

# **An American Perspective of the Impact of N. F. S. Grundtvig’s Educational Ideas on People and Enlightenment**

## **Summary Observations at the Launch of *The School for Life***

*By Clay Warren*

This article initially establishes that Grundtvig’s andragogical philosophy has not been read—let alone critically examined or acknowledged through appropriate citation—by American adult education scholars despite his demonstrable impact on the field. Then, this claim is expanded to include other life-long learning scholars writing in English. It is acknowledged that when English-language secondary sources (writings *about* Grundtvig in an effort to “get the word out”) as well as writings focusing on Grundtvig’s education ideas *in practice* are considered, the story is different and a steady output is readily found. However, because lifelong learning is being embraced worldwide as never before, and because Grundtvig’s writings are extraordinary for their powerful argument that education should be available to all people in the “school for life,” the case is presented that a comprehensive and authoritative volume of Grundtvig’s education writings available to an English-speaking readership has been long overdue. *The School for Life* (2011) satisfies this demand, although Warren identifies a number of translation and editing problems that face a team attempting to recreate in another language both aesthetic and rhetorical features of Grundtvig’s distinctive prose and poetry. The article ends on a celebratory note, urging readers to take advantage of the new possibility of discovering in detail, and in Grundtvig’s own words, why learning should suit its students (and how it may do so) rather than the other way around.

## **Introduction**

The haystack first; then the stacks of hay. If one were to propose a summary comment gleaned from English language sources about the impact of N. F. S. Grundtvig’s educational ideas, it could read as follows. Grundtvig has had a large influence on adult education around the world; however, most of this influence traditionally has come via discussion about, and observation of, his ideas in play; very little of this influence has come from people outside of Denmark (and perhaps even inside) reading his extensive writings on the subject.

Why is such a result so anomalous? The answer is well known to academics around the world. Disciplines trace their development back to historical roots through reading the extant works by the founding

fathers. For example, doctoral students in my discipline, communication, inevitably read Aristotle. Persuasion scholars in the 21<sup>st</sup> century not only stay abreast of contemporary empirical and critical studies of primary modes of influence; we also study logos, ethos, and pathos as they were established over 2,000 years ago in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (2009 trans.).

Such development has not happened with Grundtvig, and my concluding essay (Warren, 2011) in *The School for Life* lays out the case in depth. The most ironic example of this circumstance comes from the United States and thus deserves special consideration.

### **Grundtvig and Adult Education in the U.S.**

It is not unusual for people interested in lifelong learning to hear that Grundtvig is considered to be the father of adult education worldwide (see Bhattacharya 2005, 10). On a similar note, American lifelong learning scholars by consensus claim E. C. Lindeman as the father of adult education in the U.S. (Warren 1989, 211). A natural deduction from these two claims, or at least a starting point for inquiry, would be that Lindeman in his writing would acknowledge and reference Grundtvig's influence. Consider the four assumptions below.

<b>Assumptions for a Lifelong Learning Model</b>
Because education should be learner-centered, the learner's experience is the greatest resource.
Study should be problem- or situation- rather than subject- or vocation-oriented.
Teachers should be facilitators of discussion rather than inculcators of facts.
Learning is motivated by a mature desire to understand and to assume roles in society; thus, learning can be equated with life itself.

Whose ideas are these? I believe an international community of life-long learning scholars, excepting the American contingent, would claim these concepts as Grundtvigian.

In fact, however, they are a quadratic summary of the andragogical assumptions of American adult educators (including Knowles, Kidd, et al.) based on Lindeman's core philosophy. Juxtaposing these principles alongside a similar summary gleaned from Grundtvig's educational writings, here is the result (Warren 1989, 219).

