

Copyright  
by  
Margaret Taylor Burke  
2013

**The Thesis Committee for Margaret Taylor Burke  
Certifies that this is the approved version of the following thesis:**

**Learning Through Making:**

**A Study of Craft Education at the John C. Campbell Folk School**

**APPROVED BY  
SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:**

**Supervisor:**

---

Paul E. Bolin

---

Melinda M. Mayer

**Learning Through Making:**  
**A Study of Craft Education at the John C. Campbell Folk School**

**by**

**Margaret Taylor Burke, B.A.**

**Thesis**

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

**Master of Arts**

**The University of Texas at Austin**

**August 2013**

## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to John C. Campbell, Olive Dame Campbell, and Marguerite Butler for their commitment to education and community, and to the friends and family who have supported my own pursuits in education.

## **Acknowledgements**

This project would not have been possible without the support and interest of many people. Unending thanks to my thesis chair, Dr. Paul Bolin, for his support, patience, and guidance throughout the entire thesis process. Also, thanks for making me laugh and reminding me to enjoy the process. I did. Thanks to my reader, Dr. Melinda Mayer for her advice and support in the final stages of writing. Thanks to the Department of Art and Art History for awarding me a travel scholarship through which my research trip was made possible. The staff, students, and instructors at the John C. Campbell Folk School were essential to this project. Thank you to Marketing Manager Keather Weideman, who invited me to the Folk School to conduct this research, made numerous introductions on my behalf, and shared her own Folk School experiences with me. Thank you to Director Jan Davison, who demonstrated interest in my project and shared his many stories of the Folk School, opening the doors of his institution to me in so many ways. Special thanks to each student, instructor, and staff member who took time out of their busy visit to share their Folk School experiences with me, these individuals quickly became the heartbeat of my research.

## **Abstract**

### **Learning Through Making:**

### **A Study of Craft Education at the John C. Campbell Folk School**

Margaret Taylor Burke, M.A.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2013

Supervisor: Paul E. Bolin

The purpose of this study was to investigate why adult students engage in arts learning and what they gain from that experience. Specifically, this research combined case study and narrative inquiry methods to produce a richly textured understanding of the John C. Campbell Folk School and the experiences had by students, instructors, and staff at the school. Due to the unique nature of a rural, interdisciplinary folk arts school, a survey of the Folk School's history and educational philosophies was conducted to provide a framework for understanding the school's specific environment. Through informal narrative interviews with students, instructors, and staff, individual accounts of the Folk School experience were established. By identifying what drives enrollment and outcomes of attendance, this study draws conclusions about what individuals seek through informal arts learning. The findings of this study indicate consistent motivations for initial enrollment at the school, but a broad range of reasons for re-enrollment. The reported outcomes were strongly related to personal development, enjoyment, and relationships built at the school. Based on the findings of this study, key components of

informal, adult arts learning were identified that can inform other schools and institutions as they promote adult programs.

## Table of Contents

Table of Contents .....	viii
List of Tables .....	xii
List of Figures .....	xiii
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study .....	1
Introduction to the Study .....	1
Central Research Question.....	2
Problem Statement .....	2
Motivations for Research .....	3
Personal Motivations .....	3
Professional Motivations .....	4
Hypothesis/Speculation about Investigation .....	5
Definition of Terms.....	6
Appalachia .....	6
Craft or Studio craft .....	7
Creative Sociability.....	7
Danish Folk School.....	7
Southern Highlands.....	8
Limitations of the Study.....	8
Benefits to the Field of Art Education .....	9
Conclusion .....	9
Chapter 2: Review of Literature .....	11
Introduction.....	11
Appalachian Context.....	11
What is Craft? .....	13
Experiential Education.....	17
Leisure Studies .....	22
Conclusion .....	24



Chapter 3: History of the John C. Campbell Folk School .....	25
Introduction .....	25
John C. and Olive Dame Campbell.....	25
Study for the Russell Sage Foundation .....	27
The Danish Folk School.....	31
The John C. Campbell Folk School .....	33
Beginnings .....	33
Ideology .....	36
Middle Years.....	38
Present.....	40
Conclusion .....	41
Chapter 4: Present-day John C. Campbell Folk School.....	42
Introduction .....	42
Methodology .....	42
Data Collection .....	45
The Place.....	46
The Keith House .....	47
The Olive D. Campbell Dining Hall and Craft Shop.....	50
History Center .....	53
Studios .....	54
Residences.....	58
Trails .....	60
The Institution .....	61
Course Offerings .....	62
Structure of the Day .....	63
Emergent Themes .....	65
Immersive Experience .....	65
Community and Relationships .....	66
Hands-on Experience .....	67
Exploration of New Things.....	68

Experience Beyond the Folk School .....	69
Conclusion .....	70
Chapter 5: People of the John C. Campbell Folk School .....	71
Introduction .....	71
Methodology .....	71
Interviews .....	76
Staff .....	77
Keather .....	77
Marianne .....	80
Tammy .....	82
Jan .....	83
Teachers .....	88
Pattie .....	88
Paul .....	92
Pam .....	94
Scott .....	96
Students .....	99
Gil .....	99
Jim .....	102
Rachel .....	104
Bill .....	107
Conclusion .....	111
Chapter 6: Data Analysis and Emergent Themes .....	112
Motivations to Attend .....	112
Characteristics of Visitors .....	115
Immersive Experience .....	117
Relationships .....	118
Personal Development .....	120
Process and Product .....	121
Conclusion .....	123

Chapter 7: Conclusion.....	125
Purpose of the Study .....	125
Findings .....	125
Unexpected Findings .....	128
Recommendations for Further Research.....	129
Career and Craft.....	129
First-time v. Returning Visitors .....	130
John C. Campbell Folk School History .....	130
Multi-site Study .....	131
Concluding Remarks.....	131
References.....	133

## **List of Tables**

Table 1: Study Participants and Relationship to the Folk School.....	77
--	----

## **List of Figures**

Figure 1: The Kolb cycle .....	19
Figure 2: A delivery of chairs. Photo circa 1925 from the John C. Campbell Folk School archives. ....	47
Figure 3: Campus Map of the John C. Campbell Folk School, illustrated by Annie Cicale. ....	58
Figure 4: Weekly calendar of events provided to students and visitors during my stay at the Folk School, February 24-March 2, 2013. ....	64

## **Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study**

### **INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study was to identify why adults engage in voluntary informal arts opportunities, specifically looking at their motivations and outcomes for doing so. The study took place at the John C. Campbell Folk School in Brasstown, North Carolina, an educational institution settled in the mountains of western portion of the state that provides weekend and week-long courses in a wide range of studio crafts. The 885 classes that are offered annually include but are not limited to: basketry, folklore, painting, leather working, gardening, calligraphy, soap making, blacksmithing, book arts, woodcarving, writing, and knitting ([www.folkschool.org](http://www.folkschool.org), n.d.). I identified the school's organizational goals through document research and interviews with school staff, including instructors, administrators, and the director. These interviews explored each of the individual's personal ideas on arts education. Through conversations and interviews with attending students, I identified their personal motivations for attending the school. I interviewed individuals with a variety of connections to the school – first time students, returning students, instructors, staff, the director, and students who have become employees or instructors – in order to produce a dynamic explanation of the school's attraction, offerings, and successes. I also engaged in studio observations, explored the grounds and layout of the school, and participated in activities and meal times to provide context for the narratives I gathered.

Through my research, I illuminate where some of the value lies in an arts-based folk education. As arts organizations face funding cuts and school-based arts education is being marginalized in favor of STEM education, determining the personal, cultural, and educational value of the arts is imperative. By studying arts education in a setting where

students are enrolled voluntarily and come from a variety of backgrounds, I identified various reasons that students undertake studio craft studies. Pinpointing personal motivations gave me data from which I extrapolated reasons that arts education is valuable to the development of the individual. I conducted an exploratory and non-evaluative case study research at the school to gain an understanding of the setting in which this educational engagement is happening. Theoretically, this information may be transferable to other art education settings, particularly adult-focused informal learning opportunities, and would demonstrate and support the need for arts education for a broader audience.

#### **CENTRAL RESEARCH QUESTION**

The following question provided the impetus and direction for this investigation: What motivates students to engage in craft education at the John C. Campbell Folk School and what do they gain from this art experience?

#### **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

After learning about the John C. Campbell Folk School and its unique educational objectives, I began to look for research on craft education and adult education. Most of the adult education research I found pertained explicitly to adult literacy, without attention to arts learning. Cultural and educational implications prevent this literature from applying to my case, but I found relevant writing within the field of leisure studies. Within this context, I discovered a number of individual- and community-focused motivations for engaging in non-work activities, but nothing that spoke specifically to arts engagement.

Through this research, I wanted to address reasons that adults engage in voluntary arts learning. As an emerging professional in the field of arts education, I see much of the field striving for adult engagement, but without much idea of what this demographic seeks. Some of the findings in this research project are specific to the John C. Campbell Folk School, but other themes that emerged may be generalizable to a range of institutions and learning settings. My research responded to the existing literature and adds to the understanding of adult motivations for arts engagement and the value of crafts and craft education.

## **MOTIVATIONS FOR RESEARCH**

### **Personal Motivations**

Growing up in a small town in the Blue Ridge Mountains, fall was my favorite season because each weekend there was a different festival to attend. Almost every Saturday morning my parents would pile the family into our car with a picnic basket and cooler and we would take off over the mountains. Some festivals were dedicated specifically to local crafts; others were held in celebration of garlic, bluegrass music, apple picking, or local history heroes. Regardless of the festival theme, there were always local artists and artisans present to sell their work. This is when I first fell in love with the aesthetic of Appalachian craft. Bowls whittled from tree trunks occupied the booth next to homemade apple butter, situated across from landscape photography and beside hand-worked leather goods. Conversation circulated through the aisles, enchanting me with stories of crafts passed down from fathers, grandmothers, and husbands who were no longer with us. The stories I heard were as beautiful as the art on display. With careful instructions, artists would allow me to touch the hand-blown glass pitchers or



silver necklace they had created. I felt an authenticity at these festivals that I have encountered few other times in my life.

Sometimes on my birthday I would be surprised with an item I had pointed out months earlier at a festival. Most of the art on my parents' walls and bookshelves is a reminder of our weekend trips. Each one carries layers of stories: the story of the craft, the story of the artist, the story of the object, and now the story that my family has to share about our trips to festivals all throughout the mountains. The objects and experiences that I received from my family trips have cemented my love for Appalachian craft. When I discovered the John C. Campbell Folk School, I knew it was something I wanted to investigate further due to the personal connection I have with craft from my childhood.

Upon learning more about the school, I realized that there is a strong focus on community and the handmade. While I am hesitant to ever refer to myself as an artist, I have been a lifelong maker. I love to craft, to create, and to play with various materials. The product is usually unskilled, but it is the process that I enjoy experiencing. This focus on creating and making is prevalent at the John C. Campbell Folk School, further motivating my investigation of the school.

### **Professional Motivations**

While attending the University of Virginia, I was introduced to Thomas Jefferson's idea of lifelong learning. The school strongly encouraged students to explore our interests outside the classroom. Although I was aware of this philosophy, I did not knowingly incorporate it into my teaching ideology until I began working at the National Children's Museum. At the museum, I worked with children and families in informal

learning settings. As I observed children playing and engaging with our exhibits, I began to see opportunities for learning in all the programs and activities that we offered. By participating in seemingly non-educational activities and playtime, kids were exploring and imagining and, ultimately, learning. My time at the Children's Museum also illuminated the idea that learning motivations and outcomes can change based on the setting in which the learning is happening.

Combining what I saw with children openly exploring their interests in a non-academic setting and what I knew about the importance of lifelong learning, I began to value educational opportunities that took place outside the traditional classroom. For me, it is important that the student is interested in what they are learning. The voluntary nature of courses at the John C. Campbell Folk School was one of the features that attracted me to the school. The way that adults choose to engage in learning at the school seems parallel to children playing and learning at the museum, although there often appears to be a higher level of awareness and intention to the educational process with adults. Adults who seek out a craft education at this folk school deliberately engage in an educational opportunity, which may slightly change the dynamics that I observed at the children's museum. It was valuable to recognize how the John C. Campbell Folk School approaches education through a subject- or learner-centered pedagogy, and whether process is valued as experiential learning or as the means to a product.

#### **HYPOTHESIS/SPECULATION ABOUT INVESTIGATION**

I embarked on this research to find out why people are interested in learning traditional Appalachian crafts. Most of the Folk School attendees are in a financial position to purchase the material goods that they want and need. In order to have leather

shoes or a woven blanket, for example, it is not necessary to make them because they can be purchased in a variety of styles, colors, and sizes – without even leaving the house, in fact. For this reason, I went into this research not thinking that students are attending craft classes for the final product they create. I entered this study believing that there is another factor, or perhaps many factors, that draw students to this art-focused educational experience.

Since I interviewed and observed a large variety of individuals with different connections to the Folk School, I expected to encounter a broad range of motivations and experiences. I anticipated that some students would be simply seeking a creative leisure experience during their stay at the school, while others would be hoping to pick up a new hobby. I expected that there would be something attractive to visitors about the nature of the Appalachian arts community – its history, distinct culture, or how the culture is so well preserved. I also thought I may get responses that some students are moving towards an increasingly do-it-yourself or homesteading lifestyle or perhaps hoping to begin a business with their newly acquired skills. I hoped that some would respond that they sought a new creative challenge or opportunity to keep their minds and hands nimble. Ultimately, I anticipated that people at the John C. Campbell Folk School would report a wide variety of motivations that include personal growth, professional or vocational practice, community inclusion, and cultural immersion.

## **DEFINITION OF TERMS**

### **Appalachia**

Appalachia is a modern word that identifies a geographic and cultural region of the Eastern United States. There is no singular consensus regarding the boundaries of the

region, but it is largely accepted that the area stretches northward from Northwest Mississippi to Southeast New York, covering parts or wholes of thirteen states. It is an adaptation of John C. Campbell's term *Southern Highlands*, and carries distinct topographical, cultural, and historical connotations.

### **Craft or Studio craft**

Studio craft is a genre of art that includes, but is not limited to, textiles, glass, ceramics, metalworking, gold and silversmithing, bookbinding, lettering, calligraphy, paper arts, and furniture making. For the purposes of my research, I use these terms to refer to all the John C. Campbell Folk School's offerings, even those that fall more comprehensibly under music, ecology studies, or folklore.

### **Creative Sociability**

Creative sociability is a phrase coined by Nina Lübbren, an art historian, who connects craft artists' solitary work with their desire to form a community and share their stories and skills. The solitary nature of creating art often necessitates other social connections; this phenomenon is what Lübbren termed "creative sociability" (Harrod & Hughes, 2009, p. 61).

### **Danish Folk School**

The Danish Folk School is a concept and institution developed by N.F.S. Grundtvig as a response to academic high schools, intended to educate the general public rather than the elite. The Danish Folk School had broad educational objectives and self-identified as a "school for learning, where everybody was learning from each other,

learning to live, and opening the participants to the idea that their life could be rich with many opportunities” (Bruun, Gitte, & Andersen, n.d.). The post-primary focus of the original school concept has adapted to the changing needs of rural Denmark, and Folk Schools now often provide educational retreats to mature and aging adults. The Danish Folk School is the model that Olive Dame Campbell and Marguerite Butler used for establishing the John C. Campbell Folk School.

### **Southern Highlands**

Southern Highlands is a title developed by John C. Campbell that identifies the southern strain of the Appalachian Mountains, generally encompassing the mountain range as it extends from Georgia through North Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky, Virginia, and West Virginia. Brasstown, North Carolina, the site of the John C. Campbell Folk School, falls within this geographic area.

### **LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The most prominent limitation of this study is its scope. Exploring one organization prevents me from generalizing my findings to the full field of art education, as few comparable institutions exist. This study’s findings do not translate to all educational settings, especially those targeting children. However, the themes, intentions, and goals that I uncovered may be applicable and useful to other adult-focused informal education settings. My findings would be exclusively transferable to other voluntary, non-traditional learning experiences, perhaps such as those provided by museums.

Additionally, the narratives collected through this study are all from voluntary participants, so they reflect the experiences of individuals who have a positive view of

the school. This does not impact the validity of the study, but should be considered, as the motivations and characteristics that I uncover are specific to those individuals who the school has successfully reached. This produces some thoughts for best practices, but does not comprehensively address the school's shortcomings. The study was conducted over a four-day visit to the John C. Campbell Folk School. Out of respect for time and financial resources, I chose participants who were present at the school during my stay there.

### **BENEFITS TO THE FIELD OF ART EDUCATION**

Identifying the motivations for and outcomes of adult arts engagement at the John C. Campbell Folk School is beneficial to the field of art education by showing other educational institutions why adults seek arts engagement and what they find notable about arts learning. This information may enable other institutions to tailor their programs with respect to the identified motivations and ambitions. Understanding why adults seek creative and educational opportunities may help the professionals in my field know how to provide experiences that are engaging and enriching for those who participate in them. It may also encourage these professionals to find out why their own patrons and students engage with their institution. This knowledge deepens the relationship that our organizations have with patrons and visitors. Reaching into the field of studio art, perhaps my study illuminates some of the individual and community benefits of an immersive studio craft education.

### **CONCLUSION**

This chapter introduced the reader to the John C. Campbell Folk School and the foundation for this study by outlining the central research question, problem statement,

motivations and possible outcomes, definition of terms, limitations of the study, and benefits to the field of art education. For further context, Chapter 2 presents a review of literature pertinent to my study including a discussion of Appalachian culture and geography and the concepts of craft, experiential education, and leisure studies. Chapter 3 provides a historical perspective on the John C. Campbell Folk School. Beginning with the pursuits of John C. and Olive Dame Campbell, this chapter follows their trajectory from their introduction to Appalachia and the Danish Folk School philosophy through the founding of the school and on to the present day Folk School. Chapter 4 introduces the reader to case study research, one of the two methodologies used in this investigation, and presents a look at the Folk School as it exists today. Chapter 5 introduces this project's second research methodology, narrative inquiry, and explores the experiences of students, staff, and instructors at the John C. Campbell Folk School. Chapter 6 is the analysis of the interviews and observations conducted in this study, which presents emergent themes and their significance. Chapter 7 is the investigation's conclusion, recapping the study's purpose, findings, recommendations for further research, and concluding remarks.

## **Chapter 2: Review of Literature**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This review of literature explores some of the foundational concepts that provide context for my investigation of why students seek craft education and what outcomes are produced through this learning. These contextual themes are: Appalachia, the geographical and cultural region within which the John C. Campbell Folk School exists; a definition of the term *craft* as it applies throughout this study; an exploration of the concept of experiential learning; and an overview of the field of leisure studies as it addresses individual motivations for engaging in recreational activities.

### **APPALACHIAN CONTEXT**

As with any geographic area, Appalachia has its own set of social, cultural, and political norms. To study a school that is situated within this context, it is best to have a foundational understanding of the region including its history and the nature of the people who were instrumental in the school's development. Much of the topography of the region is painted in pastoral landscapes with beautiful views and rich natural resources. The perception of the people of the region, however, lays in stark contrast to this description. Appalachian people are often stereotyped as poverty-stricken and ignorant, living in isolation down winding dirt roads. The American public perception of these people has permeated their culture—leading some to fight stereotypes, while others fall victim to public expectations (Anglin, 1992).

Appalachia is a region of the eastern United States that covers 205,000 square miles, including all of West Virginia and portions of Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina,



Tennessee, and Virginia. More than 25 million people live in the region spanning the 1,000 miles from Mississippi to New York. Unsurprisingly, there is broad variation in economic prosperity throughout the region, but 42% of Appalachia is rural in comparison to a national rate of 20% (Appalachian Regional Commission, n.d.).

The paradox of Appalachia is that it is a singular title for a vast geographic area diverse in history, culture, and economy. Because it has been geographically and socially isolated through much of its history, the area and its people have been generalized and stereotyped, both negatively and romantically. Through the years, Appalachia has been periodically “rediscovered” by groups intending to provide relief to the region. The results of these interventions often perpetuate, rather than break, the established stereotypes (Abramson & Haskell, 2006). Mary Anglin, an anthropologist at the University of Kentucky who has devoted her professional life to the study of the Appalachians and the people who inhabit the area, argues that in order for Appalachian culture to be understood, the public must stop speculating about these people and start listening to them (Anglin, 2002).

Appalachian culture is distinct, albeit not singular. The voices of Appalachian people are heard through their literature, music, folklore, and crafts. Novelist Lee Smith, the Soup Bean Poets, and writers James Agee and Jesse Stuart are all children of the region. Folklorists flourish in Appalachia, even “Aunt Arie,” who inspired a film and Broadway musical. Folk arts are prevalent, but more “highbrow” artistic groups are also appearing in the form of theaters and orchestras. As Blake (2001) notes, the voices of the region are all different, but each reflects the tension between traditional Appalachian life and modern American culture. In a poignant comment on Appalachian culture, Blake (2001) observes, “Appalachian beauty is functional, unpretentious, and is related

directly to the needs of life. The arts, crafts, philosophy, and humor actually help pull one through life's hard spots" (p. 222).

The Appalachian economy is a heavily studied subject that is too complex to synthesize here. It has relied on logging, coal mining, independent farming, and tourism throughout the past 150 years (Blake, 2001). Economic development in Appalachia is tenuous and inconsistent. In 1965, 223 of the region's 420 counties were economically distressed. In 2013, the number has dropped to 98. The improvement is notable, but does not indicate a steady progress over the years, nor does it express solid economic health. Appalachia is still far behind the rest of the country with regard to poverty and available healthcare and education (Appalachian Regional Commission, n.d.).

## **WHAT IS CRAFT?**

There are a multitude of opinions on what craft is, where its boundaries lie, and who can define it. Sometimes craft is more easily defined by the things that it is not than by the things that it is. It does not share a singular aesthetic, medium, studio, or geographic region. Craft is not consistent amongst styles, cultural contexts, or even generations. It does not have a precisely structured process that results in products that are identical over time. Craft is its own distinct, albeit mysterious, realm within the world of art. In an attempt to formulate an explanation of what craft is, I have compiled and synthesized various perspectives on the subject. Some voices are expressed through academic papers and others are in response to prompts from the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Crafts Council, asking what craft is. The viewpoints about craft fell into three categories: conceptual, process-focused, and product-focused.

Most of the perspectives expressed big picture ideas on craft as a discipline, a title, and a concept. The difficulty in defining craft lies partially in the complexity of the use of the word, which is a term utilized for categorization and identification, but its meaning depends on its context. It is, as David McFadden of the Museum of Arts and Design aptly explains, a term “heavily laden with cultural baggage” (*What is Craft?*, 2011). To simplify this complexity, craft is often accompanied by identifying adjectives such as contemporary, Appalachian, or studio, to discern the many types of craft and distinguish one type of elevated craft from lowbrow crafts. Museums and publications often separate different crafts based on the medium, such as the “African Ceramics Gallery” at the Birmingham Museum of Art and publications like *FiberArts* and *Anvil Magazine* (blacksmithing).

Part of defining craft is drawing limits on what it can be, as shown above. An inverse tactic is also used by scholars and practitioners who view craft as the intersection of various disciplines, including design, art, engineering, science, architecture, sculpture, and utility. Craft can also be viewed as the point of origin for these disciplines (*What is Craft?*, 2011).

In developing a definition of craft, various characteristics exist that are specific to the process of making. An exploration of the material’s properties is significant in the creation of an object. Learning how to manipulate the media to bring an artist’s idea to fruition is an important part of the process (Crafts Council, 2011). Caroline Broadhead explains her emphasis on the process: “What craft means to me is the making part, the how you make, and this is an exchange with materials—what you give to a material, and what it gives back” (*What is Craft?*, 2011). This creative exploration is instrumental in the development of various skills.

Skill building happens on many levels in craft creation. The intellectual process of creating an object requires project planning, creative problem solving, critical inquiry, development of aesthetic judgment, and the utilization of prior knowledge in new contexts. The physical process of creating an object requires visual engagement, dexterity, ability, technique, and various other creative and practical skills (Crafts Council, 2011; *What is Craft?*, 2011).

