

The essence of being 'non': A phenomenological study of leaders' beliefs within non-formal educational settings.

Tieja Thomas
B.Mus, McGill University, 2005

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Supervisory Committee

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by

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Abstract

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Despite non-formal education being introduced into the international discourse on education policy in 1972, there has since been relatively little research devoted to exploring this concept and, in particular, to the experiences of educators who lead non-formal educational processes. This thesis documents a phenomenological inquiry into the educational beliefs held by leaders working in non-formal educational settings within Canada. The purpose of this inquiry was to determine the existence of a shared set of educational beliefs among leaders in non-formal educational settings. The research included an emergent qualitative inquiry design that drew on hermeneutic and phenomenological philosophies as well as critical theory. Research methods involved narrative inquiry, auto-ethnography, and photo-elicitation. Data elicited by this investigation revealed that participants subscribe to a shared set of educational beliefs, the essence of which involves the interaction and interchange between elements of praxis, service, and concern for the develop of whole beings.

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Dedication

For Brenda.
You have given me both roots and wings.

Frontispiece

“... informal, formal, and non-formal. None of these alone can meet all the important lifetime learning needs of an individual, much less of a whole society. All are needed, and no one of them can properly claim superiority of rank, value, or effectiveness over all the others; each has its peculiar strengths and limitations. They are complementary and supplementary and mutually reinforcing” (Coombs, 1985, p. 27-28).

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The idea for this research came together in my mind by three distinct routes: my professional experience in non-formal education as a program coordinator in various non-profit organizations; my personal commitment to providing individuals with equitable access to educational opportunities that are suitable to their needs as learners; and my personal belief that the field of education encompasses both the in-school and out-of-school worlds. It is my hope that a study of this nature will contribute to moving the topic of non-formal education from the periphery of Canadian educational discourse to a more central position.

Problem statement

As a result of *Learning to Be* (1972), a report by the UNESCO International Commission on the Development of Education, chaired by Edgar Fauré, non-formal education became a recognized part of international discourse on education policy. Since then, however, little research has been devoted to exploring the field of non-formal education (NFE) and, in particular, to the experiences of educators who lead non-formal educational processes.

Existing research

There exists a small body of literature that seeks to conceptualize the field of NFE (Brennan, 1997; Colley, Hodkinson, & Malcolm, 2002; Coombs, 1968, 1976, 1985; Coombs & Ahmed, 1974; Coombs, Prosser, & Ahmed, 1973; Livingstone, 1970; Rogers, 2004; Smith, 2009). Additionally, a few studies explore the experiences of

educators working within non-formal educational (NFE'l) settings in terms of teaching beliefs, professional development, and career motivation (Bainer, Cantrell, & Barron, 2000; Sime Poma, 2007; Taylor, 2003, 2006, 2008; Taylor & Caldarelli, 2004). However, there is a marked absence of literature related to the educational beliefs held by leaders working within NFE'l settings.

Significance

The scarcity of information relating to the educational beliefs held by leaders within NFE'l settings is regrettable because it is this sort of information that will potentially contribute to the legitimization of the field of NFE. Highlighting the common experiences and beliefs of leaders working within NFE'l settings can ultimately be a factor in creating a community of practice among professionals in this domain, thereby taking the first steps towards giving these heterodox professionals more professional legitimacy. Moreover, a study of this nature may well stimulate others to amass knowledge of this currently under-researched educational sphere.

Purpose statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover to what extent leaders working in non-formal educational settings subscribe to a shared set of educational beliefs. This phenomenological inquiry sought to articulate the essence of NFE leaders' beliefs about the aims and purposes of education. Using the lens of a *critical phenomenetic* perspective, this study focused on understanding the beliefs held by leaders working within NFE'l settings with the aim of answering the

following two questions: (1) To what extent do the beliefs held by NFE leaders mirror NFE'l philosophy? (2) Does there exist a basis for creating a community of practice among leaders in the NFE domain?

Methods of inquiry included phenomenological and hermeneutical reflection on data elicited by a narrative investigation of NFE leaders' educational beliefs, and on data elicited by a photo-elicitation investigation of the phenomenon.

Situating myself

Prior to delving into a discussion relating to this inquiry, it is important that I first establish for the reader a sense of where I come from and what ideological assumptions undergird my work. Therefore, in the following passages I endeavor to situate myself for the reader with the aim of providing my audience with a context in which to situate my work.

My worldview is greatly influenced by two elements of my lived experience: my dichotomous identity and my familial relationships.

I am a lesson in duality.

Not quite one of something, and yet not enough of the other.

Mixed language. Mixed race. Mixed culture. Mixed heritage. I am mixed up!

I am destined to go through life as a hyphen.

English-Français. White-Black. Ukrainian-Trinidadian. Québécois-British Columbian (Tieja Thomas, personal communication, November 16th, 2008).

What Barnett, Choong, & Hudspith (2002) discovered in their work on identity and Leadership discourse was that perhaps individuals' mixed heritages and innate 'in-betweeness' positively influences their ability to see numerous sides of an issue. I believe that my physiological makeup as a bilingual and bi-racial

individual enables me to move more easily between multiple worlds, performing bridging work. Throughout my life, I have come to understand that my identity is greatly transformed by who else is in the room. Engaging with a variety of people in different circumstances permits “certain aspects of [my identity to] become more salient” (Wenger, 2003, p. 95). Because of this, I often find myself articulating my identity not only in terms of who I am, but also in terms of who I am not. Drawing on the fluid and dynamic nature of my identity, I believe that I am well-equipped to elicit and weave multiple perspectives and threads of experience together, thus creating a rich and robust tapestry of lived experience.

...For as long as I can remember the influential players in my life have always modeled a reverence for community, belonging, and relationships.

(Tieja Thomas, personal communication, July 30th, 2009).

I was born in 1983, the last of six children. My family configuration was not typical for the time. My parents had adopted two boys before they started having biological children in 1978. As such, my oldest brother is eighteen years my senior and we have never lived in the same house together. However, even though age, life experience, and physical distance kept my siblings and me apart at different points during the years, I have always felt a deep bond with each and every one of them.

The feelings of belonging and community that were deeply entrenched in my childhood shaped my being in the world in such a way so that now I am constantly aware of my interconnectedness to the people around me. Margaret Wheatley (2009) writes “nothing in the universe exists as an isolated or independent entity. Everything takes form from relationships [...]. In the web of life, nothing living lives

alone” (p. 93). I realize that as I grow older and as I move from community to community, I carry bits of my various relationships with me creating an identity that extends in space and across boundaries. This identity is “neither unitary nor fragmented. It is an experience of multimembership, [combining the] many relationships that [I] hold into the experience of being a person, at once one and multiple” (Wenger, 2003, p. 94-95). This aspect of my lived experience and personal identity greatly informs my ontological and epistemological research perspective.

What I believe

Ontological perspective

I understand both of these terms to signify not only the “place” that you find yourself within the physical world, but also the “place” that you’re at within yourself

(Tieja Thomas, personal communication, August 8th, 2009).

My ontological perspective is informed by a social-constructivist lens. This paradigm “assumes a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondent cocreate [*sic*] understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 24). I assert that “truth – and any agreement regarding what is valid knowledge – arises from the relationship between members of some stakeholding community” (Lincoln, 1995, as cited in Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 204).

In connection with my multifaceted identity, my understanding of any ontology is guided by my belief that there exist multiple truths. Relating to the influence of familial relationships on my particular worldview, I believe that truth(s)

arise out of our relationship to the human and more-than-human elements that surround us. I contend that truth is co-constructed throughout time and depends on variables such as place, space, and context. As such, my understanding of any given truth is situated in terms of lived experience, personal identity, and particular situations (Heywood & Stronach, 2005).

I adopt a constructivist view of ontology because I do not feel comfortable adhering to the notion that truth is absolute. However, it is also important for me to note that somewhat conversely, I also do not feel comfortable claiming that truth is entirely relative. For this reason I assert that *certain* truths are absolute, specifically those relating to morality; however, I contend that most truth(s) arise out of a relative process between knower and known.

Epistemological perspective

I had a very powerful "aha" moment (and may have frightened both Allison and Sarah, who were seated next to me, with my very physical and emotive reaction) during today's talk (Tieja Thomas, personal communication, August 5th, 2009).

Just as I acknowledge multiple truths, epistemologically, I also acknowledge that there are multiple ways of knowing. I contend that we come to 'know' something through our lived experience and embodied emotions. The English philosopher, John Locke, believed that experience teaches us everything. He thought that all of our "ideas ultimately come from experience, so that the contents of our thoughts, even when we are reflecting rather than perceiving, all come from sensation" (Warburton, 2001, p. 82). Similarly, Merleau-Ponty believed that

“consciousness can only engage with the world because it is already within, and a part of, the physical, corporeal world” (as cited in Dall’Alba & Barnacle, 2005, p. 724). I contend that one comes to know through their senses, which intertwine both subject and object: the embodiment of the subject is what activates the senses, thus facilitating knowing (p. 724).

Research paradigm

Greenfield & Ribbins (1993) write that the “purpose of social science [research] is to understand social reality as different people see it and to demonstrate how their views shape the action which they take within that reality” (p.10). They argue that social science researchers should not set out to discover ultimate truths about society, but rather to interpret what individuals see as their social reality and to help make sense of the world, as both researcher and participants experience it. One way of seeking to understand and address these issues is by embarking on a qualitative examination of a particular inquiry focus.

In what follows I outline the results of a qualitative research study. I chose to locate my research within a qualitative paradigm because I felt as though this research approach corresponded well to my proposed line of inquiry, which aimed at exploring and understanding the meaning that individuals ascribe to a given human phenomenon (Creswell, 2009). As a qualitative researcher, I carried out a study that “stress[ed] the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 10).

My decision to approach my research with a social-constructivist lens corresponded to my personal situatedness and worldview, and spoke to my dialogic and highly relational personal identity. It is my belief that my chosen research methodologies and methods served to create a holistic research paradigm that tapped into multiple perspectives and philosophies thus enabling me to attain rich and rigorous inquiry results.

Definition of terms

Beliefs

Beliefs “mirror the truths constructed by people, guide behavior, [and] act as a lens for assessing present and future actions” (Taylor & Caldarelli, 2004, p. 454).

Community of practice

The term ‘community of practice’ signifies a group of people who share a commitment to a common interest and/or profession. Wenger (2003) indicates that in their search for meaning, all individuals naturally seek out dynamic communities in which to belong. Therefore, within communities of practice knowing, sharing, and learning are not understood as abstract phenomena done for their own sake, but rather done in the interest of belonging. Additionally, communities of practice are understood to be the basic building blocks of social learning systems and are produced through the combination of three elements. First, members share a sense that they are contributing to a *joint enterprise*. Second, members “build their community through mutual engagement” (p. 80), building relationships of *mutuality*

with one another. Third, members produce a *shared repertoire* of experiences – “language, routines, sensibilities, artifacts, tools, stories, styles, and so forth” (p. 80).

Constructivism

Constructivist teaching and learning is a fundamentally social phenomenon that involves adopting a highly dialogic practice. Constructivist forms of education place emphasis on creating activities that are geared towards educators and learners enjoying a shared meaning-making process (Taylor & Caldarelli, 2004).

Critical friends

A trusted friend or group who “provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critique of a person’s work as a friend. A critical friend takes the time to fully understand the context of the work presented and the outcomes that the person [...] is working toward. The friend is an advocate for the success of that work” (Costa & Kallick, 1993, p. 50).

Dialogic

Narrative processes (either written or oral) in which multiple voices, perspectives, and/or discourses are present and engage with each another.

Essence

Van Manen (2002) specifies that: “Phenomenologically speaking, essence is a complex notion that alludes to the ever questionable ways of the being of being” (Essence section, para. 6). Within the phenomenological literature there is ambiguity concerning whether essence relates to the Kantian notion of ‘phenomena’ (appearances, which constitute experience) or ‘noumena’ (things themselves, which

constitute reality). Some phenomenologists, specifically those who adhere to Husserl's writings, refer to the "whatness of things, as opposed to their thatness (i.e., their existence)" (para. 1). These scholars reduce essence into a positivist and foundationalist judgment by focusing on the empirical properties of an object. Somewhat conversely, I adopt the understanding that "essence is not a single, fixed property by which we know something; rather, it is meaning constituted by a complex array of aspects, properties and qualities" (para. 4). Essence of this type avoids categorical descriptions and essentialized definitions that render descriptions illusory. Instead it represents a multifaceted and intersecting description.

Learner-centered

A fundamental tenet of NFE'l philosophy is that NFE'l processes are guided by a learner-centered approach to teaching and learning. This approach is fostered by three specific contextual factors: temporal considerations, voluntary learner participation, and the prospect of a flexible curriculum within NFE'l settings.

Non-formal education

Within the minority world context, non-formal education is understood as any organized educational program or activity with identifiable learning objectives that takes place outside the authority of the formal school system. NFE'l programs and activities are educational opportunities that are brief in duration, ranging from a few hours to a period of weeks or months. They are comprised of a curriculum contingent upon the participants involved. These educational experiences are

learner-centered and emphasize a hands-on and dialogic approach to learning where a reciprocal learning process is enjoyed by both the facilitator and learner.

Photo-elicitation

The interview practice of using a “single [photograph] or sets of photographs assembled by the researcher on the basis of prior analysis and selected with the assumption that the chosen images will have some significance for interviewees” (Prosser & Schwartz, 1998, p. 124). The format of photo-elicitation interviews involves giving participants photographs and asking them to interpret, discuss, and explore the meaning attached to them.

Praxis

A process of informed and committed action in which practitioners engage in a course of thoughtful interpretation, understanding, and application of opinions and ideas (Smith, 1999b). The full quality of praxis involves action that embodies certain qualities: individuals are required to determine how to act and carry out situationally-specific actions as well as demonstrate their “commitment to human well-being and the search for truth, and respect for others” (Praxis section, para. 1). Furthermore, praxis requires that individuals engage in a course of interpretation, understanding, and application: As individuals think about what they want to achieve, they alter the way that they might achieve that. As individuals think about the way that they might go about something, they change what they might aim at (Smith, 1999a). Praxis involves the fluid process of continuously moving between ends and means, and thought and action.

Service

Work done by one person or group that benefits another. Motivated by the human disposition towards well-doing as an end in itself (Smith, 1996; 2005).

Overview of thesis

In chapter one I provided the reader with a brief overview of this study and identified the research questions that guided the inquiry. Additionally, I described the ontological and epistemological foundations of this research and clarified any relevant terms. Chapter two includes a discussion of the philosophical foundations on which this study is built as well as a review of pertinent literature. The literature discussed in this section falls under the headings of Alternatives in education, Non-formal education, and Beliefs. Chapter three outlines for the reader the methodological considerations relevant to this research and offers a discussion of the data collection and analysis methods used. Additionally, this chapter outlines study management and ethical considerations. Chapter four and five present the results of this research. Chapter four highlights major study findings and chapter five systematically answers the research questions outlined in chapter one. Furthermore, chapter five includes recommendations, prospective areas for future research, and my final reflections on this inquiry.

This chapter has outlined major considerations for this study. In the following chapter I turn to a more in-depth review of literature relevant to this inquiry.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Philosophical foundations

I begin here with an exploration of the notions of truth and reality relevant to this line of inquiry. I feel it important to begin in this manner because in my pursuit of “truth, in the broadest sense, [... I must be] *attuned* with the real” (Wilber, 2000, p. 96). Additionally, it is my hope that a discussion of this nature will afford the reader insight into the philosophical foundations on which my study was built.

Issues of truth(s)

Guba & Lincoln (2005) offer a comprehensive overview of issues of truth as they relate to various research paradigms. In their discussion, they describe a spectrum of understanding truth(s) that places the modernist perspective on one end, the postmodern perspective on the other, and the constructivist perspective oscillating between the two. The authors contend that for “modernist (i.e., Enlightenment, scientific method, conventional, positivist) researchers, most assuredly there is a ‘real’ reality ‘out there’, apart from the flawed human apprehension of it” (p. 203). Researchers in this paradigm argue for objectivity in research and employ inquiry methods that seek to access reality through rigorous application of testing measures that utilize the physical or empirical world. Very often they are foundationalists, which is to say that they “argue that real phenomena necessarily imply certain final, ultimate criteria for testing them as truthful” (p. 203).

Located along the truth spectrum, but not firmly situated at either end, are constructivists, critical theorists, and participatory/cooperative inquirers. Researchers in this paradigm “take their primary field of interest to be precisely [...] subjective and intersubjective social knowledge and the active construction and cocreation [*sic*] of such knowledge by human agents” (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 203). Often these researchers are non-foundationalists or anti-foundationalists, meaning that they contend that there is no ultimate criteria for judging truth(s), but rather only criteria that is “agree[d] upon at a certain time and under certain conditions” (p. 203). Moreover, rather than locating truth(s) ‘out there’, they believe that truth(s) is firmly located within specific social contexts and individual beings, and that any agreement about truth should be bound by moral considerations and should be the result of community negotiations or dialogue (p. 204).

Researchers in the postmodern paradigm view truth(s) as partial, contending that it can never be wholly accepted due to the fluid and dynamic nature of the individuals and social groups that create and constantly re-create/co-create it (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 203-204). Postmodern inquirers argue against an objective reality, placing “emphasis on the social construction of social reality” (p. 204). Postmodernists suggest that no method of inquiry alone can deliver on ultimate truth and therefore argue for employing multiple methods of research and interpretation in order to achieve rigor and reliability in research.