<b>Assumptions: American Adult Educators</b>	<b>Assumptions: N. F. S. Grundtvig</b>
Because education should be learner-centered, the learner's experience is the greatest resource.	Students should bloom according to their individual capacity and not be crushed into conformity by externally derived ideals.
Study should be problem- or situation- rather than subject- or vocation-oriented.	Subject matter is not important; study should be chosen according to interests and should be geared toward personal growth rather than scholarship.
Teachers should be facilitators of discussion rather than inculcators of facts.	Reciprocal teaching is the ideal learning process engaged through the living word.
Learning is motivated by a mature desire to understand and to assume roles in society; thus, learning can be equated with life itself.	The ultimate reason for learning is enlightenment of life—the grasp of religious/historical/poetic knowledge of one's world, and thus of one's self, integrated through both freedom and fellowship.

As one can see, the andragogical assumptions of American adult educators and of N. F. S. Grundtvig exist in a mirror-image relationship.

Here is another example. "Periods of intellectual awakening are correctly named 'enlightenments' for it is then that lovers of wisdom focus the light of learning upon experience and thereby discover new meaning for life, new reasons for living."

As before, the enlightenment idea and explanation appear to be straight from Grundtvig. In reality, this statement is attributable to Eduard Lindeman (1926/1961, 110).

Lindeman praised adult education in Denmark, in fact, as is evident in the following quotation.

In Danish life (...) one finds an educational ferment such as motivates no other people in the modern world. Since the days of Grundtvig (...) Danish adults have striven to close the yawning abyss between life and enlightenment [*by laying*] the foundations for a system of education which continues so long as life lasts. Adult education, one begins to learn after prolonged observation, has not merely changed citizens from illiteracy to literacy; it has rebuilt the total structure of life's values. (Lindeman 1926/1961, xxix-xxx)

Nevertheless, this laudation stands as Lindeman's only reference to Grundtvig in his *The Meaning of Adult Education*, a book widely regarded as America's andragogical bible. Grundtvig is never quoted, in fact, although Lindeman provided citations of many other scholars, such as Dewey, Santayana, and Whitehead.

And, although there was a decided scarcity of English translations of Grundtvig's educational writings in 1926, Lindeman might have sought customized translations of at least a few texts, especially if a scholar such as he attests to being so profoundly influenced by a predecessor's thoughts. Such a quest, in Lindeman's case, might have been helped by his presumed Danish heritage along with a number of visits to Denmark.

Stewart, one of the most thorough of Lindeman's biographers, stated of *The Meaning of Adult Education* that "Grundtvig's philosophy (...) jumps from every page" (Stewart 1987, 126). In the same book, however, he admitted how difficult it would be to do adequate research on Grundtvig with such a paucity of available English translations of his writings.

I faced a major—and insurmountable—hurdle in trying to define Nickolai Grundtvig only from review of those small portions of his work that have been translated into English. It became apparent that research into previously untapped (in this country) Danish language sources was essential. (Stewart 1987, xvi)

In the face of this proclamation and despite fine research on a number of other angles, Stewart apparently did not jump this hurdle but went around it, using *only* the few available English translations of Grundtvig's writings. Not only that, despite his credentials as a biographer, he apparently did not read, and certainly did not reference, Thaning (1972), Grundtvig's official biographer, whose book in English was obtainable from *Det Danske Selskab* (now known as the Danish Cultural Institute).

On the other hand, Stewart uncovered newly available family sources to address the ancestry issue: "Eduard was certainly of German descent by birth (...) Denmark served a deep psychological need in Lindeman, the need to be something other than German by heritage" (Stewart 1987, 129). Up to the time of Stewart's biography, principal adult educators had promoted the idea that Lindeman was Danish. As an example, Kidd's foreword to a reprint of *The Meaning of Adult Education* stated: "His visits to Denmark, the homeland of his parents, affected him profoundly as is clear from the present book" (Lindeman, 1926/1961, xxiii).

An inquisitive scholar might wonder how Stewart, despite the inability to clear the translation hurdle, could so adamantly state that “Grundtvig’s philosophy (...) jumps from every page” of Lindeman’s book. How would he know that? Did he get the knowledge from American adult educators following Lindeman who had read Grundtvig?

The answer to the last question is no. By the time of my 1989 review, no information on Grundtvig gleaned from his actual writings was available in Kidd (1959/1973), Bergevin (1967), Knowles (1970), or Houle (1972)—all major U.S. scholars of adult education. Houle, in fact, in his 1972 work entitled *The Design of Education*, boasted about his “elaborate” documentation of the field.

