

# *Folkloristic Research As A Pedagogical Tool In Introductory Courses*

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**I**n a recent paper entitled "The Role of Hypotheses in Folkloristics,"<sup>1</sup> Ketner has argued that the method of hypothesis is essential for the study of phenomena which researchers in the past have generally identified as being "folklore" if such study is to be undertaken as a science. He also urged that the use of the method of hypothesis in folkloristics, what we shall for the present call "folkloristic research," is preferable to what has been known as "collecting," the latter technique being subject to numerous logical and conceptual difficulties. After reading the arguments of that paper, it would, we think, be perfectly in order for someone to wonder whether such a proposed revamping of methods in folkloristics is feasible, practical, and effective in an actual academic setting. It is our purpose in this essay to report upon some attempts to find an answer to that question.<sup>2</sup>

In preparing this report, we have assumed that our readers are familiar with the paper by Ketner mentioned above. The phrase "method of hypothesis" will appear at many points in our comments; we use it to refer to the process of scientific inquiry as outlined by Ketner in his earlier essay. The present report is presented in the kind of spirit of ongoing inquiry which one finds in scientific research. We are aware that many of our findings are still tentative, and we know that in this report there are issues which need further comment. But this is not inappropriate since research reports are seldom offered to the wider scientific community in the spirit of being the "final word."

## BACKGROUND

The setting for our test of the pedagogical practicality of folkloristic research has been primarily in three introductory courses in folkloristics composed of 120 students. Although the size and type of

courses differed, the aim in each was the same: to indicate to the student the nature of folkloristics and its methods by presenting to them some kinds of phenomena that folklorists study and by reviewing in class some analytical approaches and developing some basic theoretical constructs; thus, all the courses were primarily problem-centered rather than data-oriented and are concerned with recurrent questions in folkloristics.

A particularly acute problem for introductory courses has been that of devising viable pedagogical techniques, especially major research activities, that would be enlightening to students in regard to course objectives. We believe that one standard response to this problem is inappropriate: that of "collecting" such "items" as beliefs, proverbs, songs, or riddles, to be recorded on cards or sheets of paper along with the name, age, address, occupation, and ethnicity of the "informant." Such a procedure has been suggested in more than one published guide for folklore study and is utilized by many instructors in introductory courses; the authors of this report were subjected to it as beginning students. But such a procedure is open to several logical and conceptual difficulties.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, students often receive no grade for "collecting" projects, because the only legitimate criterion for evaluation seems to be quantity. And, as we foresee future needs of the folkloristic research that is now developing, the results of such a project would be of minimal interest and value to later scholars should they have access to such material through archives. Furthermore, we believe that beginning students have the necessary intelligence, imagination, and insight to use the method of hypothesis to deal significantly with their immediate experiences or to make sense of their own behavior and the behavior of others. Our guidance would, of course, be made available to them. But we hoped that we could impress upon the members of these classes that they were to research a question which interested them and which might potentially result in important findings.

In these courses we had tried several other techniques involving firsthand observations by students. Sometimes class participants were required to submit during the quarter three reports of about 1,000 words each surveying different experiences in the recent past in which behavior conceived of as folklore was manifested; usually the student merely concluded his description with a tentative hypothesis for further, more meaningful investigation which, of course, was never carried out, thus making us question the usefulness of the project for the student or others who might see the results. On other occasions class members were assigned a single, long, interpret-

ative paper; but experience indicated that while the student had a centrally-informing idea (a thesis, which is not the same as a hypothesis), the paper itself was merely an attempt to prove the writer's assumption. Such an approach does not give a student an opportunity to learn the spirit of inquiry, although it might give him an opportunity to learn or practice principles of rhetoric. But rhetoric and inquiry are radically different in terms of logic. Rhetoric is a way of using words to explain or convince; inquiry (the method of hypothesis) is a way of finding out what is correct or incorrect in regard to some issue. Thus, in such long, interpretative papers, students would try to support a thesis; whereas, in the method of hypothesis, one would attempt to find out if a hypothesis is true or false, either alternative being equally welcome if achieved. This is a subtle, but highly significant methodological difference. The situation was the same when students were asked to write historical papers; the results were largely descriptive, the ideas essentially suppositions the students wished to defend. As one student remarked about his experiences in writing term papers, "Usually you start a poli sci paper with an idea and then support it with your own bull; you can support any idea any way you want." Some other approach was obviously necessary. It was the method of hypothesis that we finally recommended to the students for use in their research.<sup>4</sup> We have employed the same method in trying to find an answer to our question about research projects that students might fruitfully undertake.

## HYPOTHESIS

Our concern is with the pedagogical feasibility of the method of hypothesis, and with its potential usefulness in regard to future researchers who might look back to its results (at least as being a fruitful starting point). In light of these two questions which were of interest to us, we proposed the following four hypotheses which we set out to test in our courses. First: we surmised that folkloristic research (the method of hypothesis as applied to problems in folkloristics) would be understandable to students (even freshmen and sophomores) just beginning their study of folkloristics. Second: we supposed that such students would be able to produce some significant research in a fairly short period of time by means of its use. Third: we proposed that these students would best learn about the nature of folkloristic science, as well as about themselves and the kind of behavior folklorists have studied, through an actual

practical application of that method to a problem of interest to the student. Fourth: we suspected that the results of some of these students' work would be of value to more experienced and advanced students in folkloristics.

## RESEARCH STRATEGY

In the early stages of the two courses we announced to class members that they would be required to undertake folkloristic research upon which they would report. They were told that this project would comprise approximately one-third of their grade in the class. We asked each student to try to work out a project on his own, but we made it quite clear that help from the instructor was freely and enthusiastically available if needed in developing an appropriate problem for study. In many cases we read a preliminary draft or outline of the student's proposed statement of background, hypothesis, and research strategy, and offered suggestions for improvement. Fairly early in the classes, shortly after the students came to have a general idea about the nature of folkloristics, we presented an account of the method of hypothesis. After the students had an overall grasp of the technique of folkloristic research, they were presented instruction sheets outlining the specific method vis-a-vis the projects they were to undertake. Those sheets are reproduced in Appendix One in the spirit of offering them to other instructors for their evaluation and possible use. These instructions are a composite of the two versions which we used.