Many craft practitioners believe the moment of creation is significant for the personal connections that are established. The act of creation provides a time for socializing, as the performative nature of many practices facilitates interactions between the individuals who work alongside each other (Metcalf, 2007). For artists and craftspeople who are not producing work in the company of others, there are shared “behaviors of making” that connect makers of all disciplines (*What is Craft?*, 2011). Simon Olding, Director of the Crafts Study Centre, claims that craft lacks meaning entirely if you separate contextually the object from the individual who made it (*What is Craft?*, 2011).

The process of making a craft is unique for multiple reasons. To many, it is the antidote to mass production—the precise purpose of making craft is to experience the process, to change one’s pace and perspective for a period of time. Caroline Roux of *Crafts Magazine* describes what makes craft important to her, as she says that the “time it takes to produce an object becomes part of its value” (*What is Craft?*, 2011). The product’s worth, then, is dependent on the conception, execution, and outcome of a creative process. Craft is not easily definable because it “only exists in motion. It is a way of doing things, not a classification of objects, institutions, or people” (Harrod & Hughes, 2009, p. 59). Process clearly factors into the definition of craft, but this notion is

transient and intangible, which leads us to rely on the product as well in order to complete our understanding of the term.

The final category defining craft is the physical object that results from these conceptual considerations and processes of production. An obvious characteristic, but one worth mentioning, is that the object should be handmade. Further, it should demonstrate a level of technical skill and be one-of-a-kind or part of a small batch production (Crafts Council, 2011). The Arts Council England also expects that the work “reflects the signature of the individual maker” (Crafts Council, 2011), a nod to the process argument that craft be antidotal to mass production. Similarly, the product should demonstrate some mastery of technical skill, knowledge of the material, and exploration (Patria, n.d.).

Many argue that the product must have a level of utility, but not everyone believes that it should be solely functional. Some crafts are based on objects of utility, but are only intended for aesthetic purposes. For example, one would likely not use a Chihuly vase to hold flowers, although that is its function (Patria, n.d.).

Other times, the product is only valued as the tangible result of a process. Ray Greenless, Director of Craft Council, believes that end products are primarily meaningful in that they help us to “understand and enjoy the energy and care which has gone into [its] making” (Crafts Council, 2011). An even more extreme opinion is presented by Paul Greenhalgh, former Director of the Corcoran Gallery. He argues that the idea of craft should exist solely for categorization and entirely independent from a specific aesthetic (*What is Craft?*, 2011).

In an expression of wonderful synthesis, craftsman D. Scott Patria observes that “craft is about objects, the artists who make them, and the people who use them” (Patria, n.d.). Craft is dependent on the idea, the creation, and the use of an object. Without each

piece of the process, we cannot have craft. It is traditional techniques intermingled with a modern obsession with the process of creating.

## **EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION**

According to the Association of Experiential Education (2007), experiential education is an overarching philosophy that informs various educational methodologies, resulting in teachers and learners deliberately engaging with direct experience and reflection. Ultimately, experiential education should “increase knowledge, develop skills, clarify values, and develop people's capacity to contribute to their communities.”

The Association outlines twelve principles of experiential education:

- (1) Experiential learning occurs when carefully chosen experiences are supported by reflection, critical analysis and synthesis.
- (2) Experiences are structured to require the learner to take initiative, make decisions and be accountable for results.
- (3) Throughout the experiential learning process, the learner is actively engaged in posing questions, investigating, experimenting, being curious, solving problems, assuming responsibility, being creative, and constructing meaning.
- (4) Learners are engaged intellectually, emotionally, socially, soulfully and/or physically. This involvement produces a perception that the learning task is authentic.
- (5) The results of the learning are personal and form the basis for future experience and learning.
- (6) Relationships are developed and nurtured: learner to self, learner to others and learner to the world at large.
- (7) The educator and learner may experience success, failure, adventure, risk-taking and uncertainty, because the outcomes of experience cannot totally be predicted.
- (8) Opportunities are nurtured for learners and educators to explore and examine their own values.
- (9) The educator's primary roles include setting suitable experiences, posing problems, setting boundaries, supporting learners, insuring physical and emotional safety, and facilitating the learning process.

- (10) The educator recognizes and encourages spontaneous opportunities for learning.
- (11) Educators strive to be aware of their biases, judgments and pre-conceptions, and how these influence the learner.
- (12) The design of the learning experience includes the possibility to learn from natural consequences, mistakes and successes. (Association of Experiential Education, 2007)

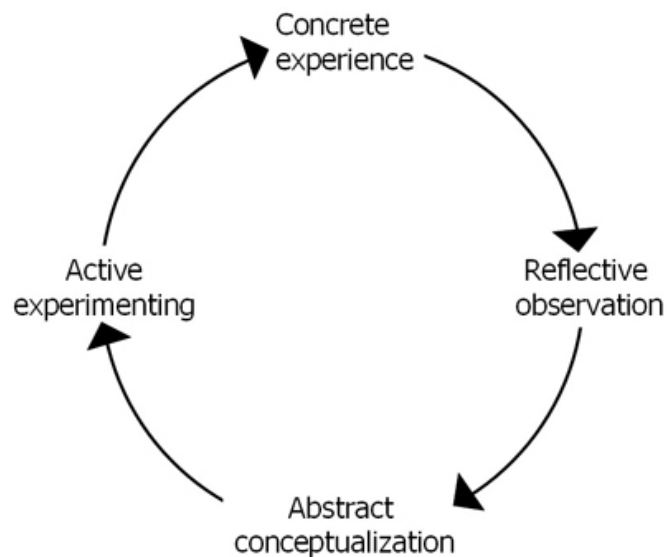
Much of the literature on this subject uses experiential learning and experiential education interchangeably. For the purposes of this research, I only use the term experiential education. There are differences in meaning between the terms learning and education that apply here. Learning implies a process of transformation that occurs internally in the learner alone, while education implies a transactive experience that occurs between teacher and learner. Experiential education relies on this relationship for the development of knowledge, skills, and self-efficacy (Itin, 1999).

Experiential education is first referenced in 1916 in Dewey's *Democracy and Education*, as Dewey introduces the idea of including experiences in education. This concept grew out of his belief that students should be educated as citizens who can succeed in a democratic society. In order to accomplish this outcome, the education system should link experience and reflection or doing and understanding, for it is "insufficient to simply know without doing and impossible to fully understand without doing" (Itin, 1999, p. 92). Educator and philosopher Paolo Freire also supported this philosophy, as he asserted that education should not be separate from the learner's daily life and should result in the development of a capable democratic citizen. Kurt Hahn founded multiple schools, programs, and initiatives based on the philosophy of experiential learning, including the successful outdoor education program Outward Bound. Through an extended outdoor adventure program, Hahn strives to create a transactive process that benefits teacher and learner and produces educated individuals who are committed to their community. Each of these figures use experiential education

as a tool for increasing self-efficacy and participation in democratic society and understanding subject matter within a specific experience that is translatable to alternate settings. Learning should be purposeful and engaging (Itin, 1999).

Drawing on these foundational concepts, philosopher David Kolb developed a circular model of experiential education involving four actions (Figure 1).

Figure 1: The Kolb cycle



The learning cycle can begin at any of these points, but most often initiates with an individual carrying out a particular action (concrete experience), seeing the result of that action (reflective observation), deciding how or whether to adjust the action for a desired result (abstract conceptualization), and testing the new hypothesis by adjusting the action (active experimenting). This model results in an iterative process of learning and doing, the concrete experience tests ideas and the feedback changes practice. From this cycle, Kolb also identified four learning styles that place learners on a spectrum



between “concrete experience and abstract conceptualization and active experimentation and reflective observation” (Smith, 1996). The convergent individual is focused, pragmatic, and unemotional, with strengths in abstract conceptualization and active experimentation. The divergent person is imaginative, people-focused, and capable of generating ideas and considering various perspectives, with strengths in concrete experience and reflective observations. The assimilator is an intellectual with capabilities in theory, abstract concepts, and inductive reasoning, and strengths in abstract conceptualization and reflective observation. The accommodator is a problem solver, quick thinker, and intuitive problem solver with strengths in concrete experience and active experimentation. These categories are not intended to be inflexible or impenetrable. Some learners will exemplify multiple categories or various characteristics in each category.

In an article accompanying the Power of Making exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 2011, Daniel Charny explored some of the motivations, methods, and outcomes of learning through making, specifically focused on craft and artistic exploration. He places motivations on a spectrum that spans from survival to vocation to personal fulfillment. Makers transform from novices to regular practitioners, and eventually to experts, and there is growth at each level of skill. The maker’s relation to the material and process changes as he or she learns it, facilitating more nuanced observations and more technically challenging products. This iterative process of doing, reflecting, and adjusting, is an example of Kolb’s circular model of experiential learning (Smith, 1996).

Making is a combination of tradition and innovation, as the creator is making something new, unique, and specific, working from an established system of making things that has existed for multiple generations or even centuries. Physical and

intellectual engagement come together in the process of making. Concepts are brought to fruition as physical objects through active thinking, problem solving, and iterative trials that require dexterity and technical skill. Sometimes, making is an exact execution of an idea. Other times it is an exploration of one's creative thought and the physicality of the medium, as Charny (2011) illustrates:

Even when making is experimental and open-ended, it observes rules. Craft always involves parameters, imposed by materials, tools, scale and the physical body of the maker. Sometimes in making, things go wrong. An unskilled maker, hitting the limits of their ability, might just stop. An expert, though, will find a way through the problem, constantly unfolding new possibilities within the process.

This focus on active learning, problem solving by combining creative and pragmatic thinking, perseverance, and the development of skills and knowledge is well aligned with the principles of experiential education, even though Charny was not trying to make that connection.

An understanding of experiential education is necessary for my research to be as comprehensive as possible. It is an adult-learner focused educational theory, although it also has broader applications. It combines the concrete action of doing something with the intellectual processes of observation, reflection, and adjustment. Making and learning craft follows this same circular pattern. It is the combination of a traditional process and innovative approaches that create the deepest learning, engaging the learner and educator in the process and honing skills that will apply outside of craft making, so that the individual can approach life issues democratically, with the pragmatic strength and creative flexibility.

## **LEISURE STUDIES**

According to the Leisure Studies Association (n.d.), leisure encompasses a broad range of activities and engagement, including “the arts, entertainment, countryside recreation, conservation and environmental interpretation, the media, sport and tourism.” Beginning in the 1950s, leisure became a subject of study and consideration due to increased affluence, greater mobility, and unemployment. The Leisure Studies Association was established in 1975 in response to an increase in interest in leisure studies by a variety of institutions and policy makers. The ways that people engage in leisure represents the state of society as well as some of the effects of social change. Leisure can describe something as simple as children’s activity in playgrounds, or as complex as international economic activity.

While there is little agreement about what leisure is for the individual or greater society, it is largely understood as something distinctly different from work experience. Max Kaplan, a scholar of leisure studies, identifies leisure activities as being pleasant, with positive outcomes and a friendly quality; self-determined; take place during one’s free time; provide recreation, personal growth, and service to others; and exist in a range of commitment and intensity levels. Some leisure activities are restricted by time and money constraints, an individual’s social and moral obligations, or the availability of opportunities (Best, 2010).

Sociologist Robert Stebbins proposed the noted and differentiated ideas of serious leisure and casual leisure. Serious leisure is a more heavily studied subject, possibly because it is a more structured concept. According to Stebbins, serious leisure activities are pursued with passion, with a commitment to continued participation, for the benefit of the individual, follow a ‘career’-like path (Best, 2010, p. 7), and require perseverance, personal effort, and an identification with the activity. To test his theories, Stebbins

studied various groups engaged in leisure activities, such as couples who shag dance, male Civil War re-enactors, female Sea Cadet volunteers, and quilters. He found that individuals who participate in these activities benefit personally from their engagement, but that they also invest a great deal of time, energy, and money in these activities. Some take on secondary jobs or remortgage their homes to cover the incurred costs. In return, there are intrinsic rewards for participation, such as commitment to something and the development of skills, and extrinsic rewards, such as the products they make, programs they are involved with, and reinforcement of gender, cultural, or social identities. While identities are constructed in part through leisure activities, Stebbins argues that leisure is not a place for reinforcing/reproducing societal power relations (Best, 2010).

Casual leisure is commonly thought of as more of a personal diversion than an investment. Stebbins (1997) identifies six types of casual leisure: play, relaxation, passive entertainment, active entertainment, sociable conversation, and sensory stimulation. These activities are often discussed in terms of their deviant or hedonistic qualities, such as drinking and doing drugs. The study of postmodern leisure, however, has shifted the focus a bit to settings such as shopping malls and amusement parks, where fact and fiction intermingle. A third strain of leisure activities is therapeutic leisure, which includes things like exercise and casual social interaction that are focused on stress-reduction. Companionship is often included in this type of leisure engagement, although it could reasonably be a part of any type of leisure. Practicing leisure activities with a partner is arguably considered stress-reducing and much of the social world is constructed through leisure engagement. Aristotle even suggests that social life revolves around leisure time (Best, 2010). Despite the type of leisure activity at hand, it is a celebration and expression of human values that renews the self and often benefits others in some way.

The experience economy is a factor currently impacting leisure studies, which was introduced by B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore in a 1999 book titled *The Experience Economy*. It is a major focus in the marketing industry, based on the idea of presenting experiences, rather than just objects, for consumption. To accomplish this, the focus of leisure has switched to entertainment, storytelling, and culture to highlight relationships, feelings, identities, and cultural engagement. It has denoted a shift in marketing towards areas of entertainment, edutainment, and cultural values, which brings leisure engagement to the forefront of minds across industries (Pine & Gilmore, 1999).

## **CONCLUSION**

This chapter provided a review of literature related to the John C. Campbell Folk School, primarily its Appalachian context, a definition of craft as it is perceived by the Folk School, and a survey of literature in the fields of leisure studies and experiential education. This material helps to establish a foundation upon which many of the ideas and actions of the study were built. The following chapter presents a thorough historical narrative of the Folk School, following its founders' early studies, folk school research in Denmark, establishment of the school, and the school's evolution and development since 1925.

## **Chapter 3: History of the John C. Campbell Folk School**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In order to understand the John C. Campbell Folk School in its current state, I undertook a close study of the school's history. Beginning with John C. and Olive Dame Campbell's early pursuits and interests, this chapter leads the reader through establishment and evolution of the John C. Campbell Folk School, with attention given to the ideologies and experiences that informed the school's educational objectives.

### **JOHN C. AND OLIVE DAME CAMPBELL**

In 1867, John C. Campbell was born in Laporte, Indiana to a Bavarian mother and a Scottish father, the superintendent of the railroad. Campbell graduated from Andover Academy in 1888, Williams College in 1892, and Andover Seminary in 1895 with degrees in Divinity (Davidson & Davis, 2008; *Guide to the John C. Campbell Folk School Papers*, 1986; Osment, 2008; Smith & Wilson, 1999). Campbell's privileged upbringing compelled him to give back to others in his adulthood (Davidson & Davis, 2008).

By the 1890s, railroad systems were reaching into Appalachia, providing access to areas that were previously isolated and mysterious. For the first time a traveler could leave New York City and be deep in Appalachia in only a matter of hours. This access increased awareness of the region, including many previously held judgments about the area's agricultural practices and unsavory living conditions. When the Vanderbilt family constructed the extravagant Biltmore estate in Asheville in 1895, it stood in stark contrast to the surrounding area's economic condition. This increase in interest in the area attracted many missionaries, including John C. Campbell (Davidson & Davis, 2008). For

twelve years, Campbell assumed various administrative positions at colleges and universities in the region. It was during this time that Campbell coined the term “Southern Highlands,” a combination of “American South” and “Scottish Highlands.” He was one of the first to distinguish Appalachia as a distinct geographic and cultural area and conclude that Scotch-Irish were the dominant ethnic strain there. Campbell’s mission was to simultaneously preserve existing Appalachian culture and introduce it to others (Osment, 2008).

Campbell’s first professional position was in Joppa, Alabama where he was the administrator for Cullman Academy. This first taste of mountain culture, as well as the poverty that affected so many of his students, ignited a passion for Appalachia that extended throughout his career. He briefly worked at Pleasant Hill Academy in Pleasant Hill, Tennessee before marrying Grace Buckingham and moving to Demarest, Georgia. In 1901, he was appointed as Superintendent of Piedmont College there. Quickly, he was promoted to dean and then president of the financially troubled college. When Grace died of tuberculosis in 1904, the exhausted, overworked, and heartbroken Campbell was ordered by his physician to take rest on an ocean voyage. On this trip in 1906 he met his second wife, Olive Arnold Dame (Davidson & Davis, 2008; *Guide to the John C. Campbell Folk School Papers*, 1986; Osment, 2008).

Olive Arnold Dame was born in Medford, Massachusetts. She was the daughter of a school principal and became a schoolteacher after graduating from Tufts College in 1903. In Medford, she taught for three years while saving money for an overseas voyage to the British Isles with her sister, Daisy. It was on this trip in 1906 that she met John C. Campbell, who accompanied the ladies for the remainder of their journey (Davidson & Davis, 2008; Smith & Wilson, 1999). On this European excursion, Campbell first read

about the Russell Sage Foundation. He and Olive Dame were married in Massachusetts in 1907 before returning to his post at Piedmont College (Smith & Wilson, 1999).

#### **STUDY FOR THE RUSSELL SAGE FOUNDATION**

While at Piedmont College, Olive Dame Campbell developed a love for Appalachia. To support their shared interest in the region and its people, John C. Campbell approached the Russell Sage Foundation for financial backing of an Appalachian study in 1908. The proposal was awarded a \$3,000 grant to study the health, educational, social, and economic conditions of the region (Davidson & Davis, 2008; Smith & Wilson, 1999). By coming into intimate contact with the individuals of the region the Campbells intended to conduct a “systematic study of the conditions that affected the lives of the highlanders” (Smith & Wilson, 1999, p. 254). The same year John and Olive Dame Campbell set out in a covered wagon on a journey that would take them north from Georgia to West Virginia.

Their method of contact was different than most of the missionaries who traveled through Appalachia. Rather than spreading religious ideology, the Campbells sought to identify the challenges of mountain life in an attempt to create solutions (Davidson & Davis, 2008). Visiting every community, church, and school was a tall task for the pair, requiring constant physical and emotional engagement for weeks and months at a time. They often had to abandon their wagon and take trails on horseback or by foot to reach deep into the communities they hoped to serve.

John C. Campbell surveyed the educational opportunities outside of public education in the region and published his findings in a 1917 report for the Russell Sage Foundation entitled *The Future of the Church and Independent Schools in Our Southern*



*Highlands*. In his studies, Campbell asked participants what they hoped to see in the future. Often, the answer was “education,” indicating that the current educational opportunities were not sufficiently reaching their intended audiences (Davidson & Davis, 2008). His publication addresses some of the failures of mountain schools and proposes potential solutions to these problems. The primary failure of the schools was their neglect of regional needs. Many schools were year-round, when in fact seasonal sessions would allow for students to attend to their agricultural duties without sacrificing educational growth. In this oversight, educators failed to recognize that economic betterment is necessary for self-sufficient educational, religious, and social structures. Additionally, motivated and ambitious teachers often left the region for better financial and social opportunities (Campbell, 1917).

Ultimately, John C. Campbell saw a need to focus on the development of the individual that was separate from the community wherein they lived, worked, and learned. Bridging this disconnect would enrich life in the region economically, educationally, and morally (Davidson & Davis, 2008). By focusing on training that would result in economic independence, schools would develop capable, altruistic leaders committed to their community and its culture. When people come together in a supportive atmosphere, they not only learn but also develop a deep love for what you have taught them (Davidson & Davis, 2008). He proposed that folks acquainted with the mountain lifestyle should undertake study of these Danish folk schools so that they may see how to adapt the theories of these places for the enrichment of mountain life. His educational philosophy focused on the native mountain culture: nourishing, nurturing, and celebrating it. Campbell charged the church and independent schools with helping to make this change because public agencies require funding that is dependent on a broad

public understanding and appreciating the type of work that they will be carrying out, which was time consuming and unreliable (Campbell, 1917).

John embarked on this journey with the intention of surveying the region's existing educational climate and needs but was also drawn to other aspects of mountain life. Through his interactions with the people of Appalachia, he transitioned from a missionary-focused student to a practitioner interested in humanitarian and social trends. His findings reached beyond the realm of education and into the everyday lives of the Appalachian people (Osment, 2008; Smith & Wilson, 1999).

Popular culture romanticized, vilified, and exaggerated mountain life. Olive Dame Campbell kept detailed records of her and her husband's interactions with the people and activities in Appalachia that provide a more honest image of the mountains. She was particularly taken with the culture of mountain life: the craft, music, and lifestyle there. She embraced the good things in Appalachian culture, noting that everything in Appalachian homes was homemade in true pioneer nature (Davidson & Davis, 2008). Despite the public opinion that Appalachian people were backwards, Olive believed that "at the bottom they [are] pretty much like the rest of us" (Smith & Wilson, 1999, p. 255).

While John was surveying educational and humanitarian needs, Olive was drawn to the craft and music traditions or, as she called them, "all things native and fine" (Smith & Wilson, 1999, p. 255). One of the greatest Appalachian music traditions was the ballad, a narrative song passed down through families and communities, not taught through books or formal training. Olive began recording these songs by asking a singer to perform over and over while she wrote the words. She would then find a piano or organ, sometimes days later, where she would reconstruct the melody and make a written reproduction of the ballad (Davidson & Davis, 2008). She contacted Cecil Sharpe, a British ballad collector, to bring these ballads to his attention. When Sharpe visited the

United States he joined her for some of her visits and was surprised at the accuracy of her unrefined system of collecting ballads (Smith & Wilson, 1999). In 1917, Olive Dame Campbell and Cecil Sharp collaboratively published *English Folk Songs of the Southern Appalachians*.

In 1909, the Campbells concluded their study and created a detailed, wall-sized map of the region defining the boundaries of Appalachia. With this gesture they were the first to distinguish exactly what Appalachia encompassed (Davidson & Davis, 2008).

As the Campbells conducted their research they were increasingly compelled to establish a permanent home in the Southern Highlands in order to carry out their work (Smith & Wilson, 1999). In 1913, they had their chance to do so when the Russell Sage Foundation opened a Southern Highland Division office in Asheville and appointed John C. Campbell to lead it (*Guide to the John C. Campbell Folk School Papers*, 1986; Smith & Wilson, 1999; Osment, 2008). In this position Campbell was also the leading force in establishing the Conference of Southern Mountain Workers, which brought together disparate regional agencies, including governmental, civic, and religious organizations, to combine resources in order to “facilitate cooperation, bridge differences, and create opportunities” (Osment, 2008) specific to rural mountain conditions. John C. Campbell served as executive secretary of the organization, creating acquaintance between workers and establishing a forum for the exchange of ideas to benefit the entire region until his death in 1919 (Fariello, 2006). After her husband passed away, Olive Dame Campbell assumed his role with the Conference of Southern Mountain Workers for 10 years, continuing the work they both believed in (Osment, 2008).

## THE DANISH FOLK SCHOOL

In an attempt to overcome her heartache, Olive Dame Campbell went to Nantucket, Massachusetts to finish writing *The Southern Highlander and his Homeland*, which she published in her husband's name in 1921 (Davidson & Davis, 2008; *Guide to the John C. Campbell Folk School Papers*, 1986; Osment, 2008; Smith & Wilson, 1999). This book is a product of their Appalachian study and grew out of the detailed records that Olive kept throughout their many years of travel. Continuing their shared mission became a coping mechanism for Olive in dealing with John's death (Smith & Wilson, 1999).

Determined to fulfill their vision, Olive Dame Campbell secured funding from the Russell Sage Foundation and the American-Scandinavian Foundation to embark on a fourteen-month research trip to Denmark and surrounding countries in 1922 (Smith & Wilson, 1999). She was accompanied by her sister Daisy and friend Marguerite Butler, whose background and interests were similar to those of Olive: she graduated from Vassar College and taught at Pine Mountain Settlement School in Kentucky (Davidson & Davis, 2008).