The [adult education] system proposed here owes much to the growth of thought in adult education and the credos and systems which have been widely espoused as guides to practice (...) the analysis of these topics rests on an elaborate documentary study which is summarized in the bibliographic essay at the end of the book. (Houle 1972, 3)

And, credit indeed should be given to the thorough 66-page documentary section, except that it contained not a single work by Grundtvig. Moreover, Grundtvig was mentioned only twice, and briefly at that, in a spot about powerful leadership facilitated by the use of “the living word” (a Grundtvigian term that Houle did not define).

This group of four adult educators all praised Lindeman, however, with Knowles offering a glowing testament:

Eduard C. Lindeman was my first mentor (...) [*The Meaning of Adult Education was*] my chief source of inspiration and ideas for a quarter of a century. I still reread it once a year for the inspiration of seeing ideas that were formulated before 1926 that have only in recent times been validated by research. I regard Lindeman as the prophet of modern adult educational theory. (From Knowles’ foreword in Stewart 1987, xi)

The old ditty known as ‘The House that Jack Built’ sets up an aphoristic model of how this citation train has unfolded in the United States: Brookfield (1984) quoting Knowles (1970) quoting Lindeman (1926/1961) who lived in the house that Grundtvig built.

Considering the above findings, among a number of other pieces of evidence, I felt justified in 1989 in offering the following summary position: “Grundtvig’s andragogical philosophy had not been read—let alone critically examined or acknowledged through appropriate citation—by American adult education scholars despite his demonstrable impact on the field” (Broadbridge, Warren, & Jonas 2011, 357).

## Grundtvig and Adult Education around the World

Twenty years later, upon invitation by *Grundtvig-Studier* wishing to give fresh currency to “Andragogy and N. F. S. Grundtvig: A Critical Link” in their focused context of Grundtvig Studies, I revisited the theme of reading and acknowledging through direct citation Grundtvig’s educational writings. The main question this time around was: Are the twenty-year-old criticisms still valid, even after expanding the search to include other lifelong learning scholars *writing in English*? The answer:

Most educators outside of Denmark (...) still seem not to have read Grundtvigian primary sources in translation (let alone in Danish), and are not quoting him in major books and articles produced on adult education (...) (Warren 2009, 167)<sup>1</sup>

Some current examples of major works that exclude Grundtvig’s writings include:

- *Adult and Continuing Education* (Jarvis & Griffin 2003), a five-volume work billed as the first comprehensive overview of the field of Western adult education and its major themes, consisting mainly of pieces from Britain and America, failed to explore Grundtvig’s contribution to the development of lifelong learning.
- *Adult and Continuing Education: Theory and Practice*—an earlier work by Jarvis (1995)—discussed andragogy, Lindeman, and Knowles, but ignored Grundtvig completely, while mentioning People’s High Schools only in passing.
- *Handbook of Adult and Continuing Education* (Wilson & Hayes 2000), published in 768 pages by the American Association of Adult and Continuing Education, has been

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<sup>1</sup> It should be kept uppermost in mind that my research question and findings fall within an English-speaking parameter. Nevertheless, this observation holds true for other non-Danish languages, even German. For example, Friedenthal-Hasse (1987) noted that Grundtvig’s “influence was felt [*in Germany*] through the effect of his life and indirectly through his practical work, not through a direct assimilation of his written work.” A recent and extensive general Grundtvig anthology in German (Bugge, Jørgensen, & Lundgreen-Nielsen, 2010), however, does offer translations of three complete pamphlets by Grundtvig on adult education in People’s High Schools.

described by reviewers as a “definitive reference”; yet, Grundtvig was not mentioned, even in passing.

