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Organic and institutional views of learning in Northern Uganda: Toward a theory of dichotomous education in postwar contexts

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Abstract

A dichotomy of organic and institutional views of education emerged as a strong theme in a qualitative research study that was undertaken amongst primary school teachers in Northern Uganda. Teachers clearly conceptualised children's learning in two categories - dependant upon culture and village life (termed organic education in this paper), and dependent upon organised schooling (termed institutional education). As the study progressed the complementary nature of these two categories became salient, as did their importance in community redevelopment after war. When the effects of war decimate organic education by destroying family units and interrupting village life, communities heavily rely upon institutional education to raise children. However, the necessity to re-establish organic structures so that education is not limited to schools and teachers was also apparent. This paper discusses the need to take a dual (organic and institutional) approach to community redevelopment, and considers the wider implications for practice and policy in post-war contexts.

[Insert Graphical Abstract here]

Keywords: education in post-war contexts, development, Northern Uganda, education as rehabilitation.

Highlights:

- A research study found that teachers in Northern Uganda conceptualised children's learning to be dependent upon a) their cultural heritage and family background (organic education); and b) their education system (institutional education).

- *Prima facie* these two views of education – organic and institutional – seem somewhat paradoxical. However, it was found that in a post-war context both types of education are vital to community redevelopment.
- In the first instance, institutional education has acted as a 'gap stop' to help raise the upcoming generation while the traditional organic structures of the home and village are in disrepair.
- Schools in Northern Uganda have acted as villages and teachers as parents, and this *pro tempore* arrangement has assisted in times of crisis and post-crisis community restoration.

1.0 Introduction

The tensions that exist between organic and institutional modes of learning are apparent in literature (Cuban, 2009, Furedi, 2009; Beckett, 1999; Robinson, 2009). The presence of this organic-institutional tension was found in a qualitative research study in Northern Uganda (Willis, 2012) of primary school teachers' conceptions of children's learning. Teachers described children's learning as a product of both the education (schooling) system and their cultural heritage. Two views emerged: one, that children's learning is a product of the schooling system; and two, that learning occurs around the village fireplace without the constraints of time and place that are imposed by institutional systems. Teachers explained that both of these modes of learning had been impacted by the effects of war, particularly organic learning that occurred in village life. *Prima facie* these binary views seemed somewhat paradoxical, but as the study progressed their complementary nature became salient, as did their importance in community redevelopment in post-war contexts. This study demonstrated that when the effects of war decimate organic modes of education by breaking down family units and interrupting and displacing village life, communities heavily rely

upon institutional modes of education, specifically organised schooling, to holistically educate children. Simply, family and village structures in Northern Uganda struggled to pass down generational wisdom as parents had been killed in war, villages were displaced, and traditional fireplace learning had been lost. By the end of the most recent conflict, over half the population in Uganda was under the age of 15 (Uganda Demographics Profile, 2011). For a time, due to a shortage of adults and the phenomenon of child-headed families, communities relied on schools to educate children; and this study demonstrates how schools acted as villages and teachers acted as parent-figures while communities rebuilt after war. Furthermore, this study also highlights the necessity to rebuild organic structures so that education does not become the sole responsibility of schools and teachers. This paper discusses the need to take a dual organic and institutional approach to rebuilding education systems in Northern Uganda, and considers the wider implications for practice and policy in post-war developing contexts. Social research in Northern Uganda is timely as although there has been much aid and development activity in schools in this region, after decades of civil unrest there is a notable lack of literature.

To better understand the dichotomy of organic and institutional views of education, a phenomenographic methodology was employed. Accordingly, the research questions that guided this study were: 1) *what are the experiences of teachers in Northern Uganda with children and their learning?*; and 2) *how did teachers describe their experiences?* Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 16 participants from four local primary schools in the Gulu district of Northern Uganda. The study described the variation of teachers' experiences and categorised these in a model of children's learning (Willis, 2012).

1.1 A brief history of education in Northern Uganda

Before colonisation and Western influence, education in Uganda was based on tribal traditions where every adult took responsibility for the care and education of all the village children (Ofori-Atta, 2009; Ssekamwa, 1997). Learning was not confined to school systems, curriculum documents, buildings, timetables, or fees; rather it was more organic in nature (Beckett, 1999) as it took place in the field or around the campfire (Ssekamwa, 1997). Boys were taught by men and girls were taught by women in a generationally integrated society. Lessons included “desirable social behaviour, customs, history, geography, biology, chemistry, agriculture, religion, psychology, philosophy, economics and politics” (Ssekamwa, 1997, p. 2); however, they did not occur within the institutional bounds of buildings or timetables. Rather, learning was an ongoing experience and the education of every child was considered the responsibility of every adult. One of the head teachers who participated in this study articulated this cultural values when he explained: “the child is for everybody” (Willis, 2012).