In Europe they discovered hands-on, noncompetitive schools in which teachers and students lived and ate together and engaged in deep conversations. Relationships and educational exchanges were not limited to instruction times. Campbell observed that out-of-class time was a valuable setting for interactions amongst participants, students, and educators alike (Davidson & Davis, 2008). Campbell later noted, "One has to face the fact that there is something a little elusive about the *Folkehöjskole*. It is not to be captured and compassed with a glance" (Campbell, 1928, p. 1). Thus, the women undertook an intensive investigation of the structure and culture of these institutions as they traveled the European countryside.

The *Folkehøjskole*, or Danish folk school, grew out of the educational philosophies of N.F.S. Grundtvig, a 19<sup>th</sup> century Danish theologian. With no background in psychology or sociology, his educational philosophies evolved from his life experiences rather than formal training. He envisioned a school that provided equal educational opportunities to all Danes by removing the disparities between life and education in an effort to awaken, enlighten, and enliven more than educate (Campbell, 1928; Davidson & Davis, 2008). Part of the success of the folk school relies on the transactive exchange that occurs between teacher and learner. His focus was not on the content being taught, but the environment in which it was taught and the ways it was presented.

For Grundtvig, folk schools are rooted in the communities they grow from, “reinforcing pride in local culture, especially music and craft heritage” (Berea College Special Collections and Archives, 1986). His theories are targeted specifically to adults, based on the idea that as children we are self-absorbed, as teenagers we are strongly susceptible to the influence of others, and in both stages our rapid physical growth demands much of our bodies’ energy. In adulthood, the mind is finally prepared to support more demanding mental activity (Campbell, 1917, 1928).

Ultimately, Grundtvig promoted a folk school that had human development at the core of its mission. Through a marriage of spiritual and temporal growth, the *Folkehøjskole* would not be able to teach everything, but rather would equip students with the tools to gain the knowledge they lacked (Campbell, 1917). His educational theories were founded on a belief in people not as they are, but as they might be at their maximum potential (Campbell, 1928).

The travelers observed many of these characteristics in the schools they visited. They contemplated what changes should be made in adapting Danish folk school principles to the Appalachian setting. With their minds and notebooks full, Olive Dame

Campbell and Marguerite Butler returned to the United States in 1923, determined to find a location for their folk school.

## **THE JOHN C. CAMPBELL FOLK SCHOOL**

### **Beginnings**

Upon their return, Campbell and Butler were earnest and excited to share their research. They gave a talk on their findings at the annual conference of the Council of the Southern Mountains, in hopes that existing educational institutions might try to adapt their philosophies. No one did, so Campbell and Butler realized they would have to carry out the task themselves (McNelley, 1966). Olive Dame Campbell focused her efforts on publishing a book of the trip's findings, *The Danish Folk School*, which was ultimately published in 1928. Meanwhile, Marguerite embarked on an investigation of possible locations for the school that would extend John C. Campbell's vision (Davidson & Davis, 2008; *Guide to the John C. Campbell Folk School Papers*, 1986; Osment, 2008).

Originally, Butler's search spread across five states. Her requirements included a rural space far from land owned by mining or lumber companies in a community that was interested in committing resources to this cooperative undertaking. Ann Ruth Metcalf, a sociologist, public health nurse, and former colleague of Butler's, had previously done a study in Cherokee County, North Carolina and proposed the area as a possible school site (McNelley, 1966). During a visit to Murphy, North Carolina, Butler was approached by Fred O. Scroggs who requested that she visit Brasstown, just a few miles away. At a community meeting there Butler clearly laid out the women's vision for the school: there would be no vocational training and no college preparation; it was a school for ordinary

people that would marry their education with agricultural improvement in the region (Davidson & Davis, 2008).

Scroggs played a strong hand in organizing Brasstown citizens in support of the school. He was a progressive community leader familiar with the ideas of the Danish folk school, and he harnessed land, labor, money, and materials for the school's construction (Davidson & Davis, 2008). Members of the Brasstown community expressed their commitment through a self-initiated pledge that received 116 signatures of support promising: \$800 in cash; telephone poles; building stone; firewood; native shrubs, trees, bulbs; 1495 days of labor through the first three years; and 388 labor days annually without time limit. After a monetary gift from the Carnegie Corporation and 30 acres of land given by the Scroggs family, Butler and Campbell committed to Brasstown as their location. They chose Brasstown because it was in a region capable of agricultural development, was a natural center with access to railroads, and was located within a substantial population of landowning people who wanted the school there (McNelley, 1966; Smith & Wilson, 1999).

On November 23, 1925 the John C. Campbell Folk School was incorporated under North Carolina law, with the support of the Conference of Southern Mountain Workers, the American Missionary Association, the Board of National Missions of the Presbyterian Church, and the National Council of the Protestant Episcopal Church. These associations were informal, as the school was neither accountable to church nor state but worked in cooperation with both. According to Pat McNelley, a friend and supporter of the school:

Beginning in December 1925 with almost empty pockets, but hearts filled with faith, hope, and a willingness to work, the Folk School sought, through active share in community activities, to build a firm foundation of local understanding

for the school proper, which held its first session in the winter of 1927-28. So the JCCFS began to build and grow. (McNelley, 1966, p. 9)

Upon opening the school, Campbell assumed the Director's position and Butler was hired as her assistant (Smith & Wilson, 1999). Georg Bidstrup was brought on soon after. He had previous experience with Danish folk schools, agricultural cooperatives, and teaching gymnastics and folk dancing (Davidson & Davis, 2008). The school's first week of classes began February 7, 1927. Forty people crowded into the school's living room that week, despite snowy and treacherous conditions. Students were exposed to history, practical forestry instruction, geography, cooperatives and guilds, and public health that first week. Friday was even dedicated to a baby conference, in which community members brought their little ones in for health check-ups (McNelley, 1966).

The first full session of school ran from December 1, 1927-February 28, 1928, allowing students to return to their farm life duties in the spring without missing out on school time. The session was open to students over sixteen years of age who had an interest in developing their best self and had no stated requirements except a desire to learn and to grow. Course subjects included field surveying, cooking, sewing, farm equipment construction, sports, gymnastics, music, and "grammar, reading, writing, and arithmetic of the most practical kind" (McNelley, 1966, p. 13). The school day began at 9:00 a.m. with songs, hymns, poems, or inspirational talk. Subject courses followed this morning ritual and lasted until 4:00 p.m. Students and teachers boarded at the school while it was in session, living and learning side-by-side. This immersive, community-style living was an important part of the education. Olive Dame Campbell valued family-style dinners, chores, and a commitment to what the culture of the region could be as important parts of the educational experience (Fariello, 2006).



## **Ideology**

While the school was founded on the principles and ideology of the Danish Folk School, it functioned as a folk school for Americans in the Southern Highlands, not a Danish school on American soil. Campbell and Butler's educational ideology included a genuine collaboration between the school and the community it served. The curriculum favored the personality of the individual over the dissemination of facts and prioritized "work of the everyday above mere academic learning" (Fariello, 2006). In fact, the school's motto was and still is, "I Sing Behind the Plow," a nod to a Danish folk song and a commitment to finding the beauty, pleasure, and opportunity for growth in everyday activities. The school followed a philosophy that "knowledge itself does not make man good, useful, or happy. The real aim is to awaken, enliven, and enlighten. An awakened, enlightened spirit will go on of itself" (McNelley, 1966, p. 5). The mission was not only to educate students, but also to enrich the community by retaining motivated, knowledgeable individuals. Similarly, the school functioned to enlighten all citizens, which is why there were no requirements, admissions, credits, or examinations. Dr. Arthur Morgan, the first Director of the Tennessee Valley Authority, said that the John C. Campbell Folk School was "not really a school, but a spirit of living" (McNelley, 1966, p. 5). Similar to the Campbell's approach during their study for the Russell Sage Foundation, the people of the John C. Campbell Folk School perceived the community's needs and developed programs accordingly (Alvic, 2003).

Olive Dame Campbell served as the first executive director of the John C. Campbell Folk School from its incorporation in 1925 until her retirement in 1946. Noticing a group of idle men carving wood, or making *shavings* as they called it, outside

Scroggs' store, Campbell encouraged them to make figural objects. She then sold the whittlers' work through the mail and gave the makers the profits from the sales. This gesture was significant for many reasons. First, it encouraged Campbell to incorporate craft at her school and validated her belief that craft can be a means for economic prosperity. It also provided money for local citizens who then were able to financially support their families in ways they could not accomplish previously. Her acknowledgement of this group also inspired the creation of the Brasstown Carvers, an artist cooperative that is still in operation today and has gained national notoriety for the quality of work that its members produce (Davidson & Davis, 2008; *Guide to the John C. Campbell Folk School Papers*, 1986; Smith & Wilson, 1999). Campbell also established the Southern Highland Handicraft Guild through her role at the Conference of Southern Mountain Workers. The Guild brings together and supports craftspeople, primarily in cultivating opportunities for economic prosperity, and is still in action today (Smith & Wilson, 1999).

Campbell initiated other types of cooperatives, as well. Relying on Georg Bidstrup's expertise, the school started a dairy cooperative, a forestry program, and an agricultural cooperative. Although profits were low, the school's programs were successful. When the Depression hit, these programs helped the region to survive. A credit union that loaned money to individuals within a five-mile radius of Brasstown and based credit on people's character was founded by the school and kept the area's economy afloat during the 1930s (Davidson & Davis, 2008). The school and community were shaken during World War I as citizens lived in fear and young men and women left the area to assist with war efforts. When the conflict ended, few who had left Brasstown returned to the region. They stayed in more prosperous areas to work in factories or pursue a college or vocational education (Davidson & Davis, 2008). As an attempt to

bring more students in, the school received clearance to serve veterans who wanted to take advantage of the GI Bill through blacksmithing, ironworking, cabinetmaking, and woodworking classes in 1946 (Fariello, 2006). That same year, Olive Dame Campbell retired as director of the John C. Campbell Folk School after twenty-one years of diligent service. She split her retirement years between the northeast and Brasstown, staying involved with the school until her death on June 14, 1954 (Davidson & Davis, 2008; Smith & Wilson, 1999).

### **Middle Years**

In the years since Olive Dame Campbell's retirement, each director has brought a distinct agenda to his or her tenure at the school. Georg Bidstrup, the agricultural expert hired at the school's inception, became the school's second director. He had since married Marguerite Butler and the two led the school together. They increased the school's commitment to folk dancing, including an emphasis on a dance course offered each June and regular community dance opportunities. In 1969 they retired, passing directorship on to John Ramsey. He maintained their focus on dance traditions and also reinvigorated the school's agricultural initiatives in his brief leadership (Davidson & Davis, 2008). In 1966, Pat McNelley, a friend and supporter of the school, wrote *The First Forty Years*, a book that documented the school's history. She noted that in the 1960s the folk school increasingly served people who live and work in "the midst of the pressures and nervous tension of our complex urban society" (p. 39), and who visit as a reprieve, to see the countryside, enjoy the warm atmosphere, and engage in creative work and play ultimately to "renew their spirit and gain inner security" (p. 39).

In 1974, Maggie and Gus Masters were appointed co-directors of the school. They took over during tough economic times and accepted little to no salary in order to keep the school alive. As practicing enamellists, they augmented the school's arts and crafts focus. They initiated the widely acclaimed annual fall festival, constructed a pottery studio, remodeled the blacksmith shop and the carpenter's shop, enlarged the craft store, and introduced the resident artist program. After an eventful two years, the pair retired in 1976 to pursue their crafting and teaching full time (Davidson & Davis, 2008; Obituary: Margaret Masters, 2010).

Esther Hyatt assumed directorship of the John C. Campbell Folk School upon the Masters' departure. As the first mountain-born director, she strengthened the school's connection with the surrounding community. Her administrative assistant, Bob Fink, assumed interim directorship when Hyatt left. In the mid-1980s, Ron Hill was appointed director of the school. He was a successful fundraiser who rehabilitated the buildings on campus. He also implemented a formal folklore program that collected, catalogued, and archived documents, oral histories, and music (Davidson & Davis, 2008).

The school's current director, Jan Davidson, was appointed to his position in 1992. Davidson was born and raised in nearby Murphy, North Carolina and visited the school often as a child. After receiving a Ph.D. in folklore, he returned to the area. Davidson promotes the school's commitment to non-competitive education, noting that in most educational settings there are systems set up to weed people out. At the John C. Campbell Folk School, however, the environment is developed to bring people together. Rather than centering on a discipline, Davidson has focused on a return to the school's original philosophies: cooperation, tolerance, and collaboration (Davidson & Davis, 2008).

## **Present**

Today, the John C. Campbell Folk School is a center for learning and cultural enrichment for all, with weekly community dances; regular lectures; and annual events such as Folk Dance Week; Little Folk School; Middle Folk School; and the Fall Arts, Crafts, and Music Festival (*Guide to the John C. Campbell Folk School Papers*, 1986). One testament to the school's effectiveness is the large number of people who have come to Brasstown as students or visitors but stayed to be a part of the school's community. Martha Owen, currently the school's resident spinner, originally came as a child with an interest in spinning. She credits the lack of pressure, the unique learning environment, and the learner-driven nature of craft education for the school's success (Davidson & Davis, 2008).

While the school's appeal to visitors is varied and far-reaching, Pat McNelley (1966) notes the "uniqueness of the school's teaching methods, high standards of culture and craftsmanship, and the spirit of cooperation which exists between school and community" (p. 21) for attracting students. Presently, the school draws students from a wide geographic spread, particularly individuals living in urban areas who want to experience mountain culture or get away from the hustle and bustle of city life for some time. Students attend for the chance to engage in a hobby, receive vocational training, or to accompany a friend or spouse who visits the school, according to a documentary about the school produced by UNC-Public Television (Davidson & Davis, 2008). An increasing number of retirees are also attracted to the school, which is likely due to increased life span and economic security. This population largely comes for leisure, not livelihood (McNelley, 1966).

From its inception, Olive Dame Campbell intended for the school to be an institution that promoted community, vocational and practical skill, individual strengths,

and preserved the tradition of the Appalachian Highlands. The school encompasses “Olive’s efforts and John’s philosophy and inspiration” (Osment, 2008). While much has changed with the years, Campbell’s philosophy remains present at the school today. The school serves as a workshop for life. Morning rituals, evening dance programs, and family-style meals encourage relationships amongst students and between students and instructors. Instructors are experts in their respective media who are excited to share their craft for the betterment of others (Osment, 2008). The school still manages to “emanate an intangible aura that stimulates a fresh outlook in mind, body, spirit” (McNelley, 1966, p. 1). Martha Owens notes that, ultimately, Olive Dame Campbell envisioned a better world, reached through the education of its citizens (Davidson & Davis, 2008). This is happening on an increasingly broad scale. John C. Campbell hoped that people would become invested in the future of Appalachia by embracing the traditions of its past (Osment, 2008). Through this exact avenue, the John C. Campbell Folk School has created an interest in and respect for mountain life.

## **CONCLUSION**

This chapter contained a historical look at the John C. Campbell Folk School, its founders and inspirations, through the present day. The focus in this chapter was on understanding the foundations and evolution of the school, examining some of the activities and beliefs of those who developed and directed the John C. Campbell Folk School over the years. The chapter that follows looks at the school in its current state, from the buildings and physical layout of the school to the structure of the educational day.

## **Chapter 4: Present-day John C. Campbell Folk School**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter explores the present-day John C. Campbell Folk School. In doing so, I describe the physical space of the school, the environment and community that exists there, and the course offerings in order to present a comprehensive illustration of the school and uncover some of its unique characteristics.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The research methodology used in this study was determined by my central research question, which asks why students enroll in courses at the John C. Campbell Folk School and what they gain from this experience. Because my study specifically investigated one school, a comprehensive understanding of the school itself frames the participants' responses. Building this framework led me to case study research, which is intensive investigation resulting in rich, descriptive data designed to examine the particulars of a phenomenon or issue (Lapan, Moore, & Quartaroli, 2012).

Case study research is qualitative in nature, as it explores the meaning of an issue or phenomenon. Qualitative research provides data in the form of words rather than numbers, requires inductive analysis, maintains focus on individual participants, and presents the nuances and complexities of the subject without generalizations. It exists in contrast to quantitative research, which requires deductive analysis, usually generates a numerical data set, and produces generalizable results that can be replicated (Creswell, 2009). Quantitative research asks a specific question while qualitative research asks a broad, open-ended question. Qualitative inquiry “*generates* theory and extends our . . . understandings rather than *generalizing* about them” (Stokrocki, 1997, p. 34). My

research addresses broad questions: *why* are people attracted to the John C. Campbell Folk School and *what* do they gain from this experience.

Within the realm of qualitative research, there are many methodologies and strategies for data collection. These categories vary between fields and among experts. According to Creswell (2009), qualitative data collection happens at the site of the issue being studied. The researcher functions as an instrument for data collection, compiles data from multiple sources, and employs inductive data analysis. In presenting data, the researcher maintains the meanings expressed by participants rather than creating his or her own meaning and creates a holistic account of his research that explains the complexities of the issue at hand rather than generalizing or synthesizing them. Each of these characteristics applies to the study that I conducted at the John C. Campbell Folk School. Mary Stokrocki (1997), however, more explicitly delineates subcategories of research that fall under qualitative methodologies: ethnography or microethnography, phenomenology, educational criticism, social critical theory, and case study.

Case study is the type of qualitative research that facilitated a deep exploration of students' experiences at the John C. Campbell Folk School, producing data that is descriptive and explanatory. Since it is open-ended, case study research necessitates the establishment of boundaries. For this study, I spent three full days at the John C. Campbell Folk School, observing and interviewing. I did not expand my investigation to other schools, thus making this a single case study rather than an investigation with multiple cases. Such limits are necessary in order to focus my research, out of respect for time and resource constraints.

As outlined by Lapan, Moore, and Quartaroli (2012), case studies serve to explain, describe, explore, or compare a phenomenon. This particular case describes and explores the John C. Campbell Folk School. It is collective amongst participants in that I



gather multiple perspectives to extrapolate themes and similarities, but it does not measure this collective experience against external schools or settings. This case study is multi-modal because it triangulates data from multiple sources, increasing reliability and accuracy (*Writing Guide: Case Studies*, 1993). The sources I employ are my own observations, interviews with individuals, and document-based research through the school's archives and educational and marketing materials. Characteristics of case study research expand beyond data collection into the manners used for data analysis.

Stokrocki (1997) explains Eisner's theory on data analysis as the "process of explaining the meaning of an event by putting it in context, making the experience vivid, identifying its prior conditions and potential consequences, and providing reasons for practices" (p. 36). Content analysis begins during collection, as the researcher notes themes and patterns while uncovering the layers of the phenomenon. From this, potential explanations are developed, taking concrete data into abstract thought. Organizing data provides the opportunity for comparative analysis and interrelated findings. In this study, this is the action of comparing observations against printed material from the school and accounts recorded during interviews. Through this triangulation, I strived for "totality and coherence of meaning" (Stokrocki, 1997, p. 35) in my account of the John C. Campbell Folk School. Analysis also incorporates a search for human meaning, to the researcher, the discipline, and to those beyond the field of study. This component of analysis brings research findings into practical application.

The descriptions here are consistent with the research I conducted. It was about the John C. Campbell Folk School and my research took place on location. I used multiple modes of collecting data, was aware of my role as the research instrument, and began analyzing my data as I collected it in order for it to shape and inform the rest of my research. As I mention in the chapter that follows, I used case study research in

conjunction with narrative research in the form of interviews to create a more nuanced and holistic understanding of the Folk School and the individuals who attend there.

## **DATA COLLECTION**

The day I arrived in Brasstown, I awoke to a dusting of snow on the ground. The air was cold, but as the sun rose, a distant feeling of warmth cut the chill. I had a two-hour drive ahead of me from Asheville, the closest airport to Brasstown. My driving companion was a large cup of coffee, keeping my sleepiness at bay. The previous day of traveling from Texas to North Carolina had ended only a few hours earlier, at 3 a.m. The coffee and my excitement kept me alert.

As I drove southwest through the Nantahala National Forest I was overcome with a familiar feeling. In the two years that I lived in Washington, DC, it was easy to get caught up in the chaos of life there. Driving south towards my parents' home in the Blue Ridge Mountains, I always felt the stresses of city life falling away as the mountains rose to greet me. On this particular day it was my feelings of anxiety that fell away: anxiety over meeting new people, being in an unfamiliar environment, and embarking on research that I had already invested myself in so deeply. The mountains enveloped me as I embarked on my journey.

The cold morning was still evidenced in the snowcaps on the Nantahala Mountains. A light snow sits differently upon mountaintops than a heavy snow does, and on this morning the accumulation sat softly atop the trees, looking more like powdered sugar sifted onto the branches than snow. The light dusting seemed to signal the onset of spring weather, somehow. The sound of the radio went in and out as I weaved through the mountains, a surefire sign that I was leaving civilization and closing in on my

destination. I drove off the main highway onto a four-lane thoroughfare, then a two-lane road, and eventually onto an unlined country roadway that brought me to the John C. Campbell Folk School. I was unaware that I had even entered Brasstown. No grocery store, town hall, or city blocks identified the town. The roads leading to the Folk School, however, were lined with a handful of brightly painted bungalows selling local art. If you've been to many tourist destinations you know the type: founded in vernacular tradition, but gradually turned into tourist attractions so that eventually they are caricatures of their original state.

Turning left onto Folk School Road there was no grand building or elaborate sign to welcome me. A few large but modest buildings were scattered across the hillside. As I ascended a hill and came around a curve I spotted an iron sign on the side of the road that read "John C. Campbell Folk School." I had arrived.

### **The Place**

Approximately thirty structures occupy a rather small stretch of the school's 300 acres. There is a large tin-roofed, open-sided pavilion used for festivals and gatherings, barns transformed into studios and offices, a wide variety of student housing options, masonry buildings used for blacksmithing, and at the center lies Keith House, the History Center, and the Olive D. Campbell Dining Hall. Miles of trails are laid out through the campus. Some are utilitarian, used for getting from building to building. These paths are mulched or graveled, clearly marked, and even lit in the evenings. Other paths are cruder in consistency and lead through the less-populated areas of campus, inviting hikes and private walks, a welcome reprieve from the constant social interactions.

### *The Keith House*

My first stop at the school was the Keith House. This white building with green trim and red doors, I came to learn, was the first school building erected on the property. It is arguably the epicenter of activity at the school, home to most of the administrative offices, a large community hall, a sitting room, residences for the hosts and work-study students, and a twenty-four hour coffee station. Entering the Keith House, you are welcomed by a small foyer cluttered with brochures, cards, and flyers from local businesses, craftspeople, and organizations. The smell of must and old wood circles the space. The community hall is immediately to the left, outfitted with simply crafted wooden benches along the perimeter, a large wooden stage at one end, and a hoard of handcrafted wooden chairs. These are the same chairs, in fact, that were made by community members and donated to the school in 1925 (Figure 2).



Figure 2: A delivery of chairs. Photo circa 1925 from the John C. Campbell Folk School archives.

The Community Hall is the space where community members and Folk School students meet most often. It is the location for most of the social activities on campus, outside of studios and meal times. On Mondays at 5:00 p.m., community members come to the Community Hall to practice clogging. At 7:00 p.m. David Brose, the school folklorist, presents folk music, folklore, and stories. Tuesday evenings in the Hall are for students to learn square, contra, and circle dancing from Bob Dalsemer, who is in charge of the music and dance program at the Folk School. On Wednesday evenings, community members fill the Hall to practice a variety of dances. The room is the practice site for numerous local dance troupes, including the Folk School Cloggers, the Rural Felicity Garland Dancers, the Sticks in the Mud Morris Dancers, the Dame's Rocket Northwest Clog Morris Dancers, and the Black Socks Rapper Sword Dancers. On Friday evenings, free concerts take place in the Community Hall. This live music is presented for the students, but is free and open to all community members as well.