We found it necessary to have periodic reviews of the logic of folkloristic research with regard to specific questions and problems that arose concerning individual reports. Some of these problems were aired in class on a day set aside for that purpose so that others could benefit from seeing a difficulty of fairly widespread interest cleared up. In Ketner's case, a period was also set aside toward the end of the course to enable students to present their work in the class. Team projects, involving two or more persons handling slightly different aspects of a common problem, were encouraged and a few were actually undertaken. For instance, one group of students inquired into the kind of behavior often designated as "superstition." This team produced a film about their activities which was presented in their class with interesting results, especially since one member of the team had been studying the interactions between other team members and their "informants." The most pressing difficulty of which the student was immediately

aware centered around choosing a topic sufficiently narrow in scope to permit investigation during the few weeks at his disposal. In some instances the students had only vague notions of topics that might be of interest to them, but with no questions for investigation in mind, much less having hypothesis for testing. We cite as an example of such difficulties the student who suggested the following subjects for research: "Lore embodying the concept of American moral superiority is generated 'as a result of a belief in a definite set of American values,'" and "Lore embodying the Horatio Alger work concept is generated as a result of the belief that if one works hard they will succeed." The first topic is much too broad and vague, and the second is tautological. Another difficulty plaguing some students involved an initial inability to distinguish a hypothesis from an assumption. "If I postulate [*nota bene*] that the embroidering or elaborate patching on jeans of some college students serves symbolic uses of personal identification and ideological statement (such as expressing anti-urban and back-to-nature sentiments and 'membership' within a certain segment of the college community, or achieving status because of the artistry)," asked one student, "do I also have to spend a lot of research time testing whether this behavior is folklore or art?" Basically, an assumption is a belief that is not in question during the course of a particular inquiry; indeed, assumptions typically provide the background against which a question may be raised in order to initiate an inquiry. In this case, the student may assume that the behavior under investigation is of interest to many folklorists and that it can be treated as a form of artistic expression. A hypothesis is a tentative answer to a question raised in an inquiry, such as the student's proposed explanation for the tendency of some individuals to elaborately patch their jeans; hence, a hypothesis, because it is only a tentative answer, may either stand or fall as the inquiry progresses.

The foregoing account summarizes briefly our own general procedure for setting up the class so that students could begin to employ the method of folkloristic research. In addition to this apparatus for making the procedure available to the class, we also wanted to test our own hypotheses mentioned in section II above. The apparatus just described, then, was a necessary starting point for that task. A requisite second step in our own test of the pedagogical effectiveness of folkloristic research was to deduce observable consequences from our hypotheses so that we could have a basis for determining whether our own pedagogical experiment was successful. Concerning the first hypothesis, we felt that the technique for folkloristic research would be shown to be understand-

able to beginning students if we as teachers could see that many of the students were able eventually to acquire the skill of employing the technique in an intelligible and thoughtful way. The criterion for determining whether students had acquired this skill was to be the way in which they discussed their project either in their reports or through oral presentations in class. Because the course at its longest is only ten weeks, if the first hypothesis is confirmed, then the second hypothesis will also be confirmed, at least with regard to the time element. The significance factor in the second hypothesis would be confirmed if at least a few of the students were able to produce work found to be enlightening by us and our colleagues among the faculty and advanced graduate students. That is to say, here we assume that "academic significance of a research project" means that persons quite knowledgeable in a field of study are taught new and putatively useful things by comments that have this kind of significance. A confirmation of the second hypothesis will also tend to confirm the fourth hypothesis in that what would be of interest to more advanced students would presumably also be significant in the sense mentioned. Furthermore, with regard to the fourth hypothesis, "value to more experienced students" can be determined if such students express an interest in taking comments from the putatively "valuable" research as an important "jumping off point" for their further work. The third hypothesis would be confirmed if the students in the course showed, through actual ability to do research on their own, that "science" is basically an attitude toward, and a way of approaching, the solution of problems that come to one's attention with regard to a particular subject matter. That is, the third hypothesis would be confirmed if students came to realize that the *most* important thing about a science is its problems and the way these are approached, not its data, nor its collections, nor its archives.

In order to further facilitate the testing of these hypotheses we planned to discover the reactions of the students themselves to the folkloristic research in which they had engaged. Nearly two dozen individuals among 60 students in two classes volunteered to discuss their impression of the pedagogical effectiveness of the technique. These people had exhibited a wide range of competence in engaging in research and seemed representative of the quality of the classes. Interviews, which took place in Jones' office during the final week of class and a week after the reports had been submitted, followed the lines set forth in a standard questionnaire which he devised.

## OBSERVATIONS

With reference to the first hypothesis, we saw that many students were able to manipulate the method of hypothesis in an intelligent and capable manner. In the preparation stages, many students presented us with rough drafts which were somewhat vague or lacking in a precisely stated hypothesis. In these cases we endeavored to review once again the logic of folkloristic research. These students usually presented, a few days later, a revised rough draft of their research design which showed that a good deal of thought along the general logical lines we had suggested had resulted in a viable and workable project. Another observation of relevance here lies in student comments. "I realize I have actually learned an awful lot more than just a lot of facts about legends, or rites of passage, or what Jesse James was like," wrote a freshman in the final examination booklet; "I have actually learned how to apply questions to different ways of life and most immediately how to do research and write a research paper. Your class has ignited a spark in my interest of folklore and I would now definitely like to pursue it." In the "implications" section of the report, many persons remarked that their research had opened up a large line of inquiry with many more relevant hypotheses suggesting themselves for testing in the near future; in one case this section was nearly as long as the report of research undertaken, and in some instances this section contained the student's most significant insights (for example, one student concerned with the impetus for graffiti did not realize until research was well under way the desirability of interviewing individuals engaged in this kind of behavior instead of restricting analysis to inferences based solely on an examination of the anonymously written messages: "Further research and analysis" of the type later considered "might indicate that there is more thought and personal expression in graffiti than the recent investigation has shown"). This kind of reaction seems typical among persons who can successfully and intelligibly employ the method of hypothesis--that is, for a successful practitioner of this method, one problem considered typically leads to new problems for future work. Of course, these students could have been simply saying such things in order to "impress the teacher." However, we tend to discount this possibility since in most of these cases we were convinced (based upon long practice in recognizing "apple polishers") that this was not the case.