Some academics lament the lack of this kind of collective adult responsibility in current Western societies (for example, Feurestein, Feurestein & Falik, 2011; Furedi, 2009). Views of learning in the West have become increasingly individualistic and competitive in recent times with the introductions of international comparative studies and national testing programmes. Such institutional views of learning is a far cry from the organic traditional learning experienced by the Acholi tribe of Northern Uganda before colonisation.

Colonial influence came in 1875 when the king of Buganda invited English interest to his region, and the institutionalisation of learning and education was introduced soon after (Ssekamwa, 1997). This phenomenon reinforced socio-economic and gender divides as formal education was most accessible to the sons of wealthy and powerful families (Syngellakis & Arudo, 2006).

Education in Uganda today is redolent of the colonial era as didactic teaching methods and rote learning remain (Syngellakis & Arudo, 2006).

Forty years of consecutive civil wars, from the time of Idi Amin in 1971 to the end of the most recent conflict in 2006 between the Ugandan army and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) rebel forces, led to dramatic breakdowns in society (Mwakikagile, 2009; Van Acker, 2004). Entire villages, schools, and families were displaced during the recent conflict with the LRA, and in many instances formal education ceased. LRA warfare was particularly horrific as children were a central feature in the hostilities. An estimated 30,000 children were abducted and forced to serve as soldiers or sex slaves over a 20-year period (United Nations OCHA/IRIN, 2004). During this time the Universal Primary Education programme was launched, which meant that schools in the North had to simultaneously manage the effects of war and the introduction of free compulsory schooling for every child. By 2003, James Lomoro, the Gulu District Inspector of Schools, reported that 116 of 234 schools had been displaced and only 56% of primary school aged children were attending school in the Gulu war zone (Human Rights Watch, 2003).

In all of this, children in Northern Uganda did not cease to grow and learn, but instead of learning literacy and numeracy like their contemporaries in other communities, they were learning war tactics and survival skills. Research shows that displacement, conflict and/or poverty affects the psychological development and neurological patterning of a child (Adjukovic & Adjukovic, 1998; Feurestein, Feurestein & Falik, 2011), as whatever neurological attractions are first, most frequent and most coherent affect the formation of synapses (Medina, 2009). The various effects of war upon school-aged children are outlined in Joshi and O'Donnell's (2003) work, including regression (Osofsky, 1995), stomach complaints and inattentive behaviour at school (Dodge, 1993), and fear for safety or of being alone (Perry, 2001). In addition to this, post-traumatic stress disorder

and antisocial behaviour also feature strongly in youth who have been exposed to war (Derluyn, Broekhart, Schuyten, & De Temmerman, 2004).

Given that learning does not just happen ‘in the head’ but is a product of social and cultural interactions (Bandura, 1986; Bruner, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978, 1986) the impacts of social stresses are also significant. Such stresses in Northern Uganda include the high prevalence of HIV/AIDS that leave many children as the heads of their homes, and a largely uneducated parent population, which is a by-product of years of conflict (Republic of Uganda, 2003). The education of girls is often terminated early as poverty situations encourage the early of marriage of girls to attract a bride price, which in turn results in child-mothers and the perpetuation of the cycle of uneducated parents. Those children who do attend school are likely to share a classroom with 50 to 100 other students with only one teacher (UNESCO, 2008). Power outages are frequent, and books and clean water are scarce. Altogether, the very human trait of learning is vulnerable to the effects of war, poverty and disease.