Drawing on constructivism and critical theory, my inquiry was a “form of practical philosophy – a deep questioning about how we shall get on in the world” (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 206). In what follows, I describe research that sought to

make sense of truth(s) which are “derived from community consensus regarding what is ‘real’, what is useful, and what has meaning (especially meaning for action and further steps)” (p. 197). Using notions of truth(s) that arose from participants’ consciousness, the research study delineated herein explored a variety of social, intellectual, and theoretical realms.

Issues of realities

In his treatise, *Objective Knowledge* (1972), critical rationalist, Karl Popper delineates three realms of reality: (1) the physical world; (2) the world of the mind; and (3) the body of human knowledge made manifest through physical objects. He states that knowledge of reality is acquired through objective means and therefore, reality cannot solely be restricted to what humans know. Correspondingly, he contends that any ontology belonging to the third realm of reality exists independent of human consciousness. Popper explains that it is important to distinguish between appearance and reality; while appearances have a sort of reality of their own, theirs is surface reality and should not be confused with a depth reality (p. 37).

In his work, *A Brief History of Everything* (2000), Ken Wilber offers a similar classification to Popper’s definition of reality. He writes that reality can be categorized into: (1) the (inter-)objective realm; (2) the subjective realm; and (3) the inter-subjective realm. The first realm is understood as the site of objective, neutral, value-free surfaces. The second realm is understood as objects of our consciousness and subjective awareness. The third realm is understood as any ontology residing in a collective worldview: one that is bound by time, place, and

culture. Furthermore, Wilber maintains that “reality is composed neither of things nor processes, neither wholes nor parts, but whole/parts, or holons” (p. 18). He describes holons as an “entity that is itself a *whole* and simultaneously a *part* of some other whole” and contends that if one looks “closely at the things and processes that actually exist, it soon becomes obvious that they are not merely wholes, they are also parts of something else” (p. 17).

Christopher Hodgkinson offers a comparable classification of reality in his book, *Administrative Philosophy* (1996). He begins by stating that “reality is not a simple, unambiguous term” (p. 5). Rather, he asserts that it is at the very least a term with a tripartite definition that includes: (1) the deterministic world of hard science; (2) the world of social science; and (3) the world of human experience. The first realm contains ontologies that are quantifiable and measurable. The second realm contains ontologies that are only partially determinable, being that they are dependent on individual beings, environments, and specific contexts. The third realm contains subjective, phenomenological, psychosocial, psychological, and life-world ontologies. This realm of reality is enunciated through propositions of language: “linguistic assertions of a philosophical nature whose function is to induce connotations and provoke changes in the received level of understanding” (p. 6). This realm is interpreted through individuals’ value biases, epistemology, and “wealth of experience, knowledge, and insight” (p. 6).

The research outlined within this thesis drew on aspects from each of the aforementioned authors’ definitions of reality. The practice of co-construction symbolized in Popper’s definition of the third realm (the union of the physical and

intellectual realms) corresponded to my constructivist research approach. Wilber's belief that realities (or holons) are at once a whole unto themselves and part of larger wholes, and his assertion that there are no ultimate wholes, but rather an unending series of whole/parts, informed my use of hermeneutic methodology. And finally, Hodgkinson's belief that the subjective realm of reality is effectively interpreted through individuals' lived experience and personal situatedness was consistent with my use of phenomenological methodology and narrative inquiry methods. This final interpretation of reality served not only to access the descriptive 'reality' of participants' experiences, but also functioned as a way of analytically accessing the essence of their beliefs and understanding.

Alternatives in education

The burgeoning growth of public schools at the dawn of the twentieth-century spurred an era of educational discourse within North America that was replete with contentious debates. Now well into the start of the twenty-first century, influential educational philosophers and theorists continue to voice differing opinions about the aims of education. While certain educational thinkers support a view of education that is steeped in the more traditional realm of institutionalized learning, school-based curriculum, and standardized testing, others have adopted a broader attitude that includes a view of education that expands past the borders of the conventional realm of public schools governed by Ministries of Education (Flinders & Thornton, 2004, p. 1).

In what follows I summarize the work of influential philosophers who argued for alternative ways of delineating what constitutes education. Through this

discussion I hope to afford the reader a greater understanding of the context in which the domain of non-formal education was originally conceptualized.

Critical discourse

As early as the turn of the twentieth-century American philosopher John Dewey argued for a definition of education that went beyond the borders of the traditional school house to reflect the realities of students' everyday lives. In his renowned work, *My Pedagogic Creed* (1897), he surmises that "school must represent present life – life as real and vital to the child as that which he carries on in the home, in the neighborhood, or on the playground" (p. 19). He writes later in *Democracy and Education* (1916) that there is the "standing danger that the material of formal instruction [is] merely the subject matter of the schools, isolated from the subject matter of life-experience" (p. 8).

In order to counter the some times narrowing effect of school-based curricula, Dewey argues for the expansion of the notion of education to include activities that engage the whole pupil. Specifically, he encourages participation in educational pursuits that prompt students "to explore, to manipulate tools and materials, to construct, to give expression to joyous emotion, etc." (p. 195). Furthermore, Dewey (1916) reminds his audience that educational results are often a consequence of play and work in most out-of-school conditions.

Paulo Freire envisioned a model of education that explored methods of teaching and learning that would address the needs of the whole learner. In his discussion of the 'banking model of education' found in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Freire argues for a form of education that engages the learner as an active

participant in his/her education. He criticizes traditional forms of education where the teacher's task is to 'fill' students with narratives of "reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized, and predictable" (p. 52). He calls for a form of education that incites both teacher and student to realize their vocation to be fully human, thus engaging in mutual processes of knowledge discovery and creation.

Unlike traditional forms of education where teachers are seen as expert purveyors of sacred knowledge, in his highly influential work Freire envisions a form of education where teachers are "partners of the students in their relations with them" (1970, p. 56), in order to join them in their quest for humanization. This model of education requires both student and teacher to engage in a dialogic process through which "teacher's thinking is authenticated only by the authenticity of the students' thinking" (p. 58). Reconceptualizing education in this way, Freire describes a highly relational process in which both teacher and student are "jointly responsible for a process in which all grow" (p. 61).

The crisis of schooling

In 1968 Philip H. Coombs radically declared that the world of education was in *crisis*. A graduate of the University of Chicago, Coombs worked as the first Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs with the Kennedy government during the 1960s. During this appointment, he went to Paris where he organized the International Institute for Educational Planning, a UNESCO-created group that advises countries on educational reform (Saxon, 2006). In both of his substantial works on the subject of educational reform, *The World Educational Crisis* (1968) and *The World Crisis in Education* (1985), Coombs states:

Since 1945, all countries have undergone fantastically swift environmental changes, brought about by a number of concurrent world-wide revolutions – in science and technology, in economic and political affairs, in demographic and social structures. Educational systems have also grown and changed more rapidly than ever before. But they have adapted all too slowly to the faster pace of events on the move all around them. The consequent disparity – taking many forms – between educational systems and their environments is the essence of the worldwide crisis in education (1968, p. 4; 1985, p. 5).

In these works, Coombs argues that in order to meet the demands of the changing world, the field of education needs to be reconceptualized and educational systems need to receive “help from every sector of domestic life” (1968, p. 5).

Additionally, he contends that “educators [can] not be expected by themselves to set right everything that [is] out of joint in their educational systems, because the crisis encompass[s] the whole of society and the economy, not education alone” (1985, p. 5).

He concludes his initial report by stating that managers of educational systems have to reconsider the implications of expanding existing or inherited educational systems that remain steeped in the antiquated ideas of the aims of education. Additionally, he highlights the need for “fresh approaches that [will] adapt [...] to the evolving demands of a much larger and more diversified group of learners” (1985, p. 6). As such, he suggests that the field of education be understood

as being comprised of three mutually influencing subdivisions: formal education, non-formal education, and informal learning.¹

Against the backdrop of the late-1960s discourse about the crisis in education, other thinkers of the time were also arguing for a redefinition of education itself. Beginning in the early-1970s the practice of equating education with formal schooling began to diminish as progressive educational philosophers weighed in on the debate.

In a speech given at the *Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE)* in the fall of 1970, Ivan Illich declared that a “good educational system should have three purposes” (p. 106). The first purpose outlined by Illich points to the concept of lifelong learning: he contends that education “should provide all who want to learn with access to available resources at any time in their lives” (p. 106). This statement implies that education should not solely encompass the learning that occurs within formal educational institutions and is further elucidated in his influential treatise, *Deschooling Society* (1971). The second point presented by Illich addresses the need for all learners to teach and learn from one another. The third point argues for making available opportunities for learners to make public critical issues related to their education.

In *Deschooling Society* (1971), Illich offers a harsh critique of the formal school system and its influence on society. He argues that the “ethos, not just the

¹ While in his original treatise Coombs uses the term ‘informal education’ I choose to use the term *learning* here rather than *education* because I understand ‘education’ as planned and structured learning. In light of this, I believe that to term the serendipitous, unsystematic learning that takes place under the definition of ‘informal’, education, would be contradictory.

institutions, of society ought to be 'deschooled'" (p. xix). Defining school as the "age-specific, teacher-related process requiring full-time attendance at an obligatory curriculum" (p. 25-26), he condemns schools for being sites of cultural reproduction that serve to disseminate middle-class ideology. Stating that curriculum is being used to assign social rank, he further maintains that "universal schooling was meant to detach role assignment from personal life history: it was meant to give everybody an equal chance to any office. [...] However, instead of equalizing chances, the school system has monopolized their distribution" (p. 12).

Illich (1971) makes a case for creating a definition of education that includes educational processes that take place outside of formal educational institutions. He contends "most people acquire most of their knowledge outside school, and in school only insofar as school, in a few rich countries, has become their place of confinement during an increasing part of their lives" (p. 12). To upset the monopoly of the formal education system Illich (1970) states that the "general physical environment must be made accessible, and those physical learning resources that have been reduced to teaching instruments must become generally available for self-directed learning" (p. 110-111). It is his contention that a re-classification of educational activities to include out-of-school learning would promote more equitable educational opportunities for all members of society.

I believe that the theoretical re-conceptualizations offered by both Coombs and Illich still hold practical applications for today's society; however, I also contend that some of their specific arguments are no longer valid within the contemporary Canadian educational context. I argue in particular against Illich's harsh critique of

the formal school system, believing that contemporarily, formal education no longer holds the same monopoly on learning as it once did. Significantly, I assert that the technological advances that have taken place throughout the last forty years have permitted educational resources to become more widely available, thus expanding notions of where and how learning happens, and for whom learning is accessible.

Putting NFE on the map

Taking up the ideas put forth by many of the prominent progressive educational philosophers and theorists of the late-1960s/early-1970s, some of the international education-organizing bodies joined in discussions concerning alternative forms of education. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was among organizations to join the debate.

It was *Learning to Be* (1972), a report by the UNESCO International Commission on the Development of Education, chaired by Edgar Fauré, which formally situated NFE in the international discourse on education. This work was inspired by four central assumptions held by the Commission: (1) the world community had common aspirations, problems and trends, despite differences of all kinds between nations and peoples; (2) their belief in democracy, to which education was the keystone; (3) the total fulfillment of each individual is the aim of development; and (4) only lifelong education could shape a complete human being (UNESCO, 1997).

In the report, which highlights the ever-greater interdependence of education and society, it was determined that education “could no longer be considered as a period preceding - and distinct from - active life. Every kind of

experience should be used to acquire further knowledge” (UNESCO, 1997, para. 6). It was therefore concluded that education should not be limited to formal schooling, nor limited to a specific period of one’s life. Thus, the report calls into question the monopoly of institutionalized education and ultimately recommends that school and out-of-school activities be treated without hierarchical distinction.

Some twenty years later, another Commission was formed to examine educational and learning needs, this time for the twenty-first century. The International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century was formally established at the beginning of 1993. This Commission, chaired by Jacques Delors, set out to institute recommendations that would guide learning processes during the upcoming century. To inform this mandate the Commission engaged in wide-ranging processes of consultation, turning to professions and organizations directly and indirectly related to both formal and non-formal education (UNESCO, 1996, p. 250).

One of the results of this Commission was the creation of *Learning: The treasure within* (UNESCO, 1996), a publication that foretells the educational needs of the twenty-first century. In it, the concept of lifelong learning emerges as one of the key concepts to be brought forth into new millennium. The report goes “beyond the traditional distinction between initial and continuing education” and emphasizes the need for individuals to learn how to learn, thus making it possible to navigate the various stages of their lives (p. 22). Perhaps most significantly, this report identifies four pillars of learning; pillars that Delors suggests are the basis of

knowledge creation throughout life. They are: Learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be.

The treasure within report stresses that complete educational experiences draw on each of the four aforementioned pillars equally. Furthermore, the report explains that each pillar supports unique components crucial to the concept of lifelong learning. It describes each pillar as follows: The 'learning to know' pillar centers on promoting educational opportunities that advance individuals' ability to learn how to learn, "so as to benefit from the opportunities education provides throughout life" (UNESCO, 1996, p. 97). The 'learning to do' pillar involves educational activities that promote not only the acquisition of occupational skills, but also the "competence to deal with many situations and work in teams" (p. 97). The 'learning to live together' pillar includes educational opportunities that encourage individuals to develop an "understanding of other people and an appreciation of interdependence" (p. 97). The 'learning to be' pillar is built on the belief that educational programs and activities should support the development of individuals' personality so that they are "able to act with ever greater autonomy, judgement [*sic*] and personal responsibility" (p. 97).

Non-formal education

Prior to undertaking my discussion of the beliefs held by leaders within the domain of non-formal education, I must first endeavor to clarify for the reader the salient characteristics of this educational subsection. By virtue of the term *non-formal education* being an expression of something that 'is not', any discussion of this domain must include a discussion of 'what is'. Therefore, in what follows I begin

by exploring the relationship between formal education, non-formal education, and informal learning. Subsequently, I provide the reader with an overview of the uses of NFE within the minority world context. To conclude, I examine the salient characteristics of non-formal education with the aim of highlighting the working definition that guided my inquiry.

A brief caveat before I begin: NFE is often used as a tool for development in majority world countries; however, the discussion contained herewith focuses on delineating a definition of NFE as it relates to minority world countries. Should the reader be interested in learning more about the uses of NFE in development work (s)he is encouraged to consider, among others, the writings of Aspin, Chapman, Hatton, & Sawano (eds.) (2001); Coombs (1968, 1985); Coombs & Ahmed (1974); Coombs, Prosser, & Ahmed (1973); Graham-Brown (1991); and McGivney & Murray (1991).

Situating NFE

Non-formal education developed out of a response to the policies, practices, and limitations of formal education (Brennan, 1997). Therefore, as I embark on a discussion of NFE, I begin with a definition of formal education.

Formal education is understood as the “hierarchically structured, chronologically graded ‘educational system’, running from primary school through the university and including, in addition to general academic studies, a variety of specialized programmes and institutions for full-time technical and professional training” (Coombs, Prosser, & Ahmed, 1973, p. 11). The educational programming offered under the guise of formal education is most often credentialized, long-term,

institution-based courses organized by a larger governing body such as a Ministry of Education (Livingstone, 1970). Very often the learning that takes place within this sector is “intentional from the learner’s perspective” (Colley, Hodkinson, & Malcolm, 2002, para. 15).

One way of understanding formal education is through organizational theory and group dynamics. If one were to apply the idea of a formal group being “one which does not change as new members join it” to the concept of education (Rogers, 2004, para. 17), then one could deduce that the structure of formal education does not change when new participants join. For example, the content of a grade ten physical science course is not likely to change from one year to the next as a new group of students attend. The curriculum used in formal education is set by educational agencies and “rarely varies very much according to the interests of the class being taught” (para. 18).

At the complete other end of the educational spectrum we find informal learning.² Defined as learning that results from participation in daily activities and contact with family, friends, and associates, informal learning is the serendipitous lifelong process whereby individuals acquire most of their fundamental attitudes, values, and skills (Colley, Hodkinson, & Malcolm, 2002; Coombs & Ahmed, 1974; Coombs, Prosser, & Ahmed, 1973; Livingstone, 1999). Informal learning accounts

² Contemporarily there is some confusion surrounding the use of the term ‘informal’ as it relates to education. Some authors (notably those originating from the US and the UK) use the terms ‘informal education’ and ‘informal learning’ to signify educational activities that fall under the definition of what I would consider to be NFE. It is surmised by some that this definitional and semantic disparity is a result of the UK and US governments’ departure from UNESCO during the years of 1985 to 1997 and 1984 to 2002, respectively (Faris, 2004).

for a significant portion of any person's total lifetime learning, including individuals who are very highly 'schooled' (Coombs & Ahmed, 1974).

While it is possible to provide fairly succinct definitions of formal education and informal learning, arriving at a similarly concise definition of non-formal education has proven to be rather contentious over the years.

The original definition offered by Coombs, Prosser, & Ahmed (1973) describes NFE as being "any organized educational activity outside the established formal system – whether operating separately or as an important feature of some broader activity – that is intended to serve identifiable learning clientele and learning objectives" (p. 11). Since this initial abstraction, other definitions have arisen. Of note is Livingstone's (2001) definition that describes NFE as learning that "occurs when learners opt to acquire further knowledge or skill by studying voluntarily with a teacher who assists their self-determined interests, by using an organized curriculum" (as cited in Colley, Hodkinson, & Malcolm, 2002, para. 18). Another definition to consider is that offered by Schugurensky (2000) who states:

Non-formal education refers to all organized educational programs that take place outside the formal school system, and are usually short-term and voluntary. [...] As in formal education, there are teachers (instructors, facilitators) and a curriculum with various degrees of rigidity or flexibility. Unlike formal education, these programs do not normally demand prerequisites in terms of previous schooling. However, sometimes a diploma certifying competence or attendance is granted (p. 2).