- *International Perspectives on Lifelong Learning* (Istance, Schuetze, & Schuller 2002) produced one relevant sentence: “Denmark in the nineteenth century showed the way, and under the leadership of Grundtvig [*sic*] gave birth to lifelong learning for participatory democracy” (p. 32). It would seem important to explore in some depth the perspective of a man who founded lifelong learning, the topic of this book. However, one sentence is all Grundtvig received, and it is difficult to ignore the misspelling of his name.
- *The Literature of Adult Education: A Bibliographic Essay* (Houle 1992) provides the most ironic example of the continuation of the practice of sidestepping Grundtvig. Houle, twenty years after his 1972 work and three years after my criticism of it published in *Adult Education Quarterly* (the principal journal of adult education in the U.S.), now had access to three small translations of Grundtvig’s writings, and some of the texts featured his educational ideas. Houle’s work this time around was an even larger study of adult education and featured an analysis of documents with the stated goal of helping professionals find the necessary guidance to improve their practice of adult education in all areas. It included over 1200 lifelong learning-related books. Grundtvig had been mentioned at least in 1972; in 1992, his name was conspicuously absent from a lengthy index of international names. Included in the index were such questionable adult education references as Aristotle, Thoreau, Tolstoy, and Swift. In a meager two-page history of People’s High Schools, on the other hand, Houle cited Lindeman about an early study (Begtrup, Lund, & Manniche 1936) of this Danish institution: “Americans will still have difficulty in understanding the Danish movement, but (...) no one need now be satisfied with second-hand interpretation” (p. 13). The *double-irony* of this observation about second-handedness from Lindeman, and as provided by Houle in his 1200-volume study purportedly analyzing *all areas* of adult education, seems like a set-up for the well-known Danish sense of humor.

When secondary sources (writings *about* Grundtvig in an effort to “get the word out”) come into play, the story is different and a steady output is readily found. To name some examples, especially from non-American fronts:

- *Grundtvig-Studier*, an annual journal from 1948 with brief English summaries of its articles and occasional articles in English.
- “Grundtvig’s Educational Ideas” by K. E. Bugge in *N. F. S. Grundtvig, Tradition and Renewal: Grundtvig’s Vision of Man and People, Education and the Church, in Relation to World Issues Today* (Thodberg & Thyssen 1983).
- *International Biography of Adult Education* (Thomas & Elsey 1985).
- *Heritage and Prophecy: Grundtvig and the English-Speaking World* (Allchin, Jasper, Schjørring, & Stevenson 1993).
- *N. F. S. Grundtvig: An Introduction to His Life and Work* (Allchin 1997).
- *Thinkers on Education*, Vol. 2 (Morsy 1997).
- *Democracy Is Born in Conversations: Recreating N. F. S. Grundtvig for Lifelong Learners Around the World* (Warren 1998).
- *Grundtvig in International Perspective: Studies in the Creativity of Interaction* (Allchin, Bradley, Hjelm, & Schjørring 2000).
- *Education for the People: Concepts of Grundtvig, Tagore, Gandhi and Freire* (Bhattacharya 2010).

When works in English focusing on Grundtvig’s education ideas *in practice* are featured, there are several major former or current organizations (four in Denmark and one in the U.S.) relevant to Grundtvig’s impact outside of Denmark.



- *Option*, the journal of the Folk Education Association of America (FEAA), published a number of articles between 1976 and 1998 about Grundtvig's educational ideas and impact.
- Nornesalen: Center for Research on Life Enlightenment and Cultural Identity was initiated in the 1990s to study Grundtvig's transnational impact. Nornesalen produced a number of books, examples being *Grundtvig's Educational Ideas in Japan, the Philippines, and Israel* (Zøllner 1994), *Canada and Grundtvig* (Bugge 1999), *Folk High Schools in Bangladesh* (Bugge 2001), and *Grundtvig's Educational Ideas in Central and Eastern Europe and the Baltic States in the Twentieth Century* (Kulich 2002).
- The Danish Cultural Institute (Det Danske Kulturinstitut) is the name established in 1990 for its predecessor Det Danske Selskab, which was founded in 1940 to promote knowledge about Danish history and culture. Primarily, it is a state-supported administrative agency that serves to arrange exhibitions, seminars, study tours, and publications. The latter include occasional works in English, sometimes about Grundtvig, such as Thaning's (1972) biography and Thodberg and Thyssen's (1983) edited volume focusing on Grundtvigian ideas "then and now."
- The Association for World Education (AWE) was begun in the U.S. as the Association of World Colleges and Universities, but changed its name to AWE and its focus to individuals drawing inspiration from the principles of Grundtvig as well as other thinkers who have contributed to the ideas of enlightenment of life and global lifelong learning. Since 1973 it has published, in English, the *Journal for World Education*.
- The Grundtvig Study Centre (GSC), University of Aarhus, commenced operations in 1988 as the Centre for Grundtvig Studies, and has evolved into an important institute dedicated to Grundtvig-related research, publications, seminars, and conferences. GSC commissioned Allchin's (1997) book as well as planned a much-needed series of English translations of Grundtvig's writings. *N. F. S. Grundtvig. A Life Recalled: An Anthology of Biographical Source-texts* (Bradley 2008) is the first in this series and is organized in four parts: Grundtvig's