In regard to the "significance" factor in the second and fourth hypotheses, we did find that several graduate students and colleagues reacted positively to some of the reports, as did we. One graduate student, who was also the teaching assistant in one of the courses, was greatly impressed with one report by Louise Harris entitled "The Practice of Role Playing in Folkloristic Research"; this graduate student remarked that the essay had illuminated for her some aspects of problems involved in dealing with the nature of ethnic groups. Other graduate students, working on their own research projects, have asked to examine reports of similar work undertaken in these introductory courses. Two of the reports (the paper by Harris plus D. J. Matsuura's "Rice as Art") are now required reading in two advanced folklore courses (a graduate field research course and a senior course in foodways), and these and several other essays including Beverly Robinson's " 'Tut,' the Forgotten Argot"<sup>5</sup> and Laurence Modell's "Traditional Music in Urban California" are, we feel, worthy of publication. Obviously a more complete test of our hypotheses regarding the significance of the students' reports would take much more time and would involve the examination of the essays by other graduate students and professional folklorists, but experiences thus far *suggest* positive results.

Concerning the third hypothesis, we did discover a general attitude among the majority of students toward the end of the course which could be summarized as "by gosh, I can do some pretty good work by thinking through a problem on my own!" In some class interchanges, this feeling of confidence led to certain persons being consulted as experts within the context of the particular class. For example, near the end of one course, the class was pondering collectively a particular issue, and someone said, "Let's ask X; he has been working on that." X then proceeded to describe his research design and to go through the results. Here one can see the right sense of authority at work, for X's authority was recognized by the class as resulting from certain bodies of evidence and argumentation that X had actually worked through. His authority was not arising in this group due to his status as a movie star or member of the dean's honor role or noted football player. That many students in the class recognized this factor shows that they understood something important about the nature of the logic of science. On a relevant point, many students commented toward the end of these courses that they did not think that they could have

become this involved in doing a term project. Many students stated that they had devoted considerable time to their project, not because they were required to do so (they said that they could have "gotten by" with less effort), but because they were drawn into their work since they wanted to know how it would unfold. These students made comments such as, "I didn't know what the answer was to my problem, and no one could tell me the answer, so I was very concerned to get the thing solved." One student, who had complained earlier in one of the classes that he was not being given the "answers" and that he worried about that, later said, "I'm glad you refused to give me the answer, because then I would have never learned how to get my own answers." Some students remarked that having learned the method of hypothesis had led them to reevaluate what they had learned in other social sciences such as anthropology or sociology. Some persons said that they would like to see how the method of hypothesis could be applied in these other disciplines more extensively than it has been.

The reactions of students during the interviews tended to confirm the hypotheses we were testing, but they also suggested other points we had not initially considered. The standardized questions asked during the half hour sessions had several objectives. We wanted to determine difficulties students might have had in understanding or carrying out what was expected of them, what problems they might have encountered doing "field work" which for many was a new experience, and what attitudes they held concerning the pedagogical effectiveness of the research assignment and the potential usefulness of their work for other people (the questionnaire is reproduced in Appendix Two).

"The biggest problem I had," remarked one interviewee, "was hammering out a hypothesis; I thought it was too vague, too hard to confirm or disconfirm." While most students said "I understood what you wanted," responses perhaps more accurately reflecting their feelings were, "I might have had trouble formulating the hypothesis except that I did talk to you and that more or less cleared it up for me," and "after discussion in class I kind of knew what you meant." That is to say, as evident from the review of difficulties that students had, there was in the minds of most individuals an element of doubt about the proper approach to the problem, although this tended to be dispelled as research progressed and individuals discovered that, in the words of one student, "The hypothesis was my personal belief, but I found out it wasn't wholly true." Most students had some trouble initially in choosing a topic narrow

enough to make research feasible; in fact, there was a tendency at first to take on a project encompassing many different kinds of phenomena among large numbers of people in order to make grand generalizations about human behavior, although we believe this is not unusual and is even to be expected in the initial stages of research. "I just couldn't think of anything at first," complained one of the students caught in this syndrome; "everything was a little, tiny topic and I couldn't find a really big question for research." Another person admitted, "I had some vague ideas about researching immigrant groups and folklore and how it survived; but it was too vague and I had no idea how to narrow it down." Once the students realized they had to deal with limited cases, that what was important (for a large part) was the *intensity* of the investigation, other questions arose. "I selected a topic pretty early but later had doubts; I might have problems getting sufficient responses, I thought, and I didn't know whether the questionnaire was adequate." In essence, few of the students pursued the problem initially conceived of for research, because they realized the question was stated too broadly, they could not in fact submit the hypothesis to test because the consequences could not be deduced, or they would not be able to conduct the necessary research because the appropriate situations for testing the hypothesis were not available.