Finally, Heimlich (1993) offers a simpler definition that describes NFE as “any organized, intentional and explicit effort to promote learning to enhance the quality of life through non-school settings” (p. 2).

As with formal education, it can be helpful to think of NFE in terms of organizational theory and group dynamics. NFE can be understood to include educational programs and activities where the content is often dependent on the participants involved in the process. Consider for instance a musical ensemble: the repertoire covered within any given group is highly contingent upon which instrumentalists are present and the level of ability of each individual. If one were to observe the rehearsals of many different musical groups, while fundamental elements may remain the same across ensembles, there would likely also be a large degree of differing characteristics (i.e. instrumentation, repertoire, size, etc.).

There exist important distinctions between the three educational sectors. For example, there is a difference between formal and non-formal education in terms of sponsorship and institutional arrangement, as well as a disparity between their educational objectives and content, and the target groups that they serve (Coombs, 1985). These distinctions, however, should not be understood as the basis for hierarchical classification. While there are those who believe that non-formal education is the ‘ideal’ form of education, there are also those who see NFE as inferior to the formal system (Rogers, 2004).

Still others argue that neither of the aforementioned perspectives is appropriate. Rather, some argue that NFE was conceived to complement the formal system and should be seen as equally applicable and “no longer be considered as

'the poor cousin' of the formal system" (Brennan, 1997, p. 198). It is my belief that neither informal learning, formal education, nor NFE alone can "meet all the important lifetime learning needs of an individual, much less of a whole society" (Coombs, 1985, p. 28). All are essential to learners' holistic development and none can claim primacy of rank, value, or effectiveness.

Uses of NFE

Brennan (1997) states that the uses of NFE arise out of a response to the limitations of the formal system. As such, he describes three sub-types of NFE: (1) as a *complement* to the formal system, targeting school dropouts or adults lacking basic literacy skills; (2) as an *alternative* to the formal system, referring to indigenous or traditional forms of education; (3) as a *supplement* to formal education, responding to national development needs that are associated with an economic take-off.

LaBelle (1982) describes NFE activities as serving two distinct population groups: children and youth, and adults, and divides NFE's pursuits further within each target group. He categorizes activities for children and youth into two types. Type one comprises private, profit-making activities such as before- and after-school clubs, summer camps, artistic instruction, and tutoring services. Type two comprises public and private non-profit activities such as ethno-religious programs, youth groups, and organized sport and recreation activities.

Activities for adults are categorized into three types. Type one includes programs for social and individual development such as artistic instruction, basic skills development, leisure activities, and problem solving (i.e. home and auto

repair). Type two includes programs that address health and safety education/training. This category encompasses activities such as first aid training, family planning workshops, and counseling services. The third type relates to job training and employment skills. Programs within this category include vocational education programs and job-related skills upgrading/training.

Characteristics

Within the dearth of literature related to NFE in the minority world context, activities aspiring to the name 'non-formal' are generally characterized as being learner-centered, focused on the present time, responsive to localized needs, short in duration, and flexible in terms of delivery format (Coombs & Ahmed, 1974; Fordham, 1993; Taylor, 2008; Taylor & Caldarelli, 2004). NFE's opportunities are often activities that "place an emphasis on information sharing, skill building, and fostering personal enjoyment through learning outside the formal setting" (Taylor, 2006, p. 294). Additionally, NFE's activities are often described as 'fun': there is a certain degree of informality in the format of non-formal activities, as opposed to the more explicit and ordered format of formal programs (Taylor & Caldarelli, 2004).

Generally, participation in NFE's activities is voluntary, time for instruction is short in duration, participant composition is varied in terms of the age and ability of learners, and sites of instruction range from outdoor environments to public settings such as museums, home improvement stores, and community centers (Norland, 2005; Taylor, 2006; Taylor, 2008). Due to the brief nature of these activities, there is an emphasis on fostering affective relationships between

facilitators and participants. Research has proven that in order to “provide a successful educational experience, [facilitators] have to develop rapport with the learners within a limited amount of time” (Taylor, 2008, p. 84).

Typically, within the NFE'l context instruction is characterized by a non-hierarchical relationship between the learner and facilitator where preference is given to a hands-on approach to learning that emphasizes a dialogic process (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Norland, 2005; Taylor & Caldarelli, 2004). Very often educational personnel are “hired to teach for their content expertise and may have little systematic teacher training” (Taylor, 2008, p. 81). Furthermore, epistemologically, NFE practitioners believe that knowledge is rooted in an individual's lived experience and comes into awareness through a reciprocal process between the facilitator and the learner (Taylor, 2003; Taylor & Caldarelli, 2004).

Working definition

Drawing on the information presented in the above section concerning non-formal education, I devised the following definition, which then guided my inquiry into NFE within the minority world context:

Non-formal education is any organized educational program or activity with identifiable learning objectives that takes place outside the authority of the formal school system. NFE programs and activities are educational opportunities that are brief in duration, ranging from a few hours to a period of weeks or months. They are comprised of a curriculum contingent upon the participants involved. These educational experiences are learner-centered and

emphasize a hands-on and dialogic approach to learning where a reciprocal learning process is enjoyed by both the facilitator and learner.

Beliefs

Characteristics common to multiple definitions of beliefs suggest that they “mirror the truths constructed by people, guide behavior, act as a lens for assessing present and future actions, and are reflected in what people say and do” (Taylor & Caldarelli, 2004, p. 454). Beliefs are understood to play a significant role in determining how individuals organize knowledge and information. They are “essential to helping individuals adapt, understand, and make sense of themselves and their worlds” (Taylor, 2003, p. 350). Moreover, some scholars believe that all humans hold an innate drive to establish belief systems in order to make meaning of their experiences (Mezirow, 2000).

Leonard (1999) contends that examining an educator’s “beliefs about the purposes of education helps us to better understand the connection between educators’ philosophical beliefs and their practices” (p. 219). In an examination of teaching beliefs held by adult educators, Pratt & Associates (1998) identified three types of beliefs fundamental to perspectives on teaching: (1) procedural beliefs which focus on practical skills; (2) epistemic beliefs which focus on an individual’s view of knowledge; and (3) normative beliefs which focus on an individual’s role, responsibility, and relationship to others. In the context of my study, I focused on the normative beliefs held by leaders working within NFE’l settings. There is a marked absence of literature related to the educational beliefs held by leaders

within the NFE'l domain; however, certain authors have previously examined the teaching beliefs of educators working in this sector.

NFE context

Multiple studies of teaching beliefs of educators within non-formal settings conducted by Taylor and associates (Taylor, 2003, 2006; Taylor & Caldarelli, 2004) have focused on accessing the reasons and underlying assumptions that inform NFE practitioners' behavior. These studies have found that many non-formal educators hold a view of teaching that is learner-centered and emphasizes fostering supportive relationships between educators and their audience. Often, practice is guided by a commitment to providing hands-on learning opportunities that seek to access the knowledge rooted in the lived experience of participants. Additionally, while many educators are hired because of their content expertise, most view themselves as generalists rather than specialists in their field.

Other findings include the fact that non-formal educators hold a nominal level of expectation for learner participation in the activities that they facilitate. This is attributed to the fact that participation in most NFE activities is voluntary and activities are relatively brief in duration. Additionally, non-formal educators feel it paramount to respond to the needs of their often-heterogeneous participant groups. Finally, they see their role not as being purveyors of knowledge, but rather as being facilitators of learning and knowledge creation.

This chapter has highlighted pertinent literature connected to this inquiry. In the next chapter I move into a discussion of the research methodologies.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

The research methodology that I devised and subsequently used for this study, *critical phenomenetics*, arose out of the coupling of critical theory with hermeneutic and phenomenological philosophy. This methodology served the purpose of my research and was consistent with my ontological and epistemological perspectives. Aware of the potential limitations of this methodology, I offer a brief discussion of a predominant methodological critique before presenting a more detailed discussion of each methodology individually.

A common argument against using qualitative methodology is that it precludes the possibility of neutrality. For example, it has been maintained that a “phenomenological perspective questions the possibility of objectivity [in research]” (Greenfield & Ribbins, 1993, p. 9). However, this limitation is also this methodology’s strength, as it permits the qualitative researcher to “enter into and take the viewpoint of the [participant] whose behavior is to be explained” (p. 9). It is my belief that researchers cannot look at reality through a lens unaffected by the human perspective, replete with its values, biases, and prejudices. Therefore, I felt it most effective to develop humility in order to admit to this necessary limitation and subsequently acknowledge a subjective perspective.

Hermeneutics

Kincheloe & McLaren (2005) state that some researchers argue that because the practice of interpretation is central to all (qualitative) research, all research is necessarily hermeneutic. Rooted in the myth of Hermes, the messenger of the Greek

gods who “presides over the tension between the ‘seeing’ of a truth and the task of communicating it” (Davey, 1999, p. 6), hermeneutics is understood as an interpretive process through which individuals’ understanding of a given ‘text’ is shaped by their particular history and socio-cultural identity. In qualitative research, it is common practice for researchers to “speak/write about the world in terms of something else in the world, ‘in relation to...’” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p. 311). In this way, research emerges as a dialectic product of one’s foreknowledge and one’s current situated experience.

The circular hermeneutic process of moving between explanation and understanding, foreknowledge and current knowledge, and the specific and the general allows multiple truths to emerge and subsequently be refined, adopted, or dismissed. Wheatley (2006) asserts “if we hold awareness of the whole as we study the part, and understand the part in its relationship to the whole, profound new insights become available” (p. 143). This specific characteristic of the hermeneutic philosophy informed the emergent design of my research. I did not set out with a question for which there is an easily quantifiable (or answerable) answer. Rather, I purposely left my inquiry broad so that meaning could be co-constructed between my participants and myself.

Phenomenology

Phenomenological methodology guided my inquiry because as Titchen & Hobson (2005) state, “[p]henomenology is the study of lived, human phenomena within the everyday social contexts in which the phenomena occur from the perspective of those who experience them” (p. 121). In collecting data from

practitioners situated in NFE'l contexts, I adhered to the phenomenological principle of gaining insight from the perspective of the individuals entrenched within a phenomenon. The phenomenological perspective “always sees reality as constructed by [individuals] in the process of thinking about it” (Greenfield & Ribbins, 2005, p. 8). As such, by examining lived experiences, I “look[ed] beyond constructions, preconceptions, and assumptions (our natural attitude) to the essences of the experiences being investigated” (Gearing, 2004, p. 1430).

Unlike Husserl who viewed phenomenology as the “rigorous and unbiased study of things *as they appear* [emphasis in original]” (Dowling, 2007, p. 132), I employed a hybrid version of Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology and van Manen’s interpretive phenomenology. This phenomenological approach permitted me to focus on the phenomenon of the essence NFE leaders’ beliefs about the aims and purposes of education. Additionally, this approach allowed me to reveal the extent to which these beliefs were shared among study participants and whether or not these viewpoints mirrored NFE'l philosophy. In shedding light on this phenomenon, I gained significant insight into the particular characteristics of NFE leaders’ educational philosophy and practice.

Critical theory

One of the ultimate purposes of this study was to challenge dominant power structures, hegemonic discourse, and traditional practices within the field of education. Currently, Canadian educational discourse includes a cursory discussion of NFE and informal learning. While the goal of this research was not to challenge or undermine the importance of formal education, I did hope that my inquiry would

lead to moving the topic of NFE from the periphery of contemporary Canadian educational discourse to a more central position. As stated earlier, it is my firm belief that the three sectors that comprise lifelong learning: formal education, non-formal education, and informal learning all serve to complement, supplement, and mutually reinforce one another. I believe that all three forms play a significant role in the conceptualization of the field of education.

The motivation for this research as articulated above, therefore situated my inquiry in the realm of critical theory. Estrella & Forinash (2007) explain that “research of this kind begins from a place of disruption, of questioning the accepted ways of understanding the world” (p. 379). Kincheloe & McLaren (2005) argue that “critical research can be understood best in the context of the empowerment of individuals. Inquiry that aspires to the name ‘critical’ must be connected to an attempt to confront the injustice of a particular society or public sphere within the society” (p. 305). In seeking ways to legitimize the work done by individuals involved in NFE, this study aimed to effectively plant the seeds for educational change and reform with the ultimate goal of questioning contemporary Canadian educational policy and practice.

Study management

Role of the researcher

I am a Master of Arts in Education degree candidate at the University of Victoria. Prior to this, I had been employed in a formal leadership position within a non-formal educational organization located in Montreal, QC. As the researcher, I was responsible for designing and carrying out the study. I handled all aspects

related to the coordination of participants' involvement in the study. Additionally, I was responsible for collecting and analyzing the data, as well as ensuring that the protocols for participant anonymity and confidentiality and the ethical dissemination of results were adhered to.

Participants

Participants for this proposed study included myself (group 3, *the researcher*) and two other distinct participant groups: (1) *colleagues*, a purposefully selected sample of individuals who currently occupy or have previously occupied formal leadership positions within non-formal educational settings; (2) *critical friends*, a group comprised of my immediate family members and close friends.

Participants in group 1 represented a population that has first-hand knowledge of the phenomenon studied. Individuals in this group were contacted for recruitment using the information available on staff lists previously distributed to the researcher. All participants were contacted by email requesting their participation in this study. The number of participants in this group totaled five individuals. There was one representative for each of the NFE types outlined by LaBelle (1982):

Target Group	Type	Description	Participant*
Children & Youth	1	Private, profit-making activities	Meg
Children & Youth	2	Public/private, non-profit	Paulo
Adults	1	Social/individual development	Gloria
Adults	2	Health & safety activities	J.D.
Adults	3	Job-training activities	Maxine

* Names have been changed in order to protect participant anonymity.

Participants represented professionals who have at least 5 years of experience leading NFE'l processes located in Montreal, QC. Participants ranged in age from 27-47 years old and represented a cross-section of genders. A requisite for participation in this study was that individuals could not hold a teaching license. This was a condition of participation in order to isolate a population that had not systematically been exposed to educational philosophy as it relates to the formal school system.

Participants in group 2 were recruited among the researcher's immediate family and close friends. They represented individuals who were expected to have intimate knowledge of the researcher's educational philosophy and beliefs. They ranged in age from 27-62 years old, were situated in various regions around the world, and represented a variety of ethnic and racial backgrounds. This participant group was contacted for recruitment using information previously gathered by the researcher. All participants were contacted by email requesting their participation in this study. The number of participants in this group totaled four individuals.

Study limitations

Limitations for this inquiry included the amount of time allotted for this study. Ideally, I would have been in a position to spend prolonged time in the field in order to develop an "in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study" (Creswell, 2009, p. 192). However, due to institutional requirements, the scope of the study had to be restricted in order to fit into my recommended degree completion schedule.

Study delimitations

Delimitations for this inquiry included the recruitment of study participants, both for group 1 (colleagues) and group 2 (critical friends). By virtue of qualitative research being a highly relational form of inquiry, a researcher in this style should seek to foster positive relationships with her participants in order to elicit truthful and comprehensive results. Owing to the time limitations discussed previously, I chose to recruit participants with whom I already had a relationship. However, being aware of the possible implications that this decision held for potential data bias and/or reliability, I employed multiple research strategies that sought to triangulate the data in an effort to create a coherent justification for themes and findings (Creswell, 2009).

Methods

My inquiry lent itself well to accessing elements of lived experience through storied accounts. Wanting to learn more about the particulars of NFE leaders' beliefs, I chose to use the following methods of inquiry in my research: auto-ethnography, narrative inquiry (participant interviews), and photo-elicitation. These three methods complement one another and served to unearth particulars of individuals' experiences and attitudes.

Auto-ethnography

In keeping with my use of a social-constructivist approach to research, I recognized that my personal background would ultimately shape my interaction with my inquiry. Therefore, I explicitly positioned myself in the "research to acknowledge how [my] interpretation flow[ed] from [my] personal, cultural, and

historical experiences” (Creswell, 2009, p. 8). As a research tool, auto-ethnography had much to offer me, both as an individual concerned with the postmodern interest in “richness, recursiveness, rigor, and relationships [in research]” (Gilstrap, 2007, p. 2), and as a researcher who wished to locate herself in her research (du Preez, 2008).

One of the central tenets of auto-ethnography is that it involves “setting a scene, telling a story, weaving intricate connections among life and art, experience and theory, evocation and explanation ... and then letting go, hoping for readers who will bring the same careful attention to your words in the context of their own lives” (Holman Jones, 2005, p. 765). As a form of self-narrative that situates the self with others in particular contexts, by virtue of being self-reflective and deeply personal, auto-ethnography and auto-ethnographic accounts produce a rich and revealing text in which the author tells stories of her own lived experience.

Procedure

I began my auto-ethnographic process by composing brief narratives over a period of three months that spoke to my beliefs about the goals and aims of education. Subsequently, I invited a group of ‘critical friends’ to compose short biographical narrative accounts that highlighted what individual participants in this group understand my educational philosophy to be. This group of participants was made up of three of my immediate family members and one close friend, and represented a population that could speak with authority on what they understand my educational philosophy to be.

After having composed my auto-ethnographic narratives and collected those from my critical friends, I wove portions of my account together with portions of the written narratives provided to me by individual participants. The data supplied by my group of critical friends acted as an external lens through which I could view my own interpretation of my educational philosophy. This data offset the implicit subjectivity of my auto-ethnographic account and afford me ways of acknowledging areas of bias within my own commentary.