vig's memoirs, memoirs of Grundtvig, a lengthy index to help readers understand the broader context of works written in the 1800s, and a prologue of significant dates relevant to Grundtvig's life. The text selections will be of greatest resonance to those interested in history and religion.

Various individuals, as well as smaller organizations (such as the Japanese People's High School Movement), also continue to assess Grundtvigian-related ideas and institutions. As well, occasional masters theses and doctoral dissertations pursue themes of relevance to Grundtvig.

Counting the number of People's High School-like institutions worldwide has proved virtually impossible, largely because of definitional problems. Must a school be a "genuine" Grundtvigian People's High School, an institution that bears a significant resemblance to the original, or a learning organization that incorporates a few features of Grundtvig's ideas? Recognizing the problems in such an endeavor, AWE has chosen to focus on individuals outside of Denmark who have been inspired by Grundtvigian principles and either acted or inspired others to act on them. My concluding essay in *The School for Life* offers briefs on some of these important inspirational figures who, overall, were influenced by visits to People's High Schools in Denmark and/or through extensive discussion of Grundtvigian principles with knowledgeable Danes. Examples of key members of this international group, not to be confused with an exhaustive list, are offered below.

- Eduard Lindeman, previously discussed at length, has arguably been the most important U.S. figure. As a result of his influence, American adult education has modeled its philosophy, if not its practice, on Grundtvigian ideas.
- Miles Horton, co-founder of Highlander Folk School in 1932 in Tennessee, may be the best-known American practitioner of folk-style education. Highlander played a significant role in the labor union movement (1930s/40s) and in the American Civil Rights Movement (1950s). Closed in 1961 because of its activism, it has been reorganized as the Highlander Research and Education Center (known, now, for its cultural programs and short leadership courses).
- Miles Tompkins inspired Jimmy Tomkins and Moses Coady, the forces behind the Antigonish Movement that established

the credit union system throughout Canada. As educational tools, they used innovative study clubs and a six-week leadership school with Grundtvigian touch-points.

- Shigeoyoshi Matsumae, creator of more than 100 private educational institutions, author of more than 60 books, created a Grundtvigian-inspired legacy in Japan that endures. Founder of the Tokai University system, which targets engineering and the sciences, Matsumae saw to it that the university would have a Department of Nordic Studies.
- Edicio de la Torre, an important resistance movement leader during the Marcos regime in the Philippines, established the Institute for Popular Democracy, Popular Education for People's Empowerment, and the Education for Life Foundation (ELF) to fund these institutions. The ELF established a modified residential People's High School without dedicated buildings or land, termed by Korsgaard as "the most successful Grundtvig inspired project, which has been sponsored from Denmark throughout the last 40 years" (Korsgaard 2002, 25).
- Julius K. Nyerere, premier and later president of Tanganyika, now Tanzania, sponsored the development of roughly 60 "development colleges." Among other Grundtvig-inspired principles, Nyerere believed that adult education must be an integral, inseparable, part of a people's and country's life in order to contribute to their development.
- Erica Simon, a French university professor who taught Scandinavian-based courses, wrote a cyclopean doctoral dissertation on Grundtvig and founded a small People's High School-like institution for French rural folk. No doubt regarded as the non-Dane most knowledgeable about People's High School history, she gave a series of lectures at the Nordic Folk Academy in Sweden that eventually were translated into English.
- Jawaharlal Nehru, Prime Minister of India, attested to his being inspired by Grundtvigian ideas.

