Do you offer programming year-round?
- 19) About how many programs do you offer each year?
- 20) Who, generally, are your instructors?
- 21) Who, generally, are your students?
- 22) What ages of learners does your school serve?
- 23) Do students typically come from farther away (like tourists) or are they members of the local community?
- 24) How would you describe the teaching and learning in your programs?
- 25) What do you think is going well at your folk school?
- 26) What are the biggest challenges that your school faces as it moves forward?
- 27) What supports would help your organization to move forward sustainably?

28)Based on what you know about the modern-day folk schools in the US and in Scandinavia, what do you think is enabling these schools to grow and proliferate? Is there a missing ingredient here in Canada or is the interest in folk schooling just newer here?

29)What unique opportunities would you say that Canadian folk schools have, if any?

30)Is there anything else that you'd like to add or that you think we've missed here?

Demographic Information:

If you are comfortable, can you please share some demographic information that will help to better understand the makeup of Canadian folk schooling?

Gender:

Preferred Pronouns:

Ethnicity:

Age:

Appendix B: Interview Information Letter

Dear Potential Participant:

You are invited to participate in this research project entitled “The Makings of a Movement: New Beginnings in Canadian Folk Schooling” due to your involvement in folk schooling in Canada. Taking part in this study is voluntary. Before you decide whether you would like to take part in this study, please read this information carefully to understand what would be involved.

This letter provides information on the research project, what you can expect if you decide to participate, how the data will be handled, and how data will be used in the future. If anything is unclear or you want more information, please feel free to ask any questions that you may have. Contact details are found at the end of this letter.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this research is to gain an understanding of folk schooling in Canada today with the goal of learning more about folk schools’ cultural contexts, form and functions, success and struggles, and any supports that may be needed. Interviews will inform a case study research project which includes folk schools across Canada. The research is being conducted as dissertation research, part of

Devon Lee's PhD studies in the Faculty of Education at Lakehead University under the co-supervision of Drs. Paul Berger and David Greenwood.

WHAT INFORMATION WILL BE COLLECTED?

In the interview, I would ask you questions about your experiences in starting and/or leading a folk school, information on your professional and educational background as it pertains to your role in the folk school, questions about the structure of your organization, and the form that teaching and learning takes in your folk school. I would ask about your perceptions of what is going well and what might be needed to support folk schooling going forward.

As a reminder, your participation is voluntary and you are free to elect not to answer any questions or to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

The consent form attached to this letter will give you the choice of being identified in the final report and any research publications and outputs, or you can choose for your identity to remain confidential and separated from the information you provide in the interview. At any time prior to publication of the research, you can change your mind regarding the use of your identifying information by contacting me. If you choose for your identity to remain confidential, the information that you provide will only be used in a general way that will not identify you personally. If a quote or detail may affect your confidentiality, it will not be attributed to your organization specifically

WHAT IS REQUESTED OF ME AS A PARTICIPANT?

If you would like to be involved in this study, I will contact you to arrange a one-hour interview at a time that is convenient for you. Interviews may take place via telephone or virtually on Zoom depending on your preference and the technical capabilities at your Faculty of Education location. The interviews will be audio-recorded for the sole purpose of creating interview notes for your review.

Given that folk schools often leverage embodied practice to engage oneself wholly in the act of learning, you have the option of proposing an embodied practice for you (or us) to complete during our interview.

You will also be asked to direct me toward any relevant documentation that might be helpful in better understanding your organization including things like annual reports, research reports, media articles, webpages, social media pages, etc. It is up to your discretion as to what you can share beyond that which is publicly available.

WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS AS A PARTICIPANT?

As a potential respondent in this research study, you are under no obligation to participate and are free to withdraw at any time without consequence. You are

welcome to decline to participate, withdraw from the research at any time, or refuse to answer any questions or requests without any negative consequences to yourself or your organization. This research strives to maintain the highest standards of ethical conduct and integrity—you should expect to be treated with respect and dignity

A summary of the interview will be provided to you afterwards for stylistic improvement and to ensure accuracy and clarity. I will be writing the dissertation and other publications, but you are free to withdraw any information that you have contributed at any stage by contacting me and indicating your wish to do so. If you choose to withdraw after your data has been included in a publication, data which has not already been published in the public domain will be removed from subsequent publications. You may access articles and other publications arising from this research, and the dissertation will be distributed to you by email if you have elected to receive it and have provided your contact information on the consent form.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS AND BENEFITS?