Following the creation of the collective auto-ethnographic document, I then analyzed this joint product and highlighted themes that could be applicable to a community of NFE professionals. The combined narratives and related analysis was then returned to individual critical friends. While participants in the critical friend group were invited to offer me their feedback on the joint product and resulting interpretation, none provided me with any additional analysis or comments.

Rationale

I chose to engage in an auto-ethnographic process in order to become better informed of my own viewpoints before seeking to reveal and understand the beliefs of others. This reflected the phenomenological practice of bracketing individual experience in order to overtly highlight pre-understanding and bias. In creating my auto-ethnography I was forced to critically reflect on my current beliefs and articulate the events in my personal history that have shaped my current being-in-the-world. Alexander (1999) writes that “we all exist between the lines of our narrated lives, the stories we tell and the stories that are told about us” (p. 173). As such, I used the auto-ethnographic process as a way of reading between the lines of

my interpretation of my lived experience and the interpretation offered by others. I believe that the information provided to me by the critical friend participant group served to reinforce and discount my views of 'self'. Combining acts of *Verstehen* or personal understanding (personal narratives) with acts of *Erklären* or external explanation (critical friend accounts) (Greenfield & Ribbins, 1993), I was able to engage in a hermeneutic meaning-making process that served to create a rich product, one that reveals both internal and external reliability.³

I used auto-ethnography as a tool to gain access to my own story, thereby uncovering salient elements of my own personal and professional beliefs as they relate to education. I used this process in order to implicate myself in my study, as a member of the community that I was seeking to examine and understand (Alexander, 1999). The knowledge that I acquired was the result of an understanding based on a participant viewpoint rather than based on an observer viewpoint. Therefore, I argue that the results that I gained from the auto-ethnographic process were more authentic and reliable because they were generated from a *crystalline* process that reflected both external realities and internal understanding (Richardson, 1997, as cited in Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Moreover, using the themes that emerged from my auto-ethnography as an opening point I was able to create pertinent interview questions for individuals in my 'colleague' participant group.

³ For an example of a portion of the combined narrative, see Appendix A.

Narrative inquiry

Narrative inquiry seeks to “study an individual’s experience in the world and, through the study, seek ways of enriching and transforming that experience for themselves and others” (Clandinin, 2006, p. 46). Estrella & Forinash (2007) state that “this form of participatory research helps validate people’s experiences and empowers them to take constructive action” (p. 381). For the researcher interested, as I am, in accessing elements of individuals’ lived experience, narrative inquiry provided me with a framework in which to elicit storied accounts which highlighted the phenomenon under investigation. Moreover, owing to the fact this research method is “concerned with discovery and showing how an experience matters” (Lindsay, 2006, p. 31), this process enabled me to provide participants with the opportunity to give voice to and honour their professional experiences and knowledge.

Procedure

I conducted one to two-hour semi-structured interviews with individuals from a participant group made up of former colleagues and associates from the field of NFE. Participants in this group were comprised of current and former NFE professionals who have at least five years experience leading NFE’l processes. The interviews took place at the following locations: two of the participants’ workplaces, two of the participants’ homes, and a restaurant. The interviews made use of both guiding and emergent interview questions. The pre-determined questions were

designed to elicit participants' reflections on their beliefs about the aims and purposes of education.⁴

Prior to meeting face-to-face with participants I forwarded them each an electronic draft of the interview questions that had been created on the basis of the themes emerging from my auto-ethnographic document. I asked participants to collaborate with me in order to refine the questions so that together we could craft an interview that addressed the issues that were most important to them, in their professional leadership role. Participants were given one week during which to offer amendments to the first draft of interview questions. When no amendments were offered after one week, the final draft of interview questions was circulated electronically. Participants all had at least ten days to review the questions and prepare for their face-to-face interview.

I took notes during each individual interview, which was also audio-recorded. Transcripts were made of individual interviews and then were analyzed using thematic coding techniques (Creswell, 2009). Once preliminary analysis was completed, individual interpreted transcripts were forwarded to their corresponding participant in order to elicit participant feedback on the narrative accuracy and interpretive reliability of their account. Participants were provided with a detailed description of the themes and codes used in the interpretation. Furthermore, participants were informed that if they disagreed with my initial interpretation then every effort would be made to arrive at a joint interpretation that satisfied both the participant concerned and myself. Participants were also

⁴ See Appendix B.

invited to contribute their own analysis to their interview transcript, in order to foster the hermeneutic meaning-making process; however, no participant offered any additional interpretation.

Rationale

I benefitted from the use of narrative inquiry, in that it provided me with a basis from which to begin my critical theory work. Wheatley (2009) states that simple “human conversation is the most ancient and easiest way to cultivate the conditions for change – personal change, community and organizational change, planetary change” (p. 7). By listening to the stories of others, I gained an intimate view of their lives from a “privileged place where meanings [came] together to shape, and be shaped by, our shared experience” (Lindsay, 2006, p. 33).

I had originally anticipated that one ultimate result of the narrative inquiry process would be the creation of a shared metanarrative that addressed the educational beliefs of NFE practitioners. This document was intended to represent a combination of my auto-ethnographical account with participants’ personal narratives. However, after having gone through the research process I became uneasy with the notion of a concrete metanarrative. Therefore, rather than trying to represent individual voices in one definitive homogenous narrative I chose to let each individual perspective stand on its own. Moreover, realizing that my perspective is implicit in any of my work, I have chosen to limit the portion of my auto-ethnographic account used with participant narratives to four narrative passages.

Photo-elicitation

Similar to the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), used widely in the field of psychology (Murray, 1938; McClelland, 1953), photo-elicitation is the interview practice of using a “single [photograph] or sets of photographs assembled by the researcher on the basis of prior analysis and selected with the assumption that the chosen images will have some significance for interviewees” (Prosser & Schwartz, 1998, p. 124). Like the TAT, the format of photo-elicitation interviews involves giving participants photographs and asking them to interpret, discuss, and explore the meaning attached to them. This method is believed to evoke more comprehensive responses than those generated using traditional pen and paper interviews. Some researchers attribute this effect to a physical cause:

The parts of the brain that process visual information are evolutionarily older than the parts that process verbal information. Thus, images evoke deeper elements of human consciousness than do words; exchanges based on words alone utilize less of the brain’s capacity than do exchanges in which the brain is processing images as well as words (Harper, 2002, p. 13).

Process

I used the method of photo-elicitation within my research in order to identify common and/or divergent interpretations of the concepts of education and learning within NFE'l settings. I invited individuals in my colleague participant group to bring an image or photograph to their face-to-face interview. Participants were instructed to choose an image that in some way represented their conceptualization of education or alternatively, an image that contradicted this conceptualization.

Similarly, I also selected an image that represented my notion of education and brought it with me to participant interview sessions (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Researcher's photo-elicitation image



Figure 1. Image taken by the researcher on a visit to an organic farm located in Saanich, BC (July 2009).

The two images (participant's and my own) were introduced into the semi-structured interview once the pre-designed interview questions had been addressed. The photo-elicitation technique was used at the end of the narrative inquiry in order to elicit thoughts, ideas, or beliefs that had potentially gone unexplored using oral/aural methods alone. It is my fundamental belief that this tool served to reveal deeper layers of interpretation and bring out a complexity of elements relevant to the beliefs of leaders working in NFE'l settings.

Participants were invited to first describe their chosen image and explain its relevance to them personally. Following this, I commented on their selection and offered prompts that inspired deeper reflection by the participant. The prompts included:

- Could you tell me a little about the [objects] [people] in the photograph? How do they relate to your definition of education?
- Could you describe more about the setting of the photograph? Is the location important to your understanding of education?
- Are there any aspects in this image that don't fit in with your conceptualization of education? Are there missing elements?

Once the participant's image had been discussed, I then asked them to explore the image that I provided. They were encouraged to comment on my photograph using a similar format to the one used for their selection. The introduction of a second image, one that participants had not previously seen, related to my desire to invite individuals to reflect on a perspective (photograph) that may have been quite different from their own. It was my expectation that this two-part process would elicit a richer and more comprehensive set of responses than working with one image alone.

Rationale

My proposed inquiry strove for a holistic approach to accessing the essence of educational beliefs held by leaders within the NFE domain. As Prosser & Schwartz (1998) point out, "through [the] use of photographs we can discover and demonstrate relationships that may be subtle or easily overlooked. We can communicate the feeling or suggest the emotion imparted by activities, environments, and interactions" (p. 116). Thus, photo-elicitation provided myself as well as my participants with multiple points-of-view that are not normally ascribed to us. Instead of our natural 'inward' view, photographs offered us alternative

perspectives and ways of seeing, accessing, and understanding our 'self' and our beliefs.

Analysis

Although my goal in using hermeneutic methodology was to cultivate a culture of participation within this research project, ultimately this research was not participatory research in its truest sense; many aspects of this research were controlled solely by me, as both a researcher seeking to stretch her wings, and as student seeking academic credentials. Owing to this, the qualitative data analysis process was by and large a result of my own interpretive abilities.

The qualitative data elicited through participants' narrative interviews were transcribed verbatim in order for thematic analysis to subsequently be carried out. Once interview transcripts had been created, I used the thematic coding procedure suggested by Creswell (2009) to begin my preliminary review. I first began by getting a sense of the whole, reading all transcripts in their entirety. My second step was to go through each transcript and to record my initial impressions about the data. My third step involved clustering my impressions together under topics (codes).⁵ Subsequently, I assessed the preliminary codes that I had identified, looking for points of affinity and dissonance. My final step was to identify a way to group my codes together into themes that related to each other. While sitting with the data one afternoon and struggling with this last step, I experienced a very emotive moment of recognition when all the codes seemingly grouped themselves together, pointing to a possible thematic framework.

⁵ For a complete list of thematic codes, see Appendix C.

It was the four 'pillars of learning' found within *Learning: The treasure within* (UNESCO, 1996) that ultimately became the framework used to report on the study findings. I had previously gained awareness of this publication through a course that I had taken during the winter of 2009. The continued analysis of my inquiry findings was greatly eased using the four 'pillars of learning' outlined in the UNESCO (1996) report. The four major themes: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be, provided me with a structure in which to group participants' narrative accounts. The four pillars were used to cluster the codes that I had devised through my analysis of participants' interviews. Furthermore, I drew on the ideas presented within the discussion of the four 'pillars of learning' in order to substantiate my choice of thematic codes, thereby further bolstering the reliability of the study.

Data representation

After careful thematic analysis, data are presented to audiences in the form of a Master's thesis that adheres to the institutional guidelines set forth by the University of Victoria. In addition to this, I also anticipate the following dissemination methods:

- The creation of a web site that provides leaders working in NFE'l settings with a central location to access resources related to their profession and to network with one another.
- Presentation of inquiry findings and recommendations to all study participants in the form of an electronic PDF document.

Ethical issues

A qualitative study of this nature contains certain inherent ethical considerations. Both narrative inquiry and auto-ethnography are profoundly relational forms of inquiry. As such, research of this nature situates the researcher and her participants in the midst of living and telling stories which themselves are situated in the “midst of larger cultural, social, and institutional narratives” (Clandinin, 2007, p. xvi). The implications of this make it necessary for the researcher to be aware of and attend to ethical matters that are always an ongoing and present part of these research methods.

While there were no significant ethical issues related to the proposed study, certain basic considerations were taken into account: Individuals who were approached for recruitment to participant group 1 and 2 had a previous affiliation with the researcher. In light of this, every effort was made during the recruitment process to minimize the *power-over* dynamic. Recruitment was done via email rather than in-person or on the telephone, in order to allow potential participants time for reflection when deciding whether or not to partake in the study. Additionally, potential participants were assured that their existing relationship with the researcher holds no bearing on their decision to participate in the proposed study.

This study posed minimal risk to the participants and researcher. However, in accordance to ethical guidelines, individuals who chose to participate in the study were asked to sign a form signifying their complete and informed consent prior to engaging with the research. They were also informed that their participation was

completely voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw from the research at any point. Furthermore, participants were informed that should they choose to depart from the study, the data provided by them up until the point that they withdrew would only be used if they chose to give their free and informed consent for its use.

This chapter provided the reader with a description of the methodological context of this study. In the next chapter I present the findings that arose from this inquiry.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This study sought to discover to what extent leaders working in non-formal educational settings subscribe to a shared set of educational beliefs. The following is a collection of passages taken from the narratives that arose during participants' semi-structured interviews. An analytical explanation of participant quotations has been purposefully omitted throughout the following discussion due to the fact that I do not want to present my interpretation as objective, "which it is not, and definitive, which is impossible" (Wheatley, 2006, p. 67). Moreover, this omission is just one way in which I choose to honour the participants' honest and candid reflections about their educational beliefs.

Within the highly participative nature of the society in which we live, "we need to include more and more eyes" if we are going to attempt to "make wise sense of the world" (Wheatley, 2006, p. 66). In light of this, readers are encouraged to form their own interpretation of the subsequent narrative passages. I believe that it is only "when more and more of us are included in the process of observing what is going on, and contributing our unique interpretations to the [dialogue]" that we fully realize and benefit from the potential of having access to multiple perspectives (p. 67). Therefore, it is my hope that readers will engage in an interpretive process for themselves that helps them to identify both points of affinity and dissonance within and among participants' experiences.

Four pillars of learning

Arising out of the lineage of education commissions that produced such reports as, *The World Crisis in Education* (Coombs, 1968) and *Learning to Be* (Fauré, 1972), the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century was formally established at the beginning of 1993. The primary mandate of this Commission, chaired by Jacques Delors, was to identify what future educational needs would be and how educational policies and practices would figure in. The Commission approached its task by focusing on the aims (both individual and societal) of the learning process while keeping in mind “the extreme diversity of educational situations, conceptions and structures” around the globe (UNESCO, 1996, p. 249). Six lines of inquiry were chosen and explored: education and culture; education and citizenship; education and social cohesion; education, work and employment; education and development; and education, research and science. To inform its mandate the Commission engaged in wide-ranging processes of consultation, turning to professions and organizations directly and indirectly related to both formal and non-formal education (p. 250).

One of the results of this Commission was the creation of *Learning: The treasure within* (UNESCO, 1996), a publication that foretells the educational and learning needs of the twenty-first century. In it, the concept of lifelong learning continues to be one of the key concepts to be brought forth into the twenty-first century. The report goes “beyond the traditional distinction between initial and continuing education” and emphasizes the need for individuals to learn how to learn, thus making it possible for them to navigate the various stages of their lives

(p. 22). Perhaps most significantly, this report identifies four pillars of learning; pillars that Delors suggests are the basis of education throughout life. They are: Learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be.

In the interest of clarity, throughout the following discussion I will be referring to the four aforementioned pillars as 'pillars of learning'. I choose to do this because although within the literature the four pillars are referred to interchangeably as pillars of 'knowledge', 'education', as well as 'learning', I believe that each pillar is most aptly implicated in the concept of lifelong learning. Moreover, while the four pillars are explored separately, both within the report and in what follows, it is important to note that there exist many points of intersection, exchange, and overlap between them. I assert that each of these four paths of learning form both a whole and a part (or holon) of lifelong learning (Wilber, 2000). As such, it is not without an admitted degree of discomfort that I subsequently categorize each pillar linearly.

Learning to know

The report identifies 'learning to know' as one of the crucial aims of education in the twenty-first century as it is the "passport to lifelong education, in so far as it gives people a taste – but also lays the foundations – for learning throughout life" (UNESCO, 1996, p. 23). This pillar is understood to include educational opportunities that promote mastery of the instruments of knowledge and has at its basis the "pleasure of understanding, knowing, and discovering" (p. 86-87).

Lifelong learning

Each of the study's five participants identified the concept of 'learning to know' as being central to their educational beliefs. However, this idea was expressed in different ways and to varying degrees among individual participants. During her interview Maxine, who exhibited the strongest discourse of 'learning to know', explained that her educational beliefs are heavily concerned with offering learners the opportunity to experience different types of learning activities in the hopes that they will develop a taste for learning that stays with them throughout the course of their lives:

I guess it's about exposure. It's about offering [learners] opportunities to try things. And that's what non-formal educational activities are. What's nice about being exposed to different things, you might not enjoy it right there and then, but maybe at some point in your life you can sort of relate back to it and say, "When I was 13 years old I tried that. Now I'm 30, maybe I'll pick it up again." Because you have knowledge, you have exposure. You have a little bit of understanding.

Paulo emphasized the need to help individuals learn how to learn with the aim of having them engage in lifelong learning:

I think it's important that you don't tell [learners] how to learn. You make them aware of the way that they learn best. [...] You give them the tools of what they can do and they do what they want and learn how they want to learn. [...] You give them the tools to get to that point. And I think it's when

students see that they've progressed, they've learnt, that's really when they feel special.

Differentiated learning

'Learning to know' also relates to activities that promote or include the use of differentiated learning techniques and tools. At one point in her interview, Maxine addressed this aspect of the 'learning to know' pillar:

It's about opportunities. Having the opportunity to experience something that would be out of your reach if it weren't for your schooling experience. So if we give children opportunities to experience different types of things, then the possibilities of them finding something that they really enjoy and like and may be able to take further are greater. And the more you expose them [to different opportunities], the greater the possibilities there are for them to continue in schooling and wanting to learn. [...] So it's exposure to different subjects; exposure to different ways of presenting those subjects; exposure to different ways of approaching different subjects.

Relating it to his experiences of working with athletes Paulo highlighted the importance of offering learners opportunities to engage with the material in different ways. Promoting hands-on learning, he said, "It's one thing to be telling somebody how to do something or a specific technique. But they won't learn it, how to do it properly until they actually do it and they practice it."