Other important events take place in the Community Hall throughout the week. It is the location for Morningsong, the ritual gathering of school visitors at 7:45 each morning. Morningsong is a means of building community around regional music, songs, and stories. It is optional, but was well attended during my visit. The week's culminating event, the Student Exhibit, also takes place in the Community Hall. On Friday afternoon, students bring their work to the Keith House to present their week's creations and partake in a celebratory closing ceremony. Each student has a chance to demonstrate what he or she has learned throughout the week. This is not a critique or review of the work, but a celebration of the week's progress and exploration.

Across the foyer from the Community Hall is a sitting room, referred to familiarly as the den. Walls made of dark wood are lined with bookshelves, which constitute an honor-system library for students and Brasstown citizens alike. A mismatched collection

of leather and wooden furniture is arranged to create small gathering spaces, sometimes around a table. Two handcrafted decorations adorn the walls, a hammered metal sign that reads “hands to work, hearts to God,” and a carved wooden sign that displays the school’s slogan, “I am just a common farmer / I sing behind the plow / for I am happy and free.” Both are products of and allusions to the handmade work done at the school. In this space people gather for conversations, coffee, and late in the evenings, to catch up on work emails. It is worth noting that this is the only space at the school that gets a wireless Internet signal. Fewer people than expected utilize this, but now and then a student can be spotted wearily working on a laptop. I was curled into one of the large leather chairs in the den one evening when a woman sat next to me. I can’t remember who spoke first, but we spent the better part of an hour talking and it wasn’t until her son came in after his dance practice that I realized she was a Brasstown local, not a visiting student. At the folk school all are welcome equally.

Beyond the den there is another small sitting room. This is where the coffee is always brewing, just outside the administrative offices. Closed behind a large wooden door and curtained window all the business of the school takes place. At the end of a long line of administrative assistant’s desks and management staff offices sits the Director’s office. A few staff members work at various sites throughout the school, such as the History Center, where the development manager and school folklorist conduct business, and the Red Barn, where the marketing team works.

In the basement of the house is a large room used for workshops and demonstrations. It functioned as the dining hall before the Olive D. Campbell Dining Hall was built in recent years. On the second and third floors of the house, residential rooms are reserved for the hosts and work-study students. Throughout the house the floors creak and the burnt smell of forced air heat mixes with the unavoidable dust that accrues in old

buildings. It is adorned with handmade iron details, photographs from the school throughout its history, and welcoming furniture. It is kept clean enough to feel comfortable, but dark and mismatched enough to maintain a rustic feel.

The Keith House is rarely quiet. When the administrative staff is in, they are bustling around to keep the school running smoothly. In the evenings, the Community Hall is full of students and community members who come for concerts and dances. Beyond the structured activities in the space people often mill around the den reading, working, and chatting. The work-study students and hosts who reside in the Keith House are busy folks who can be seen coming and going at any hour. It is the place where community members and visiting students mingle most often.

### ***The Olive D. Campbell Dining Hall and Craft Shop***

The Olive D. Campbell Dining Hall and Craft Shop occupy a relatively new building just down the hill from the original Keith House. As I drove up Brasstown Road onto the school's campus, this building was the first to capture my attention. The upstairs of the building is the Olive D. Campbell Dining Hall. This is where all meals are enjoyed. The building is divided into three large, connected dining rooms. Off-white walls and wood floors frame the rooms, which are full of large wooden dining tables with eight wooden chairs at each.

Mealtime is the most ritualistic activity I observed at the school. A bell is rung at each meal. I assumed that this was to alert individuals all over campus that it was time to eat. To my surprise, however, hungry students gather outside the dining hall before the bell is rung. The bell, then, signals that students are allowed to go inside. Once in the dining hall, students get their drinks before choosing a table at which to be seated.

Seating is not assigned or divided based on course enrollment. After everyone has settled on a seat, a staff person or instructor makes announcements and leads the group in a song or blessing. Food is then brought to the tables and served family-style. This method is effective in fostering conversation because it requires that the people sitting around the table interact with one another. Conversation could stop at simple niceties, but it rarely does.

Often, the nametags worn by each student and instructor are used as an icebreaker. These nametags list the course you are enrolled in for the week and your hometown along with your name. Couples, families, and friends frequently sit together during mealtime. It is common, however, for people to choose new company at each meal. During my visit, I rarely sat with the same people more than once, and the energetic environment facilitated conversation so that it was never forced or uncomfortable. After mealtimes, students are responsible for clearing their own plates and picking up dessert for the table. This could be done individually, but it never was. Someone always initiated the clearing of the table and everyone pitched in to help. I might gather the plates while someone else busses the salad bowl and condiments. It may have been equally effective for everyone to clear his or her own dishes, but this cooperative method mirrors the school's interest in building relationships. Realistically, I could have met twenty-one new people each day at mealtime alone. The way the school has structured meals is successful in engaging students with one another. Often, staff members are also present at lunchtime, sitting amongst the students.

Downstairs from the Olive D. Campbell Dining Hall is the Craft Shop. It is often buzzing with drop-in visitors and students, especially before and after lunchtime. The work found in the shop represents over 300 craftspeople, and encompasses both traditional and contemporary Appalachian craft. The items in the shop are made from



various media and exemplify a broad range of styles. The craft shop is visually overwhelming. Every inch of space is used for product display. Rustic looking stained wood displays touting handwoven scarves stand alongside glass cases with nature-themed handmade jewelry. Objects seem to almost overtake the space. In fact, I cannot recall what color the walls or rug were, but I can remember the flow of the space. Glass jewelry cases filled the center of the room and were also placed by the checkout counter. Books and Folk School merchandise were relegated to small side rooms and fiber arts filled a large corner of the space.

The work in the craft shop is not divided solely by discipline, it is organized by the artisans who made the items. Utilitarian and decorative objects fill the space: woven rugs, painted ceramics, wooden kitchen utensils, knitted clothing, and nature-themed jewelry pieces. Of course, there are t-shirts, mugs, and canvas bags emblazoned with the John C. Campbell Folk School logo and motto.

The objects in the craft shop have a specific vernacular style and are intended to come from the Southern Appalachian region. The school has published eight guidelines for consideration in displaying an artisan's work in the Craft Shop. Objects must be handmade, marketable, and original in design while maintaining faith to the craft's tradition. They must demonstrate excellence in design and craftsmanship, and be durable, functional, and professionally presented. Special consideration is made for items created within the community and the Southern Appalachian region and work produced by teachers and demonstrators at the school. Lastly, items brought to the Craft Shop cannot be for sale in any other shop within 15 miles of the Folk School (*Jurying Standards for the John C. Campbell Folk School Craft Shop and Fall Festival*).

In addition to the craft items, there is an extensive bookroom. The space is really more of a nook, filled floor to ceiling with publications on all things Appalachia and all

things craft. Songbooks and other publications produced by the Folk School are for sale along with books on Appalachian history, culture, and lifestyles. There are instructional books on quilting, knitting, and woodcarving. Coffee table books with beautiful illustrations of hand-produced crafts are available. Informational books that present the history of and context surrounding various crafts can be found in the book room. There are even books that surpass the realm of craft, crossing into nature studies and homesteading manuals.

The shop's small collection of art-making tools is also found in the book nook. The school provides the tools that students need in their courses. These tools are intended for further use at home. Looking at these tools nestled amongst the books, I realized the difference between this small room and the expansive craft shop. The items in the craft shop are mementos, objects that school visitors will place in their homes or give away as gifts as a commemoration of the time they spent at the school. The items in the book nook are intended to foster further investigation of the crafts that students explore in their courses at the school. Although the bookroom occupies a small space, it is the area of the craft shop that best fulfills the folk school's ideology.

### ***History Center***

The History Center sits in a masonry building near the Keith House, in the most traversed area of the school. The second story of the building is dedicated to staff offices and archival objects. These objects are accessible through David Brose, the school folklorist who works in this building. The first story of the building holds the space that is open to visitors. One large room is crowded with tall glass display cases and printed labels identifying objects, photographs, and newspaper clippings. There is even a small

wooden table and chairs posed with kitchen items from the early twentieth century. The items in the History Center chronicle the histories of the folk school and Brasstown.

### *Studios*

With the large volume of courses offered at the Folk School each year, it is no surprise that there are over fifteen distinct studios on campus. All the studios are equipped with necessities for the rotating schedule of teachers and students. To keep traffic moving smoothly through the studios, the school employs Resident Artists. These artists do not stay on site full-time, as their title suggests. They schedule the classes, hire and manage the instructors for their area of expertise, and maintain the studio's tools, equipment, and materials. The school employs eighteen Resident Artists to manage the following areas of study:

- (1) Basketry, Brooms, and Chair Seats
- (2) Blacksmithing
- (3) Book Arts, Paper Arts, Printmaking, Marbling, and Calligraphy
- (4) Clay
- (5) Cooking (two resident artists)
- (6) Dolls, Bears, and Figurative Sculpture
- (7) Enameling, Hot-Warm Glass
- (8) Gardening
- (9) Jewelry, Metalwork, Stained Glass, and Kaleidoscopes
- (10) Nature Studies, Storytelling, and Folklore
- (11) Painting, Drawing, and Mixed Media
- (12) Quilting
- (13) Spinning, Dyeing, Felting, and Knitting
- (14) Weaving, Rugs, Needlework, and Thread Art
- (15) Woodcarving
- (16) Woodturning
- (17) Woodworking

Generally, studios are located near like studios. Three blacksmith studios are situated at the southwest perimeter of campus. The Francis Whitaker Blacksmith Shop was built as a milking barn in 1930, but has since been transformed into a blacksmith shop under the guidance of Francis Whitaker, the “Dean of American Blacksmithing” (*The John C. Campbell Folk School*). In 2010, the Clay Spencer Blacksmith Shop opened as an addition to the Francis Whitaker Blacksmith Shop. The newer building is the primary studio space now, with 12 forging stations surrounding an instructor’s large demonstration forge. There is also an expansive tool library in the new studio, and the earlier shop is now used for specialized activities. The combined studio space is a fascinating blend of new technology and traditional farm architecture.

I entered the blacksmith studio through the original milking barn. Uneven bricked floors led me past large, industrial-looking machinery and a long metal table with various tools attached to its edges, and on to a wall holding tools. Up a couple of wooden stairs, I entered the new blacksmithing facility. The instructor greeted me and led me to the drawer of safety goggles before letting me into the space. This room was what I expected of a blacksmithing studio. Each student was working intently at a forge with a fire flickering inside. The instructor engaged with each student one-on-one, calling for everyone’s attention occasionally to demonstrate a particular skill or answer a common question. There was laughter and conversation in the blacksmith studio, but the tone was more serious than in other studios, perhaps due to potential danger and needed concentration.

Further toward the center of campus is the Pitman Fiber Arts Building, home to the quilting and weaving studios and an extensive fiber arts library. The weaving studio is a spacious, white room half-filled with large looms that appear the same to the novice eye, but each is distinguished slightly from the others in its production purpose. Hand-

dyed fabrics and brilliantly colored woven textiles were draped over the looms. A countertop along the far wall held plastic bins filled with the aforementioned dyes. In the other half of the room sat a group of rug-hooking students working on their craft independently but talking collectively.

North on the gravel road is Studio Row, a collection of studios that bridge many disciplines, including the clay, woodcarving, enameling, and jewelry, metalwork, and cold glass studios. The woodworking studio and the basket, broom, and chair seat studio called the Rock Room share one large building just beyond Studio Row. Both of these studios rely heavily on wood and are practically placed alongside a building for wood storage. The basketry studio is a vibrant environment, a tone undoubtedly set by the instructor. Reeds in natural tones and dyed in vibrant hues hang along the top of the wall. One wall has a shelf set a foot or two below the ceiling that displays a handful of completed baskets. In-process projects sit in front of students, alongside water-filled plastic bins draped with loose reeds. It is one of the few studios with non-white walls, imbuing energy into the space.

The basement of the Keith House is home to the paper and book arts studios, with a wet space for papermaking and a dry space for book making. In the Harvest Room of the Orchard House, photography and writing courses are held. The room is outfitted with the computers and Internet access necessary for these classes. Davidson Hall is the location for some of the messier courses. A wet room is equipped with floor drains for large scale dyeing during fiber spinning courses. A cooking studio provides all of the tools, appliances, and utensils needed for a cooking course. The music studio is also in Davidson Hall, with a large communal room and private practice spaces.

The woodturning studio is located in its own building, a result of the large woodturning program that the school supports as well as the space required for the large

student lathes and a demonstration space. Each student was focused on his or her independent project when I entered the studio. There was no conversation, except between the instructor and whichever student he was helping. In fact, I was unsuccessful in capturing anyone's attention while I was taking photographs because everyone was deep in concentration. Just next-door is the painting studio, a new addition, marking the northernmost perimeter of the school grounds. On its website, the school notes its wealth of outdoor area as a studio space, as it is used for nature studies classes.

The map that follows shows the physical layout of the school, including the more concentrated school buildings (residences, studios, and community spaces) and the surrounding hiking trails and natural areas (Figure 3). This map is provided to students and drop-in visitors at the Folk School as they orient themselves with the campus. The hand-drawn character of the map is consistent with the hand-crafted feel that many details at the school evoke.



Figure 3: Campus Map of the John C. Campbell Folk School, illustrated by Annie Cicale.

## Residences

When students check in they are told which building will be their residence for the week. When they venture to their respective houses they identify their room for the week by their name on the door. For obvious reasons, I did not visit all the lodging options on campus, but I did poke my head in every room of the Hill House while on the search for my own room. Eventually, I discovered an exterior staircase that led to an unlit

room. I had either found my destination or I was about to be a very unwelcome intruder in someone else's space. Luckily, I found the room unoccupied. It was a private room and bathroom floored and walled in dark wood, similar in form to many of the school's buildings. The smell of dust and wood stain mingled in the space with such force that I propped the door open as I unpacked my bags. The room was decorated with a surprising mix of store-bought and handmade items. All the fixtures in the bathroom were produced in the blacksmithing studio. I would later learn that many of these fixtures are a result of a blacksmithing week the school hosts annually to train blacksmiths. The woven hamper and bed dressings, however, appeared to be store bought, although quilting and weaving are courses offered at the school.

The first night I spent at the school, I flopped onto my bed, surprised at my level of exhaustion. Without a thought, I pulled out my laptop to check my email. No wireless signal! I fought through a moment of confusion, then frustration, and then resignation before arriving at relief. When unwinding from my day, I could not look to the Internet for distraction, mental escape, or even engagement with my responsibilities at home. This would force me to reflect on aspects of my day that may have otherwise gone unnoticed. Even in the privacy of my own room I was engaged with the school and disconnected from my life outside Brasstown.

For students who come to the school from afar, there are options for lodging that range in cost and luxury level. More adventurous visitors can camp on the school campgrounds, which accommodates RVs and tents. Indoor accommodations are spread across campus amongst thirteen buildings. These living situations are divided into four categories, with correlating cost and privacy levels. Dormitory style housing is the cheapest indoor option, with four to six twin beds per room and a shared bath. Increased privacy is an option with two twin or queen beds, shared with another person and with



access to a hallway bathroom shared amongst rooms. The next level offers a private rather than a shared bath, with two twin or queen beds per room. The most private option is the *premium* option, a room with one or two queen beds, shared with another person, with a bathroom in the room. For all indoor lodging levels, linens and meals are included; for campground dwellers, meals are an additional expense available individually or as a weeklong package. All the buildings and sites on campus are connected by a system of roadways and trails.

### ***Trails***

An important aspect of the immersive experience at John C. Campbell is the natural beauty of the area. I traveled to the school in February—certainly not the most lush or beautiful time of year—and still the scenery did not disappoint. The Appalachian Mountains are soft, low-lying ridges that sit comfortably apart from the town. Unlike the massive, awe-inspiring Rockies, the Appalachians circle the area like a security blanket that is equal parts beautiful and protective.

The school incorporates the rich natural resources in their courses through the nature studies program. For students not enrolled in those courses, they can explore the environment on foot through a series of trails built by the school. There is a road that runs through the school grounds, but it is a thoroughfare for townspeople and is not entirely pedestrian friendly. The trails are a safe and simple alternative, sometimes running just a few feet from the main road. The trails are short, the longest is just over half a mile, but they introduce visitors to native plants and more than 120 bird species. One trail, the Rivercane Walk, is a quarter mile loop punctuated by seven art sculptures and installations that honor the Cherokee heritage prominent in this area of Appalachia. The

works are placed along the trail harmoniously with the surrounding landscape, but they subtly stand out from the natural background.

One morning I explored the trails before breakfast. A cold mist sat in the valley the Folk School occupies. The smell of snow was in the air, although it was not cold enough to see my breath in front of me. Originally disappointed that the trails were so short, I soon appreciated their brevity, as tiny snowflakes started to fall. This was the only time during my stay at the Folk School that I was alone outside of my room at Hill House. I could hear other students talking in the distance, but felt isolated. The trail provided a welcome reprieve from the enduring stimulation of Folk School life. Social engagement is constant. Intellectual and hands-on stimulation are ongoing during class time and late into the night as students and instructors return to the studio to continue working on projects. On the trail, however, there was almost silence. Damp leaves gave way underfoot and I could hear indistinct school activity, but I felt alone. In this moment of pause I realized how disconnected I felt from my life in Texas, after only two days away.

### **The Institution**

The Folk School's location, buildings, and trails create a simple, idyllic setting for the rest of the school's affairs. The Keith House is the epicenter of this activity, coordinating student enrollment, fundraising initiatives, and all the nitty gritty administrative operations that keep the school running.

### *Course Offerings*

The John C. Campbell Folk School offers over 800 weeklong and weekend courses each year in traditional and contemporary craft, art, music, dance, cooking, gardening, nature studies, photography and writing (John C. Campbell Folk School, 2012). This is an intentionally broad range of courses that encompasses arts as modern as digital photography as well as disciplines with long historical pasts, like glass painting and clay work. On its website, the school categorizes all of these 800 courses into 48 subjects. Fine arts options include drawing, music, painting, and printmaking. In the realm of folk arts, blacksmithing, folklore, quilting, and soap making are options for enrollment. The most intriguing subject is “unique offerings,” a catchall categorization that includes courses for making bamboo fly rods or building hand-and-rod puppets.

The week that I visited the school, fifteen courses were offered in a variety of disciplines. In the vein of more traditional art classes, two-dimensional art courses were offered in acrylic and glass painting. Courses focused on woodwork included woodturning, woodcarving, and making marquetry boxes. The course offerings in fiber were rug hooking, spinning and dyeing, and quilting. Clay, basketry, and blacksmithing were also options, and are more consistent with common notions of Appalachian craft. Some courses do not fall into a visual art discipline, such as harmonica playing or cooking. Other courses span multiple disciplines, like kaleidoscope making and marbling paper arts. The range of courses exemplifies fine art techniques with folk art sensibilities. The more novel classes encourage exploration in new materials, techniques, and disciplines.

### ***Structure of the Day***

A day at the folk school is structured with six hours spent in studio, from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. and 1:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. Each morning before class begins, there is an optional gathering in the Community Hall, called Morningsong. This event brings together students, instructors, and school staff in celebration of regional music, folklore, and Folk School history. At 8:15 a.m., breakfast is served in the Olive D. Campbell Dining Hall before students head to their studios for their first class period. At noon, classes break for lunch, which is served at 12:15 p.m. Lunch has no specific end time, but there is always enough time to visit the craft shop or explore a trail before heading back to the studio for the afternoon session.

At 4:30, the afternoon sessions break out, leaving an hour and a half before dinner is served. Each day there is an activity offered during this time, such as a tour of campus, a demonstration, or field trip into Brasstown. Supper is served at 6 p.m., followed by optional evening activities. Many students return to their studios to continue working in the evenings, some go into Brasstown, and others take advantage of the school-sponsored activities. These events involve demonstrations, dance lessons, a viewing of the school's institutional video, *Sing Behind the Plow*, and music, folklore, and stories presented by the school's folklorist. On Friday evenings, there is a free concert that is open to students and community members.

Six hours per day are dedicated to studio time, but structured programs and informal activities fill the additional hours. These activities are focused on learning about other crafts, engaging with regional music and stories, exploring the outdoor space, and interacting with others at the school. Days are long and full, but they offer a balance of work and fun. A schedule of events is provided to students each program week,

indicating studio time, meals, and additional activities available at the Folk School (Figure 4).

TIME	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
7:45 am	Morningsong: Folk School History with Jan Davidson	Morningsong: Music & Songs with David Vowell	Morningsong: Music & Songs with Reed Caldwell	Morningsong: Music & Stories with David Brose	Morningsong: Music & Stories with J.D. Robinson
8:15 am	8:30 Monday Only	BREAKFAST			
9 am -12 pm	CLASSES				
12:15 pm	LUNCH	Instructors' Lunch	LUNCH	*Future Plans of the Folk School Lunch	LUNCH
1:30 - 4:30 pm	CLASSES				Finish up in class and Clean Studio* Set-up for Exhibit in Keith House Community Room 4:00 pm Student Exhibit - 4:30 - 5:00 pm Closing Ceremony 5:00 - 5:30 pm
4:45 pm	Campus Tour - A 45-60 minute walk around campus with Tammy Godfrey. Meet at the Craft Shop.	Take a trip to Blue Moon Elise, soap making, yoga studio and healthy living shop in downtown Murphy. Meet at the Craft Shop.	<i>Glass has been painted and fired for over 1,000 yrs.</i> Join us for a demonstration in this age-old, classical technique with Karen Reed in the Enameling studio.	Visit instructor Kenneth Thomas in the Blacksmith Shop, where he will demonstrate making a basic hook.	
	Instructors' Social at Farm House 4:45				
6 pm	SUPPER				
7 pm	Folk Music, Folklore & Stories with David Brose & Friends in the Keith House Community Room. 5pm Cloggers practice in Community Room	Square, Contra & Circle Dancing with Bob Dalsemer in Keith House Community Room. View Folk School DVD "Sing Behind the Plow" 8 p.m. Keith House Living Rm	Watch instructor Rajeania Snider turn plain paper into art. Keith House ~ Lower Level. Dance Practices in Keith House 5:30 - 9pm	Resident Artist Pattie Bagley demonstrates speed weaving in the Woodworking ~ Rock Room. Join her for a nice sur "prize!"	Concert in the Keith House Community Room <b>Shady Creek Bluegrass,</b> hard-driving, traditional bluegrass.
Other Activities					
Tues. & Thurs. 7 - 8:00 am Yoga with Susanne Stoddard. Davidson Hall ~ Music Studio	Wed. & Thurs. 3:30 ~ 8:00 Chair Massage with David Baker (\$20 for 20 Minutes) in Farm House. Sign up outside office	*Thursday Lunch Special presentation with Director Jan Davidson & Development Manager Reed Caldwell. Sign up outside office. All are welcome.		STUDENT HOSTS: Kyla Allon, ext. 115 Office 828-837-2775 2nd floor, end of hall. Lynn Ann Miller ext. 116 2nd floor, turn right, first room on left. Host Cell: 828-360-2330	
History Center & Craft Shop Hours: Mon. - Sat. 8 am - 5pm Thurs. 8 am - 6 pm Sun. 1 - 5 pm					

Figure 4: Weekly calendar of events provided to students and visitors during my stay at the Folk School, February 24-March 2, 2013.

## **EMERGENT THEMES**

The John C. Campbell Folk School has a culture entirely of its own. This culture is founded in its Appalachian roots and Danish folk school ideologies, but it is exemplified in the structure of the school day and outside activities, the location of the school, and commitment to the students' experiences. The immersive nature of the school, strong community bonds, a focus on hands-on experiences and exploring new things, and an investment in creating a long-lasting learning experience are all contributors to the school's appeal and success.