This study aims to learn more about the educational and cultural landscape of folk schooling in Canada today. My goal is to understand benefits that folk schools provide to participants and communities, and to learn more about what challenges they face, and what their greatest needs are. The main anticipated benefit of this research is that it can generate insights into how to support a sustainable and

equitable practice of folk schooling in this country by learning more about the folk schools that are operating here today.

While there is minimal risk from participating in this research, some questions may be perceived as sensitive, and you may not want certain information made available to others. To mitigate any risks, only the research team consisting of Devon Lee (researcher) and the supervisory team will be able to access the raw interview data. Furthermore, you will have the option to elect not answer questions and to remove all identifying information from the data collected for research outputs. Again, your participation is voluntary and you are only being asked to offer information you feel comfortable sharing.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE DATA AFTER IT IS COLLECTED?

Only the research team consisting of Devon Lee (researcher) and the supervisory team of will be able to access the raw interview data and identifiable materials such as hand- written notes and your consent form. All raw data will be stored on password-protected computers and in locked filing cabinets in Dr. Paul Berger's office for seven years following completion of the research.

The results of this research will be shared primarily through a PhD dissertation. Subsequent publications may include academic journals, popular media articles,

academic or professional presentations or workshops, and possible research grant or other grant applications.

This study has been approved by the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board.

If you have any questions related to the ethics of the research and would like to speak to someone outside of the research team, please contact Sue Wright at the Research Ethics Board at 807-343-8283 or research@lakeheadu.ca. If you have further questions about this research study, please contact dlee2@lakeheadu.ca.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Devon Lee (MEd, BEd, BS) PhD Candidate, Faculty of Education, Lakehead University

RESEARCHER CONTACT INFORMATION:

Devon Lee, Researcher

807-356-3784

dlee2@lakeheadu.ca

Co-Supervisor

807-343-8010 ext 8708

paul.berger@lakeheadu.ca

Paul Berger, Associate Professor,

Appendix C: Interview Consent Form

Name of Participant: _____ (Please Print)

I agree to the following:

- ✓ I have read and understand the information contained in the Information Letter
- ✓ I agree to participate
- ✓ I understand the risks and benefits of the study
- ✓ I understand that the results of this study will be part of Devon Lee's PhD Dissertation and may be used in other research outputs as indicated in the Information Letter.
- ✓ I am a volunteer and can withdraw from the study at any time by contacting the researcher and indicating my desire to do so; there is no penalty for withdrawing from the study; I may also decline to answer any question
- ✓ The data will be securely stored in Dr. Paul Berger's office at Lakehead University for a period of 7 years following completion of the research project
- ✓ The research findings will be made available to me upon my request
- ✓ My identity will remain confidential unless I have agreed to be publicly identified on this consent form
- ✓ All of my questions about the research study have been answered

By consenting to participate, I have not waived any rights to legal recourse in the event of research-related harm.

I have read and agreed to the above information and consent to be interviewed.

I agree to be identified by name in research outputs (**Please Circle One**): Yes / No

I would like to receive a final report of the research study (**Please Circle One**): Yes /

No

If yes, please provide an email address:

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix D: Research Ethics Board Approval Letter



Research Ethics Board
t: (807) 343-8283
research@lakeheadu.ca

November 29, 2024

Principal Investigator: Dr. R. Paul Berger
Student: Devon Lee
Education
Lakehead University
955 Oliver Road
Thunder Bay, ON P7B 5E1

Dear Dr. R. Paul Berger and Devon:

Re: Romeo File No: 1470779
Granting Agency: n/a
Agency Reference #: n/a

On behalf of the Research Ethics Board, I am pleased to grant ethical approval to your research project titled, "The Makings of a Movement: New Beginnings in Canadian Folk Schooling".

Ethics approval is valid until November 29, 2025. Please submit a Request for Renewal to the Office of Research Services via the Romeo Research Portal by October 29, 2025, if your research involving human participants will continue for longer than one year. A Final Report must be submitted promptly upon completion of the project. Access the Romeo Research Portal by logging into myInfo at:

<https://erpwp.lakeheadu.ca/>

During the course of the study, any modifications to the protocol or forms must not be initiated without prior written approval from the REB. You must promptly notify the REB of any adverse events that may occur.

Best wishes for a successful research project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "C. Pousa".

Dr. Claudio Pousa
Chair, Research Ethics Board

/sa