Meg also alluded to the importance of differentiated learning techniques when she referred to using different feedback methods with learners:

It might be more sort of suggestive, in the sense that, "Perhaps you could do this or try this." And then the learner's maybe left not feeling incompetent. Hopefully if it's done well, they're motivated to continue to learn and to try; to keep trying; to not be discouraged.

Sparking an interest

The 'learning to know' pillar also relates to educational activities that encourage individuals to widen their field of knowledge, enable them to understand the various aspects of their environment, and arouse intellectual curiosity (UNESCO, 1996, p. 87). Paulo clearly identified this aspect as being a central component of his educational beliefs and practice:

I want [learners] to learn but I want them to *understand*, more importantly. [...] Something I always tell [learners] is if they can understand how the muscle works, then they can figure out an exercise or figure out a stretch. [...] I like for them to understand what they're doing. Why they're doing it. How their body works.

Thinking

Another component crucial to the 'learning to know' pillar is that of individuals developing concentration, memory skills, and their ability to think, both in terms of practical problem-solving and abstract thought (UNESCO, 1996, p. 88). I highlighted this idea in my auto-ethnography. In it, I state that: "I try to inspire critical thinking. I strive to provide learners with the skills and tools necessary to make informed decisions about which paths to take on their lifelong learning journey."

Similarly, Meg stressed the importance of developing critical thinking skills. She said: "We do have to learn how to think for ourselves. And kids come across this each and every single day and I think it's a really important skill. [...] I really believe that we have to think critically. It's not always about taking things at face value." At another point in her interview Meg returned to the idea of fostering critical thinking ability in learners so that they can be autonomous and responsible individuals:

Again you need to hopefully have the right people around to sort of guide kids. And to give them the right sort of questions to think about what it is they're doing. So they *can* make those kinds of decisions for themselves, because there's not always somebody around to answer something for them all the time.

On a number of occasions during his interview, Paulo also highlighted the importance of creating opportunities for learners to engage in personal problem solving:

Paulo: Part of the learning process is at times letting [athletes] figure out what's going wrong. I think my way of coaching, at the beginning, it was very much figuring out what's wrong technically and pointing it out. "This is what's going wrong. How can we fix it? Do you think we can fix it?" So on and so forth. But after a little while, I think it's essential that it's the athlete that acknowledges what they're doing wrong.

Me: Ok, so it's coming from them.

Paulo: Oh, for sure. And in terms of in hammer-throw and shot-put there are times where if you pass the line or you step outside of the throwing area, it's a fault. Or if you throw it out to the left or to the right, out of bounds, it's a fault and it doesn't count in terms of your distance. So I think it was very key that when that kind of stuff would happen I would just ask [the athlete]: "What went wrong?" And they would tell me. And I'd say 99% of the time it was right.

Learning to do

The shift away from physical labour and the development of service industries in many advanced economies in the twenty-first century has meant a corresponding shift in the definition of 'learning to do'. Described in *The treasure within* report as how one puts what they've learnt into action, the 'learning to do' pillar is concerned with personal competence and effectiveness.

Engagement and meaning

This pillar includes the reasons why and/or methods how individuals choose to put what they've learnt into action. I, along with my participants believe that individuals are more likely to act on something if the material is meaningful to them and if they are able to engage with it in meaningful ways. Both engagement and meaning can manifest in different forms. Gloria offered one explanation:

[Project development] has to be ground-up. It has to be grass roots.

Otherwise I think that it's liable to just become less pertinent. [...] Pertinence is super important. You have to feel engaged. You have to feel connected. And

if you have a say in what it is that you want, then obviously already that's going to be something. You feel you have a stake. You're a stakeholder in it.

Paulo explained that he believes that hands-on experience and opportunities to teach add to the appreciation of subject matter and engagement in activities:

It's great when [learners] can show me an exercise and display it and guide me through it, like I've never weight trained before. And I think that helps them appreciate it. Appreciate the subject matter and appreciate the fact that they have power; that they can teach a teacher. [...] Teaching their educator is something completely different. It's not a test. It's them informing me.

Showing me that they've retained the knowledge from last week and actually going further and really getting into it.

Interpersonal skills

Increasingly, employers are demanding not only job-specific skills from their employees, but highly subjective qualities, as well. More and more, individuals are being asked to demonstrate proficiency in the areas of communication and interpersonal skills. J.D., whose enthusiasm for the 'learning to do' pillar was clearly evident, explained that he believes that one of the central roles of education should be to create opportunities where individuals are able to gain exposure to different cultures:

Education for me falls upon cultural diversity. Getting knowledge throughout different cultures. Generating cultural savvy-ness, so to speak. Learning from one another. Putting it together to help create changes that take place or are needed within the world. And that's how I think we're going to be able to relate

better. How we're going to be able to create better change. How we're going to be able to grow. Because it takes our mentality out of a box. [...] Work-wise and now with the advent of globalization and everything taking place, we've got to be more culturally savvy through education and everything else, to make change.

Both Paulo and Maxine also felt that developing interpersonal competencies were an important aspect of education. Paulo explained that he believes that "you have to know how to deal with people. You have to know how to deal with different types of people. You have to be able to react to other people's reactions." Similarly, Maxine offered the following example:

When you are able to take different extra-curricular activities for 3 months and then 3 months later you've got to choose again and the group of [learners] you're with changes, then you learn relations. And you learn about how to interact with others. And you learn about how to cooperate in different types of circles. Which is so important in today's way of being. It's all about team building and learning in teams and stuff like that.

Personal initiative and leadership

The treasure within (UNESCO, 1999) publication offers the following suggestion for individuals seeking to be well-prepared to take action in the twenty-first century: "It basically comes down to knowing how to develop personal initiative" (para. 13). At one point during his interview, J.D. clearly stated his belief in the significance of developing personal initiative:

The two concepts that I run with are leadership and developing self-leadership. Whereas, I guess I would define the two differences as: leadership requires you to have followers and a situation. Sort of a triad like that.

Whereas, in self-leadership it's not necessarily to lead a group of others, but rather for you to be able to self-manage yourself before getting into leading.

[... And] there needs to be more formal education towards teaching others how to self-manage.

In talking about his experiences coaching university-level athletes, Paulo had this to say about personal initiative:

[The athletes] trust you, you trust them, and you trust them to make the right decisions in terms of how they can become better as an athlete. And it's a long learning curve. But towards the ends, it was very much up to them to do well, rather than up to me to make them do well. [...] Again they didn't compete at the highest level and compete hard because they expected or they knew I was expecting that. They did it because they wanted to do it.

Meg explored the notion of personal initiative when, during her interview, she explored one of the images (Figure 1) used for photo-elicitation:

Butterfly could be learner. Yeah, the curiosity. Butterfly could be learner. Sort of, "Let me go over here and see what's over here. Let me check out this. Let me check out that." Sort of directing its own path. Following its own lead almost. Curious.

Teamwork

The treasure within report stresses the importance of developing the areas of personal initiative and leadership, as well as decision-making, innovation, and team skills (UNESCO, 1996, p. 90). It identifies the fact that it is not enough to merely acquire occupational skills; one must also acquire “the competence to deal with many situations and work in teams” (p. 97). The notion of teamwork came up in all of the participants’ interviews and was articulated in different ways. For example, both Meg and Gloria offered different insights into what aspects they believe to be central to the notion teamwork. Meg classified teamwork in terms of the following: “Problem-solving means two people sitting down and looking at what the issues are and brainstorming for possible solutions.” Gloria explained that “teamwork is depending on each other, [and] not always thinking that your opinion is the right opinion.”

Within my auto-ethnography I also pointed to the important role that education plays in supporting individuals’ ability to develop teamwork skills. Reflecting on my own educational experiences, I wrote: “... I also learned how to be part of a team. I developed an awareness both of myself as an individual and as part of a greater whole. I learned how to focus on my actions and myself while always remaining keenly aware of what else was going on around me.” For his part, Paulo discussed the importance of learning teamwork skills from an early age. He said: “At a young age if problem-solving, social relationships, and team-building are instilled in you, they’re skills that you can use for the rest of your life.”

Learning to live together

The increase in violence within the contemporary world has produced the need for educational process to gain renewed focus in the 'learning to live together' pillar. At its base is the requirement for individuals to develop an understanding of other peoples and their history, as well as their traditions and spiritual values. Moreover, this pillar places emphasis on partaking in shared experiences that highlight the interdependence of all individuals. It is believed that such experiences will induce individuals to implement common projects and/or manage inevitable conflicts in intelligent and peaceful ways (UNESCO, 1996, p. 22).

Community

The report urges individuals to "work together on rewarding projects which take them out of their usual routine" and "highlight what people have in common rather than the differences between them" (UNESCO, 1996, p. 93). Gloria exhibited an unmistakable commitment to the 'learning to live together' pillar, both in terms of her educational beliefs and her practice. Her narrative held many references to the need for educational processes to incite learners to engage in common projects:

Me: You said at one point and you seemed to emphasize that you *need* to do community work.

Gloria: Yeah.

Me: Can you expand on that a little bit?

Gloria: [... It's] the most astounding thing: the fact that you can do [community work] with just a group of people from all kinds of different backgrounds with common interests or common issues that are affecting

their lives. I think it was just really important to me. And working in a communal way I think is important to me too.

Gloria expanded on how her experiences working with artistic media enable her to engage learners in thinking about their community and/or in participating in community projects:

I teach a lot of video and artistic practices. So when you teach those kinds of things often times the easiest and the most accessible thing to reach when you're trying to be creative is your own personal thoughts and feelings related to who you are, your family, your community, and all that stuff. [...] I think in the kind of participatory media way [learners are] trying to find a way to represent their community. Or issues that are involved [or] that are plaguing their community or helping their community or just issues in general that are related to that. So I think that's always a good place to start. And sometimes it's a good place to stay. I think I still stay there with my art right now. It's very introspective. It's about my family, myself, my community. And I think that if you can keep the content close then I think there's going to be more of a personal connection. In which case, you just feel more connected to it.

Dialogue and responsiveness

I believe that one aspect of the 'learning to live together' pillar is the creation of learning opportunities that respond to the needs of learners. In my opinion, many educational processes continue to systematically stifle learners' curiosity and growth. Educators and educational systems need to possess the ability to adapt and

adjust to meet the needs of a heterogeneous society. Encountering others through dialogue and being receptive to new ideas serves to both foster equitable learning opportunities as well as create conditions for learning that alter individuals' identity and understanding.

Maxine described that when facilitating learning processes she relies on learning from the learners with whom she works:

I think that when you're a facilitator it's so important for you to be able to assess your group and learn from your group. The first thing that you should be doing is learning where it is that they're at. [...] Because you're there to enrich that particular group and the only way that you can do that is by understanding your group. And I think that learning goes back and forth on a minute-to-minute basis. When you're teaching and you're walking around, you're learning from your students continuously because you are molding, you are correcting, you are looking at what it is that they're doing and seeing if this is feasible or not.

Reflecting on my personal educational philosophy, I highlighted that when facilitating learning processes I believe that: "It all depends on what the individual learners want/need. [...] I provide [learners] with the opportunity to move from one location to the next, but I won't force anyone to go in a direction of my choosing." Similarly, on numerous occasions during his interview J.D. described how he enacts responsive practice within his professional work in order to create equitable learning opportunities. He maintained, "being self-employed, a lot of the programs I create are based on people's needs. [...] It just leaves so much room for continuous

growth. I don't feel ever limited in what I can do. I just have to listen to what people need. And create." When asked why he has adopted this approach to his practice, he explained that:

My whole philosophy of education is to make sure that it's relational to the learner. I think that is probably the key for many aspects of teaching in a non-formal way or structure: to make sure that the programs or the services or the clients' needs are individualized.

Meg described a corresponding approach to her practice. In her work with elementary school-aged youth, she detailed her habit of being adaptable through a process of self-evaluation and responding to feedback:

You have to adapt. You have to change your plans. You have to evaluate. You have to be looking at it. You have to be reflective. You have to figure out what are the needs of the learners. And sometimes it's through feedback from the learners themselves. You have to say, "Oh yeah, ok, that's a good idea."

Similarly, Gloria also spoke of feedback informing and altering her practice:

I need so much feedback. As a teacher I need to know what their expectations are. I need to know what *they* want to learn. [...] I'll say, "What are your expectations? What do you think is going to come out of here?" And "What do you think is meant by this silly thing that they make me write on the outline?" And then we kind of have a dialogue about it. And that's the most important thing.

She also went on to describe how she understands the term 'participation' and how she engages in participatory practice:

What I mean by participation is just getting *everyone* involved in the learning process and in the voicing of their opinions and their expectations. And in that process I feel that we could really learn more about what those goals could be. Because often times I think that when it comes from an administrative standpoint or something like that, they're so not in touch with the field or what's going that it sometimes it gets lost.

Equity

Another fundamental component of the 'learning to live together' pillar is the availability of accessible learning opportunities. This notion is vital if a society wishes to offer equitable learning opportunities that foster individual success and development. Within her interview Maxine explored existing barriers to education, citing finances as a primary cause for inequitable access to learning opportunities:

[There needs to be] many more opportunities for kids and especially for kids that don't come from privileged homes. Because they're the ones that have the least exposure because they're the ones whose parents don't have the money to send them anywhere else. So why can't we give to them through schooling? If schooling is empowering and if schooling is free and if schooling is for everybody and everybody has the right to go to school and to an education, why does that education have to end in the classroom? Why can't that education be extended outside of the classroom? Because for many of those kids – if you knew our clientele – the learning only *starts* outside of the classroom. And if somehow we can take that learning outside of the classroom and enrich it, so that when they go into the classroom it's easier,

then we would most likely be successful in retaining those kids. And I really believe that.

Gloria shared a personal learning about accessibility barriers that came from her experience of working overseas and then returning to Canada. Faced with the reality of social inequalities upon her return, she questioned what could be done in order to address the disparities within society:

When I came back from Africa I was kind of confused. I wondered: why can't there just be something for marginalized groups in a community that I can get involved in? [...] I think that there's a lot that could change. I think accessibility, research. I think we need to research what the needs of certain communities are. And if we're looking at marginalized communities then: what are the needs of those particular populations? And then we need to integrate into their setting. I think would be probably the best thing.

Relationships

Perhaps at the very core of the 'learning to live together' pillar are relationships. Not only is this area of learning concerned with demonstrating the "diversity of the human race and [...] the similarities between, and the interdependence of, all humans" (UNESCO, 1996, p. 92), but it is also the path of learning that promotes fostering connections between individuals. All of the study's participants described fostering healthy and positive relationships as fundamental to their educational beliefs. When exploring one of the images (Figure 1) used for photo-elicitation J.D. made this connection to his educational beliefs:

A couple of things come to mind. Let's start off with the vine or the plant. Here is something that comes directly out of nature. That has so much, not only purpose for us, as humans, but also for other creatures on this planet. Usually vines, trees, and everything plants are usually associated with growth. Within this growth, having this butterfly on it too, as it seeks nourishment [...] How do I say this? They *need* each other.

On more than one occasion during her interview Meg articulated the role that relationships play in her educational beliefs and practice. For her, healthy relationships can be modeled and taught in different ways:

Nobody's perfect and sometimes you're showing your vulnerabilities and you're modeling to this other person that you may not always have the right answers, but it's ok. And we're going to work on this together and we're going to try and figure it out. Because we're just human. We're not perfect. And I think there's something to be learned from that.

Again at another point, she returned to the importance of relationships saying:

I think that it's really only through relationship that we can really grow and develop. [...] I know that in my work with the kids, I work really, really hard to try and develop a relationship. To try and establish trust so that when there is an issue they can come to me and we can talk about what the issue is and perhaps try and find some solutions.

Paulo's experience both as a former athlete and now a coach has deeply informed his commitment to relationship development:

It's essential to have a great one-on-one relationship with your athlete. So I know for myself I like to be as involved as possible in my athlete's life. If something is going wrong outside of the sport, with school [...] I would always touch on it before or after practice and make sure I didn't forget in terms of touching on that the next practice. That showed you cared.

For Gloria, relationships and relationship building is fundamental to the learning process:

Relationship building is a super important part. I think there's nothing worse than being in a position where you can't feel that you can mentor. Or be close to the person that you're working with. [...] If we can't meet on common ground and [...] if we can't form some sort of relationship and there's no connection, then there's not going to be any connection between them and what I'm teaching them. I don't see how that could work otherwise.

Learning to be

At its very first meeting, the Commission restated its belief that education must contribute to the all-round development of each individual (UNESCO, 1996, p. 94). The report stresses the principle previously set out in the report, *Learning to Be* (UNESCO, 1972): "The aim of development is the complete fulfillment of [all individuals], in all the richness of [their] personality, the complexity of [their] forms of expression and [their] various commitments" (p. vi). In short, the 'learning to be' pillar asserts that one of the fundamental aims of education is to enable individuals to realize what Freire termed, their vocation to be fully human (1970).

Confidence

Due to significant changes in society and the rapid rate at which they occur, one of the primary tasks of educational processes in the twenty-first century is to provide individuals with the “powers and intellectual reference points they need for understanding the world around them and behaving responsibly and fairly” (UNESCO, 1996, p. 94). Correspondingly, one of the essential roles of education is to enable learners to develop their talents, creativity, imagination, and confidence so that they might “remain as much as possible in control of their lives” (p. 94). Gloria supported this educational aim by stating:

You don't have to worry about colouring outside the lines a little bit. I think I'd like to see a little bit more of that in the world in general. I think we worry tremendously about not colouring outside of the lines. [...] I would love for our society to foster environments where people can just feel comfortable expressing whatever they want.