2.0 Theoretical framework and methodology

Seeking to describe how teachers in Northern Ugandan conceptualise children’s learning demanded the fluid and dynamic nature of qualitative research (Burns, 2000; Lichtman, 2006). Further, the open-ended nature of the guiding research questions demanded a phenomenographic methodology (Marton, 1981). Marton (1993) aptly described phenomenography as “the empirical study of the limited number of qualitatively different ways in which various phenomena in, and aspects of, the world around us are experienced, conceptualised, understood, perceived and apprehended” (p. 4425). The defining quality of phenomenography - which differentiates it from its more widely known cousin, phenomenology - is the construction of a mental model that brings together the categories of description and metaphorically illustrates the variation of participants’

experiences. The experiences of teachers in Northern Uganda were thusly described and shared in open-ended interviews, and teachers' conceptions of learning were identified and organised into categories of description for analysis. Nine interviews were conducted with 16 participants from four schools, two government and two non-government. The dynamics of the researcher's role in the data collection and analysis processes are documented in Willis (2012). Phenomenography is particularly suited to educational research due to its dependence upon experience and it practicality for solving pedagogic problems (Marton 1988; Marton & Booth, 1997).

During the data analysis phase a code scheme was created to reflect the emerging themes. This scheme was reorganised several times to move away from merely describing the data (Richards, 2009) to describing the conceptions. The software NVivo™ was used as a tool to organise the codes and monitor the development of themes. As this process progressed, it became apparent that six categories of description could accommodate the identified conceptions. These categories of description were organised into a mental model that used a local metaphor to describe teachers' conceptions of children's learning, according to phenomenographic convention. (A simplified version of this model is depicted in the graphical abstract).

3.0 Results

As the data analysis phase progressed, it became apparent that six categories of description could accommodate the identified conceptions of children's learning (Willis, 2012). The focus of this paper is the two conceptions of learning that were identified as organic (learning as dependent upon cultural heritage) and institutional (learning as dependent upon the education system). These two conceptions were fundamental to the categorisation of all other conceptions, and they lay the foundation for later discussions pertaining to community development. A data sample is provided below.

3.1 Conceptions of learning as dependent upon cultural heritage and the education system

In simple terms, Northern Ugandan teachers conceptualised children's learning to be dependent upon a) their cultural heritage and family background, which can be typically located in the home and village; and b) their education system, which is typically outworked at school. Within the wider research study, these two categories of description were considered fundamental or foundational to children's learning. Together they form a binary view of learning that is somewhat paradoxical: dependence upon cultural heritage and family background is more aligned with concepts of organic learning (Beckett, 1999; Robinson, 2009); whereas, dependence upon a school-based system that is examination-driven evokes a more institutional and institutional approach to learning. Evidence of these two conceptions can be seen in the data below. Pseudonyms for research participants are used to comply with ethics protocols. Moreover, some of the expressions in use are typical of African English. Rather than inserting [sic] repeatedly this paper accommodates these differences and relies upon the reader to do likewise.

3.1.1 Children's learning as dependent upon cultural heritage and family background

Data analysis revealed a strong conception that cultural heritage and family background are fundamental to children's learning. The data showed a strong tendency for Northern Ugandan teachers to gravitate toward socio-cultural theories of learning. Cultural heritage and family background, particularly the informal but steadfast learning that took place around the fireplace (*wang-oo*), were considered rudimentary to identity, security, safety, and the perpetuation of social norms. All of these factors were considered foundational to a child's learning. Not once was learning described as an isolated experience; it was always described in communal context. Whenever Northern Ugandan teachers referred to the psychology of learning, their references were always embedded within social and cultural contexts. Clearly, social and cultural structures -

including the family, village, the fireplace, field and farm work, churches and schools - were considered vital to children's learning. This conception is highly compatible with socio-cultural learning models (for example, Bandura, 1986; Bruner, 1996; Leach & Moon, 2008; and Vygotsky, 1978, 1986).

Additionally, conceptions of learning were not confined to certain times or spaces; rather learning was considered to be an ongoing, naturally occurring process (Ssekamwa, 1997) that shouldered the teaching of values. It was explained that many adults, including teachers, village elders, parents, aunts and uncles, and older siblings, took responsibility for children's learning. Ofori-Attah (2009) explained that 'all adults were teachers in one way or another' (p. 152). One particular comment from this study's dataset encapsulated this phenomenon:

> *The child is for everybody and whatever happens to a child affects the whole community, and the whole community was concerned for the growth of every child in the community. And to me that was good. And you find a child grows up and knows that all these are my people.* (Timothy)

In a similar tenor, another participant talked specifically about traditional values of respect and how this was ingrained in traditional learning methods.

> *Right from home respect is taught through elders, and education has the same respect. So you find it is a little somewhat easier because it is in their [children's] blood they have respect. Talking to an elderly person, they respect and want to learn what you are teaching them. Therefore, quick to learn.* (John)

Furthermore, Abe's views of the traditional African setting and childhood learning were very similar to Timothy and John's descriptions.