### **Immersive Experience**

The immersive experience is part of the success of the John C. Campbell Folk School. On a fundamental level, physically leaving your everyday life and going into a new environment forces a change in perspective and experience. For example, if someone takes guitar lessons every Tuesday night for two hours, he or she has not fully stepped outside of his or her normal life. While in the lesson, the student may be feeling residual stress from his or her workday or anticipatory anxiety about the things that need to be done when at home that evening. Some days, he or she will inevitably miss the lesson altogether. However, the environmental change that occurs while attending the Folk School signals to us that we are out of our familiar routines. The schedule at the school is consistent, but not rigid. There are no deadlines or penalties for tardiness. In fact, I did not see anyone rushing around campus in the entirety of my visit.

Leaving our regular lives can be rejuvenating, particularly when the new destination is lush with natural beauty. When I visited the school in February, it was not the most vibrant time of year. I can only imagine how fresh spring is in Brasstown, or what it is like to sit on the porch of the Keith House in October, looking out onto the

Nantahala Mountains as they ignite in yellows, oranges, and reds. Even in February the school was attractive. Daffodils rose from the cold ground, blooming even under a forecast of snow. And the rich hue of barn red pops against the green pastures and brown tree lines in the school's valley.

The pace of life is less hurried at the Folk School, but there is always something for your involvement. There are activities available from 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. almost every day of the week. With six hours dedicated to studio practice each day, there is ample time to engage in these activities. The day is punctuated with short blocks of time that enable students and visitors to enjoy its offerings outside the studios. At home, a leisure hour is quickly filled with chores, errands, and work. At the Folk School, for the most part, this is left behind. A free hour can be used to venture onto the campus trails, attend a Contra dance lesson, or poke around the Craft Shop. All these activities further an appreciation for or understanding of the Appalachian region, craft, and culture, which seems increasingly valuable as more students come to the Folk School from afar.

### **Community and Relationships**

Social interactions are an integral part of the culture at John C. Campbell. Opportunities for interacting with others are present at each point in the day. With the exception of the loud or machine-intensive courses, studios are buzzing with conversation. Many of the studios I visited were set up with students sitting in a circle around tabletop space. The tabletops were full of wood shavings, loose fibers, and half-finished projects. Collective conversation flowed around the room, interrupted by questions about the craft process. Instructors create a friendly, comfortable atmosphere, facilitating the development of relationships within each studio.

Individuals at the school also have the chance to interact in the dining hall, where some of the in-studio roles fall away and students, teachers, and staff interact in a non-hierarchical way. This is true in the out-of-class activities as well, such as dance lessons and Morningsong. Everyone can point to a time in their life where choosing a seat in the school cafeteria caused serious anxiety. The Folk School does not elicit these feelings. In fact, I never had a second thought about where I might sit during a meal. I just surveyed the room and picked a spot because I was confident that every group would be welcoming and all conversations would be comfortable.

On campus, there is a feeling of community at all times. When sitting in the den I was greeted with a smile, at the very least, by every person who came through the space. Often, we had a brief exchange and occasionally we started lengthy conversations, solely because of our proximity and environment. Smiles, nods, and hellos are commonplace when you pass someone in the hall or on a pathway. This friendly environment cannot be attributed to one person, it is fostered by the school staff, instructors, and the students who attend classes there.

### **Hands-on Experience**

One of the most obvious characteristics of any art or craft education is that it is hands-on. Theoretical learning is only exciting if there is a chance to put it to practical use. All the learning in studios is experiential. Teachers demonstrate specifics and talk through problems and processes as necessary, but students are producing work as the week moves on. In each class, students have made at least one product that demonstrates their progress by the end of the week. It may be in the form of a song, a quilt, or a broken



fire poker, but it represents the growth of craft knowledge and mastery of skills that developed over just a few days at the school.

Creating a physical product that shows an abstract development is fulfilling and students are excited to show off what they produced. Through mistakes, frustrations, and re-dos, a final product is completed that stands for something much greater than itself: a week of trying something new, focusing on one thing specifically for an extended time, and developing a desired skill.

### **Exploration of New Things**

The Folk School encourages exploration of new subjects and disciplines in a number of ways. Demonstrations throughout the week expose students to other crafts offered at the school. There were at least three formal demonstrations during the week of my visit. This speaks to the school's dedication to enjoyable and exploratory learning, rather than the perfection of one craft or skill. On another level, drop-in visitors are encouraged to walk through campus and even come into the studios. They are asked to be respectful and not invasive, but I observed multiple visitors coming into the studios. For me personally, watching the hands-on studio time was the most exciting and engaging part of my observations. It made me yearn to create something, learn something, and try something new. I imagine that it had a similar effect on the non-enrolled guests who come to the Folk School just to see what it is all about.

Mentioned previously, the school has an entire category of courses called "unique offerings." These courses are innovative and generally interdisciplinary, but there are many instructional offerings that fall under other categories that are rather unconventional, such as "growing your own mushrooms" or "leather sandal shoe

making” (*Course Catalog*, 2013). Just having such courses available makes them both valuable and accessible. Choosing a course like these is less intimidating than blacksmithing or oil painting, which are highly skilled and well-studied crafts. For both innovative courses and traditional classes, the school catalogue descriptions are inviting and do not require a strong background in technical skills. For a blacksmithing course, the instructor notes “no experience [is] necessary, just the desire to try blacksmithing” (*Course Catalog*, 2013). For a course that involved fire, machinery, and hammering, the instructor minimizes potential student fears that may emerge through lack of experience. The course write-ups are littered with phrases such as “build confidence in,” “explore the basics of,” and “we’ll immerse ourselves in” (*Course Catalog*, 2013), indicating that the courses offered by the school are process- and student-focused, not product-focused.

### **Experience Beyond the Folk School**

The John C. Campbell Folk School creates an environment that provides a fulfilling weekend or weeklong experience for its students. Many efforts are made to encourage students to continue their engagement with their craft after they leave the school campus. Tools and instructional books are for sale in the Craft Shop. Purchasing these tools while you are still at the school is important, because often we think that we will carry these interests home. However, everyday responsibilities resume quickly away from the Folk School, and even well-intended students may not find time for their craft. A student who has already invested in tools or literature may find that this initial disengagement occurs, but since they have the physical reminder of the promise they made to themselves, they may be more inclined to continue with the craft when they do find the time.

Instructors are also very accessible and genuinely invest themselves in their students' learning. Student-instructor interactions are not relegated exclusively to studio time. They extend to meals in the dining hall, dancing in the community room, and over the coffee machine in the Keith House. This familiarity helps to break down an invisible wall of authority that can exist between students and teachers, and fosters the development of respectful relationships. More than one person I met at the Folk School offered their contact information to me to keep in communication beyond my visit. I would imagine that this type of relationship investment happens amongst other individuals at the school also, continuing conversations about craft and creating beyond time spent at the school.

## **CONCLUSION**

This chapter explained the case study portion of this research project, an in-depth look at the John C. Campbell Folk School. This data was gathered through the outreach and educational materials produced by the Folk School and my own observations of the school, studios, communal spaces, structure of the day, and overall visitor experience. The following chapter explains the narrative inquiry portion of this research study, which is focused on the interviews that I conducted with students, staff, and instructors at the school.

## **Chapter 5: People of the John C. Campbell Folk School**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Through face-to-face interviews and conversations, I gathered narratives from people involved with the John C. Campbell Folk School to identify individual motivations, expectations, and outcomes from their Folk School experiences. This chapter explains the narrative inquiry methodology as it was utilized within this study and presents the results of each gathered narrative, with a focus on the individual participant and his or her experience.

### **METHODOLOGY**

Elliot Eisner (1991) defines qualitative research as a search for characteristics that explain an experience. The investigation is field-focused, interpretive in nature, expressive in language, highly detailed, persuasive, and utilizes the researcher as an instrument. Each of these characteristics is consistent with the research presented in this study. As mentioned previously, this study combined two methods of qualitative research: case study and narrative inquiry. The preceding chapter covered the case study portion of my research, which provided context that framed the contents of this chapter. Chapter 5 presents the narrative inquiry portion of my research, the collected stories of many individuals associated with the Folk School. Within the case study research method, a researcher has a range of options for collecting data. Narrative inquiry is the method most compatible with my research needs.

Narrative inquiry, a name used interchangeably with *storytelling*, is the process of collecting narratives that focus on people's experiences and the meaning that they attribute to those experiences (Gillham, 2000; Lemley & Mitchell, 2012). It is a way of

mentally processing an experience that places the storyteller at the center of this understanding because the focus is on what the participant, rather than the researcher, identifies as important. Narrative inquiry research is a multi-level process that collects stories of individuals to explain or describe the experience of a collective group (Lemley & Mitchell, 2012). This is the method I follow in this study, as I take individual accounts of art learning at the John C. Campbell Folk School and, without losing the individual stories, develop a broader understanding of why people come to the Folk School and what they gain from their engagement there. As Lemley and Mitchell (2012) explain, narrative inquiry is a transactional experience in which there are relationships between the people, places, and ideas within each story. Relationships are also developed throughout the process between the storyteller, researcher, and audience. The authors argue that the intersections of these relationships are the most important results of narrative research.

A commitment to valuing each individual's stories, experiences, and existing social constructs is imperative in narrative research, as it evolved from an increasingly participatory research movement (Trahar, 2009). While narrative research provides participants with a "natural and unselfconscious way to order their experiences" (Kramp, 2004, p. 9), it is necessary to contextualize their experiences and the reporting of them. This is why I conducted observations and historical research and visited the school in person, to provide a frame within which I could understand the individual's experiences (Kramp, 2004) while in attendance.

Narrative is both the process and the product in research. The stories are told to the researcher during the process, but are re-presented to the reader as the product. Through narratives, a storyteller links events, perceptions, and experiences, bridging the space between what happened and what it means. In this process, unanticipated narratives

are shared. If a researcher is expecting a specific result, he or she may miss these other possibilities that emerge (Trahar, 2009).

There is no one method of gathering data that serves narrative inquiry better than others. Often it takes a combination of conversations, interviews, participation, and observation to produce rich and comprehensive data (Trahar, 2009). I structured my research according to this mixed methods ideology, using observations, participation, and interviews to produce my data. Within this methodology, Gillham (2000) puts all “verbal data” on a spectrum that runs from a “verbal observation,” listening to other’s conversations, to “structured questionnaires” with precise, close-ended questions (p. 6). In developing my research instrument, my choice of in-person, semi-structured interviews was based on the fact that they are a natural, conversational way of collecting data, intended to produce honest results not directed by the interviewer. In interview research, the researcher serves as the collection instrument. As an individual who is personally interested in the subject at hand, but not a participant in the type of education I am studying, I am aware of biases I bring to my research. These include a personal and professional interest in art education, a love of craft, and a connection to the geographic area that I studied. Kramp (2004) writes that personal involvement with the subject or participants is not a dangerous bias, but the precise way that people connect to one another, acquaint themselves, and admit others into their life. A narrative researcher is not a bystander or observer, but an individual who makes a real connection to the participants by approaching them as equals and being invited into their lives.

Through this research, I uncover some of the values and purposes of an informal arts education at the John C. Campbell Folk School. While I strongly believe that there is value in this type of learning, I did not impose this view on the participants, nor did I have firm expectations about what values I might uncover. Laplan, Moore, and Quartaroli

(2012) write, “The attitude of a case study researcher during data collection remains one of an inquirer who is truly curious about the nature of the case, always searching for understanding and answers” (p. 261). A semi-structured interview is flexible, allowing for the exploration of responses beyond my original expectations. Researchers who know what they are looking for may be correct, but may also miss other indicators. When conversation strays from the expected path, a researcher should value this verbal data equally and analyze it for meaning. I interviewed volunteer participants at the Folk School. Some interviews were arranged by a staff member while others were spontaneous, but all were voluntary. This is purposeful sampling, which is beneficial to my research due to the short time frame I had to conduct my study. A purposeful sampling produced richer results within my timeframe than would a random sampling.

The participants of my study were students, instructors, and staff at the John C. Campbell Folk School present on campus during my visit to Brasstown, North Carolina from February 26 to March 1, 2013. I interviewed four students, five instructors, four staff members, and one individual who occupies a position that bridges the space between student and staff. Keather Weideman, the Marketing Manager at the Folk School, coordinated my staff interviews and a few instructor interviews. The rest of the interviews I sought out independently by visiting studios and speaking with people during meals. I candidly explained myself, introduced my research, and asked if anyone was interested in speaking with me. This request was always well-received; it produced at least one interview, and often more, each time I asked. This does, however, skew my data towards a positive perspective of the school, as the individuals I spoke with volunteered to sit down with me, indicating that they likely have positive things to say. Since my research is seeking motivations for *why* people attend the school and *what* they gain from

the experience, this positive perception does not invalidate my results, although it should still be considered.

In narrative inquiry research, data collection and analysis do not happen exclusively of one another. During data collection, initial levels of analysis are also taking place, resulting in an interactive process that has the potential to produce dynamic and unexpected results. The narratives that I collected at the John C. Campbell Folk School are the bulk of my data. I coded each interview to identify prevalent themes and determine existing patterns, drawing conclusions about each participant's experience. After analyzing individual interviews, I analyzed these themes to identify broader patterns and connections. I triangulated information gathered from interviews, as well as the aggregate information from the interviews and other document sources (John C. Campbell Folk School website and written materials). From the connections that I identified, I have generalized common aspects of the shared experiences.

Narratives reveal complexities that cannot be reached through observations alone, and these complexities lead to deeper understandings (Kramp, 2004). There can be tension in narrative research between privileging the individual experience or the collective voice. Trahar (2009) argues that both can be accomplished, one need not be prioritized over the other. For both these reasons, I analyzed my data on an individual level as well as a collective level to respect and value the individual experience, while extrapolating themes and patterns.

I conducted my analysis with respect to a structure developed by Mary Kay Kramp (2004), in which she identifies two types of analysis for narrative research. The first, which she calls *analysis of narratives*, is presenting narratives through the language of the participants. The researcher identifies themes with each participant and then common themes amongst narratives, taking the narrative from stories to commonalities.



The second type of analysis that Kramp identifies is *narrative analysis*, in which the researcher presents the research as his or her own narrative of the investigative experience. In this method, analysis begins in each story and moves to shared themes. In presenting the data, the researcher moves back and forth between the particular and common elements that are found. It is possible to accomplish both types of analysis together, as I do here, since they are not “inherently contradictory [and] can be complementary” (Kramp, 2004, p. 18). Reporting also influenced my decision to choose narrative research. In reporting, narratives are accessible to a wide audience, enabling research to be more broadly disseminated than what occurs with jargon-laden academic writing (Stokrocki, 1997). Since craft and folk schools are not a trending topic in academic writing, producing narrative research on the subject engages the audiences that are most interested in it.

## **INTERVIEWS**

The following section takes the reader through each interview conducted during this study. For the sake of clarity, Table 1 identifies the interview participants by name and relationship to the Folk School. After this introduction, participants are referred to by their actual first names throughout the chapter.

<b>Participant Name</b>	<b>Relationship to School</b>
Keather Weideman	Staff: Marketing Manager
Marianne Hatchett	Staff: Business Manager
Tammy Godfrey	Staff: Assistant Program Manager
Jan Davidson	Staff: Director
Pattie Bagley	Staff: Resident Artist Instructor
Paul Garrett	Staff: Resident Artist Instructor
Pam Howard	Staff: Resident Artist Instructor
Scott Cole	Instructor
Gil Mattson	Student
Jackie Parker	Student
Jim Davis	Student
Bill Posey	Work Study Student
Rachel Smith	Student

Table 1: Study Participants and Their Relationship to the Folk School

## **Staff**

### ***Keather***

Keather is the Folk School’s Marketing Manager, and was my point of contact throughout my research. Originally from neighboring Asheville, North Carolina, Keather spent eleven years working in Seattle for a large advertising firm before returning to the area and taking this position at the Folk School twelve years ago. She admitted that, despite growing up in North Carolina, when she lived here the Folk School was “only barely on [her] radar.”

Keather's own craft practice includes gardening, photography, and spinning, knitting, and dyeing fibers. She has taken courses at the school in clay, dance, and spinning, dyeing, and knitting. Keather explained what she likes about the school:

I like working for a place that I feel good marketing. It is such an easy place to promote; there is very little embellishment you need to do. Take good photos, put them in a catalog, write your course listings, and do the best you can do to represent the school. If you can do that, it is very easy to get people to come here. It's a lot different than what you would consider your typical job doing marketing.

She also supports the school's noncompetitive environment and hands-on approach to teaching. She explained that the instructors are oriented to the philosophies of the school so that they can structure their courses and learning environments accordingly. Many instructors started at the Folk School as students, so they are already familiar with the atmosphere of the school and the noncompetitive focus. If they are not comfortable with, or even excited about, that aspect of the school, they would likely choose to teach elsewhere. Since the school is a nonprofit organization and cannot pay a large stipend to instructors, it supplements their pay with a free course at the school for each course an instructor teaches. This encourages teachers to enjoy the school as both an instructor and a student, and deepens the relationship that the instructors have with the institution. Keather also enjoys the people she gets to work with, including staff, instructors, students, and visitors. When she leaves her office for the dining hall or to stop by studios, she is always pleased with the interactions she has with others. Working with like-minded people "totally elevates your mood," she explains.

After exploring Keather's personal feelings about the school, conversation turned to the students and instructors and what attracts them to the Folk School. Some people come because they already practice a craft or want to be introduced to a new craft: "They're looking for an experience of learning something. Maybe they're not aspiring to

ever be a potter or having the equipment at their home, but they're trying to dabble for a week." The school focuses on the process over product, as Keather said, "It's not about how many beautiful, wood-turned bowls you can crank out in a week or evaluating our students on their skill or aesthetic capabilities . . . . The primary purpose is focused on the act of making and learning and the whole process of it." This focus attracts people who are in a more exploratory stage of their craft or who want a somewhat recreational experience with craft more than a rigorous technical education of the craft. Keather hopes that visitors to the school surprise themselves by getting more than they sought out and surpassing their expectations for themselves.

Keather also spoke to the immersive experience that the school provides to students who come and stay on campus. "Anytime someone can get away from their routine and their home and just unplug and can be focused on what they're learning," she said, "it allows them to fully be here, they can't escape and watch T.V., make phone calls, or clean their house" and that enables a deep level of engagement with the school, other participants, and the craft at hand. Letting go of daily tasks opens up energy for new pursuits. Keather also mentioned that the setting at John C. Campbell is a factor in the success of the school. The mountain views and rural space have a calming psychological effect and lack distractions that may be more present than if the school was in a big city or a town. Full immersion at the school also has a strong social impact on visitors in that there is constant social contact from seven o'clock in the morning until well past seven o'clock in the evening.

The final aspect of the school that Keather identified is its commitment to the surrounding community. From its inception, the school was intended to benefit and support the Brasstown community. In the ninety years since it was founded, this allegiance has manifested itself in various ways and to varying degrees, but it is currently

a priority for the school staff. The Folk School is “pretty much an open house all the time for anyone who wants to come by,” making it accessible for local citizens as well as visiting students. Keather, who is involved in Contra dancing at the school, took note of their Tuesday night Contra dance classes, which are free, introductory lessons open to the public. The school also runs a fundraiser called Empty Bowls. Potters at the school donate bowls they have made to be sold at a soup and salad dinner hosted by the school. The proceeds from this event benefit the local food bank. It is imperative to Keather that the school maintains its relationship with the local community and provides an enjoyable learning experience for visiting students.

### ***Marianne***

Marianne, the school’s Business Manager, is originally from New Jersey but has been in North Carolina since attending Montreat College. She married a man from the Murphy area whose family was involved with the Folk School in its early years. They planned on retiring in Brasstown, but moved earlier than anticipated when her husband got a job in the area. Through her family ties she has a rich knowledge of the school’s history, the surrounding area, and many craft disciplines. In her personal life she is an avid cook and she has taken courses in stained glass painting, basket making, and enamels at the Folk School. During our conversation she pointed out a few of the baskets that adorn her office – some she made and others were gifts from students.

When I asked Marianne why people travel across the country to visit the Folk School, she told me about a woman who visits the school from California. This student explained to Marianne that the cost is equal: taking an entire week of classes in Brasstown or a single day class in California. Although she pays to travel, she also gets a

vacation in a peaceful, picturesque place where she feels safe visiting by herself. This one account speaks to the School's success in establishing a comfortable learning environment that is a reprieve from daily life.

Marianne noted that a visitor's experience at the school is richer than just gaining technical knowledge of a craft. Within each discipline, instructors often share the history and culture of the craft. Depending on which course you enroll in, you may be exploring various cultures' methods of crafting in the same medium. Demonstrations throughout the week and closing ceremonies introduce visitors to a wide variety of crafts outside the discipline they are enrolled in. Marianne also mentioned that international artists and vendors attend the Folk School's Fall Festival, further expanding a recognition and understanding of the cultural arts.

The school is also structured to make a social impact on the visiting students. Meal times are a great example of this, as "you can eat with seven different people at breakfast, seven different people at lunch, and seven different people at dinner . . . by the end of the week, you've met 100 different people." Out-of-studio activities also encourage students from different disciplines to interact with one another.

Marianne believes that the folk school is an environment that fosters personal growth. This is encouraged through the philosophy that she shared about craft learning: "It's not just for women, it's for men, it's for little kids, it's for big kids, it's for anybody who would like to learn." She told me about a young boy attending the school's summer program for local kids who was not succeeding in school, did not have many social relationships, and was not athletic, but he succeeded in his work at the Folk School. This gave him confidence to succeed in the areas where he had previously lacked success. This idea of openness and support for the student's individual needs is summed up in

Marianne's belief that "any kind of achievement, big or small, begins with an individual task."

### *Tammy*

Tammy is the Assistant Program Manager at the Folk School, tending the school's daily operations and managing classes, instructors, and students. She has lived in the Brasstown area all her life, but never knew about the Folk School until she saw a job posting at the school nine years ago. Since then, she has worked in the registration, accounting, and programming departments.

In terms of her own craft practice, Tammy mostly dabbles as a way of better relating to the instructors and students she interacts with at work. She has enrolled in only two classes during her nine years at the school. She started a weaving class in her second year at the school, but withdrew when her daughter fell ill. A few months before our conversation she took her second class, a woodturning course. Woodworking is a strong program at the Folk School, and she wanted to try something unfamiliar. Although Tammy usually hates getting dirty, she loved the hands-on aspect of woodturning, the loud noises of the machinery, and the pride she felt from succeeding at something outside her comfort zone. Tammy was so proud of the items she turned on the lathe that she showed them off to me during our interview – a mushroom and hanging ornaments.

A number of the characteristics that Tammy found satisfying in her own craft experience also emerged as characteristics of visiting students' experiences. At each week's orientation, Tammy makes a point to ask the incoming students about their expectations for themselves and advises that they will be surprised by what they can accomplish in such a short time. At closing ceremonies she checks in again to see who

surpassed their own expectations during the week. She finds that week after week people are surprised and pleased at what they can do during their visit. The students find confidence in their abilities within the skill and in other areas of their lives through their Folk School accomplishments. In order to surprise yourself, however, you have to be willing to try something unfamiliar and possibly challenging. In order to accomplish this, Tammy “want[s] students to know it is not about competition, it is about learning the process.” She tells the students to trust themselves and to “take creative risk” as they learn their new craft.

The community at the school is also one-of-a-kind, according to Tammy. “It is hard to explain, you have to experience it,” she says. The community at the school attracts students and instructors alike. One group of students signs up for the same course, the same week, with the same instructor each year. They all call on the day the catalog comes out and reserve their spots because they want to be together and they want to be with that specific instructor. Others will take the same class multiple times for the instructor, people, and experience, and not necessarily for the product they create. Instructors come not for the pay, but because they want to be at the Folk School: “They love the folk school. They are just so passionate about what they do.” Ultimately, Tammy explains, “we want to make people feel good here at the Folk School.” The School’s main goal, in her mind, is not transferring knowledge or skill or producing perfect crafts, but having an enjoyable experience.