No mechanical problems were mentioned in regards to undertaking research, and apparently few difficulties were encountered in doing the observations and interviews. Perhaps one reason for this is that students chose human subjects from their own working or living environments or from other situations with which they were familiar already. "I started out with people I knew but I didn't know their behavior; it's difficult for me to talk to strangers," said one interviewee. Remarkd another person, "I work with these people, they're around me; logistically it was easier to study them and I am curious--I had some ideas that I'd never carried out." Half a dozen students focused mainly on themselves as subjects. One student's statement that "I regard my consideration of my experiences more validly because I know myself better," has much to recommend it; certainly the student who examines in depth a situation of which he is a part or with which he is already somewhat acquainted has an advantage that a stranger lacks. Writing the report, interviewees said, was not really difficult either, owing to the instructions provided, although a few persons preferred a thematic treatment rather than the recommended chronological approach in setting forth observations. One advantage of the latter

technique not considered by us but expressed by one student is important generally: "I kept a record during interviewing which was better that way because it reflects how I stopped pushing to get an answer. At the beginning I was revealing too much, trying to justify my hypothesis, and making it prejudiced. I was pushing people to try to get an answer and not letting it come naturally." Hopefully, other students also realized the extent to which they may have initially pushed people to get the response they wanted and how this might have adversely affected the outcome of their research.

Was this project a learning experience for the student? "Oh, definitely. Mostly because I was allowed broad enough range to deal with something I've always been interested in," replied one interviewee. "I loved doing it," "I really enjoyed it," and "I really liked it; it was much more alive this way" were common remarks. In response to the first question on our questionnaire, few individuals indicated specifically how the project was a learning experience for them. Only some statements are suggestive, such as, "It gives you an idea of what the folklorist has to go through," "I did learn from it--I learned mainly what I did wrong," and "I think it's a good thing for relating folklore to the present; I could really relate the study of folklore to my own behavior." Two individuals indicated that the project might have more lasting effects: one noted that he continued to look for the same kinds of behavior that he had studied, and to analyze them in different contexts, and the second contended that the project had "enabled me to take your method and some ideas, analyze them in my own mind, consider my own experiences, and then put it all together in practice; next time I'll be even better prepared to do it." Other questions in the interview elicited more specific points, of course, but it was apparent at the outset that none of the twenty-three interviewees felt that they had learned nothing, and most were enthusiastic about having had the chance to do their own independent research.

"At first I didn't know what folklore is; I assumed it was Paul Bunyan stories and stuff like that. I tried to find out what folklore is and I learned that it's something that affects each of us everyday. My whole idea changed. The research project was a practical way toward a definition instead of just listening to someone talk about the problem." Most of the interviewees stated explicitly, like this individual, that the research project had helped them understand more fully the nature and prevalence of the kinds of phenomena which have been identified as folklore, especially "in terms of how we approach it in this class--folklore as human behavior; this is one

of the few ways you can have the point driven home to you." In essence, "I think it helped me understand that there's a lot more to folklore than I thought--more to the subject than just folktales; it made me think about what's involved." No one contended that he had not learned something about human behavior, and several interviewees explained that they had gained a sensitivity to and perceptiveness about other people because of the research project; apparently, the method of hypothesis was new to about half the interviewees who said that the procedures involved in the research project had helped them to understand the nature of scientific inquiry and that, in one case, "it helped me on other papers."

Would students have preferred doing library research rather than the kind of project we proposed which focused on contemporary behavior observed by the researcher? Only one student answered in the affirmative, because "I had a lot of material I already had and could have used it." Some people were adamant in their preference for this project. "You get more involved when you're talking with people, and you learn more," said one person. "I don't learn anything when doing library research except how to look up cards in a file cleverly," said another student; "there's no real learning, you just spill out someone else's ideas." Or worse, "It seems to me that when I write a library report I just forget about it; this project is one I'll remember because I did the research and it's a part of me." Satisfaction in engaging in independent research seems also to be a factor here. "This project gives you a nice feeling of contributing something original; I've never gotten that from other research papers."

Preparing an ethnography or collecting folklore items as an alternative to the research project was not preferred, although, in general, some said that the former might have been interesting and the latter certainly easier. One individual suggested that he might feel a bit more comfortable simply describing some events that he had witnessed, but another person said, "No, you have to have a problem for investigation. Otherwise you'd just be collecting and it wouldn't have the lasting significance that writing all your observations down and analyzing the behavior would have. I'd just have said, 'Oh, well, isn't that strange,' if I'd been only describing something, and left it at that." Most of the students would seem to agree with one person who said, "I prefer to get into peoples' feelings, deal with why they do things; I want to get behind the scenes rather than superficially report events; you learn more that way." As far as collecting is concerned, said one individual, "I've done that before; that was rather boring, in fact." At best, some

students thought they might have gained, through firsthand experience in collecting, a greater knowledge of the many kinds of behavior that have been considered folklore, although that bit of information is readily available in introductory texts. In addition, "It might be entertaining, but you couldn't make any valid generalizations from that type of material." Basically, however, "it doesn't do anything; there's no synthesis, no working through it, no understanding; nothing comes from it, and you miss the entire learning process." In the words of another student, "It'd be sort of like a math class where the professor said, 'I don't know if this is true but trust me'; you learn the answer maybe, but not the process. I would not have learned anything myself."

The final set of questions concerned the potential usefulness of the results of the research projects to others, particularly in comparison with the utility of archives consisting only of collected items. Students admitted that, "because of some problems I had, people might not be able to use the report much; perhaps the 'Implications for Further Research' would be of most value." Each interviewee felt that his paper was indeed a contribution (in two cases this is debatable) and that it would be of interest and help to other people, assuming that others are concerned with the same or similar problems. As one person suggested, "Maybe my hypothesis is wrong, but others could test it, too, and build on my research." By contrast, attitudes toward the utility of folklore collections were negative. "I don't think that'd be enough," said one student; "there are many deeper meanings behind what people do and say and you'd never find out the real reason for events." Three people suggested that the material might be used to point out, as a comparison for its own sake but having no other goal, differences in stories or jokes depending on location, occupation, or ethnicity, "but it's still difficult for me to see what use it'd be." Five individuals felt that collections of this sort might give others an idea of the range of behavior conceived to be folklore. Three students thought perhaps the data could provide leads for potential interviews (assuming real names and addresses were indicated, although this poses problems in respect to protection of persons so interviewed) but, said one student, "I would rather go out and find the people myself and find out things for myself; that's most meaningful to me." A couple of people said, "I enjoy reading things like stories but I don't know of how much use it would be," and "It's interesting and it's fun to hear tales, but it doesn't lead to learning anything; it's interesting, that's all." Perhaps most telling were the remarks of two other people trying very hard to be charitable: "It would be nice to have if

someone wants to have it," and "I can't see directly where it would be useful, but if I ever needed it, it might be very helpful."