Not least, there are new variations related to the Grundtvigian theme. Here are two examples.

- The Traveling Folk High School (*Den Rejsende Højskole*) [DRH], begun in 1970, today claims 14 DRHs in eight different countries on four continents with over 6,000 “development instructors” having worked as DRH staff. Its webpage (DRH-school website 2010) identifies its mission as offering “study in practical, autodidactic and traditional courses about global issues, development work and the fight against poverty.”
- The Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP), established and well funded by the European Parliament and Council, features partnerships, in-service training, and study visits to various countries. LLP sub-programs include historical personages associated with various levels of education: e.g., Comenius (schools), Erasmus (higher education), Grundtvig (adult education), and Leonardo da Vinci (vocational education). The European Union (2010) published a pamphlet in English laying out the educational and cultural opportunities. Applications were invited beginning in 2010, and applicants may come from the 27 members of the European Union, as well as from Croatia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Macedonia, Norway, and Turkey.

### ***The School for Life***

As *The School for Life* arrives in 2011, there are three main books containing some English translations of the educational writings of Grundtvig.

- Jensen, N. L./Broadbridge, E. (trans.), Michelsen, W., Albeck, G., Toftdahl, H. and Thodberg, C. (eds.) (1984), *A Grundtvig Anthology: Selections from the Writings of N. F. S. Grundtvig (1783-1872)*. Cambridge and Viby.
- Knudsen, J. (trans. and ed.) (1976), *Selected Writings: N. F. S. Grundtvig*, Philadelphia.
- Lawson, M. (ed.) (1991), *N. F. S. Grundtvig: Selected Educational Writings*, Skive.

The recent book by Bradley (2008) does not feature Grundtvig’s educational writings; however, its monumental index will help readers understand Grundtvig’s philosophical approach to life.

The Jensen/Broadbridge and Knudsen books are out-of-print and thereby not easy to obtain; moreover, the majority of the texts in these works do not deal with educational ideas. To its credit, the Lawson book was the first to be devoted exclusively to Grundtvig's educational writings; however, to be even-handed in assessment, it has some translation issues and is constrained by its distribution network.

Despite these works in English, adult education scholars overall have not given Grundtvig his academic "due" by reading his available educational writings in English and citing him along with other major figures of educational thought. The "academic mystery" presented in the extended American example at the start of this essay is the clearest, but hardly the only, case of a seeming willingness to bypass Grundtvig's actual writings when reflecting on a literature of lifelong learning.

On the other hand, as stated, there are a number of fine books and articles in English that identify Grundtvig's ideas and substantiate their international impact. And, there are many leaders worldwide who have been influenced by his philosophy. His influence and the impact of his ideas, however, have proceeded mostly through secondary sources (people writing about his ideas) and oral discussion. The latter circumstance is an irony that Grundtvig doubtless would have found intriguing, and perhaps delightful, given his belief in the primacy of this means of communication.

After Christen Kold, the "creator" of the Danish People's High School system, established his Grundtvigian-based school in Ryslinge in 1851 (chronologically third after Christen Flor's and Rasmus Sørensen's small People's High Schools in Rødding (1844) and Uldum (1849), respectively, but the most important in terms of influence), the movement quickly spread throughout Denmark and across Scandinavia. Today, there are many People's High School-like institutions, past and ongoing, that have made and continue to make contributions to the lifelong education of adults. As Korsgaard (2002) has observed:

It is ingrained in the Danish self-understanding, that the Grundtvig inspired idea of adult education, as practiced by the folk high school institution, has proved its value again and again, and it cannot be questioned that it will make a major contribution to the development of the societies in the Third World. (p. 24)

It is not only the Third World, however, that can make use of these ideas. Around the world, lifelong learning is being embraced as never before.