### ***Jan***

Jan grew up in the Brasstown area and has had a relationship with the Folk School since childhood. He specifically remembers visiting the Folk School years ago with his



own school for a dance and with his family for the Christmas celebrations. He came early enough to know Marguerite Butler and other early characters at the school. As a musician and folklorist, Jan worked with the North Carolina Arts Council and participated in the state's visiting artist program, which placed artists in communities around the state to practice their art for community groups, clubs, schools, and libraries. He then took a curatorial position at the Mountain Heritage Center at Western Carolina University where he conducted original historical research connecting contemporary Appalachian practice with the area's history. In 1992, he was hired as the Director of the John C. Campbell Folk School. Prior to being positioned as director, he taught a handful of classes in music and folklore at the school.

Jan confidently identified motivations for student enrollment at the John C. Campbell Folk School. "What we teach, they could learn it at home," he admitted. Often, an intense interest in the craft itself drives attendance. Some people come purely for a vacation, seeking a change in pace and scenery. Others come to learn how to do something that they hope to turn into a vocation. Despite these possible motivations, Jan cautioned, "Every single person is a unique case as to why they come, what they get out of it, and when they're satisfied." He provided numerous stories and accounts explaining why individuals have come to the Folk School and what they gained from the visit. One student has come to the school about 200 times. Not surprisingly, she has taken classes in all of the disciplines. "It is like she is going to do the Folk School completely so she comes and takes different things every time," Jan explained. Since courses are not bound by syllabi or performance evaluations, a student could take the same class multiple times and have a different experience each visit.

The Folk School provides ample opportunity for social engagement and development. As Jan said, "The people who come here and participate in the folk school

take away not only the knowledge of how to do something they didn't know how to do before, but also a different way of working with people." This occurs on multiple levels. As mentioned time and time again in other interviews, meals in the dining hall provide a comfortable environment for interacting with unfamiliar people. "You sit down after the blessing and pass bowls around. That's family style, that's how you would do it at home," Jan explains. You only know a name, class, and hometown from the mandatory nametags, but Jan argues "that's all you need when you're passing 'taters!" Even passing food causes subsequent conversations between otherwise strangers. The Folk School is also a setting for reinforcing existing relationships. Jan told stories of family reunions and reconnections between old friends at the school. The social environment at the school has been disseminated through word of mouth, and there is an existing contingent of people in distress who visit the school after experiencing trauma, like a divorce or death of a loved one.

The philosophies that the school encompasses also impact the student's experience. "The magic of it," for Jan, is the noncompetitive environment. As he explains, "I am totally convinced that it makes the teaching better and the learning better, that understanding that you don't have to be better than anyone else to some third party's idea of what's good and bad." The noncompetitive philosophy comes from Gundtvig's concept of the Danish Folk School. Jan explained this concept as he interprets it:

If you get a group of people together doing something interesting and challenging in a situation in which no one is going to be ranked according to their ability or performance according to someone, it bonds those people in a different way and it brings something out of them that every human being has got, which is that part of you that needs to reach out, cooperate, make teams, make friends, and be affectionate, even.

What this speaks to is not just the absence of a competitive environment, but creating an environment in which individuals grow independently and form bonds with the people they are working alongside.

The physical and psychological experience gained from making art is another product of visiting the school. Citing Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's philosophy of flow, Jan explained that being in the state of flow is more restorative than sleep. Flow can be achieved in many ways, but engaging in craft is a particularly good way to get there, as you are working on something that your hands, eyes, and mind are focused directly in front of you. Jan calls hitting this flow a "Zen moment," and thinks that this state is the "pleasure principle" underlying my search. Getting to this state of flow is one of the things that Jan wants for visiting students. Reaching this point can get a student hooked on a particular craft, or on the ideas of making and creating things in a broader sense. Once this connection is made, Jan does not expect students to stay involved with it only at the Folk School, he wants the school to spark something in its visitors that they continue when they leave Brasstown.

The immersive nature of the Folk School is a major factor in experiencing the school because it forces a separation from the people and institutions that visitors know at home and signals a change in environment. "The change of scenery is a big factor," Jan speculated, "That is why people go places." In a hypothetical anecdote, Jan said that a woodturner would have a different experience taking a class at home with his coworkers than at the school, because when people are in familiar company there are existing roles and power structures that influence how they behave and perform. Being immersed at the school can also change a visitor's sense of time. The day's structure is set, so no decisions need to be made about what to do, when to eat, or how to get places. Living at the school is an imperative piece of the experience in terms of the Folk School's

philosophy. It was thought that a student should be at the school for six months to fully understand the essence of it, but Jan says that the Folk School today does an effective job of making that transition in just a five-day stay. This may be due to the stark difference between school life and everyday life today.

One of the ways that the school tracks how they are responding to their students' needs and expectations is through comment sheets that are filled out by students at the end of each program. The questionnaire is brief but asks the following questions, although not verbatim:

- (1) Did the experience meet your needs?
- (2) Can you make a note of them?
- (3) Did you use the catalogue and did that work?
- (4) Comments.
- (5) For returning students, would you come back again?
- (6) Would you recommend it to another person?
- (7) How far in advance did you enroll?

Each week's responses are compiled into a binder that is passed around to a long list of staff members. Comments that need to be attended to immediately, primarily maintenance issues, are resolved and noted in the comment binder. Paging through the binder, I could see where staff members had responded to inquiries and suggestions, sometimes beginning a dialogue with other staff members. The care with which these comment sheets are read and responded to indicates that the school focuses on the experience of the visitors. "Most of the time it does what it is supposed to do," Jan claims, it "makes people feel happier."

The Folk School is also receptive to the needs of its surrounding community. The school, in general, provides the largest gathering of people anywhere around Brasstown, particularly during the Fall Festival, which attracts 15,000 people to the town over two

days. Community groups harness these crowds to raise funds for their programs and activities by selling concessions at the festival. According to Jan, “It is the only time you can raise any money around here because it’s the only time you can get a crowd.” The school is one of the area’s largest employers and partners with regional organizations, namely the Upper High Watershed Association and the local school systems: “For a rural area that is not near a college town or city there is an awful lot of richness here at the folk school.” Jan identifies the opportunities at the Folk School that are open to the community on an average week: multiple dance lessons, a Friday night concert, craft demonstrations, and poetry readings.

## **Teachers**

### ***Pattie***

Pattie is the resident artist for Basketry, Brooms, and Chair Seats, and a basketry instructor at the Folk School. A friend of Pattie’s and instructor at the school brought Pattie to Brasstown for the first time in the late ‘90s, insisting that she would love the atmosphere. This is the same woman who would later convince the then-resident-artist to hire Pattie as a basketry instructor. Pattie knew after a couple of classes that she wanted to teach at the school, and she was eventually invited to do so around 2003. She has been an instructor for ten years and assumed the resident artist position around 2010. For the first five or six years that she came to the Folk School, Pattie tried to convince her husband to join her. As an illustrator, he told her that he lacks the need she has to create things. “Whatever his personal artistic needs are,” she explained, “he fulfills them in his work everyday.”

Outside the Folk School, Pattie serves as president of the state basketry guild in Georgia and is involved in local guilds in her hometown. Her love of building and making began in childhood, when she “was always picking up something – a piece of wood, a nail, a strip of something. [She] was just trying to put stuff together [her] entire life.” When Pattie’s nine-year-old daughter came home from camp with a hand-woven basket, she hunted down the instructor to find out how to make them herself. Through a couple of classes and some independent exploration, she found her passion. Pattie began teaching courses when she owned a basketry supply store and needed to supplement her income at the shop.

Pattie has a whimsical personal learning philosophy, as she explains “I just love to dabble. If I get up to like a B+ level on something, I’m like, ‘I can live with that’ and I move on.” This love of exploration is evident in the classes she has enrolled in at the school. The first course Pattie took was a basket weaving class that involved stripping an oak tree for materials and weaving with those strips, a course that she has since repeated in her many years at the school. Although basketry is Pattie’s expertise, she takes classes in all disciplines: loom weaving, woodcarving, Northern Italian cooking, and pottery, amongst others. When we spoke, she was infatuated with blacksmithing, which she enjoyed because “you’re filthy dirty and it doesn’t matter because everyone else is filthy dirty and it is just like being a kid.” She also connected this new discipline to her own area of expertise by making basket weaving tools in one of her blacksmithing courses. Pattie expressed that visiting the school and focusing her energy on creating art for a program session was an important outlet for her. The year prior, she was not able to take her free classes and she noticed that she “wasn’t right with [her]self.” This coming year, her goal is to take all ten free resident classes that she can. “The process of learning

something new, it surprised me to discover, I really enjoy. Just seeing how something else goes together” is personally gratifying to her.

When I began asking Pattie what it is that is so magnetic about the school, she responded, “As much as I come here and as involved as I am, there’s no one thing that draws me to it. It’s the totality of it.” Rather than finding a singular answer, I cobbled together some of Pattie’s responses to try and illustrate the school as she knows and loves it. In talking about what attracts people to the school, Pattie could not identify a common thread amongst one-time visitors, but found similarities amongst returning students. She wants her students to “be able to go home and weave a basket without me standing there telling them every step what to do,” and in transferring that knowledge she also facilitates a transition in which her students overcome a lack of confidence. She shared an anecdote with me in which she personally experienced a growth in confidence. Pattie knows how to sing Amazing Grace in Cherokee, which she shared during an instrument-making course. The class enjoyed it so much that they convinced her to sing it in front of the whole school at the week’s closing program. Again, she was well received and has since sung it on many occasions, most notably at her brother’s funeral. He was the musician in the family and she would not have had the confidence to honor him in that way if it were not for the support she received at the Folk School.

Pattie’s primary goal for her classes is for the students to have fun. Referencing her own educational philosophy, as well as the school’s noncompetitive philosophy, she says:

I love doing creative things, building things, and working with my hands. I just really enjoy it. I know a lot of people will get really serious about ‘you’re doing this craft and you have to have the right attitude.’ But I’m just like, ‘you need to have fun.’ And I think that if people are having fun, they are probably going to learn. The whole class atmosphere is lighter. I think people probably learn better when they’re not so serious about it.

Pattie is a good model for this behavior. She jokes and talks as she works, and though she can take her work seriously, she would rather enjoy herself as she goes.

The strong community and personal relationships that develop at the school also make it a unique place. A lot of bonding occurs in the evenings, outside of studio time. Referencing one of her own relationships, Pattie said, “If it hadn’t been for sitting around singing in the evenings, I don’t think I’d have gotten to know Larry and his family.” Another of the instructors had a machinery accident that resulted in a few lost fingers. He couldn’t keep playing the guitar, so another instructor made a dobro for him to play, which is similar to a guitar but does not require ten fingers. “It’s more than just coming up to the Folk School, it is coming up to the community around the Folk School and seeing all these people who over the years have become really good friends,” Pattie explained. The community feeling is not exclusive to instructors; it extends to students and other visitors as well. Pattie attributes the tight community to the size of the school, how the day is structured, the physical layout of the school, morning song gatherings, family-style meals, and evening activities.

Throughout our conversation, Pattie kept saying that it was hard to express how she felt about the school and what was so important and unique about it. Without realizing, she touched on some of its strongest qualities in a singular comment:

I just *love* the place! To figure out why I love it up here is really tough. There is generally – not 100%, but generally – an acceptance up here. You want to try something? Go ahead. And if you do it really well or if you don’t do it really well, you’re never put down. There is an acceptance up here that you feel comfortable trying things and if you screw it up, so be it and you try something else next time. There are so many places you can’t find that. I’ve actually loosened up with my own family around the house, where I try to be more accepting of my own family. If it didn’t work out, what’d we lose? A couple of hours, I don’t care.



The magic of the John C. Campbell Folk School facilitates free and open learning, encourages exploration of new media and methods, fosters relationships between visitors, and impacts these visitors even beyond their time at the school.

### *Paul*

Paul is the resident blacksmith at the Folk School. In this position he essentially functions as a studio coordinator, managing his respective program by maintaining the studios, fixing broken things, scheduling classes, hiring instructors, and ordering and managing materials. Resident artists often teach classes throughout the year, and they stay on site at least part-time. They have the opportunity to study while at the school, as with most resident programs, but the studio responsibilities are heavier and there is no set timeline for the program. Paul has been with the school nine years, but mentioned that some residents have been there even longer, some up to twenty years.

Paul first came to know the school through a Southern Highland Craft Guild fair in Asheville around 1999–2000, where he saw the Folk School’s booth. In addition to the friendly people he met, he remembers the photographs of ironwork and the catalogs they had on display. The same year, he enrolled in a blacksmithing course at the school. Paul had a background in racing automobiles, which gave him a solid foundation in metalworking. He built and raced his own cars, as well as assembling the trailers, pit gear, and associated tools. As he recounts, “I worked a lot with metal, mostly what we call welding and fabricating or *hack and tack*, which is gunning pieces and welding it together.” At the same time he was “playing with things, goofing around” with blacksmithing, which has more of a *heat and beat* methodology to it. At the time he

didn't realize what he was doing was blacksmithing, but has since realized how interconnected his automobile work and blacksmithing practice are.

Since enrolling in that first class Paul has progressed from student to instructor to resident artist. When I asked him what he hopes that students leave with after taking his classes, he answered very diplomatically that every class is different and he does not have a singular expectation for every group. During my visit the blacksmithing course was a beginning class, and he hoped that students were getting a good foundation in blacksmithing, learning to tend the coal fire, shape the metal, and would produce something small that they could take home with them at the end of the week. In terms of the experience they have, he said, "Ideally, you want them to have a good experience, have fun while they are here, and learn as much as they can." Historically, he referenced many craftspeople dying with knowledge that they kept secret that could have been influential for the whole field. In opposition to that trend, the blacksmithing community "is alive and well in the country to disseminate knowledge and pass it on." Paul joked that many people think blacksmiths make horseshoes and have no contemporary understanding of what blacksmithing can produce. Therefore, he thinks it is important to teach the public about the craft without fear of competition.

Aside from learning technical skills and producing an object, Paul talked about the relationships he has built throughout his years at the Folk School. He keeps in touch with some of the people from the first class he ever took at the school and hopes that people will bond with each other but also develop a relationship with the school during their visit. "We're always trying to, first and foremost, get them to come here and have a good week. In my mind, that should be the primary focus. You want them to have a good enough experience to come back," he explained. He has similar outcomes intended for the instructors as well. Many of them start as students who enjoy the school and embrace

the opportunity to visit a couple times per year. This is particularly important because, since the school is a nonprofit, payment for courses taught is conservative. They get teaching experience, an enjoyable visit to the school, and a boost to their resume.

### *Pam*

I interviewed Pam at Keather's suggestion. We sat in two upholstered rocking chairs in the Fiber Arts Library to talk about her relationship with the school and her craft. Pam's mother was a home economics teacher from the Appalachian Mountains of Virginia. Passing on her love and skills, she taught Pam to knit, sew, crochet, and weave. She recounted a story from her middle school years in which someone donated a loom to her mother's classroom. However, the loom was in such disarray it could not be used. Regardless, Pam begged her mother to keep it and teach her to weave. Her mom threw out that loom, but bought Pam her own tabletop loom for her next birthday. She continued to weave periodically, but finally began taking it seriously when she met a woman in Atlanta who invited Pam into her weaving guild.

Pam married a blacksmith, who she accompanied to Brasstown for a blacksmithing meeting at the Folk School in 1980. They continued coming to blacksmithing meetings and eventually Pam became an assistant in the weaving studio. In the '90s, she started teaching at the school because there were a lot of school groups that other instructors did not want to teach. Meanwhile, she was still living in Georgia where she worked for the Handweavers Guild of America, teaching classes and presenting at conferences. In 1999, Pam and her husband moved to Brasstown full-time to escape the "rat race" of Atlanta, and she was asked to be the resident weaver at John C. Campbell Folk School.

Pam has her own philosophies about what attracts people to the school. “This is adult camp,” she claims, “adult fun camp!” Within her courses, she tries to facilitate an experience that the students will enjoy. At the beginning of each week she asks her students what they hope to achieve. They usually do not have specific expectations, but she insists that they will leave Pam’s class with “some knowledge or appreciation for the craft,” even if they never do it again after they leave. Remembering one student who expected the looms to be warped and prepared for her when she arrived, Pam said “What’s the point in that? That’s not the sort of school we are here, a make and take. No, no. We are showing you how you can do this at home.” The Folk School “gets people started. [They] are more about process than product.” To reiterate this with her students, Pam preaches that she will not be going home with them, so they need to get the basics of the process down while they are in Brasstown, and then they can expand upon that later. The weaving studio has different types and sizes of looms so that, depending on what project is at hand or what someone’s experience is with weaving, they can find a machine that is most appropriate for them. This indicates respect for students’ individuality in that not everyone has to produce the same project and an identical product.

It was no surprise to me that Pam had stories about many of the people she knows through the school. She is a charismatic woman who makes others feel at ease, setting a good tone for connections to be made. In fact, people have donated money, materials, and equipment to the Fibers Studio under Pam’s tenure because of the strong program she runs. The relationships she referenced were all quite different. One story was about a former student and first-time weaver who is now one of Pam’s assistant instructors. She mentioned a couple who owns a little house in Brasstown where they stay when they visit the school from their home in Toronto. The wife takes weaving classes and the husband teaches book-binding courses at the school and Pam looks after their home while they are

in Toronto. She has connected people from the school to the larger weaving community and seems to be keenly aware that craft is a tool for forging relationships between otherwise unconnected people. Pam lovingly calls her return students, of which she has many, “repeat offenders.”

Pam compared the John C. Campbell Folk School to other folk schools, but noted that the environment in Brasstown is different and more comfortable than the others. “It is a great place and we are very lucky to have it here. I wouldn’t be living here if it wasn’t,” she explained. Although Pam has pride in the program she manages, she also has faith in the rest of the school’s programs. As she said, “I’m not prejudiced but doggone it, I’m going to say it: we have a wonderful reputation for weaving, we have a fabulous reputation for blacksmithing, and woodturning!”

### ***Scott***

A novice artist, Scott learned how to make kaleidoscopes when someone spent an hour demonstrating the process to him. He realized that he liked it because as he watched the demonstration he was already thinking about how he could improve on the instructor’s techniques. He took that first kaleidoscope home. Although it was ugly, he liked the process. He kept working on it to create a more finished, more beautiful product. That led him to start working with brass, tin, and copper. His early kaleidoscopes were tacky looking because he did not have proper tools, but he admits that in his art process, he is “really good at tacky.” This became the cornerstone of his practice because it encouraged the use of unconventional materials.

After gaining some confidence in his craft, Scott first came to the Folk School in 1983 to sell his kaleidoscopes at the fall festival. He had just left a position in higher

education and was pursuing a career in art. The festival was fun and energetic and the people he met were friendly. As he said, it was “just too much fun. This is a great place, there is no pretense.” Scott was invited to teach at the school that weekend, and he came back to do so for the first time in 1985. This prospect was exciting to him, blending his new interest and his previous career. “Having been an educator for most of my life in one way or another,” he explained, “that is another thing I was known for. I can help people learn how to do this.”

As a counselor and higher education professional, Scott holds many ideas on educational theory and makes deliberate decisions in how he structures his class and interacts with his students. For one, he facilitates communication amongst the students early in the week so that they can be resources for each other throughout the course. This prevents him from hovering over students and encourages students to think on their questions before they get an answer, both of which decrease dependency and increase individual confidence. He views his students as artists:

I treat these folks like kaleidoscope designers and it is really frustrating the first few days because they don't know what they're trying to think about. So that is my job, to try to keep that frustration level within a range for each person that they can handle.

Scott values problem solving and making mistakes as you explore a new medium or project. “If you don't make mistakes,” he says, “you can't learn. The mistakes you make are the critical things you've gone through. The successes are the consequences of that.” He strives to support his students by imparting enough technical skill so they can work independently, but encourages them to try new methods and produce unexpected results.

In Scott's classes, process is valued over product. This attitude grows out of his own introduction to the craft and that kaleidoscopes can be made in a range of methods and materials. In his class, Scott is:

Not necessarily teaching the concrete specifics of how to do any particular technique. The biggest gift you can give people, I think, is to help them develop their process. To investigate, to experiment, to find out ways of trying things, some of which may or may not work.

He is concerned with his students learning to manipulate, not parrot, the concepts that he teaches them.

Scott expressed some of the goals he hopes his students reach during a course. First, that they accomplish something they did not know they were able to do. Second, he wants them to finish at least one kaleidoscope. While the product is not his focus, leaving with a tangible result of the week's work is an important marker of progress and transformation.

He did not say it outright, but Scott mentioned numerous situations in which students acquire skills that they can apply elsewhere in their lives, from using power tools to having the confidence to try new things. Using metaphors of life, chaos, and beauty, Scott also facilitates personal connections between kaleidoscopes and the students making them. All in all, Scott wants his students to feel that it was a good experience and that they gained something of value through it.

Scott's teaching style creates a reciprocal learning experience, in which he is teaching and learning at the same time. By working through students' questions and problems, Scott learns more about the process of kaleidoscope making. When a student proposes something he is unfamiliar with, he has two options. He can say, "You can't do that because it gets into an area that I am not familiar with," or he can say, "What would happen if you did it this way?" He chooses the latter. He references his early years in teaching as collaborations, because it "would've taken [him] a lot longer to go through all of those processes. The teaching process allowed [him] to considerably broaden [his skills]."

## **Students**

### ***Gil***

Gil originally heard about the John C. Campbell Folk School through word of mouth, and soon thereafter began doing research on similar schools. Eventually he came back across the Folk School and decided to try it out. Since that initial visit, Gil has come to the school over thirty times. He is a former schoolteacher and military veteran who used to visit Brasstown during his summer breaks, but comes more frequently now that he is retired. The week that I met Gil he was in the middle of a visit consisting of six consecutive courses. In his many visits to the school he has tried a variety of classes. Woodcarving is his primary interest, but he has also taken woodturning courses. He enrolled in two courses for making dulcimers, which he gifted to his granddaughters, and one course in making banjers, the predecessor to the banjo, which he constructed as accurately to the original process as possible.

His crafting is not limited to just school visits. In the past, Gil has done woodcarving and wood burning at home. In fact, he met his current partner at a woodcarving class back at home, where they spent one weekend a year together at a retreat for twelve or thirteen years. She was introduced to woodcarving by her father, a master woodcarver who passed his tools on to her when he retired. Now, she and Gil live together, visit the school together, and enroll in the same woodcarving classes each visit. They have also taken classes at craft schools in Missouri and Nebraska.

Despite visits to other schools and practicing crafts through classes and workshops at home, Gil continues to frequent the Folk School. Gil reported that he makes new friends every time he visits the school, “We’re all retired and we just have one heck



of a good time.” Some of the same people return to the school, Gil said, but you can build relationships over a week even if that is the extent of your interactions. “It’s a lot of fun,” he says, “Everybody’s my age and we’ve all got stories to swap.” The fun of the Folk School is in making crafts and meeting people, for Gil. It is a way to keep his hands and mind engaged. When I introduced myself to Gil’s woodcarving class and explained my research, Gil shouted out, “I’ll tell you why people come here. Retirement is too boring!”

### *Jackie*

Jackie is, in simplest terms, a die-hard Folk School student. I met her in the woodcarving studio where she was chatting with classmates and whittling characters for a nativity scene. After I introduced myself and my research to the class, I asked if anyone would be interested in speaking with me about his or her experience with the school. Jackie laughed and said, “I’ll give you your whole thesis!” She wasn’t kidding. She has enrolled in over fifty courses at the school since 2004, bought a house in Brasstown for her extended visits, and had been at the school for five consecutive weeks when I met her. She first came to the school with her husband, who never enrolled in a class but always accompanied her during her stay and on the eleven-hour drive to the Folk School from their home. He has since passed away, but she braves the drive on her own, often driving it in a single stretch of time. At home, Jackie is a retired teacher who still substitute teaches and works as a secretary at the same school when she is needed.