Responses to two questions surprised us. We did not expect objections to placing the reports in an archive, and there were none, but several students said that they were more careful in their research and writing than they might have been because they knew their papers would be available for other people to examine. Secondly, when asked if they would have liked to look at other reports, either to get ideas for research or to make certain what was expected of them, most of the interviewees said no. A small minority felt that early in the quarter they needed more guidance which such reports might have provided, but most students contended that they already understood what was expected of them (in several cases, however, results might well have been improved if the students had perused earlier reports). The majority wanted to do research on their own, conceiving their own projects and making their own mistakes: "My failures, I learned, were as important as the successes; failing myself, I learned better." There was the fear of boredom and repetition, also, that would have prevented many students from looking at other papers, had earlier reports been available to them. That is a situation that we had not anticipated. This attitude *seems* to contradict the students' belief that their reports of research might be useful to others, for they did not want to make use of previous research themselves. Part of the problem appears to be that some students thought of their work as opening up virgin land, which accounts for their enthusiasm to some extent. Moreover, following up someone else's work would, they seemed to think, give them the same feeling that writing a paper based on the use of secondary source material in the library would generate. It is, we believe, easily possible to overcome this attitude, particularly when the instructor can emphasize that each situation for investigation has unique qualities and offers unusual opportunities for individual research.

We should also mention here the kinds of observations that would tend to count against our hypotheses. Early in the quarter several students expressed the feeling that their field work projects were not really "research." This attitude arose for two reasons: First, they were enjoying what they were doing, and, according to some, research is never pleasurable; secondly, there was no appeal to outside authority about the correctness of some issue, and in many cases, not even direct reference to the ideas of some other researcher, all of which is in contrast to the library research that most of the students were familiar with and had engaged in before. By the time

the students were entrenched in their work, however, they realized that they *were* doing real research. Some students had problems following our directions (though few admitted it), especially with regard to writing up the research report. Here we have in mind such things as omission of headings, omission of one or more of the sections, failure to submit two copies, or wrong margins. Perhaps the logical issue which was most difficult for some students to grasp is that associated with the section on research strategy, in particular the part related to tracing observable consequences of hypotheses. A couple of students failed to mention observable consequences at all, and several individuals said that they intended to use questionnaires, to rely solely on observation, or to interview the same number of females as males without indicating in any way what these techniques had to do with the question for investigation; the kind of information to be included is suggested by us in the present article in our own section on research strategy as well as in the first appendix. Another difficulty many students experienced lay in picking a problem of real interest, and in developing testable hypotheses about such a problem (despite the fact that all interviewees contended that they had overcome this difficulty). Some students actually had no relevant problem in mind, nor did they seem to acquire one as time went on. They finally simply "went through the motions" in the reports they turned in.

## CONCLUSIONS

We believe that the observations just cited tend to confirm our hypotheses. According to most of the students interviewed (representing a third of the people taking the courses to which the interview was relevant) and according to our experiences with all of the students, it would seem that the nature of folkloristic research was understandable to neophytes, that even beginning students could produce significant research in a short period of time, that students could learn about folkloristic science by application of the method of hypothesis to a particular problem, and that the work of these students is of value to more advanced people. In other words, folkloristic research, involving the method of hypothesis, is an effective pedagogical tool in introductory courses. Of course, our research has been somewhat limited, particularly in regard to answering the second question about the ultimate usefulness of the students' work for other investigators. We feel, however, that other persons could

reproduce our tests with profit to both general issues of pedagogical effectiveness and archival use. In respect to the observations which tend to disconfirm our suppositions, we think that these factors can, for the most part, be easily accounted for in the fact that our classes, in a way similar to most university classes, contained a few students who would have done poorly no matter which kind of project was proposed. With those students who were putting in at least a reasonable effort we found that our hypotheses were generally confirmed. In the words of one interviewee, "The research project pulled everything together for me. I had read the essays on the syllabus and when I was working on the report I realized, I'm doing one of those articles! It really spurred me on. I said, 'I'm a folklorist doing that kind of research.' Just going through the research project made it make sense for me."

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

We hope that at some later time we will be able again to report briefly on further testing of our hypotheses. Unfortunately, during our experiment we did not obtain, in sufficient number or depth, records of the process of learning and employing the method of hypothesis that would illustrate in detail some of the problems students had; this is one shortcoming of our work that other researchers should take into account when repeating our experiment. In addition, not enough time has elapsed and an insufficient number of individuals have had the opportunity to examine the student work from our courses for us to determine fully the extent to which the results of some students' research are of value to more experienced scholars in folkloristics. Besides presenting our report for consideration by others we also intend to bind and place on reserve for the perusal of future students (both beginners and nonbeginners) a few of the reports that epitomize the method of hypothesis and that clearly lead to many other questions for future research. Not only will this action provide useful models for other students in forthcoming introductory classes and advanced classes, while aiding them in understanding the nature of research and report preparation and indicating some possible problems for investigation, but it will also (we suggest) eventually result in an improvement in the quality of research and reporting because students can (when appropriate) build upon past work. This is perhaps the ultimate test of the value of folkloristic research as a pedagogical tool and as a means for establishing an archive of very useful materials.