> *The child development in our cultural setting was so good. In that, even if you had a child at school, the informal learning was also at home. So when the child leaves*

school and goes back to our home setting - the village - the elders takes the responsibility to teach them what they should know as the tribe of that particular area. And that was very good during our time. It is what we call wang-oo, our fireplace. So that is the fireplace and children were taught what they should learn because they belong to the society... (Abe)

Abe linked the past with the present by sharing his experiences with traditional Acholi culture and its re-emergence from war.

Education never stops. I can assure you our country is very rich...

Because we bring children up in morally upright ways - that's why... And we also have a well-established [customs] set for the districts. That is very strong. (Abe)

Further, Michael and Rose discussed the impacts of experiences in infancy upon the disposition of a child.

Michael: …environments affect learning. You can consider right from the womb, and how that child was raised. ... the mother was feeding well, he or she was nursed properly, [affects] cognition.

Interviewer: And what makes up a healthy environment in Uganda? You say healthy pregnancy, mother's feeding well, what else?

Rose: That one depends on the type of the family someone is staying. Maybe suppose you're in a poor family, you cannot get proper food to eat, you don't have a good bed to sleep on. Those are the kinds of problems that affects learning.

In a similar fashion, Mercy, a head of lower primary at a government school, discussed reasons behind children's intelligence.

There are also environmental differences. The resources at home affect achievement. [Where students with more resources excel and students with less resources struggle].

There is also the foundation of the child - how it has been laid.

If the foundation in strong they are quick learners.

Interviewer: What is the foundation of a child?

It is their interest, their environment, their friends. (Mercy)

Similarly, Emanuel, attributed how fast or slow children learn to their background.

Interviewer: When you say a child's background determines the pace, what is your experience with background?

Child background, huh? I try to mean that, you take for instance in a child-headed family, in a family where there are no parents, in a child-headed family with the rest of the siblings. So a child comes to school for class, yet their mind is back at home thinking of should be done and how the home is left; and what if I go back, where and what will I begin with? What will I do then to survive? So that will take his concentration. (Emanuel)

This conception of children's learning reflects the well-known African adage *it takes a village to raise a child*. Although the section below shows that this maxim is not being outworked in many situations today due to the breakdown of family and community structures, the data from this study shows that Northern Ugandan teachers retain a collective view of children's learning and a collegial sense of responsibility. They considered the wellbeing of a child to be an index of the health of a community. This conception is akin to assertions that a child's learning grows by virtue of the health of her environment, and learning ought to be viewed as an organic process (Beckett, 1999; Robinson, 2009, 2010). In light of the child solider and night commuter phenomena that prevailed until 2006 (United Nations OCHA/IRIN, 2004), and the child-headed family phenomenon that persists today (Republic of Uganda, 2003), this is a very sobering finding for Northern Uganda. The very foundation of children's learning was and is under threat due to harsh external factors that destroyed homes and families. This is evident in the data where teachers lament deficiencies in children's learning due to dysfunctional home environments. For example, it was explained that some children come to school with little or no knowledge of health and hygiene, basic literacy and

numeracy, road safety, or lifestyle routines. Teachers also talked about low levels of self-esteem amongst many children as a result of loss of culture. The fundamental nature of cultural heritage has been magnified by its very demise.

3.1.2 Children's learning as dependent upon the education system

Conversely, teachers would also refer to the education system when asked about their experiences with children's learning. Subjects and classes were listed and described, government documents were referred to, and routines were outlined. Teachers frequently interchanged the terms learning and education as they saw them as synonymous. Learning was clearly thought to be institutional. This became evident when teachers associated children's learning with curriculum documents and other government initiatives, like HIV/AIDS education programmes or the packed lunch initiative. From so many angles, data pointed to teachers perceiving children's learning to be dependent upon the government's ability to deliver resources or legislate social and educational change (Willis, 2012). The packed lunch initiative epitomised dependence upon the government to establish social norms:

> *But now the government came up with a system ... It is special program known as Lunch Package. You pack your lunch and you come with it to school. They tried it for one year and there was great improvement* [in learning outcomes]... (Paul)

In a like manner, the following excerpt from an interview with head teachers in a government school typifies the conception that learning is institutional.