The friendly atmosphere is the first thing that Jackie mentioned in describing her experiences at the Folk School. Students, instructors, and staff at the school wear nametags that list their hometown and which course they are enrolled in. In Jackie’s words, “I was really engaged with everything here. I loved it. I think the nametags are a part of it because everybody knows your name.” Like a small town or a television sitcom,

knowing everyone's name and having an instant conversation starter makes all visitors seem equally accessible. The instructors set the tone for the school, as Jackie said, "I love the people and I love the instructors." In fact, most of Jackie's comments about the success of the school are related to the instructors. The instructors are your best resource in most classes, some of which are quite challenging. They often make themselves available to their students well beyond the six hours of instruction time each day. Over the years that Jackie has attended classes at the Folk School, she remembers only two instructors who were "not really good instructors," neither of whom stayed involved with the school. Jackie has built relationships with many instructors outside the studio as well. She has been invited to instructors' homes for meals and visits and invites visiting instructors to stay at her house when she is not in Brasstown. The relationships that develop at the school make it a unique environment. Jackie has been to other schools and is a member of a local carving club at home, but "a lot of places don't have this atmosphere," and meeting weekly is "just not the same" as being immersed at a school.

Jackie also referenced the school facilities during our conversation. In the dining hall, the food is healthy and good. There are options for people with dietary restrictions and there is flexibility for dietary preferences. The studios are well-stocked with anything that students may need for a given course. Jackie, who is a craftswoman independently of her time at the school, sometimes brings her own supplies if she has particular tools that she likes to use. If she is trying a new craft, however, all materials and equipment are provided. Jackie appreciates this because, if she likes the craft enough to continue with it, she knows which materials she needs and what tools and equipment she prefers, since she had a week to try out different supplies. Having tools and supplies provided decreases the initial financial investment, increasing exploration of new classes and new media.

Through our conversation, Jackie mentioned some of the products that she has made both at the folk school and at home, based on her folk school instruction. She crocheted and painted with her mom and sisters growing up, but noted a particular need to stay busy as she got older. “After I retired,” she explained, “I decided I needed to be active and especially after my husband passed away, I needed to be active. So this is just for me.” Jackie told me about the rugs and baskets she made at the school that now fill her small Brasstown home. I asked Jackie about the frustrations that she encounters and the physical and mental toll that long studio hours take on her. Her response was direct: “I think we don’t get tired because it is a pleasure.” She also speculated on the idea of purchasing a loom to keep at her house near the school, as she has recently taken to weaving. Her favorite craft, however, is broom making. Back at home, Jackie does reenactments and sells her brooms. She is not concerned with making a profit from these sales; her focus is on the process of making, the activity of the reenactments, and the people she meets along the way. The two primary themes that Jackie expressed throughout her interview are the strong relationships that the school fosters and the exploration of new art forms.

### *Jim*

Jim first heard about the Folk School from an instructor he met at a hardware store in Atlanta. He was already doing sculpture in stone and slate and wanted to expand to a new medium. His grandfather was a carpenter by trade and his father was an all-around handyman, so Jim was never afraid of tools. As he grew up, he was a self-taught cabinet and furniture maker, mostly making things like cradles and giving them away as gifts. Most of his craft knowledge was learned from books and he practiced them on the

weekends in his free time for pleasure, “I would spend Saturdays and Sundays doing what I enjoyed and it usually involved creating things.”

Jim has been to the school about thirty times, usually averaging three visits per year. The week that we spoke, Jim was enrolled in a woodcarving course. Woodcarving was also the first course Jim took at the school, but in the time between then and now he has also taken blacksmithing, woodturning, and various cooking classes. He also has an extensive list of courses he hopes to take in the future: photography, writing, and painting. His interest in painting grows out of his mother’s practice. She was a painter, and in exploring painting Jim hopes to “learn some of the things that I know she knew.”

When Jim got married in 2000, one of the first things he did was bring his new wife to the Folk School with him. “She didn’t think she was an artist,” he said, “but she found out that it wasn’t her sister who was the artist in her family, it’s her.” The first course Jim’s wife took was in outdoor concrete sculpture. When she returned home, she made all kinds of sculptures for their house, but has since expanded her activity to other courses. The two never take classes together, but try to attend the school during weeks that there are course offerings that both of them are excited about. Their copy of the course catalog is “all tattered and worn because [they] look at it so much.”

Reflecting upon his first visit to the school, Jim recalled “enjoy[ing] it so much it was almost like an addiction. I looked forward to the next opportunity to come here.” When I asked Jim what he looks forward to each time he returns, he exclaimed “Everything!” He particularly enjoys meeting people, the noncompetitive environment, and the great food. As a forty-four year veteran of higher education, specifically researching how individuals learn, Jim has an invested interest in the learning environment at the school. He knows that he learns best through individual instruction and demonstration, which is what the Folk School provides. In reference to the

noncompetitive environment, he notes, “Instructors take each student where they are and then tries to help them go as far as they can during the week they are here.”

For the past five years, Jim has sold his woodcarvings and woodturnings at a local Renaissance Festival. At the festival, he would also do demonstrations using an antique-looking lathe to show how woodturnings were once made. The money he earns on these sales is invested back into his crafts, “just enough to buy some more wood and more tools.” He enjoys the personal connections made at the Renaissance Festival, especially that it is “a pleasure to make someone else happy” by teaching them something about his craft. Combining his knowledge from various courses at the school, Jim has mixed media, experimenting with engraving and wood burning, resulting in some “unusual looking pieces.” Jim has been a lifelong creator, but the Folk School has given him the technical training and flexibility to explore new materials and methods so that he feels like a craftsman. He is such a strong proponent of the school and its philosophy that he takes a box of Folk School catalogs home with him at the end of each class to give to people he meets and tells them about the school.

### ***Rachel***

Rachel caught my attention at the Folk School well before I was introduced to her. I saw her first in the dining hall. Not only was she one of the youngest faces in the room, she was decades younger than the average Folk School visitor. The same afternoon, Rachel stood out again as the only woman enrolled in the blacksmithing class. I was thrilled to get a young person’s perspective when she volunteered to speak with me about her experience at the Folk School.

We sat down together after dinner. On a couch in the Keith House with the thuds of Contra dancing in the background, Rachel told me the story of her relationship with the Folk School. Her mother is a ceramics instructor at the Folk School who originally came to take a course with one of her favorite instructors. As an instructor herself, Rachel's mother put herself on the wait list for instructor openings in ceramics courses. After a few years on the wait list, she began teaching a class at the school once a year. According to Rachel, she had been teaching at the school about five years at the time of our interview. This is how Rachel first came to know the school.

At the time of our interview, Rachel was visiting the school with her entire family. Her mother was teaching a pottery-throwing course, her father was visiting the school without being enrolled in a class, and Rachel and her brother enrolled together in a blacksmithing course. She chose blacksmithing because "it was the least like anything else [she] had done before." Since blacksmithing is reliant on so much equipment, it cannot be learned independently at home, unlike many crafts. As she said, "Where else am I going to get to do this for the week?" Her interest in exploring something new that was specific to this environment was important to Rachel and a blacksmithing course was available during the week they were visiting the school. When I asked Rachel if she would continue blacksmithing after this course, she said no. Her brother, on the other hand, had already located a forge in his city of residence where he could continue practicing blacksmithing.

The theme of exploring new interests and media continued throughout our conversation. Rachel's father, a cabinet maker, did not enroll in a course because he thought that learning a new craft would be too similar to his daily routine and that he would miss the relaxing and rejuvenating experience that a family vacation should be. Rachel commented that he had kept himself occupied with reading, hiking, and

participating in the morning and evening programs that they were too tired to attend. Despite his initial resistance, he also visited the woodworking and blacksmithing studios, and considered returning to the school to enroll in a blacksmithing class. Rachel also mentioned other students who come to the school to try new media:

I think it is cool the number of folks I talk to who are artists. It's not just people who are lawyers who come here to do art. It is a lot of people who weave for a living and then come here and take pottery or go completely out of their comfort zone even though they are full-time artists at home.

In exploring new media, Rachel found it beneficial that the Folk School was an immersive learning experience. "I think you advance a lot faster in eight classes here than you would in eight classes over eight weeks," she said. A lack of distractions enhances the students' focus on their craft, because there are few reasons not to go to class. Enrolled in an evening art course you may have to miss classes for various reasons, but at the Folk School there is no reason not to go back to the studio, even in free time. Also, working on the same craft constantly throughout a week decreases the amount of time spent on refreshing technical skills, increasing progression and production.

In addition to her family vacation and trying something new, Rachel mentioned the impact of both process and product in art making. She discussed process from the instructor and the students' perspective. Her mother explained that teaching influences her art practice because students often face challenges that she has not encountered, and working through these obstacles helps inform how she makes her pottery. Similarly, Rachel told me a story about her blacksmithing instructor who had never made a bottle opener like she wanted to make, but between her idea and his skills they were able to produce something that neither of them had done before.

In comparison to one-time classes, Rachel explained that the Folk School's "emphasis is on completing a product." The goal is not a technically perfect product, but

a finished product. Rachel referenced a demonstration-based cooking class in which you leave with a recipe or a photograph of a meal. At the Folk School, you leave with a physical product that you took from concept to completion. During our conversation, Rachel took the in-progress bottle opener out of her bag to show me what she had done so far. She quickly pointed out things that she wanted to fix and explained mistakes, but there was pride in her voice as she demonstrated her week's work.

I spoke with Rachel during her second visit to John C. Campbell, but her first visit was also accompanying her mother on a week she was teaching. In exchange for each class taught at the school an instructor is given a "resource," or free class enrollment, which they can use themselves or share with a friend or family member. On her first visit, Rachel enrolled in a chocolate cooking class using her mom's instructor resource. She had been working in a restaurant, although not cooking, and when the course was available during her visit Rachel's mom encouraged her to give it a try. Throughout the week the instructor "made some jokes about [Rachel] having fast hands, being younger than most of the folks here, and hiring [her]." A few months after taking the course Rachel graduated college and was looking for her next adventure. She sent an email to her instructor to see if he needed extra hands at his bakery. The timing was perfect as he had just moved his business to a new location and was looking to hire someone to assist his work. So Rachel moved to Atlanta and has been working there ever since. It is an illustrative example of how trying new things can produce unexpected results.

### ***Bill***

Bill Posey was one of five work-study students at the Folk School during my visit. The work-study program is a nine-week commitment, with six weeks spent working



at the school and three weeks open for enrollment in classes. Room and board, meals, and course enrollment are provided in exchange for the six weeks of labor. At the time of my visit, Bill was in his last week of classes with only an additional week of work in front of him before his program cycle ended. The timing of our interview was ideal, as his time at the school was winding down and he had begun to reflect on his experience there.

My interview with Bill was at the suggestion of Keather, and I quickly saw why. Bill is a happy man with a contagious enthusiasm for life. We sat on the porch of the Keith House after dinner one evening, with snow flurries falling and good conversation distracting us from the cold. In his life outside the Folk School, Bill works in a retreat center in western North Carolina, similar to the Folk School but without an arts or educational focus. He initially learned about the School through word of mouth within his professional community and when the Folk School course catalog arrived at the retreat center where he worked in Washington. Bill came to the school initially because he was on furlough from his year-round job, giving him an opportunity to explore something else for a few months. Having heard of the Folk School previously and as an artist himself, he applied for the work-study program and was accepted to participate in it.

Our conversation floated back and forth between his experience at the Folk School and at the other retreat centers where he has worked. Four distinct but interconnected themes came from our conversation. The act of making something, separation from normal daily life, the noncompetitive environment, and the existing community at the school are characteristics he identified as implicit in the Folk School experience.

The community that Bill identifies is primarily amongst students. He notes the importance of being present in out-of-studio settings such as evening activities, the dining hall, and casual interactions. In reference to local students who go home for meals at the

end of each day rather than boarding at the Folk School, Bill perceives that experience to be less rich in terms of building relationships. Many students return to their studios in the evening to continue working on projects. Bill notes a difference in tone in these evening visits, where “there’s more camaraderie. Usually in the evenings you might not have quite the energy so you can sit and practice your art plus socialize at the same time, get into a conversation that is relaxed.” While daytime conversations are often based in the craft or task at hand, evening conversations can divert into personal topics, creating bonds between students. The inverse of that thought also holds weight with Bill. Just being together, in the presence of other people working towards the same thing you are working towards, can create community. In response to a question about the studios with loud equipment that inhibits conversation, Bill said:

You may not be sitting there talking very much, but you’re doing the same thing, so you feel a certain bond over that. It’s kind of like just being in the same room as someone and you feel a bond with that person even if you’re not having a conversation.

For Bill, just being present at the school bonds the individuals who are there. The fact that everyone present at the school decided to come, to leave their daily lives, engage in some arts practice, and chose this location to do so, is enough similarity to connect the people who are there. Other similarities found through making art and conversation help to deepen that initial connection.

Being present at the school, separated from the nitty gritty of normative life, is another important aspect of the Folk School. Without distractions, students are able to fully focus their attention on the craft they are learning. Meals are cooked, dishes are washed, coffee is prepared, each day’s schedule is set, all by someone else. The students’ focus is on their craft, their experience, and the people they meet. When I asked Bill what he had gotten out of his experience so far, he had two thoughts. First, he got a “much-

needed break” from his other job, a break that refreshed and rejuvenated him so that he feels like he can return to that job with a new energy and focus. He also mentions the significance of being at the school for multiple days with nothing to work on but your art:

It has given me slots of time where I can focus on a craft or an art. Getting home at the end of the day, I’m tired and unfortunately don’t feel like doing anything but watching TV or reading a book or something. I don’t have the energy to sit down and do some watercolor. It usually takes a 24-hour period for me to just wind down from my regular job, get my head clear so I can finally start to focus on my art. This place gives me that because it gives me five full days and I can even go back to class in the evening. That’s really cool! You’ve got a large enough chunk of time where you can practice art. And that is a real blessing. That’s a gift for me.

For most of us it is hard to put aside chores and work to focus on something that feels recreational or extraneous. Being at the Folk School encourages that focus in a way that does not happen at home.

In Bill’s practice, this focus is a meditative or spiritual experience. “When you’re focused on work,” he explained, “you have that Zen moment. It’s like nothing else exists except your craft, your art, whatever you’re doing with your hands. And that’s beautiful.” To get to this “Zen moment,” one has to leave everything else behind, including his or her hesitations and self-consciousness. This leads me to the third characteristic of the school that Bill identifies, its noncompetitive learning environment. As a child, Bill did not like art at school because he was turned off by the idea that someone else would judge what you were doing. In fact, this is what prevented him from studying studio art at a university level. At the Folk School, where the focus is on process not product, there are no grades or critiques. The act of creation is about personal enjoyment. As a part of the Folk School, Bill noted that seeing “folks having a fun time makes me feel like I am a small part of something worthwhile.” This noncompetitive environment is safe enough that students feel free to explore, to experiment, and to deeply engage with their craft.

Noncompetitive learning, a disconnect from daily life, and a comfortable community provide the ideal environment for Bill's final aspect of the school: creating art. Visitors to the school find personal fulfillment in the art they make, trying something new or accomplishing something unexpected. Even just the act of creating something with your own hands is satisfying. Bill says it simply: "It's good for my mind. It's good for my psyche. It lifts my spirits."

## **CONCLUSION**

This chapter presented individual Folk School experiences through the narratives that the participants shared with me. Included were discussions by thirteen members of the John C. Campbell Folk School community (staff, instructors, and students), responding to my questions about their introduction to the Folk School, experiences at the Folk School and outcomes of the time spent there, and previous engagement in art making. Chapter 5 also included a discussion of narrative inquiry methodology, which directed my investigation of the Folk School. The chapter that follows is broader in scope. In it, I focus on connecting these individual experiences through shared themes and patterns that emerged through my interviews and time spent at the John C. Campbell Folk School, which provide a richer understanding of the Folk School experience.

## **Chapter 6: Data Analysis and Emergent Themes**

Each participant in this study shared a unique Folk School experience. Through coding and drawing thematic connections between the individual stories, I identified a number of similarities between the interviewees' experiences. While motivations and outcomes were more intertwined than I anticipated, the motivations for initial enrollment at the school were similar across participants. In sharing descriptions of their Folk School experiences with me, most participants also spoke about their lives outside of the school, creating a sort of profile of the Folk School student, including careers, arts engagement, and their relationship with the school. The immersive experience of the school and the school's focus on process over product surfaced as common themes. Many students noted the effect of these two school philosophies. Finally, the relationships formed in the school setting and the personal development that takes place there were notable outcomes of visiting the Folk School.

### **MOTIVATIONS TO ATTEND**

In the interviews that I conducted, participants reported overlapping reasons for attending the school initially. Most of these motivations were craft-focused or socially-focused. Study participants expressed the following craft-focused motivations for coming to the Folk School: (a) to try a new craft, (b) to learn from a specific teacher or in a particular method, and (c) to attend the Fall Festival as a visitor or vendor. Socially-focused motivations included (a) attending family reunions, (b) accompanying a friend or family member to the school, and (c) using the trip as a vacation with loved ones.

Some participants first came to the Folk School motivated by their interest in a particular craft, method, or instructor. Scott initially visited the Folk School as a vendor

at the Fall Festival. During that first visit he was invited to teach at the school, and has been involved with the school ever since. Gil heard about the Folk School through his woodcarving community in Michigan and enrolled in a course of the same medium. Jackie also came to take a specific class, although she did not elaborate on which course was her first. Rachel's mother, a pottery instructor, originally came to the Folk School to take a course from an instructor whose style she admires.

The community and social aspect of the school motivated other participants' enrollment. This is true for visitors who stay at the school but do not enroll in a course, such as Rachel's father and Jackie's husband. Marianne shared a story about a woman who invited thirty of her friends to come to the Folk School for her fiftieth birthday celebration. She and her husband paid for their course enrollment, they paid room and board, and everyone took whichever class interested them. They would then reunite at meals and in the evenings to spend time together. They explained to Marianne that the cost of doing this was the same as having a nice party at a restaurant, but everyone got a week of enjoyment, company, and crafting from this type of celebration, rather than a single night of fun. Rachel originally attended a class to spend time with her mother who was teaching that particular week. She chose a class that looked interesting, but the week was more about spending time with her mother and experiencing a place that her mom had a connection to.

A few participants heard about the school from someone, but then enrolled because of the courses offered or an interest in exploring a particular craft. This is true for Paul, who was introduced to the Folk School at the Southern Highlands Craft Guild Fair in Asheville. He enjoyed the people he met that day and came to the school to take a blacksmithing class, in keeping with his background working in metals. Although Jim heard about the Folk School from an instructor that he met at his local hardware store, it

was his interest in exploring a new medium that motivated him to enroll in a course at the school.

There are also visitors to the school who are attracted to it for a mix of craft- and community-related reasons. Bill came to the school because he works in a similar environment, which he called a retreat community, and he was interested in visiting a comparable place as well as having time to focus on art learning away from his everyday life. Pam originally came to the Folk School when she accompanied her husband to an annual blacksmithing meeting hosted at the school. She found her own interest there, as well, because her weaving mentor at home also taught at the school and ultimately got her engaged in the weaving community there. An instructor and friend of Pattie's brought her to the Folk School for the first time because she knew that Pattie would like the environment. She was already an established basket-weaver, so the school's offerings in that discipline were exciting to her. Jan, now the school's Director, came to the school as a child with his school and his family. In adulthood, he is a folklorist and musician, which brought him to the school as an instructor. It could have been the school's influence on him that led him to music and folklore, and it would be a brilliant success story for the school if he attributed his love to those early visits.

Some of the staff members were introduced to the school when a position was open and they applied for it. Keather grew up in Asheville, North Carolina but was only peripherally aware of the school. After years working on the West Coast, she returned to the area and found her current position at the Folk School. Similarly, Tammy is a native of the area but had never heard of the school before she saw the job posting that brought her to the school. Marianne's motivations were a blend of personal and professional. Her husband is originally from the Brasstown area and getting hired at the Folk School gave them the excuse they needed to return to the area.

Most of the motivations outlined above are for first-time enrollment. Although they were not explained in as much detail, motivations for return enrollment also became evident during interviews. I found that first-time visitors were attracted to the school on account of another person or the craft and instructor offerings at the school. Return visitors came back to the school because of the fun, the community, and the satisfaction of accomplishing something new. Tammy shared a story about a group of students who visits the Folk School every year, during the same week, and who signed up for the same course with the same instructor. They enroll the day that registration opens. “It’s not that these people need these big Windsor chairs,” she explains, “you only need so many for your table.” But they come year after year because they all want to be together at the Folk School. Motivations for multiple visits to the school are closely tied to the second half of this study’s central research question: What do visitors gain from their experience at the Folk School?

#### **CHARACTERISTICS OF VISITORS**

A few characteristics of school visitors emerged through their narratives. Most of my interviewees expressed a desire to explore something new. Sometimes visitors set out to try a new medium, method, instructor, or an entirely new craft. Other times, instructors want to revisit their role as student by enrolling in a course. Pattie and Jackie both explicitly stated that they feel compelled to “dabble” at the school, trying out many disciplines, even though they are proficiently skilled in one particular area.

I also noticed that many of the participants had a background in education. Gil, Jackie, Jan, Jim, Marianne, and Scott all worked in educational settings prior to engaging with the Folk School. From this, I deduce that individuals who understand educational



systems and learning behaviors have an appreciation for the type of education that the Folk School provides. It is founded in sophisticated educational philosophies but is executed with a lightness that allows it to be both fun and successful.

Previous experience with creating or making, although not specifically with art, emerged as a common theme of Folk School visitors. Paul worked in automotive racing before taking up blacksmithing, which uses similar techniques and materials but results in a significantly different product. Jim also mentioned making cradles, toys, and furniture for gifts and recreation before he started woodcarving. Individuals who enjoy working with their hands in a specific medium are more likely to engage in other types of handcrafting, probably due to the confidence they have in their handcrafting skills.

Another notable trend was that most participants do not engage with the school in only one capacity. Jan refers to this phenomenon as “multiple relationships” and it is encouraged by the school through the assistant teacher program, the resource courses provided to instructors, and the resident artist program. With only one exception, every instructor I spoke with came to the school initially as a student, and then progressed into their instructor role. Every resident artist served as an instructor before the school solicited him or her for a deeper relationship. It is not an official program at the school, but in the most popular disciplines and for full classes, teachers have the opportunity to choose an assistant teacher to help them throughout the course. They do not have an instructional role, but serve to support the teacher in terms of arranging supplies and materials preparation. As Jan explained, the assistant teacher position is:

a very potent position because a lot of times we can put someone in there who is an extremely good student and in the next year they could be the master teacher . . . We bring people up through it and they become teachers themselves in the folk school manner.

As he hints toward, two of the benefits of the multiple levels of engagement are (a) a closer community, because the same familiar faces are rotating through campus regularly, and (b) more support for the school's ideas because these are people who believe and exemplify the school's values.

### **IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE**

The John C. Campbell Folk School structures its students' experience with respect to the traditional ideas of the Danish Folk School, which are largely focused on community living. While much has changed at the school since its inception in 1925, many things have been maintained that facilitate the bonding of social connections and arts engagement. Mealtimes were discussed in most of my interviews because the majority of Folk School visitors participate in them and they provide a platform for informal, comfortable conversations to unfold and genuine relationships to form. Nametags are worn by all visitors, further encouraging conversation because they eliminate awkward icebreaker conversations and forgotten name inquiries.

The immersive experience of the Folk School is a factor in visitors' experience as well. The change of scenery signals a different pace and a disconnect from normal routines that allow visitors to relax into the Folk School mentality, which is focused on having fun and learning crafts. Multiple participants noted an absence of daily concerns – chores, emails, work, even cooking and deciding how to spend a day – while at the Folk School. Without thinking about these occupations, visitors can wholly focus on the craft they are engaging in, which assists them in reaching the “Zen” or “flow” moments introduced previously. Bill went so far as to say that it is like “nothing else exists” when he is in the studio working with his hands. The familiarity of the Folk School culture

enables returning students to get to this place of comfort and focus more quickly than first-time visitors.

The immersive experience of visiting the Folk School encourages students and teachers to focus on their craft in the absence of daily distractions. Living and working in a space amongst individuals with similar goals facilitates social engagement between visitors of the school. In turn, these relationships create a feeling of community and camaraderie that provides a fun and enjoyable experience for the visitors.