Admittedly, we have exhibited a predilection in favor of observations of contemporary behavior and for undertaking synchronic studies that are behavioristic in orientation. One very likely implication of our procedures is, however, that the method of hypothesis should be equally applicable to diachronic studies and to studies that are essentially textual. Often students required to write a short historical paper devote most of the essay to describing some past event and then conclude with what is a hypothesis which, while suggestive, leaves no room for any attempts at confirmations which would develop the stock of scientific knowledge. The method of hypothesis, in which the researcher states his hypothesis and then tests it systematically by means of research activities in the library (as opposed to a situation involving actual behavior) will, it seems defensible to say, contribute to the accumulation of both confirmed and disconfirmed hypotheses. We have also not intended to imply that all previously "collected" materials in an archive are without any value whatsoever. That is, no one should accuse us of urging that present archives "be burned," for that is not our view. Albeit, we do suggest that the usefulness of present archives is quite limited, and we do propose that the method of hypothesis may prove useful to those individuals engaged in historic-geographic studies, or in other textual or literary studies. We believe that textually oriented scholars are just as desirous as the behaviorist of having available well-documented research in which the investigator has made clear the nature of the research design and the circumstances under which observations were made plus comments about what suppositions the observations serve to either confirm or disconfirm.

Another ramification of the technique of folkloristic research is that it might result in an increase in the quality of films and records prepared by students or utilized by teachers in the classroom.

Many, perhaps most, of these documents and tools have been developed haphazardly without a succinctly formulated research design. The procedures reported on here do not rule out the presentation of research results in the form of a film (or phonograph disc or videotape or museum display) as long as the research involves the method of hypothesis and the finished product is accompanied by a brief report of the research undertaken (assuming that such information has not been made manifest in the actual presentational medium, as it might well be).

To be considered more fully, too, is the prospect that our approach will reduce or eliminate plagiarism and will discourage the submission of reports purchased from a "term paper factory." "Collecting" projects lend themselves to the fabrication of entries, or

to mere copying of material "lifted" from published compendia or folklore, as many teachers have noted and a few students have admitted. While working on this project we discovered one instance of plagiarism, that of an individual in one of these courses who had submitted a copy of a paper written by another student in an earlier class taught by a different professor. That discovery was accidental, but if all reports for all classes and courses had been on file in an archive, it is unlikely that such a case of plagiarism would have occurred. In addition, because each research project and the accompanying report is unique in nature and time-consuming in preparation, it is unlikely that a student would be able to purchase a paper from a "factory" for submission to his instructor.

Already one set of research reports (arising from one course) has been bound into a single hardback volume (under the title "Topics in Folkloristic Research-I") which has been placed in the UCLA departmental library and is available for use. In perusing it recently another thought occurred to us. It would be fairly easy to commit the descriptive titles of all reports within that volume (and in subsequent volumes) to a computerized key word index. The titles would be especially useful in such an undertaking, but other key words from the body of the report could also be incorporated. Indeed, students could fill out a key word form to submit with their finished report. Upon the accumulation of several of these volumes, the index would begin to be a useful research tool, we believe, for future students of all kinds. Through the use of such an index, one could retrieve several past reports which would again facilitate doing research that would build upon the past.

Finally, our research raises questions about "doing field work" and about the very concept of "field work," questions that must await until a later date for full consideration. Generally it is assumed that folklorists make brief "forays" in their "own backyard" while anthropologists spend extended periods of time in a foreign locale, but the concept of field work set forth in guides for folklore study is the same as that proposed by anthropologists. For example, Goldstein writes in his manual that, "By *field* collecting I mean that work which is done over a period of time by a collector living among his informants at a distance from his home or country, and during which time his total energy and activity is directed at obtaining folklore materials and data from those informants."<sup>6</sup> There has been a tendency also to treat field work as a special enterprise, for the most part beyond the capability of the student who lacks the training and skill and whose collecting activities are

conceived to be *preparatory* to field work. In his recent guide Brunvand says, "The beginning collector should probably begin with himself, move on next to the rest of his family, and only later enter the 'field,' that is, into contact with people outside his normal round of acquaintances."<sup>7</sup> It is possible, however, that "field work" does not mean necessarily undertaking research among strangers in another geographical locale for an extended period of time; instead, it might simply involve the study of living human subjects (in contrast to library or archive research) who can be interviewed and whose behavior can be observed at firsthand as it occurs. This does not exclude the researcher and his own behavior from study, either by himself or by one of his "informants." Introspection and dialogue are two of the most common and frequently relied upon, but least often cited, sources of insight. Thus, the "field," the "self," and "other selves" may all be nearly one, and the "work" may simply be research involving the method of hypothesis directed toward the study of human "selves" in various interactional processes.

## NOTES

1. *Journal of American Folklore*, 86 (1973), 114-130.

2. We are indebted to many people, especially students in several classes, for helping to make our research possible. We are particularly thankful to Robert A. Georges, Sharon Kathie O'Reilly, and Charles S. Hardwick for their inspiration, assistance, and valuable comments. However, we accept full responsibility for the remarks in this essay.

3. See Ketner, 115-118.

4. Here we have been concerned only with term papers and research projects, rather than with some of the many other techniques used in the classroom, such as experiments, brief assignments, specific kinds of analyses, or materials like tape recordings and films. Our method could also be used for group projects on a single topic and from one particular analytical perspective; whatever pedagogical tool is employed in whatever manner, however, there are ethical questions raised by the retention of students' papers for use by the instructor or others, questions which have not yet been solved or even adequately examined. For additional thoughts on these and related issues, see, for example, *Teaching Folklore in the Classroom: A Symposium*, ed. William E. Koch (Manhattan, Kansas, n. d. [c. 1960]); Robert J. Adams, "A Functional Approach to Introductory Folklore," *Folklore Forum*, 1 (1968), n. p.; essays by Ellen Jane Stekert, Ray B. Browne, Tom Burns, Carter W. Craigie, Linda Degh, Jan Harold Brunvand, and Thomas A. Greene in *Perspective on Folklore and Education*, Folklore Forum Bibliographical and Special Series Number Two (Bloomington, Ind., 1969); Jan H. Brunvand, "Popular Culture in the