Part of the process of enabling learners to develop their multiple talents is to provide them with different opportunities and means by which to express their abilities. Meg touched on this idea in her interview:

We are competent in many aspects of our lives. It's not always in a formal setting. We're not always the best mathematicians. I certainly was not. Some of us are not so good with our French grammar skills, but we have other areas that we're good at. And it helps to develop a sense of competency and a sense of self-esteem.

Maxine also underscored the importance of differentiated methods of accessing talent and confidence:

It's nice when you go to high school and you get to do a sport such as basketball. But if you had a little bit of exposure through non-formal activities some time earlier in your life, you feel more confident. And you're a better player. And you're a better student because you feel better about yourself. It's about enriching one's confidence.

Paulo, who exhibited the strongest 'learning to be' discourse, explained that he believes that sometimes the development of self-esteem and ability is fostered through direct engagement with and challenging of the learner:

I believe in them and I don't believe in [learners] giving 50% when they can give 100%. How are they going to get better? And that's respect. When you demand more than they're willing to give. And you demand more, they give more, and they get more from you. And they get more from themselves. And they feel better about themselves.

Empowerment

The report identifies fully realizing individual potential as one of the main goals and/or outcomes of lifelong learning. Often individuals' quest to fully realize their potential is supported and enhanced by the people that they come into contact with throughout the course of their lives. As such, one educator role can be: being someone who creates space and opportunities for learning; someone who effectively lets learn (Dall'Alba & Barnacle, 2007).

Paulo, Meg, Maxine, and Gloria all identified empowerment of learners as being one of educators' main roles. Paulo articulated this idea when discussing the role of educators as learning facilitators. He believes, "that's kind of what we try to do as educators: to *let* [learners] find or *help* [learners] find their way. Help them to find their goal. Help them to achieve those goals." Similarly, Meg identified the importance of facilitating the learning process:

I love to see how kids resolve their own issues some times. And I love helping them when they come to me when there's a particular issue with a friend, so that I can help them as opposed to punish them. I think sometimes schools are way to punitive with this kind of thing. I really see my role as just trying to help them problem-solve and to guide them and to help them find solutions that work for them.

While reflecting on one of the images (Figure 1) used for photo-elicitation, Maxine made this connection between learner empowerment and her educational beliefs: "My focus is on this butterfly. It's about letting someone fly. And letting someone fly through giving them ways; allowing someone to fly through different ways."

Gloria spoke of forming relationships with learners that enable them to develop and realize their full potential:

I'm looking to create an environment where people can feel that there's no limit to what they can do or what they can say or what they can create or whatever it is. [...] I always want people that I come into contact with to feel that they have everything that it takes, just by being themselves to be able to

take on whatever I throw at them. As challenging as it might be. And that they will feel empowered enough through the process of us being together in our relationship.

Within my auto-ethnography I discussed the idea of learner empowerment in writing:

“I like to think that I make the learner feel safe and supported. I am honest about not having any absolute answers, but I try to create a space wherein individuals are free to take risks and succeed, as well as fail. [...] If learners fail and then learn from a challenge and modify their behavior/thinking and are successful at a future attempt, then I’m very pleased. I believe that this is the essence of meaningful learning.”

When discussing his coaching practice, Paulo explained that sometimes empowerment comes from an explicit place of encouragement:

In Track & Field something that’s so important is called a ‘PB’. [...] PB is a personal best. I think especially with individual sports, it’s not: What is the score at the end of the game? Who won? What’s your win and loss record? It’s: Did you improve from the last competition that you had? And a personal best is something that I would always encourage my athletes to go after.

Somewhat conversely, Paulo also suggested that empowerment can, at times, come from a place of seemingly explicit challenge:

Paulo: I demand more out of [learners]. I make them fail before they can succeed. That’s my goal. I don’t make them fail so they fail. I make them fail so they can learn, so they can achieve. And when they learn, when they

achieve, it makes them better. But they have to be ready right off the bat to fail.

Me: And I imagine there has to be a supportive and safe environment in which to fail.

Paulo: Of course, of course, of course. Always. Failures with boundaries.

Me: With safety nets.

Paulo: Yeah, safety nets.

Both Maxine and Gloria explained that empowerment does not always result from two or more individuals coming into contact with one another. At times, it comes from one individual having a certain experience. Maxine recognized that sometimes empowerment comes from gaining particular knowledge. She offered this example: "Non-formal educational activities are something that you can sort of carry with you for the rest of your life. And also I think it's empowering because it gives you a little bit of knowledge." Likewise, Gloria spoke of the role that artistic media plays in the empowerment of individuals when she explained that "art can be empowering and it can be something that can change. And can change people. But also just kind of initiate change in a community or in a person."

Ontological development

The treasure within report asserts "education is above all an inner journey whose stages correspond to those of the continuous maturing of the personality" (UNESCO, 1996, p. 95). Within the 'learning to be' pillar there is a focus on the realm of the personal and concern for the development of both mind and body. In short, attention is given to ontological development.

Gloria, J.D., and Paulo each stressed the need for educational opportunities to provide a space for personal development. Gloria revealed that in her practice she supports learning that revolves around the personal:

One of the goals might be to teach someone how to make a video. And in the process they're doing self-portraiture and they start to do something that's a little bit more introspective. And they realize things about themselves that they didn't before. And then it becomes a personal education, as well.

J.D. spoke out against the push within capitalist economies to educate individuals for the sole purpose of economic prosperity. He condemned educational programs that focus on "form[ing] the individual to become what they need to be economically." Instead he pointed to his preference of creating programs that take into account multiple aspects of learners' backgrounds. He mentioned that he tries to make programs individualized, "to suit with not only [learners'] lifestyles, but also their cultural backgrounds, environmental, home ... to suit in terms of their own personal goals."

On several occasions, Paulo stated his belief that education should be a process of personal development. He asserted that during educational processes learners "are growing educationally, technically, and spiritually, holistically." He "believe[s] that it's not about making them better students, it's about making them better people." He also expressed his understanding of *how* learners develop ontologically. He clearly stated his belief that "it's not through assignments. It's not through skill evaluations. It is through soul-searching. It is through creating a bond

between you and the [learner] where they can feel comfortable to improve as a human being.”

Reflective

One significant ‘learning to be’ principle is the notion that “individual development, which begins at birth and continues throughout life, is a dialectical process which starts with knowing oneself and then opens out to relationships with others” (UNESCO, 1996, p. 95). One way in which individuals gain a better understanding of self is by engaging in reflective processes, which can be learner-led and/or facilitated by someone or something else.

Gloria understands that a lot of the media she uses in her practice are implicitly reflective. She pointed out that she believes that “what’s beautiful about video is that no matter what you’re making you’re going to see yourself in it because you chose the angle and you chose the way that you made a certain thing.” She also indicated that she frequently uses explicit reflective practices in her work with learners:

Often times I’ll bring in self-portraiture as a means to initiate learning how to make a video. And the main reason I do that is because I feel it’s an accessible way; I feel that people can become really introspective. And in that process then they automatically feel that they have a commitment to what they’re making because it’s something that is personal. It’s them. They’re trying to find a way to represent themselves.

When prompted to consider the role of reflective practice in education, Meg associated its benefit to ontological development:

Me: Is that one of the aims and purposes of education... to gain a better understanding of self?

Meg: Well, I guess the flipside of that is that I don't think the goals of education are only to learn skills and knowledge. Although that is very important, obviously. It's one of the reasons we do go to school. But it's [... important] to learn how to function in a community or society. And that's what schools are, little mini societies or communities. You have to have some insight into yourself. And to know what it is that you're bringing to the table. And stuff happens everyday with people and if you don't look at what you're bringing to the table, what your stuff is, I don't think you can truly grow. Correspondingly, Paulo underscored the part that reflection plays in

developing meaningful and effective relationships:

You can't get to know [learners] until they get to know themselves. It's not the other way around. They have to figure themselves out before you can figure them out. Because they won't open up to you until they're confident in themselves. [...] When they know themselves, it makes your job easier. And when those really click together is when the best results happen.

When asked what metaphor he would choose to describe himself professionally, Paulo chose an image that spoke decidedly to the fact that for him, education and learning are reflective realms:

I'm a mirror, I think. Not in terms of how I am professionally, but what my mentality is in teaching or coaching. I think it's important that people,

students, athletes, look at themselves in a mirror and figure out who they are. And it's when they see who they are that they realize what they're capable of.

This chapter presented the inquiry findings. The subsequent chapter draws on these findings and offers a summary analysis and discussion, and resulting recommendations.

CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

Analysis and discussion

This phenomenological inquiry sought to identify the essence of NFE leaders' beliefs about the aims and purposes of education. The study focused on articulating the educational beliefs held by five leaders who have previous or current experience working within NFE'l settings. This inquiry answers the following two research questions: (1) To what extent do the beliefs held by NFE leaders mirror NFE'l philosophy? (2) Does there exist a basis for creating a community of practice among leaders in the NFE domain?

The results of this inquiry were generated by examining the educational beliefs held by a small sample of NFE practitioners within a specific geo-political location. Owing to this, the results from this study highlight the particularity of a specific context (space, place, time). It is my hope the analysis and discussion offered here will not only make a positive contribution to the literature related to NFE, but also inspire others to amass knowledge of this currently under-researched educational sphere.

My analysis of participants' interviews revealed the complexities involved in trying to effectively address each of the aforementioned questions. I discovered that these questions could only be dealt with by examining the multiple aspects connected to and at play within each query. Drawing on my social-constructivist approach to this study my analysis centered on revealing the deep interconnections that influence my participants' lived experience.

The following discussion articulates the common themes that were identified across all of the narratives arising from participants' semi-structured interviews. In what follows I begin by clarifying for the reader what I understand to be the essence of NFE leaders' beliefs about the aims and purposes of education. Subsequently, I explore the relationship between these beliefs and what NFE literature has identified as NFE'l philosophy. To conclude, I describe what I recognize as being the preliminary basis for creating a community of practice among NFE practitioners.

Essence

The research previously laid out in this document was aimed at discovering the essence of NFE leaders' beliefs about the aims and purposes of education. It was my hope that such an examination would shed light on this phenomenon, thereby offering significant insight into the particular characteristics of NFE leaders' educational philosophy and practice. During the process of data collection and analysis I realized that the salient traits that I was identifying were far too complex to be reduced into one particular abstraction or concrete generalization as some of the phenomenological literature suggests is appropriate. Hence, in what follows I draw on the interpretation of 'essence' outlined in chapter one and offer a multifaceted and intersecting description of what I have determined to be the essence of NFE leaders' beliefs.

I assert that the essence of participants' beliefs involves the interaction and interchange between elements of praxis, service, and concern for the development of whole beings. In organizing the subsequent analysis into three sub-sections I am not trying to linearly classify each of the elements, thereby creating artificial

boundaries around them. Rather, through this sequential discussion of the following components I aspire to underscore the points of affinity and interplay between these elements, highlighting how they flow in and out of one another through figuratively porous borders.

Praxis

As can be deduced from the previous chapter, participants' philosophy of education is tightly tied to their formal practice. Throughout participant narratives there was high evidence of participants' use of praxis; participants exhibited their commitment to engaging in processes of informed and committed action in which they carry out a course of thoughtful interpretation, understanding, and application of opinions and ideas (Smith, 1999b). Each participant articulated that their beliefs about the aims and purposes of education arose out of their experience working in NFE'l settings. On multiple occasions, when asked to reflect on their beliefs participants would return to a real-life example and describe how their actions had informed their current understanding. This process of moving between theory and practice, and between personal beliefs and external feedback opened up possibilities for participants to form relations between who they are and how they act.

Service

Aristotle believed that "praxis is guided by a moral disposition to act truly and rightly; a concern to further human well-being and the good life" (Smith, 1999b, para. 7). In participants' narrative accounts, both what each of them said that they explicitly believed and the examples they offered of how they act within their

practice signaled an unmistakable commitment to supporting educational opportunities that further human development and improve the human condition. This was evidenced most clearly in the narratives relating to the 'learning to live together' pillar. Specifically, proof of participants' commitment to service became clear within the 'dialogue and responsiveness' and 'equity' sections. These sections centered on the idea of participants' ability to respond to learners' needs, offer differentiated learning opportunities, and promote equitable access to a variety of learning environments.

Whole person

Manifested within participants' accounts was their inherent concern for the development of healthy, whole beings. Most apparent in the narratives relating to the 'learning to be' pillar, participants unanimously identified their belief that facilitating the process of fully realizing individual potential is a main goal and/or outcome of lifelong learning. Similarly, study participants specified that their approach to education does not merely concern an epistemological focus on knowledge and skill acquisition, but rather is understood as supporting ontological development. They described their process of addressing the development of whole beings as involving methods of learner empowerment, opportunities for individual reflection, and pertinent interactions that foster confidence-building.

Through my examination of participants' narrative accounts, I discerned that the essence of the educational beliefs held by NFE leaders is tightly linked to their practice, which is shaped by their commitment to the notion of service and concern for individuals' ontological development.

Beliefs mirroring philosophy

This study endeavored to determine the extent to which the beliefs held by NFE leaders mirror NFE's philosophy. The dominant themes relating to NFE's philosophy include the essentiality of fun in the learning process, the adherence to learner-centered approaches to teaching and learning, and the adoption of a constructivist approach to the process of knowledge co-creation. This inquiry not only enabled me to gain insight into what is currently occurring within the field of NFE, but also what future direction this domain may take. The subsequent discussion explores the three NFE's philosophical themes and highlights points of correlation between them and NFE practitioners' beliefs.

Fun

Within the literature related to NFE, there is a high prominence of the essentiality of "fostering personal enjoyment through learning outside the formal setting" (Taylor, 2006, p. 294). Educators are encouraged to create a relaxed atmosphere within non-formal educational settings, whether through sharing personal anecdotes or by expressing their enjoyment of the activity through "positive facial expressions and a relaxed manner" (Taylor, 2008, p. 82). 'Fun' has been used to explain to a "great extent why learners attend nonformal [*sic*] educational events" (p. 86). Events that are labeled as being fun "generally foster positive emotions of pleasure, excitement, and joy" (p. 86), which all translate into an increased desire among individuals to participate.

There were not many explicit references to the importance of fun within participants' narrative accounts. While they all did speak of wanting to create an

inviting environment, one that promotes dialogue and participation, only Paulo explicitly stated that the notion of fun figures into his practice:

It's up to me to make the learning process as enjoyable as possible, because I think [learners are] going to get more out of it, if it's fun. [...] If they don't have fun, they don't want to be there. If they don't want to be there or if they're not there, they can't learn.

The lack of overt occurrences of the word 'fun' within other participant narratives does not indicate their lack of commitment to fostering enjoyable learning environments. The ideas of enjoyment, meaningfulness, pertinence, and personal development that ran through participants' interviews highlight for me their concern for creating educational opportunities that encourage learner participation and satisfaction. Participants signified their belief in the importance of fun through their narratives relating to the 'engagement and meaning' section of the 'learning to do' pillar and in the narratives belonging to the 'learning to be' pillar.

Learner-centered

One of the fundamental tenets of NFE'l philosophy is that NFE'l processes are guided by a learner-centered approach to teaching and learning. This responsive approach is "fostered by contextual factors that allow the [...] educator the freedom and confidence to approach the participants in this manner" (Taylor & Caldarelli, 2004, p. 465). There are three specific contextual factors that contribute to a learner-centered approach. These are: temporal considerations, voluntary learner participation, and the prospect of a flexible curriculum within NFE'l settings.

Within participant narratives there was evidence of a high degree of congruency between their educational beliefs and the learner-centered aspect of NFE'l philosophy. Participants explained that they both believed in and carried out assessment of the interests and needs of learners with the aim of offering responsive and relevant educational experiences. This aspect of NFE'l philosophy was explored throughout the dialogues relating to all of the pillars of learning but was perhaps most overt within the 'dialogue and responsiveness' and 'relationship' sections falling under the 'learning to live together' pillar.

Constructivism

Relating to the learner-centered approach promoted within NFE, NFE'l philosophy places similar emphasis on adopting constructivist forms of education where activities are geared towards educators and participants enjoying a shared meaning-making process (Taylor & Caldarelli, 2004). It is easy to understand why this form of learning is promoted within this domain; a transmission model of teaching is somewhat incongruent with the emphasis on the learner-centered approach supported by NFE'l philosophy.

Owing to the fact that constructivist teaching and learning is recognized as a fundamentally social phenomenon I acknowledge that dialogic practice contributes to the co-creation and communication of knowledge. While study participants did speak of engaging in two-way, reciprocal learning processes, a further investigation is needed in order to determine to what extent these beliefs actually manifest themselves in practice. Preliminarily, I did find evidence of participants' belief in the important role that dialogue plays within teaching and learning, but paradoxically, I

also found evidence of their practice of engaging in a somewhat more transmission style of teaching. For example, when discussing incorporating dialogue and learner feedback into her practice, Gloria stated that some of the learning decisions within any given group still have to pass through her, as the leader. She said, "I'm not bringing [the learning goals] to the [learners] and saying, 'So how do you think you want to learn about this?'" Evidently, this example points to the fact that a dialogic and constructivist practice is not always supported.