In short, the time is long overdue to produce an authoritative English translation of the educational writings of N. F. S. Grundtvig. As the saying goes, however, easier said than done. Despite Grundtvig's

own, and oft-repeated, proclamation about writing being “dead words” and much inferior to “living words,” as alluded to above, some Danish scholars (e.g., Thaning 1972), have pointed out he *wrote* himself to clarity (“*at skrive sig til Klarhed*” in his own words, Grundtvig 1819/1983, 332). It is estimated that Grundtvig’s output, much of it not published, could be stacked up 150 volumes high. In addition, his texts are usually filled with emendations and may exist in multiple versions as he returned to a theme over the many years of his life. Bradley (2008) chose the first two lines introducing his book as a quotation of Edmund Gosse (English critic, author, poet, circa late 1800s and early 1900s):

The writings of Grundtvig, whether in prose or verse, have never been attractive to me. They are so exclusively national as to be scarcely intelligible to a foreigner; they lie, if I may say so, outside the European tradition. (Bradley 2008, 29)

As a case in point, consider the following opinion from Grundtvig as contained in “The Danish Four-leaf Clover” (*The School for Life*, Chapter 5):

I really do believe that all that is beautiful and good can be translated into Danish with no loss whatsoever, while the best of Danish cannot be translated into any language, not even into English, without losing at least the half of it. (*The School for Life*, 145)

Grundtvig, in one fell swoop, appears to self-evidentially corroborate Gosse’s judgment without need for another piece of argumentation. Nevertheless, this quotation existed on the title page of *The School for Life* for a brief period, because it also demonstrates the difficulty of translating and editing Grundtvig’s writings. I say briefly because, on further thought, we did not wish to have readers believe even the finest of efforts would only be worth half the original!

As one example pertaining to the “exclusively national” issue, translators and editors of Grundtvig’s writings might immediately think of the difficulty in producing a paragraph, let alone a single word, that would do justice to Grundtvig’s concept of *folkelighed*. As commonly accepted, the term is essential to his ideas about popular education; however, taking the concept into another language is likely to produce some degree of misunderstanding. A popular Danish web source, *Den Store Danske: Gyldendals åbne encyclopædi* ([www.denstoredanske.dk](http://www.denstoredanske.dk)), explains in Danish that the term was created in the Romantic era of the eighteenth century by Herder (German), and represents an idealized concept of heritage. Heritage, in this sense, refers to unity among people in a geographic area along the lines of

language, history, nature, values, and visions of future goals. Trying for a more particularized definition, one might further try to describe the concept as the real, unaffected culture of "everyman" in a homogeneous country: national, but not nationalistic.

English translations of the term, however, often have resorted to some version of folk, which, in the American mind, may conjure up visions of folk culture, folk dance, folk songs, even folksiness (all of which can be thought of as rustic and country, not necessarily in a positive way). The English transplant of a Grundtvig-inspired school often has been called a folk high school—a term that may signify to English speakers two things it is not: a "high school" in American-style education and "folksy" by definition where one might go to engage profitably in basket-weaving and dancing but not an engrossing search for one's meaning of life. The translation/editing team of *The School for Life* struggled with this problem as one of its first items of business, finally deciding to use the term "People's High School" as a reasonable, if not totally adequate, substitute for Grundtvig's *folkehøjskole* in which the concept of *folkelighed* is firmly embedded.

Apart from the "national" problem inherent in Danish, three challenges appear to stand out among the additional difficulties of editing Grundtvig's writing into readable English. First, Grundtvig wrote extended sentences with new subjects and verbs turning up after yet another conjunction. Second, his writing is filled with the use of a term differentiated through contextual meaning rather than by adjectival modifier. Third, unreferenced demonstrative and relative pronouns (this-, that-, and which-words) abound in multiple lots sometimes stretching over pages.

As an example, at one key point in the text of *The School for Life* after following seven this-words back to their seeming source, the goal was an undifferentiated use of enlightenment of life which, in this case, was not the genuine article but *non-genuine* enlightenment. The editing team wisely chose to help the international reader by shortening sentences, differentiating a term by its types (when appropriate), and providing immediate antecedents for ambiguous pronouns. The richness of Grundtvigian writing is not reduced by enhancing its readability.