Folklore Course," in *Popular Culture and Curricula*, ed. Ray B. Browne and Ronald J. Ambrosetti (Bowling Green, Ohio, 1970), 61-72; Marcia Walerstein, "Ethnic Folklore in the Primary School Classroom," *Keystone Folklore Quarterly*, 15 (1970), 161-166; Rosan A. Jordan, "Reflections on Teaching Folklore to Undergraduates," *Folklore Forum*, 5 (1972), 32-33; and Richard S. Tallman, "Folklore in the Schools: Teaching, Collecting, and Publishing," *New York Folklore Quarterly*, 28 (1972), 163-186. The kind of student research we recommend, moreover, seems a practical way of achieving the goal of teaching the fundamentals of conceptual inquiry, of developing "methods of instruction that emphasize the training and disciplining of the mind" (16), requested by Derek C. Bok, *Harvard University: The President's Report, 1971-1972* (January 15, 1973), in his review of the purposes of undergraduate education.

5. This paper was revised and read at the California Folklore Society meeting in Dominguez Hills, May 18, 1973.

6. Kenneth S. Goldstein, *A Guide for Field Workers in Folklore* (Hatboro, 1964), 9, footnote 26; compare Goldstein's conception of field work with that of anthropologists as in *Marginal Natives: Anthropologists at Work* (New York, 1970), ed. Morris Freilich. Even James B. Spradley and David W. McCurdy in *The Cultural Experience: Ethnography in Complex Society* (Chicago, 1972), a work directed at anthropology students who are instructed on how to undertake ethnographies in the cities in which they live, continue to treat field work as research concerning "cultures" which are essentially "different" from the student's own.

7. Jan Harold Brunvand, *A Guide for Collectors of Folklore in Utah* (Salt Lake City, 1971), 11; see also Goldstein, 9 ("Still, anyone is capable of doing a certain amount of collecting, though not in 'the field.\"",) and Richard M. Dorson, "Collecting Oral Folklore in the United States" in a book he edited called *Buying the Wind* (Chicago, 1964), especially 17-19.

## APPENDIX ONE

# *Information About The Research Project*

THE PURPOSE BEHIND ASKING YOU TO DO A RESEARCH PROJECT IS TO give you an opportunity to become aware of the general nature of folkloristic research through actual practice rather than by means of theoretical discussion only (although obviously the latter is important). The task will involve thinking through your project aims and techniques before actually making observations which are relevant to the hypothesis you are interested in testing. Because time is

limited in this class, you will probably be able to make relatively few observations. This is understandable for class purposes, although in a more "professional" setting more work would no doubt be required.

The research project involves the observation and analysis of some aspect of types of universal human behavior processes. The purpose of research is to generate one or more hypotheses which are then confirmed or disconfirmed by means of careful testing in reference to observable events. The importance of disconfirmation should be emphasized, since this, like confirmation, adds to our stock of knowledge. Remember the story about Thomas Edison in search of a substance that would serve as the source of illumination in the light bulb? His assistant, frustrated by hundreds of failures, complained that they were getting nowhere and should quit. Edison responded that they had in fact made progress; "Now we *know* a thousand different things that won't work."

I. YOUR INQUIRY WILL *logically* DEVELOP IN THE FOLLOWING STAGES:

A. *A feeling of doubt will arise about some belief concerning a particular phenomenon, or you will become aware of some puzzling question.*

"Doubt" and "question" as they are being used here are very close in meaning. For example, you may doubt that an individual tells a particular kind of story on a certain occasion simply, as he says, "to relieve boredom." Or you might be puzzled as to what purpose(s) some bit of conventional wisdom might have for one or more individuals in certain circumstances; or you might wonder how to account for the continuity or change of a specific kind of behavior among particular immigrants to America, or for the prevalence of argot in one work situation but not in another apparently similar case.

B. *You will develop one or more hypotheses which are tentative answers to the doubt or question such that if one of these hypotheses were true, then the doubt or question would be resolved.*

Further observation is not undertaken to *prove* the validity of the initial hypothesis, but to *test* it to *discover* if it is *confirmed* or *disconfirmed* in order to acquire some new knowledge about the subject. It may be that observations generate yet other hypotheses, and that a disconfirmation of one hypothesis initiates new research. But without such working hypotheses there are no guidelines for observation, no way of knowing which observations are relevant to solving a particular problem. Working hypotheses reduce the expenditure of time and energy in observation, and provide a specific goal for research.

C. Assume for the moment that the hypothesis is correct and then deduce consequences from it--those consequences it will be possible to observe.

If the hypothesis is that behavior embodying ethnic stereotypes of one group is generated as a result of prejudice among members of another group, one consequence would be that only prejudiced individuals manifest the use of such structures in their behavior, and the antipode would be that individuals who are not prejudiced do not manifest behavior embodying ethnic stereotypes. Or if the hypothesis is that behavior embodying ethnic prejudice is generated as a result of conflict owing to direct contact among members of different ethnic groups, then some of the anticipated consequences might be that only when there is contact between, say, an Italian immigrant and an Irish-American will there be conflict, and only when there is conflict will there be generated behavior of ethnic prejudice; and if there is no contact between, say, a Pole and a Swede in America there will be no conflict and no behavior of ethnic prejudice.

Once one has considered some possible consequences of assuming the hypothesis to be true, one has guidelines indicating the kinds of events and models of behavior that must be observed. This process may also involve making terms used in stating the hypothesis more precisely. For example, "group" as used above seems vague ("group" from whose point of view and given what unifying features?); "is generated" in the above comments could be clarified (does that mean "appears for the first time," or does it mean that certain units of expressive behavior, once originated, are manifested at a later time when two or more people interact?).