While this contradiction is important to note, I do not believe that it entirely disproves participants' adherence to a constructivist form of teaching and learning. Rather, I surmise that participants are interpreting that learner-centered and constructivist learning processes are not consistently dialogic, but rather are procedures that are enhanced by a "transference of knowledge [from educator to learner] though the identification of what is relevant and of interest to the learner" (Taylor, 2006, p. 304). I speculate that this application of a transmission style of teaching relates to participants' lived experience of being learners within and products of the formal school system. Admittedly, this is quite a substantial inference and therefore I do not claim it to be definitive. Instead, I hope that these ideas will inspire further research into this apparent contradiction surrounding the use of constructivism in NFE. Not only do I contend that an additional inquiry into this matter is needed, but I also believe that it would likely produce noteworthy results.

Community of practice

This inquiry sought to identify whether or not there exists a basis for creating a community of practice among leaders in the NFE domain. Wenger (2003) maintains that the “currency of [communities of practice] is collegiality, reciprocity, expertise, contributions to the practice, and negotiating a learning agenda, not affiliation to an institution, assigned authority, or commitment to a predefined deliverable” (p. 97). Given this explanation, I believe that non-formal educational practitioners are ideal candidates to become members of a community of practice. The ungoverned nature of their work along with the fact that the NFE domain is still relatively unexamined and poorly understood offers a prime prospect for developing such a learning community. However, I hesitate to prescribe the formation of a community of practice among NFE practitioners, preferring instead to adhere to the notion that all living systems have the power to self-organize (Wheatley, 2006). Consequently, in what follows I merely outline three reasons why I support the possibility of creating a community of practice among leaders working within the NFE domain.

Shared commitment

Wenger (2003) highlights the importance of building a sense of mutuality among members of a community of practice. This sense of mutuality arises out of community members sharing in commitment to a common goal or idea and having a common point to interact about or some intersection of interest. The participants involved in this study all share a common identity of being either past or present practitioners in NFE's settings.

Participants' narratives relating to their experiences working within the NFE domain emphasized many points of commonality. Within the 'differentiated learning' section of the 'learning to know' pillar, participants spoke of their passion for and commitment to providing individuals opportunities to engage in differentiated learning activities that respond to learner needs. Equally clear was their conviction that learning is a highly relational process. One that while decidedly personal is most successfully enhanced in social situations. This was evidenced in participant narratives relating to the 'learning to live together' pillar.

In addition to these points of affinity within participant narratives there were also certain variations. These areas of dissimilarity also have the potential to play an important role within a community of practice. Wenger (2003) asserts that learning occurs when community competence and individual experience are in close tension and either one starts pulling the other: while "deep expertise depends on a convergence between experience and competence, [...] innovative learning requires their divergence" (p. 85). Therefore, while coming together around an area of common interest is a central element in creating a community of practice, participation in these learning communities can also be opportunities to engage with real differences.

Fractals

Wenger (2003) suggests "if a community is large and does not have a fractal structure with local subcommunities in which people can engage actively, then it can easily happen that beyond a small core group, various segments of the community feel disconnected" (p. 96). Owing to the relationship between NFE, formal education,

and informal learning, information contained in one part of the learning system has the potential to inform, enhance, and support information contained in another part. Moreover, new information “generated freely by the system and fed back onto itself” (Wheatley, 2006, p. 105), contributes to the continuous growth and change of the entire system.

During their interviews study participants spoke of the need to establish networks and systems of communication within the domain of NFE. They spoke of their search for ways to connect with individuals who hold similar experiences to them. Gloria articulated that she “would love for there to be a structured network of people across Canada or across North America who are doing similar things.” Access to communities of people who are comparable to us personally or have held comparable experiences not only feeds our natural desire to belong, but also permits us to gain a better understanding of self.

Study participants also identified their desire to connect to individuals working in areas belonging to the larger scheme of lifelong learning. Wanting to explore the “relationship between the part and the whole, but not confus[ing] them as identical or interchangeable” (Wheatley, 2006, p. 142), participants demonstrated that they were open to the possibility of perceiving the “dynamics operating in the whole system” (p. 142). While I encourage the formation of these kinds of relationships, I am also keenly aware that learning and advancement resulting from cross-sectional communication is most effective when the system begins with a clear sense of what it is, what it seeks to accomplish, and what each subsection contributes to the whole. Therefore, should a community of practice be

formed among NFE leaders I would strongly urge professionals within this domain to begin by fostering a genuine awareness of issues related to their specific context before seeking external connections.

Interconnections

A community of practice is not only formed through individuals coming together around a central topic or goal, but also through “enabling a rich fabric of connectivity among people” (Wenger, 2003, p. 83). One of the benefits of participating in a community of practice is gaining increased understanding about and access to resources and knowledge related to specific projects or issues. This is done in part by actively participating in dialogues within the community and by creating strong links to similar external communities.

My research sought to unearth the educational beliefs that inform NFE practitioners' practices. Using the results of this study as a means of connecting this comparatively unknown field to more of itself is a potential point of departure for sparking discussion among professionals within the NFE domain. While the concept of NFE has been part of international educational discourse for almost 40 years, the field is still relatively under-researched and poorly understood. The rewards of forming interconnections among this field are especially pertinent, given that the domain of NFE is still seeking to establish its identity within a minority world context.

Additionally, forging strong relationships not only internally but also externally can aid in fostering greater awareness of and legitimacy within the NFE domain. Externally, there exist points of intersection among the three sectors that

comprise lifelong learning: formal education, non-formal education, and informal learning. All serve to complement, supplement, and mutually reinforce one another. Due to the interconnecting nature of these domains, there is a definite prospect of developing dialogue within and between each of these sectors.

Conclusion

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover to what extent leaders working in non-formal educational settings subscribe to a shared set of educational beliefs. My research findings confirm that NFE practitioners do indeed subscribe to a shared set of beliefs concerning the goals and aims of education. These beliefs support the learning goals outlined in the critical international publication, *Learning: The treasure within* (UNESCO, 1996). Moreover, these beliefs, which parallel the four 'pillars of learning' (to know, to do, to live together, to be) described within this document, serve to inform NFE practitioners' actions.

Through this inquiry I endeavored to reveal the essence of NFE leaders' beliefs about the aims and purposes of education. This pursuit led me to discover that the essence of these beliefs involves the interaction and interchange between elements of praxis, service, and concern for individuals' ontological development. The research questions that guided this inquiry were: (1) To what extent do the beliefs held by NFE leaders mirror NFE's philosophy? (2) Does there exist a basis for creating a community of practice among leaders in the NFE domain? By examining participant narratives, I was able to articulate that NFE practitioners' beliefs are congruent with NFE's philosophy. Moreover, by highlighting areas of commonality and difference among participants' narrative accounts I identified the potential basis

for creating a community of practice among professionals working within the NFE domain.

Chapter one of this thesis provided the reader with an overview of this study, described the ontological and epistemological foundations that guided this research, and clarified salient terms relevant to this inquiry. Chapter two included a discussion of the philosophical foundations on which this study was built, as well as a review of pertinent literature. Chapter three outlined for the reader the methodological considerations relevant to this research and offered a discussion of the data collection and analysis methods used. Chapter four highlighted major study findings. Chapter five systematically answered the research questions outlined in chapter one, and offers recommendations and prospective areas for future research.

This inquiry addresses the gap in the literature related to NFE. Specifically, this study explored the previously un-examined topic of educational beliefs held by leaders working within NFE'l settings. I contend that this study and its results contribute to informing our current understanding and appreciation of the elements at play within the field of NFE. Through an examination of leaders' beliefs about the aims and purposes of education we are afforded insight into the principles that guide NFE practitioners' actions. Furthermore, this research highlights contradictions, problematizations, and prospective areas for future research both within the field of NFE and within the larger realm of lifelong learning.

Recommendations

The findings of this study are not only relevant to researchers and practitioners interested in the field of NFE, but the following three

recommendations have implications for other learning processes, as well. I expect that the ideas presented within this document will be met with accord by some and provoke a critical review by others. Whatever sentiment these recommendations provoke, I hope that the debates and discussions spurred by this research will serve to trigger critical reflection on the current state of Canadian educational and learning structures.

The following recommendations may serve to assist educational researchers and practitioners in the following areas: (1) To develop a new discourse with which to describe and communicate NFE's philosophy and practice; (2) To argue for a non-hierarchical view of the three components central to the concept of lifelong learning; (3) To adopt an educational praxis that is informed by and connected to a concern for the ontological development of all learners.

Recommendation #1: Create a NFE discourse

My first recommendation arises out of the data pertaining to creating a community of practice among NFE practitioners. My goal in pointing to the potential for creating a community of practice among NFE leaders was to provide these practitioners with the opportunity to create and engage in learning communities with other individuals who share similar professional experiences. I believe that participation in communities of practice gives members access to occasions to engage in mutual dialogue that legitimizes their work. As Wenger (2003) emphasizes, communities of practice depend on members adopting a shared repertoire of resources, including common language. It became clear to me during participant interviews that the NFE leaders with whom I spoke were struggling to

express themselves effectively with regards to their beliefs and practice. I suggest that this struggle is a direct result of participants' use of language that has been shaped by their formative formal educational experiences.

On multiple occasions during the interview process participants described their experiences related to NFE using vocabulary bound to formal educational discourse. This was most evident in the narratives relating to participants' use of a constructivist approach to teaching and learning. For example, while Meg supported a learner-centered view of teaching and learning, in discussing the importance of responding to learner needs she also stated that learning is something that needs to be managed and controlled. She stated that "learners are going to be at all different levels. Not everybody's in the same place. Not everybody has the same personality. [...] And it's definitely a challenge to be able to manage all of that stuff. And to still have the courage to stand there, at the front everyday." The notion that learning happens when someone is in front of learners, managing the learning process, is one that is very tightly tied to traditional formal education discourse. Using traditional (formal) forms of educational discourse to try and describe non-traditional (non-formal) forms of education is inherently problematic. As we can see from Meg's example, our understanding of her beliefs become confused when she attempts to describe her experiences using the only language that she has access to.

I contend that in order to gain a better understanding of the field of NFE we need to become poets of our realities. Similar to von Heisenberg's approach to crafting a new language with which to describe quantum theory (Buckley & Peat, 1996), so too must we create a new language with which to describe our experience

of NFE. We must move away from the prevailing dualistic way of interpreting the world, an approach that forces us to seek ways of describing our reality as a set of polarities. We must instead explore the tensioned space that arises from trying to fit NFE into a formal education paradigm. Our current practice of explaining NFE using formal educational discourse is akin to describing an orange using descriptors specific to an apple. While in truth both oranges and apples are fruit, they are significantly different and therefore must be depicted in distinct ways.

Our experience of living in a world of technology and machines has caused us to habitually describe the world using a vocabulary of boundaries (Wheatley, 2006). We continually draw “boundaries around the flow of experience, fragmenting whole networks of interaction into discrete steps” (p. 30). However, what is needed now is not a language that signifies concrete edges and binaries, but rather a language that denotes that we live in a world of permeable boundaries. This new language would convey the interconnectedness of our world, corresponding to the belief that “nothing exists independent of its relationship with others” (p. 35). Similarly, this new vocabulary would also move us “away from our need to think in terms of separate, polar opposites” (p. 35).

Until a new language is developed we will never fully be able to legitimize the field of NFE using our current discourse that presupposes its deficiency. To date, the field of NFE has been conceptualized as ‘non’, thus signifying its subordinate position. This conceptualization has led to derogatory references to the field’s worth, including allusion to the fact that NFE is “‘the poor cousin’ of the formal system” (Brennan, 1997, p. 198). What is needed now is for researchers and

practitioners to delve further into the field of NFE exploring the specifics of this space. Doing this will likely enable members of the NFE'l community to develop a "common language that allows people to communicate and negotiate meanings across boundaries" (Wenger, 2003, p. 88).

Recommendation #2: Embrace methods of intersectional integration

My second recommendation results from the intersecting nature of the three components of lifelong learning: formal education, NFE, and informal learning. The *Learning: The treasure within* (UNESCO, 1996) report identifies the fact that the "formal education systems tend to emphasize the acquisition of knowledge to the detriment of other types of learning" (p. 97). It suggests that it is crucial to adopt a conceptualization of education that encompasses educational activities belonging to all areas of lifelong learning. Furthermore it recommends that "such a vision should inform and guide future educational reforms and policy, in relation to both contents and to methods" (p. 97). I do not believe that this recommendation has been fully embraced within Canadian educational communities thus far.

The participants involved in this research all pointed to the fact that their conceptualization of education includes an encompassing view of learning which treats formal education, NFE, and informal learning without hierarchical distinction. Maxine articulated that she believes that the three components that make up lifelong learning are not distinct. She argued that the learning that takes place within various learning contexts is "very complementary. And that schools should be paying more attention to this, making sure that one program complements the other." Comparable to the timeless image of yin and yang, Maxine's narrative dealt

with complementarities that only look like polarities (Wheatley, 2006). She asserted that none of the components of lifelong learning are primary and that all are absolutely necessary.

If we believe that education should assist individuals in developing their ability to learn how to learn, thus making it possible for them to navigate the various stages of their lives, then we need to be attentive to the multiple arenas in which individuals learn. It is ineffective to privilege learning that occurs, for example, in formal schooling if individuals' being in the world is truly the result of learning experiences that occur within formal education, non-formal education, and informal learning contexts. I contend that there is no need to favour the learning that occurs within one particular realm of lifelong learning, pretending that it is entirely distinct. I believe that "what is critical is the *relationship* [emphasis in original] created between two or more elements" (Wheatley, 2006, p. 36).

The 1996 UNESCO report stresses that "equal attention should be paid in all organized learning to each of [the] four pillars [of learning], so that education is regarded as a total experience throughout life" (p. 86). In order to realize this goal, I recommend that educational practitioners embrace ways of incorporating elements of all types of teaching and learning into their practice. Tools that have previously been relegated to the domain of formal education needn't be reserved for formal schooling contexts. Similarly, teaching techniques specific to NFE'l contexts can be adopted in more formal settings. Employing differentiated teaching and learning techniques enables practitioners to more readily respond to learner needs, thus creating more effective learning environments.

This second recommendation challenges capitalist logic that seeks to commodify education into marketable forms of schooling. It supports learning as an interconnected experience, one that has the ability to transcend the barriers of formal institutions and organizational structures. Adopting a view of learning that encompasses all of its constituent parts enables educational practitioners and researchers to better understand and benefit from the potential that engaging in lifelong learning affords. Important to note, however, is that adopting a view of learning as a system composed of parts does not mean that we can “understand [this] system by looking only at its parts. We need to *work with the whole of a system* [emphasis in original], even as we work with individual parts” (Wheatley, 2006, p. 139). I believe that members of educational communities can profit from assuming a holistic view of lifelong learning and permitting this system to self-organize in order to respond to local needs.

Recommendation #3: Implement an ontological turn in education

My third and final recommendation reflects study participants' emphasis on the importance of the 'learning to be' pillar outlined in *Learning: The treasure within* (UNESCO, 1996). Educational researchers Dall'Alba & Barnacle's current research is concerned with the implications of foregrounding ontology, or learners' holistic development, for teaching and learning in higher education. They assert that “educational approaches that focus [solely] on the intellect render irrelevant or invisible the necessary commitment, openness, wonder or passion that are integral to learning, or to taking action more broadly” (2007, p. 681). Drawing heavily on the work of Heidegger and his concept of 'being-in-the-world', they argue for higher

education programs to focus on developing ways of being. In his phenomenological writings Heidegger emphasizes that our “mode of being in the world is that of dwelling with and amongst things and others” (p. 681). According to him, while this concept may seem obvious, it has yet to be effectively addressed within contemporary educational processes. He argues that there is a critical link between education and ontology, pointing to the fact that ontology is both *being-in-the-world* and *being-in-the-world*.

The participants involved in my study supported the Heideggerian view that education is a process of facilitating the knowing of oneself. They all indicated that learners’ ontological development is their primary concern. Participants stated that the goal of actualizing individuals’ full potential was far more important than the methods used to achieve it. For example, Paulo articulated his belief that as educators “we’ve got to worry more about the *people* that we educate and less about the educational scheme.” I believe that knowing and being are interdependent and think that it is important that learning environments foster not only learners’ skill development, but also learners’ personal development.

I contend that Dall’Alba & Barnacle’s (2007) argument to place ontology at center of higher education is not only appropriate for learning at this level, but also learning opportunities that occur throughout the course of individuals’ lives. I recommend that all those who lead learning processes need to take into account the importance of learners’ sense of self and of their relationship to the world around them. Put another way, educators need to adopt “a pedagogy that engages [learners] as persons, not merely as knowers” (Barnett, 2004, p. 257). Educational

practitioners and researchers need to pay renewed attention to the Heideggerian notion that “we do not primarily access things conceptually or intellectually, but, instead, through being constantly immersed in activities, projects and practices with things and others” (Dall’Alba & Barnacle, 2007, p. 681). We must foster learning environments that facilitate the genuine educational process of taking learners on a journey that leads them back to the place of their essential being, transforming them in the process (Dall’Alba & Barnacle, 2007).

I assert that learning for ontological development is not simply a process of accessing learners’ cognitive faculties, but rather is a process of engaging whole beings. Furthermore, I believe that this type of learning process is enhanced in genuine experiential learning environments where, rather than knowledge being treated as “information that can be accumulated within a (disembodied) mind, learning becomes understood as the embodied ways of knowing” (Dall’Alba & Barnacle, 2007, p. 683). Abandoning our current practice of thinking in terms of Cartesian dualism that privileges mind over body, true experiential and/or embodied learning requires that we re-appropriate the importance of experience in facilitating learning. It does away with our somewhat myopic view of learning in which “individual mental representations of events become prominent, static and separated from the interdependent commotion of people together in action with objects and language” (Fenwick, 2003, p. 126). Within genuine experiential learning environments “epistemology must be in service of ontology” (Dall’Alba & Barnacle, 2007, p. 686).