## **RELATIONSHIPS**

The personal and social connections that exist at the Folk School are one of the strongest patterns that I identified through this study. As I mentioned previously, the immersive nature of the school encourages social engagement and is one of the most impactful aspects of the school experience. Some visitors come to the school with friends and family and use the Folk School experience to spend time together, strengthening existing relationships. This was true for many of the participants I spoke with, who embarked on their first Folk School visit with someone they know. Others, like Jim, brought people they know to the school after visiting because they wanted to share the experience. Reports of family reunions, group birthday party trips, and the group that attends the school the same week each year indicate that the environment at the Folk School is conducive to strengthening social connections.

New connections are also made at the school. Conversations at mealtimes, in studios, and after class times are encouraged by the ever-present nametags. Many structures at the school enable a feeling of openness to new opportunities, including meeting new people. Through my observations and conversations, I found that the

instructors are instrumental in creating this feeling at the school. Within the class, they maintain a friendly authority, but during mealtimes and leisure times there is no indication of who is a student and who is a teacher. Even a student who visits the school once will likely have positive social encounters throughout the week and will have the opportunity to build extended relationships with some of the people he or she meets. Gil attributed his enjoyment of the school to the people he meets there. When I asked if he sees the same people time and time again, he said that aside from a few returnees he usually meets new people each time. To feel fulfilled by the social experience Gil has at the school, he does not need to create long-term relationships with the people he meets there. It is more about enjoying each other and connecting while they are at the school together.

Others, however, have built ongoing relationships with various individuals at the school that they are excited to revisit each time they attend a course at John C. Campbell. Many of the instructors I interviewed, Pam, Scott, and Paul, for example, are full-time residents of Brasstown. Thus, the relationships they originally made at the Folk School have permeated their daily lives because they live and work in the same community together. Others, such as Pattie and Jackie, do not live at the Folk School, but have made connections with people at the Folk School who they look forward to catching up with each time they visit the school.

There are many levels of relationships that exist at the school. Whether visitors attend with people they are already connected to or forge new friendships during their stay at the school, the social experience at the school is strong and positively impacts the people at the school.

## **PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT**

There is an intrinsic satisfaction in the act of creating something that was echoed by many participants. Being at the Folk School, able to focus solely on the task at hand, created a worthwhile opportunity for hard work and a large payoff in the form of a completed project. In creating an object or learning a new skill, students reported that they surpassed their own expectations. This promotes self-confidence and an interest in continuing to create something in a familiar discipline or one that is new. Scott relayed a story of an older woman who took his kaleidoscope class and learned how to use a glasscutter and other power tools. This student was surprised that she was able to learn these skills and was impressed that she could accomplish something she always felt incapable of achieving. In addition to the pride and satisfaction that accompany a completed product, creating something empowers the maker to challenge himself or herself and continue testing his or her abilities.

This personal development, as expressed by the participants, extends beyond the Folk School experience. Pattie's story of finding her own musical voice at the Folk School demonstrates the confidence that can be found there. Not only did she gain self-assurance in the school setting, where she is now comfortable singing at the closing ceremonies and amongst friends in after-studio hours, but she also carried this attitude home and sang at her musician brother's funeral, in his honor.

A clear example of the Folk School experience extending beyond the campus visit is Rachel's employment at the bakery in Atlanta. She came to the school to visit with her mom and take a course for leisure, but did not anticipate finding a career. However, the skills she acquired in the chocolate cooking course and the relationship she formed with her instructor proved to be long lasting and much more than recreational. Acquiring skills, surpassing personal expectations, and developing self-confidence are emergent

patterns that indicate the Folk School experience extends beyond the school's campus and the weeklong visit into the everyday lives of the people who come to the school.

## **PROCESS AND PRODUCT**

At the Folk School, process is valued over product. The school encourages instructors to structure courses so that students leave with some sort of finished product because it serves as a marker of progress, an indicator of transformation, and a tangible memento of the Folk School experience. Within the courses, however, the quality and quantity of the objects made is not the focus of the curriculum. Rather, instructors and staff have different goals for their courses. Pam and Scott both teach technical skills in a way that enables students to continue working in their medium after they leave the Folk School, rather than working through prescribed procedural steps. Their focus is on teaching foundational skills, allowing students to make mistakes, and assuming an increasingly hands-off approach as the week unfolds.

The noncompetitive environment is a huge part of the Folk School's values. It was mentioned by every instructor and staff member I interviewed, without fail. There are no grades, assessments, evaluations, or critiques at the school. Students' work is never put up against others' for comparison. However, the educational environment that the school provides encompasses much more than just a lack of competition. There is an acceptance of trial, failure, and exploration that encourages students to try different ways of doing things. More than one instructor mentioned that teaching at the school is a reciprocal learning experience because they are challenged and educated by helping their students work through problems they often have not encountered in their own practice.

This non-competitive philosophy reiterates the school's focus on the process, as the products are not used for assessment or comparison.

Another theme that emerged in this investigation is the Folk School's encouragement of its students to explore new things. This is evident in the course catalog, which has language that urges students with "just an interest" but no previous experience to try particular classes. The instructors also demonstrate this exploratory idea. Through conversations, I heard mention of instructors pushing a specific style or technique, but each of the instructors I spoke with showed a better understanding of how people learn than that. The pottery course I observed was intended to teach wheel-throwing, but after the first two days a couple of students found that they did not enjoy wheel-throwing and could not pick it up easily. Rather than push them through the last three days of class on the wheel, the instructor taught them some hand construction techniques and they created large figures out of clay instead. This flexibility is made possible by the school because there is no strict curriculum or skill assessments as a result of the noncompetitive environment.

The school's focus on the process of learning and creating is demonstrated through the cultural education that accompanies most courses. Many instructors incorporate lessons about the history and culture of the craft as they teach it. This deepens the students' understanding of and connection to the craft. Pam said that she expects her students to leave with an appreciation of the craft, whether they continue their practice or not. Other participants, who attributed their enjoyment of the school to this contextual education, echoed this sentiment.

Products are not overlooked entirely, though. Many of the people I met were excited to show me their work during the course of our interview. The products serve as markers of personal progress, pride, and accomplishment. At lunch one day, a man from

the woodturning studio pulled a hand-knitted hat from his pocket, passing it around the table to show his creation. He was not showing it as a perfectly executed knitting project, but was proud that he had mastered something outside of his discipline that he taught himself. The folks around the table were receptive to his show and tell, congratulating him and sharing their own stories of self-taught craft successes.

## **CONCLUSION**

This chapter identified themes that emerged from the narrative collection portion of this study. These themes include (a) Motivations to Attend, (b) Characteristics of Visitors, (c) the Immersive Experience, (d) Relationships, (e) Personal Development, and (f) Process and Product. These themes help to paint a picture of what motivates students to first attend, and then return, to the John C. Campbell Folk School. While all six of these themes and characteristics were not found and identified in each person that I interviewed, their influential presence in those connected with the Folk School, particularly the students, was clear and unmistakable.

The significance in these emergent themes reveals itself most strongly when these themes are weighed together rather than viewed individually. This echoes comments made by participants – the Folk School experience is great because of the totality of it, not because of a single experience or characteristic. While the motivations can be simply divided into socially-centered or craft-driven, the outcomes of Folk School engagement are more complex. Of the six identified themes, four were products of the Folk School ideology: immersive experience, relationships, personal development, and process and product. This gives strong support to the belief that the Folk School is effective in providing an art learning experience that its students find valuable. By creating an



environment in which visitors can step outside their normative behaviors, interact with new people, and engage in art learning that is process-focused, they are able to attain personal development that extends beyond their Folk School experience and into their daily lives and craft practice.

Considering the six emergent themes as a whole also provides a direct response to the central research question for this investigation by identifying motivations for and outcomes of art learning at the John C. Campbell Folk School. The motivations for engagement are focused on craft-learning or social experiences. The outcomes are directed toward having an immersive experience that facilitates the development of new relationships or deepening existing bonds, supports personal development that is rooted in craft learning but extends beyond an arts setting, and offers art learning that is focused on process, problem solving, and creative thinking more than production. These particular motivations, characteristics of visitors, and Folk School philosophies work together to create positive and impactful experience for visitors of the Folk School.

## **Chapter 7: Conclusion**

### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study has been to identify motivations for and outcomes of adult engagement in arts education. By focusing the study on one location, the John C. Campbell Folk School, I have been able to secure a broad and rich understanding of the institution and the individuals connected to it. Through a visit to the Folk School that included studio visits, observations, informal conversations, and interviews, I used a combination of narrative and case study research to respond to my Central Research Question: What motivates students to engage in craft education at the John C. Campbell Folk School and what do they gain from this art experience?

### **FINDINGS**

In undertaking this study, I expected to create two distinct lists: motivations and outcomes. Through analyzing the data gathered, I realized that the two are too closely connected to distinguish in this manner. Specific motivations for first-time enrollment emerged, but motivations for re-enrollment were tied to the outcomes of the Folk School experience. Motivations for first-time enrollment were often based on (a) the pursuit of a particular craft, style, method, or instructor or (b) to accompany someone else or reconnect with a group of people. Returning students shared a number of characteristics, including a background in education, previous craft experience, and a desire to explore new things.

The John C. Campbell Folk School exemplifies a specific set of educational philosophies, grounded in the Danish Folk School tradition and arts education. One of those philosophies is that the process of creating something is valued over the product. It

is also essential that Folk School learning take place in a noncompetitive environment. Both of these philosophies create a learning opportunity that encourages an exploration of new things. The Folk School ideologies are manifested in certain structures that encourage students to partake in the school's beliefs.

The immersive experience of the school was noted by almost all the participants in this study. It encourages focus on craft, removes distractions and daily deterrents, facilitates social interactions, and enables the students to enjoy themselves because daily duties are taken care of already. The relationships that are fostered at the Folk School enhance the experiences of students, staff, and instructors. These relationships often extend beyond the school's campus. Even if individuals never connect outside the school, those relationships exist on campus and enrich the school community. Many students noted a love of working with their hands while at the school, which is absent from most of their daily lives. Being at the Folk School helps them to take on challenges in a creative, safe environment that enables risk-taking and experimentation. Mistakes at the Folk School are learning opportunities and generally do not come with the consequences and setbacks that occur in mistakes made at work or home.

In summary, the themes that emerged through this study are (a) Motivations to Attend, (b) Characteristics of Visitors, (c) the Immersive Experience, (d) Relationships, (e) Personal Development, and (f) Process and Product. Motivations are specific to first-time enrollment, while the other themes are identified as motivations for re-enrollment and outcomes of attending courses at the school. Many of the individuals who feel allegiance to the school have a background in education and craft. Coming to the Folk School for a weeklong program enables them to focus on developing their craft knowledge and skill and building relationships with fellow Folk School visitors.

Accomplishments at the Folk School often extend beyond a visitor's stay on campus, empowering students to take on new challenges in their daily lives.

Through these findings, I can assert that experiential education exists at the John C. Campbell Folk School. As discussed in Chapter 2, experiential education should “increase knowledge, develop skills, clarify values, and develop people's capacity to contribute to their communities” (Association of Experiential Education, 2007). At the Folk School, increasing knowledge and developing skills happen simultaneously through hands-on craft learning. The school's focus on process over product provides an opportunity for students to weigh and understand values through creative problem solving and hard work. The anecdote that Scott provided about his older female student learning to use power tools and Pattie's story of singing at her brother's funeral demonstrate that the Folk School experience expands the visitor's capacity to participate in their own communities.

Outward Bound founder Kurt Hahn expressed that experiential education is a transactive process, benefitting teacher and student alike (Itin, 1999). Multiple instructors at the Folk School echo this sentiment, valuing their teaching experience as educational and enriching for themselves and their students. Viewing learning as a transactive experience—or collaborative—to use Scott's words, removes power dynamics that exist in other educational settings. This is evident at the Folk School, where students and teachers live, work, and eat together in an environment in which they are treated the same, aside from one having a skill set that the other seeks.

The Kolb cycle, mentioned in Chapter 2, is a learning cycle that describes the process of experiential education with four actions: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimenting (Smith, 1999). Through observations conducted at the John C. Campbell Folk School, I saw this cycle in practice

in studio classrooms. While Kolb's cycle can begin with any of the four actions, most classes began with the concrete experience, actually practicing the craft hands-on. That was followed by reflective observation, in which the student could see the result of the concrete experience, the beginning stages of the object. Third is abstract conceptualization, which is the connection between thinking about the object and working on it. This is the stage in which a student may adjust their technique to resolve problems or attain a new appearance. The final stage is the implementation of this new technique, which is called active experimentation.

At the John C. Campbell Folk School, physical and intellectual engagement come together in the process of making. Concepts are brought to fruition as physical objects through active thinking, problem solving, and iterative trials that require dexterity and technical skill.

## **UNEXPECTED FINDINGS**

The theme of community involvement outside of the school emerged in a large number of interviews. Aware of the historical connection between the school and Brasstown community, I was curious about how that relationship exists in the present, but did not make it the focus of my study. It was surprising, then, when it came up in multiple conversations at the Folk School. Citizens in the surrounding counties are invited to enroll in courses at the school for half price, on a stand-by basis. A fundraiser was established that uses work by visiting artists and food donated by the Folk School to raise funds for the local food bank. A summer camp run by the school hosts local and visiting students. The Fall Festival is the single largest annual even in the surrounding area, bringing tens of thousands of visitors to an otherwise rural and isolated place each

fall. This activity generated funds for the town and an awareness of the Folk School that continues to promote tourism to the area. The school serves the community by supporting it economically, bringing new residents to the area, and encouraging education of its citizens through the stand-by program.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

In the process of conducting this study, a number of other topics emerged that are worthy of attention. Below are recommendations for further related research.

### **Career and Craft**

Many of the participants I interviewed mentioned their careers while talking about their journey to the Folk School. Not surprisingly, many of them work and volunteer in educational settings, which creates a strong connection to the idea of cognitive development and mental engagement. However, Jan Davison made an interesting observation about a string of rocket scientists who attended the school to take blacksmithing classes. The nature of their work was that they had to complete one tiny piece of a large and complicated puzzle, and they had to do it perfectly. Blacksmithing is a very different process than that, as the maker is in control from conception to completion and mistakes are accepted and also, at times, reversible. A study that compared student's careers or involvements outside of the school with the craft that they choose to study at the Folk School would add another dimension to the research conducted in this study, as it would provide motivations and the reasons behind why students may select certain course offerings.

### **First-time v. Returning Visitors**

All the participants in this study are return visitors, most of whom have multiple levels of relationship with the school. While this indicates an affinity to the school, it does not skew results for this research study. However, it does bring up an interesting gap that is worthy of investigation. There may be a difference in experience and motivations between first-time and returning students. A study of these two groups may give increased insight into how best to market programs and meet the needs of all participants.

### **John C. Campbell Folk School History**

In researching historical aspects of the John C. Campbell Folk School, the early and recent years of the school are well documented in primary and secondary sources. The middle years, however, are limited more to primary sources and a single secondary publication written by Pat McNelley, a self-proclaimed friend of the school. The Folk School has maintained many of its original educational philosophies, but adapted them as necessary to continue meeting needs and staying in business. These middle years are of specific interest because they mark drastic changes in the functions of the Folk School and the demographic group that enrolls at the school. A study of the historical documents available in the History Center at the Folk School would provide data to illustrate the story of the school during these more obscure and unresearched middle years. Also, some of the characters who worked and visited the Folk School during these years are still alive, and could be utilized as living records or oral histories from the school at that time.

## **Multi-site Study**

Two schools were identified through this study that could serve as useful comparative locations for a multi-site study. Penland School of Crafts is also located in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina, and provides one-, two-, and eight-week workshops in a variety of crafts. Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts is situated in Gatlinburg, Tennessee, offering one- and two-week programs in art instruction for beginners through advanced students. Many of the participants in this study have also taken or taught classes at Penland and Arrowmont. With similar geographical locations and educational focuses, a multi-site study of these schools would encourage more nuanced characteristics of each school to emerge and provide beneficial insights regarding the educational purposes and practices of these institutions of art instruction.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

This study sought to achieve a better understanding of what individuals seek and gain through arts engagement at the John C. Campbell Folk School. By looking at both ends of the learning process, the expectations coming into the process as well as the outcomes, I have been able to conclude how the Folk School is successfully reaching its students. A key is found in Olive Dame Campbell's opening words to *The Danish Folk School* (1928),

One has to face the fact that there is something a little elusive about the *Folkehöjskole*. It is not to be captured and encompassed with a glance, and many an eager student of education is left puzzled and cold by his first introduction to it. (p. 1)

Others echoed this sentiment as well, that there is no singular characteristic of the school that identifies its magnetism, but rather it is the totality of the experience. All the



pieces that I have identified through this study rely on one another to create an overall engaging, supportive, and enjoyable experience for those who visit. Jan Davison explicitly said that the trick is getting people to the Folk School the first time, because once they step foot on campus they feel the magic and will likely return. So how can I, a researcher, articulate that which is elusive to so many? Here is my attempt.

Overall, the Folk School creates a fun environment that fosters creative exploration and interpersonal connections. Like-minded individuals come together to create, experiment, and play. Within this setting, personal growth surfaces through successes and exceeded expectations. No two people have the same Folk School experience, but return visitors cite relaxation, enjoyment, and strong relationships as reasons for returning to the school year after year.

## References

- Abramson, R., & Haskell, J. (2006). Introduction. In R. Abramson & J. Haskell (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Appalachia* (pp. xix-xxvii). Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press.
- Alvic, P. (2003). *Weavers of the southern highlands*. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky.
- Anglin, M. K. (1992). A question of loyalty: National regional identity in narratives of Appalachia. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 65(3), 105-116.
- Anglin, M. K. (2002). Lessons from Appalachia in the 20<sup>th</sup> century: Poverty, power, and the "grassroots." *American Anthropologist*, 104(2), 565-582.
- Appalachian Regional Commission. (n.d.). The Appalachian region. Retrieved from [http://www.arc.gov/appalachian\\_region/TheAppalachianRegion.asp](http://www.arc.gov/appalachian_region/TheAppalachianRegion.asp)
- Association for Experiential Education. (2007). What is experiential education? Retrieved from <http://www.aee.org/about/whatIsEE>
- Berea College Special Collections and Archives. (1986). *Guide to the John C. Campbell Folk School papers*. Retrieved from <http://community.berea.edu/hutchinslibrary/specialcollections/saa24.asp>
- Best, S. (2010). What is the leisure experience? In S. Best [(Ed.)], *Leisure studies: Themes and perspectives* (pp. 3-30). London: SAGE Publications.
- Bruun, E., Gitte, M., & Andersen, E. (n.d.). *Folkehøjskolen: Danish folk schools: Then and now*. Retrieved from <http://www.danishmuseum.org/danish-folk-schools.cfm>
- Campbell, J. C. (1917). *The future of the church and independent schools in our southern highlands*. Report presented to the Russell Sage Foundation.
- Campbell, O. D. (1928). *The Danish folk school*. New York, NY: The Macmillan Company.
- Charny, D. (2011). Power of making. Retrieved from <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/p/powerofmaking/>
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

*Course Catalog*. (2013). John C. Campbell Folk School.

Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Davidson, J., & Davis, S. H. (Producers), & Davis, S. H. & Hughes, B. (Directors). (2008). *Sing behind the plow: John C. Campbell Folk School* [Documentary]. Research Triangle Park, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Center for Public Television.

Dewey, J. (2008). *Democracy and education*. Radford, VA: Wilder Publications.

DeYoung, A. J., Glover, M., & Herzog, M. J. (2006). Education. In R. Abramson & J. Haskell (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Appalachia* (pp. xix-xxvii). Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press.

Drake, R. B. (2001). *A history of Appalachia*. Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky.

Eaton, A. H. (1937). *Handicrafts of the Southern Highlands*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.

Eisner, E. (1991). *The enlightened eye: Qualitative inquiry and the enhancement of educational practice*. New York, NY: Macmillan.

Fariello, M. A. (2006). *The people: John C. Campbell*. Retrieved from Craft Revival: Shaping Western North Carolina Past and Present website:  
<http://www.wcu.edu/library/DigitalCollections/CraftRevival/people/johnccampbell.html>.

Gillham, B. (2000). *The research interview*. New York, NY: Continuum.

Itin, C. M. (1999). Reasserting the philosophy of experiential education as a vehicle for change in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 22(2), 91-98.

John C. Campbell Folk School. (2012). *John C. Campbell Folk School*. Retrieved from <http://www.folkschool.org>

*Jurying Standards for the John C. Campbell Folk School Craft Shop and Fall Festival*. (n.d.) John C. Campbell Folk School. Retrieved from <https://www.folkschool.org/documents/Craftshop%20Jury%20Standards.pdf>

Kaplan, M. (1975) *Leisure: Theory and policy*. New York, NY: Wiley.

- Kolb, D. A. (2000). Experiential learning theory: Previous research and new directions. In R. J. Sternberg & L. F. Zhang (Eds.), *Perspectives on cognitive, learning, and thinking styles* (pp. 193-210). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Kramp, M. K. (2004). Exploring life and experience through narrative inquiry. In K. B. deMarrais & S. D. Lapan (Eds.), *Foundations of research: Methods of inquiry in education and the social sciences* (pp. 103-121). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., Publishers.
- Lapan, S. D., Moore, T. S., & Quartaroli, M. T. (2012). Case study research. In S. Lapan, M. Quartaroli, & F. Riemer (Eds.), *Qualitative research: An introduction to methods and designs* (pp. 243-270). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Leisure Studies Association. *About Leisure Studies Association*. Retrieved from <http://www.leisure-studies-association.info/LSAWEB/History.html>
- Lemley, C. K., & Mitchell, R. W. (2012). Narrative inquiry: Stories lived, stories told. In S. Lapan, M. Quartaroli, & F. Riemer (Eds.), *Qualitative research: An introduction to methods and designs* (pp. 215-241). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- McNelley, P. (Ed.). (1966). *The first forty years: John C. Campbell Folk School*. Atlanta, GA: McNelley-Rudd Printing Service.
- Morris, C. B. (2000). A sense of place: The Allegheny Echoes project. In P. Bolin, D. Blandy, & K. Congdon (Eds.), *Remembering others: Making invisible histories of art education visible* (pp. 176-187). Reston, VA: National Art Education Association.
- Obituary: Margaret Masters. (2010, July 22). *The Cherokee Scout*. Retrieved from <http://www.thecherokeescout.com/articles/2010/07/22/obituaries/doc4c48702513d50986706927.txt>
- Osment, T. N. (2008). *John C. Campbell*. Retrieved from <http://digitalheritage.org/2010/08/john-c-campbell/>
- Patria, D. S. (n.d.) *What is craft?* Retrieved from <http://www.functionart.com/WhatIsCraft.html>
- Patterson, B. B. (2006). Cultural institutions. In R. Abramson & J. Haskell (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Appalachia* (pp. xix-xxvii). Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press.

- Pine, B. J., & Gilmore, J. H. (1999). *Experience economy: Work is theatre & every business a stage*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press.
- Smith, M. K. (1996). David A. Kolb on experiential learning. Retrieved from <http://www.infed.org/biblio/b-explrn.htm>
- Smith, M. S., & Wilson, E. H. (1999). *North Carolina women making history*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina.
- Stebbins, R. A. (1997). Casual leisure: A conceptual statement. *Leisure Studies*, 16(1), 17-25.
- Stokrocki, M. (1997). Qualitative forms of research methods. In S. La Pierre & E. Zimmerman (Eds.), *Research methods and methodologies for art education* (pp. 32-55). Reston, VA: National Art Education Association.
- Trahar, S. (2009, January). Beyond the story itself: Narrative inquiry and autoethnography in intercultural research in higher education. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 10(1). Retrieved from <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1218/2653>
- What is craft?* (2011). Victoria and Albert Museum. Retrieved from <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/w/what-is-craft/>
- Wilson, K. C. (2006). Crafts. In R. Abramson & J. Haskell (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Appalachia* (pp. 769-841). Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press.
- Writing guide: Case studies*. (1993). Writing@CSU. Retrieved from <http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/research/casestudy/>