Obviously any problem for investigation will have to be simplified and refined so that it can be dealt with sufficiently given the time and facilities available. And any hypotheses from which it is logically impossible to deduce consequences that are observable must be rejected since these hypotheses cannot be put to test.

II. YOU SHOULD ADHERE TO THE FOLLOWING PROCEDURES AND FORMAT IN THE PREPARATION AND SUBMISSION OF YOUR WRITTEN REPORT.

A. *Format of the report:*

1. Type a *title page* that includes the title of the report, your name and address, the name of the course, the date of submission, and the instructor's name. The title should be straightforward and *descriptive* of the research; please avoid "catchy" titles.

2. Begin the report with a section entitled *background* in which you describe what led you to undertake the research. Here you would mention such things as an event you had observed or some statement you had read that raised a question in your mind. Ideally you would also review some of the research literature on the general topic to indicate the importance of your project and its place in the scholarship on this subject; under the circumstances, however, you are not expected to go beyond the readings in this course.

3. State your *hypothesis* in the next section and include any relevant comments about how you developed the hypothesis that are not mentioned in the first section.

4. *Research strategy* is the next section in which you describe the kinds of observations that would be relevant to testing the hypothesis, and the procedures required to make these observations (such as the number of individuals or kinds of situations of interaction, general questions to ask or specific questionnaires to fill out). It is in this section that you note some of the consequences of your hypothesis which will enable you to determine whether it is confirmed or disconfirmed; in some respect this may be the most important section but it is often least satisfactorily attended to.

5. In chronological order indicate the actual *observations* you made during your research noting the subjects and situations; if you find that a thematic treatment of observations is more practical, use that.

6. In the next section, *conclusions*, state whether the observations confirmed or disconfirmed your hypothesis, and why they did.

7. End the report with a section called *implications for further research* in which you state whether your work suggests other hypotheses for testing, and describe what might be done better or more completely if this particular research project were repeated.

B. *Other information concerning specific details of the report:*

1. Actual names and addresses of people should not be indicated in the report; if the report involves the analysis of your own behavior and you do not want this information known to others, then use a pseudonym on the title page (but please tell the instructor who you are so he can record a grade for you).

2. If you cite specific studies in a discussion of the problem for investigation, or you are testing someone else's hypothesis, then be sure to footnote the appropriate work(s). Footnotes should be typed on a separate sheet of paper and put at the end of the report.

3. You are not required to turn in the records you generate in making observations, but you may do so if you wish. Under the

heading of records are such things as notes, tapes, photos, slides, or films. It might happen, however, that the class as a whole would be interested in seeing or hearing your records which can be arranged through the instructor if desired. You may also want to include an appendix to the report if you have information you think important for understanding and evaluating your research which does not fit well into the actual report.

4. Length of the report depends on many factors but perhaps the ideal in this course, taking into account various considerations, would be a tightly written narrative of 12 to 15 pages (because of a shorter period of time in the summer session, Ketner suggested to his students a report of five to ten pages).

5. Since it is likely that these papers will be bound to facilitate use by others, please leave an inch and a half margin on the left hand side of your report.

6. Submit two copies of the report, one of which will be returned to you with constructive criticism and a grade. The other copy will be retained in the files of the UCLA Folklore and Mythology Group. Such a procedure of preserving reports of carefully conceived and executed research projects should result over the years in the accumulation of confirmed and disconfirmed hypotheses important for an understanding of human traditions. Your essay will be available for reference by others in the future who might be working on a similar project, and anyone making reference to your study will be required to give proper credit to you.

## APPENDIX TWO

# *Questionnaire Used In Assessing Student Reaction To The Research Project*

### I. LEARNING EXPERIENCE

A. *What is your reaction to this research project and preparation of a report as an educational experience in comparison to other educational experiences you have had?*

B. *What problems did you have in doing research?*

1. *What problems did you have in selecting a topic?*

2. *What difficulties did you experience in narrowing the focus of the topic?*

3. Were some initial topics and problems for investigation later dismissed? If so, why?

4. Did you understand the information of a hypothesis?

5. Did you understand setting forth the research strategy?

6. Was the project difficult to undertake owing to expense, problems in finding subjects, arranging meetings with people, or some other factors?

7. On what basis were human subjects for observation chosen?

8. How much did you reveal about your research to your subjects? Why?

9. Did you actually interview as well as observe subjects? If you interviewed other individuals did you feel confident while interviewing, or was the situation stressful for you?

C. *What were some problems you had when preparing the report?*

1. Was the structure too restrictive? If so, have you any suggestions for alterations?

2. Did you not understand what information goes in each section of the report?

3. Do you object to having your report placed in an archive for others to use?

4. Were there other problems not mentioned above that you had?

D. *Of what value was the report to you?*

1. Did the exercise help you in understanding folklore, human behavior, and the nature of scientific inquiry? If so, how; if not, why not?

2. Compare this exercise as best you can with each of the following techniques indicating what you feel might be the value of each; which would be most meaningful to you as a learning experience?

a. writing a paper on library research as the source of data and the basis of your interpretation;

b. preparing an ethnography (description) of some ways of life (for example, hitchhiking, airline stewardship, or foodhandling);

c. collecting, say, 50 beliefs or proverbs or a dozen songs or stories, and so on which you then write down on 3x5 cards along with the age, sex, name, address, occupation, and ethnic background of the informant?

## II. USEFULNESS OF FOLKLORISTIC RESEARCH TO OTHERS

A. *Do you think your paper will be of use to others interested in the study of folklore? Why or why not?*

*B. Would you have preferred examining some sample reports by other students in order 1) to get ideas for your own investigation, or 2) to facilitate your understanding of the way to conduct research and prepare your own report?*

*C. Would an archive filled with 3x5 cards (or larger sheets of paper), each containing a belief text or joke or song along with the name, age, address, occupation, and ethnicity of the informant be useful to you? If so, how would you utilize this material in learning more about the nature of folklore or in conducting your own research and writing a report?*