This final recommendation supports Heidegger's ([1967] 1998a) indication that education is not a process of "merely pouring knowledge into the unprepared soul [or mind] as if it were some container held out empty and waiting"⁶ (as cited in Dall'Alba & Barnacle, 2007, p. 684). Holding ontology as the focal point within a learning environment permits learning activities to include consideration of the "four existentials considered to belong to the fundamental structure of the lifeworld; *lived space* (spatiality), *lived body* (corporeality), *lived time* (temporality), and *lived human relation* (relationality or communality)" (*emphasis in original*, Dowling, 2007, p. 134). Only when we are successful in this objective will we be able to fully support learning that contributes to the all-round development of individuals; supporting learning that honours each individual's "mind and body, intelligence, sensitivity, aesthetic sense, personal responsibility and spiritual values" (UNESCO, 1996, p. 94).

Implications for future research

The current challenge of educational systems is to foster certain dispositions among learners: "carefulness, thoughtfulness, humility, criticality, receptiveness, resilience, courage, and stillness" (Barnett, 2004, p. 258). I believe that by integrating the three components of lifelong learning into their lives learners can benefit from inclusive opportunities for holistic development. In order to support this aim I contend that more research must first be done into the following two areas: (1) examining the practical application of taking a constructivist approach to

⁶ This belief is echoed in Freire's (1970) discussion of the 'banking model of education'.

teaching and learning, and (2) exploring possible avenues of systematically combining the three components of lifelong learning in order to ensure equity within learning environments.

Both within my findings and within the results of a similar study conducted by Taylor & Caldarelli (2004) it was discovered that educators within the NFE domain held an apparent desire to make educational experiences learner-centered and thus more palatable for learners. However, this aspiration ultimately became conflated with educators' desire to have learners engage with the specific learning goals that the educators had identified as important. I fully endorse a further investigation into this seeming paradox. I am among educators who believes in the importance of fostering learner-centered environments because I believe that learning is most effective when it is relevant to all those who are involved in the process. However, I am now much more keenly aware of the disconnect between my espoused beliefs and my practice and would benefit from learning ways to refine this element of my leadership praxis.

The individuals involved in this research emphasized their interest in increasing access to equitable learning opportunities for all learners. They remarked that the learning that takes place within formal school settings is not appropriate for all learners. They also commented that very many individuals confront barriers when trying to access learning opportunities; whether financial, physical, temporal, etc. The study's participants all suggested that adopting a holistic view of learning would be one way in which to address some of the learning disparities within society. Connected to this, they made suggestions of how this holistic view could be

supported in practice. Recommendations include: systematic integration of NFE'l programs into formal educational contexts, increased availability of informal learning relationships such as mentoring, and the inclusion of differentiated teaching and learning techniques across structured educational settings. I support these recommendations and suggest that further research into any one of these areas would prove beneficial.

Final reflection

As a leader of NFE'l processes I embarked on this journey with a vested interest in gaining an increased understanding of the educational beliefs that guide NFE leaders' practice. Moreover, this research resulted from my desire to find a community of professionals who shared similar experiences and views about the aims and purposes of education. While I'd like to say that I began this journey comfortable with the idea that I might find great variance among leaders' beliefs, I realize now how pleased I am to have discovered a shared understanding among participants.

While I began my research with my biases firmly in place, I did not conceal these views. Rather, I embarked on an auto-ethnographic process that permitted me to reveal and critique these beliefs. As a result of this, I can now say with confidence that my research has provided me with a complex picture of my own beliefs and how they relate to and diverge from the beliefs held by other professionals engaged in similar work. Furthermore, engaging in the reflective and deeply personal process of auto-ethnography, I gained an appreciation of the magnitude of what I had asked my study participants to embark on. I am humbled by their commitment

to this research and their unquestionable willingness to engage in thoughtful self-reflection. Through our genuine relationship and candid conversation we were able to address issues related to us as individuals as well as issues related to the communities in which we belong.

My research findings seem to echo the results of similar studies previously carried out within the field of NFE. However, due to the fact that individual experiences will never be fully identical I contend that there is still much potential for making new and salient discoveries within this domain. Additionally, I have a newly bolstered belief in the fact that current Canadian learning structures need to change in order to effectively address the needs of learners within society. I continue to support the value of lifelong learning and believe that educational change must result from our current systems deciding that change is the only way to maintain themselves (Wheatley, 2006).

As a final reflection on this research, I realize that it is impossible for me to articulate the significance of the learning process that I enjoyed during this inquiry. I benefited from engaging with scholars and committed educational practitioners, as much as I gained from embarking on my auto-ethnographic process. I now recognize that being an educational practitioner is critical to my personal essence; as is being an individual committed to equity, service, and community-building. I continue to affirm that learning should lead us all to a point of discovering, unearthing, and enriching our creative potential in order to “reveal the treasure within each of us” (UNESCO, 1996, p. 86).

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Appendices

*Appendix A: Auto-ethnography (excerpt)***III. MINUET: DANCE**

It's September 2009. I have returned to the world of dance. I have enrolled in a jazz dance class. There is apprehension in my heart as I dig my black soft-leather jazz shoes out of the box hidden at the back of my closet. I hold the limp shoes in my hands. I run my fingers over their well-worn seams. I bring the shoes up to my face. I drink in their intoxicating scent: leather, rosin, and the salty odor of stale sweat. My heart flutters. Anticipation makes its way up my spine. I feel dizzy. My feet twitch. I realize that I am unconsciously standing in a *relevé... à demi-pointe*. I lower my heels back down to the ground. I raise my right foot two inches off the ground. I point my toes. I flex my toes. My foot returns to the ground. I am lost inside my head as my mind wanders back in time.

I remember my time spent with a dance company which was born out of the founder's belief that people of all shapes, sizes, and abilities could be dancers.

Your overall philosophy [is] that everyone/everything has value.

I am standing at the *barre*. Burgundy long-sleeved body suit, light pink tights, pink tutu, and pink soft-leather ballet shoes. In my memory I am no more than 5 or 6 years old. I am focused on keeping my head up, my back straight, and my heels together with toes pointed out at a 45-degree angle. I am listening attentively to my teacher's instructions. Her soothing British accent comforts me. "*Demi-plié and back. Demi-plié and back. Grand-plié, relevé, and*

down". I listen intently. I am trying my very hardest to be disciplined. I take myself very seriously for a child of my age.

Suddenly, I am brought back to the present. I look at the clock. I am going to be late. I hurriedly throw my dance shoes in my bag and head out the door.

...

It is the next day. In speaking to my sister I gush about the previous night's dance class. I feel exhilarated. I feel as though I have just reconnected with a long-lost friend. I recognize that girl... wasn't she the one who used to dance? The experience was wonderful.

**Promote inclusion
Foster creativity
Engage, refine, share.**

Some of my happiest memories are of moments when I was dancing. I began dancing when I was 5 years old and the skills that I developed while being a part of that dance company are endless. Not only did I work on my physical coordination, but I also learned how to be part of a team. I developed an awareness both of myself as an individual and as part of a greater whole. I learned how to focus on my actions and myself while always remaining keenly aware of what else was going on around me.

You offer them this within a structured environment, necessary not only for developing personal discipline and focus, but also in group situations, where they also have to respect the individual learning processes of their classmates.

Today, I use dance as a way of celebrating as much as a means of releasing anxiety and frustration. Dance comforts me and I often recall the sense of community that I enjoyed while dancing:

The Friday after my father died I told my mother that I wanted to attend my regular dance class. Not only was it an hour of normalcy in what had seemed like a lifetime of chaos (truthfully, it had only been 5 days), but I also knew that I could rely on the dance community to provide me with some feeling of safety. We didn't talk about it, but I could feel the support and love from my teacher and peers. I could also get lost in the dance. It was something that I was good at. It was something that I could control. It was something that I understood. It was something that made me feel good about myself.

... one of her many tasks was running the weekly dance show ... Tieja conquered a challenge of making a group of insecure girls feel good about themselves week after week and summer after summer.

In addition to the feelings of self-confidence and community that dancing afforded me, recently I have come to appreciate the fact that my experiences dancing throughout my youth have greatly informed my belief that meaningful learning can take place when non-formal educational opportunities are taken seriously. I recall the conversation that I had with my sister following my dance 'comeback' last fall:

"As we were waiting for our turn to do the cross-floor exercise," I say, "she (another participant in the class) was sending text messages on her cell phone. And she was chewing gum the entire time!" ... I am horrified! My sister laughs knowingly.

After this conversation I wonder if I was being unnecessarily critical. After all, this is a recreational course not *Les Grands Ballets Canadiens*. But then, suddenly, an image of a younger version of myself flashes through my mind: I am standing at the *barre*, my hair is tied up in a tidy bun on the crown of my head, my chin is raised proudly, and my eyes are looking straight ahead. It is at this time that I decide: No, recreational or not, it is important to take both yourself and the activity seriously. In the dance world, this means spitting out your gum at the door, pulling your hair off of your neck and out of your face, and absolutely never bringing your cell phone to class (let alone using it during the lesson).

...what made her a good [educator] was doing the latter simultaneously with making hundreds of children enjoy their time there. Not to say that she was a pushover, in fact she was and still is quite the opposite.

Appendix B: Interview questions

Background information:

- Please state your name
- Please state your age
- What is your highest degree of formal education?
- Please state your current occupation
 - a. How long have you been doing this?
 - b. What did you do prior to this?

Educational beliefs:

- 1) Is the following sentence, taken from my working definition of non-formal education, in line with your beliefs about the aims and purposes of education?

These educational experiences are learner-centered and emphasize a hands-on and dialogic approach to learning where a reciprocal learning process is enjoyed by both the facilitator and learner.

- 2) Do you think that the aims/goals of education differ depending on the context? For example, are the goals of formal education different than those of non-formal education? Should they be?

Professional identity:

- 3) How did you come to work in a non-formal educational environment?
- 4) If you were to choose one word/term to describe yourself professionally, what would it be?

Non-formal education:

- 5) What do you (en)vision the role of non-formal educational activities to be in relation to learners' lives?

Appendix C: Thematic codes

Learning to know <i>Lifelong learning</i> <i>Differentiate learning</i> <i>Sparking an interest</i> <i>Thinking</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - differentiated learning - embodied knowing - facilitator - provoking - responsiveness - service - understanding
Learning to do <i>Engagement and meaning</i> <i>Interpersonal skills</i> <i>Personal initiative and leadership</i> <i>Teamwork</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - lifelong learning - personal accountability - process vs. product - reflective - relevance
Learning to live together <i>Community</i> <i>Dialogue and responsiveness</i> <i>Equity</i> <i>Relationships</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - dialogue - equity - participatory - reciprocal - relationships - responsiveness - service - whole/part
Learning to be <i>Confidence</i> <i>Empowerment</i> <i>Ontological development</i> <i>Reflective</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - confidence - embodied knowing - empowerment - differentiated learning - ontological - personal - reflective - responsiveness - whole being

*Appendix D1: Participant consent form (group 1 - colleagues)***The essence of being 'non': A phenomenological study of leaders' beliefs within non-formal educational settings**

You are invited to participate in a study entitled *The essence of being 'non': A phenomenological study of leaders' beliefs within non-formal educational settings* that is being conducted by Tiejia Thomas.

Tiejia Thomas is a graduate student in the department of *Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies* at the University of Victoria and you may contact her if you have further questions by email (XXXXX) or telephone (XXXXX).

As a graduate student, she is required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a Master of Arts degree in Education. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Carolyn Crippen. You may contact her supervisor at XXXXX.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this research project is to discover to what extent leaders working in non-formal educational settings subscribe to a shared set of educational beliefs. The two research questions guiding the inquiry are: (1) To what extent do the beliefs held by non-formal education leaders mirror non-formal educational philosophy? (2) Does there exist a basis for creating a community of practice among leaders in the non-formal education domain?

Importance of this Research

Research of this type is important because it will potentially contribute to the legitimization of the field of non-formal education and encourage others to amass knowledge of this currently under-researched educational sphere.

Participants Selection

You are being asked to participate in this study because you currently occupy or have previously occupied a formal leadership position within a non-formal educational setting within Canada.

What is involved

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include participating in one (1) face-to-face interview of approximately one (1) hour in length at a location that is amenable to you. Subsequently, you will be asked to review and amend (as necessary) the analysis and discussion of your interview prior to final publication.

With your permission, an audio-recording, video-recording, and written notes will be taken during the interview session. A transcription of the text with corresponding analysis will be made available to you.

Inconvenience

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, in the form of a time commitment of up to five (5) hours.

Risks

There are no known or anticipated risks posed to you through your participation in this research.

Benefits

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include your contribution to the effort to legitimize the work of non-formal education professionals and to create a community of practice.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study, your data (that was collected prior to the moment that you withdrew) will only be used in the event that you consent to its use.

Researcher's Relationship with Participants

The researcher has a relationship to you as your former colleague. To help prevent this relationship from influencing your decision to participate, the following steps to prevent coercion have been taken: you have been informed that your decision to participate in this study in no way impacts your professional and/or personal relationship with the researcher, at present time or in the future.

On-going Consent

To make sure that you continue to consent to participate in this research, the researcher will provide you with email contact information so that you can request removal of your data at any time during the research process. Furthermore, the researcher will remind you of your right to withdraw from the study, prior to any communications that occur after you give your original consent.

Anonymity

In terms of protecting your anonymity, all data will be protected by using pseudonyms and by altering any identifying information during the dissemination of results.

Confidentiality

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected by storing all hard-copies of data in a locked filing cabinet and all electronic copies of data in a password-protected location on the researcher's computer.

Dissemination of Results

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways: Master's thesis, presentations at scholarly meetings, published articles, public displays, and/or the internet.

Disposal of Data

Data from this study will be disposed of after five (5) years. Hard-copies of data will be shredded. Electronic copies of data will be electronically deleted.

Contacts

Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study include Tiejia Thomas (contact information as above).

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (XXXXX or XXXXX).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher.

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Your initials in the box below indicate that following the conclusion of the study outlined above you hereby consent to the use of your data for future analysis, publication, and/or reproduction.

Visually Recorded Images/Data

Please initial next to any and all categories to which you consent:

- Videos may be taken of me for: Analysis _____ Dissemination* _____

*I hereby consent to the dissemination of video footage in which I am featured via the following mediums:

Presentations at scholarly meetings _____

Internet (i.e. non-formal education website) _____

Public displays (i.e. *vernissage*) _____

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

*Appendix D2: Participant consent form (group 2 - critical friends)***The essence of being 'non': A phenomenological study of leaders' beliefs within non-formal educational settings**

You are invited to participate in a study entitled *The essence of being 'non': A phenomenological study of leaders' beliefs within non-formal educational settings* that is being conducted by Tiejia Thomas.

Tiejia Thomas is a graduate student in the department of *Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies* at the University of Victoria and you may contact her if you have further questions by email (XXXXX) or telephone (XXXXX).

As a graduate student, she is required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a Master of Arts degree in Education. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Carolyn Crippen. You may contact her supervisor at XXXXX.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this research project is to discover to what extent leaders working in non-formal educational settings subscribe to a shared set of educational beliefs. The two research questions guiding the inquiry are: (1) To what extent do the beliefs held by non-formal education leaders mirror non-formal educational philosophy?; (2) Does there exist a basis for creating a community of practice among leaders in the non-formal education domain?

Importance of this Research

Research of this type is important because it will potentially contribute to the legitimization of the field of non-formal education and encourage others to amass knowledge of this currently under-researched educational sphere.

Participants Selection

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are someone who can be expected to hold intimate knowledge of the researcher's educational philosophy.

What is involved

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include composing a short (max. 500 words) biographical piece that speaks to what you understand the researcher's educational philosophy to be. Another component of participation will include reviewing and amending (as necessary) the interpretation of your biographical submission prior to final publication.

Inconvenience

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, in the form of a time commitment of up to five (5) hours.

Risks

There are no known or anticipated risks posed to you through your participation in this research.

Benefits

The potential benefit of your participation in this research includes your contribution to the effort to legitimize the work of non-formal education professionals.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study, your data (that was collected prior to the moment that you withdrew) will only be used in the event that you consent to its use.

Researcher's Relationship with Participants

The researcher has a personal relationship with you. To help prevent this relationship from influencing your decision to participate, the following steps to prevent coercion have been taken: you have been informed that your decision to participate in this study in no way impacts your personal relationship with the researcher, at present time or in the future.

On-going Consent

To make sure that you continue to consent to participate in this research, the researcher will provide you with email contact information so that you can request removal of your data at any time during the research process. Furthermore, the researcher will remind you of your right to withdraw from the study, prior to any communications that occur after you give your original consent.

Anonymity

In terms of protecting your anonymity, all data will be protected by using pseudonyms and by altering any identifying information during the dissemination of results.

Confidentiality

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected by storing all hard-copies of data in a locked filing cabinet and all electronic copies of data in a password-protected location on the researcher's computer.

Dissemination of Results

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways: Master's thesis, presentations at scholarly meetings, published articles, public displays, and/or the internet.

Disposal of Data

Data from this study will be disposed of after five (5) years. Hard-copies of data will be shredded. Electronic copies of data will be electronically deleted.

Contacts

Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study include Tiejia Thomas (contact information as above).

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (XXXXX or XXXXX).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher.

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Your initials in the box below indicate that following the conclusion of the study outlined above you hereby consent to the use of your data for future analysis, publication, and/or reproduction.

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

Appendix E: Ethics certificate