And there is much richness to be found in Grundtvig's educational writings. His ideas were far ahead of their time; his writings are extraordinary for their powerful argument that education should be available to all people in the "school for life," as well as for their sheer

exuberance, inclusiveness, and sophistication along with their contradictions, verbosity, and willingness never to pull a punch.

In the end, an international audience can now discover the wit and wisdom of N. F. S. Grundtvig. Here is a sample of his writing at its most vigorous (from “A Congratulation to Denmark on the Danish Dimwit and the Danish High School,” *The School for Life*, Chapter 15):

On the other hand, I think this result [*the many positive benefits of People's High School education for all*] will be completely impossible if, only for one more generation, we retain and expand our completely un-Danish and unnatural and equally headless and heartless school system [*wrong-headed German-style education*], with all its consequent cold-heartedness, brain-constipation, brain-inflammation, dullness, lethargy, slave mentality, tinsillitis, and all manner of popular and human wretchedness. (*The School for Life*, 317)<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The following point may seem too subtle and lengthy to suit the body of this text, but is included as a footnote because it relates both to Gosse's idea of Grundtvig's writings lying “outside the European tradition” as well as to the difficulty in recreating Grundtvig's ideas for non-Danish-speaking readers. In the quoted passage in which Grundtvig condemns the current educational system in Denmark, 16 of the principal English words derive from Latin and one from Greek, whereas none of the corresponding Danish words is taken from either language. Why is this important? In his writings, Grundtvig overtly criticized Latinized education as being both elitist and dead, and wanted education to be conducted in Danish and available to everyone (not just those destined for a scholarly life). Knowing a variety of languages (as a scholar, himself), Grundtvig used German loan words dating from around the 14<sup>th</sup> century onward (e.g., nouns and verbs with the prefix “Be-/be-“) that were accepted in his day as normal Danish, but cleared his writing of any linguistic influence from ancient Rome or Greece. This observation is not restricted to the cited passage but applies to his writings overall. Grundtvig took care to use Anglo-Saxon, Scandinavian, or Norse languages whenever possible, while studiously avoiding words derived from Latin. Thus, while English readers may still appreciate the content of the passage chosen to end this essay, it also is likely true that the “ring of the Danish words” will not be felt in the same way as they would be if read or heard in their original language by Danish speakers. Also, it is debatable whether his writings lie outside the European tradition so much as endeavor to create, and thereby lie fully inside, a European tradition in which languages of nations are not dependent on so-called classical languages of an antiquated and bygone era. As Grundtvig appreciated full well, most of the Roman churchgoers in antiquity couldn't understand a word of the services conducted in Latin. Finally, none of the words in this citation has been invented or “coined” by Grundtvig, even “tinsillitis”, which I initially thought must be a typographical error applied to “tonsillitis”. But no. Tinsillitis is an imaginative English-coined word for the Danish word *Glimmersyge*. In the



Such an admonition! Such energy! Such desire to contribute to the betterment of society! With *The School for Life*, an international audience now has a book through which directly to benefit from, and to enjoy, the communication vitality and probative intelligence of N. F. S. Grundtvig and his novel idea that learning should suit its students rather than the other way around.

## Abbreviations

*The School for Life*: Broadbridge, E., (trans. & ed.), Warren, C. (ed.), and Jonas, U. (ed.) (2011), *The School for Life: N. F. S. Grundtvig on education for the people*, Aarhus.

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end, however, these fascinating features of Grundtvig's language choices remain a subtext to ideas he relentlessly tried to express as clearly as possible, and thus continued to modify, throughout his life. Although English readers of *The School for Life* may miss a portion of the native aural aesthetic, most importantly the power of Grundtvig's ideas shines through from Danish to English, as powerful ideas are wont to do, to help us coax worthy words of the past into living words of today that may help illuminate our way. N.B.: I am indebted to Flemming Lundgreen-Nielsen for his expert reconnaissance through Grundtvig's word choices and their linguistic roots.

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