> *Interviewer: Can you tell me about your experiences with students and their learning?*
>
> *Godfrey: They start school in P1* [approximately age six]. *They must be mature enough to recognise shapes, dress themselves, walk from home to school. Students start learning from home and progress to the school curriculum. They move through the syllabus developmentally. There is a focus on concrete objects in P1-P3.*

Interviewer: How do you build knowledge in a child?

Godfrey: From the syllabus. [Reliant upon the syllabus]. *It happens in stages.*

Mercy: We have spiral syllabi and the thematic. P1-P3 is focused on the thematic and learning takes place in the local language.

Godfrey's comments reflect the emerging organic-institutional dichotomy, as he talks about learning starting at home and continuing in school. Nevertheless, it ought to be noted that he was asked about how knowledge could be built in a child, Godfrey defaulted to institutional documentation.

Prudence, a primary teacher in a private school, believed learning to be in direct proportion to government policy and enforcement, and expressed a need for the government to compensate for lack of parental initiative.

But the government is putting much pressure. If the family is stopping a child from going to school, the government conducted some operation in the homes. If they find a child at home, and the rest have gone to school, the parent has to be taken to court. So that thing has helped a lot. Any child of school-going age has to be at school so that thing has helped a lot. That's why many children are learning. (Prudence)

Clearly, there is a strong dependence upon institutional initiatives. This observation concurs with literature that describes education in Uganda as reminiscent of colonial influence (Syngellakis & Arudo, 2006). However, colonisation alone cannot take full credit for reliance upon institution-based learning. It ought to be remembered that by the end of the most recent war the majority of the population in Uganda was under the age of 15 because the adult population had been decimated by conflict and war related disease (Uganda Demographics Profile, 2011). One participant explained:

So most of us are orphans these days, war and HIV those are the areas. Either the father or the mother were killed in the war because of the LRA or the AIDS. Because of the war more AIDS came to the Gulu district and might have even killed the father,

the mother. And now the child does not have an attentive guide. See once the parents are not there at all, it is up to the child what to do. (Mark)

Data indicated a strong dependence upon institutional learning to compensate for the breakdown of organic learning that would have otherwise occurred in homes and villages had war not devastated these environments (Willis, 2012). Indeed, teachers were acting in parental roles, simply because parents were not there. For example:

Children, like I said at the beginning, need to be with their parents. They need that parental love. And therefore you might be in a situation where a child because the rebels came abducted the parent of the child while the child was in that house. They probably burnt everything and left the child there in the compound. Probably they killed the parents and left. That is already violence. The child's mind is affected and the child is traumatised. When you bring such a child to a learning environment what do you have to begin with? You have to begin with love. The child will never learn anything from you unless the child believes that you [the teacher] love him or her. (Abe)

Accordingly, institutional learning need not be viewed entirely in a negative light. Indeed, data suggests institutional structure were instrumental in child rearing during and immediately after the wars. This idea is explicated in the discussion section below.

Moreover, it was found that conceptions of institutionalised education included a reliance on institutional artefacts. For example, there was a conception that children's learning was reliant upon the adequate provision of textbooks.

Last year the government has tried to provide the textbooks. But before that there were a lot of problems. So they have been given some books that can help to learn. But even those ones they are not enough because they have the textbook like this one. (Mark)

Many teachers baulked at the idea of improvising or being creative, as it posed a risk to uniformity in education. This was a concern amongst many interviewees, as they esteem consistency and hesitate at instructional diversity. This shows a tendency toward objectivism rather than constructivism in pedagogic approaches. The following excerpt epitomises these concerns.

> *Walter: To me I look at it as they have to provide the materials in order to help those ones who are not creative enough.*
>
> *Interviewer: So when you say there is a limit to creativity, what do you mean by that?*
>
> *Walter: What I am saying is when a situation comes, like now here the way we are going to react is different. So the way we are going to be creative to handle the situation is going to be different* [from each other]. *So there will be no uniformity in Uganda.*
>
> *Mark: Because when you solve this one, this one may solve it in the right way, this may give the wrong way. And in learning whenever you give the wrong one, the child will go with this wrong answer from our* [district].

When asked about developing their own lessons, many teachers hesitated, as they preferred to teach the 'right' thing from the textbook. These comments raise a particularly vexatious issue as they reveal a fixed mindset (Dweck, 2008) concerning learning and education as teachers viewed learning as knowledge transfer.

Data analysis revealed that within this conception is a degree of scepticism toward creativity and favour toward fixed views of intelligence. It may be possible that this conception is a product of didactic, memorisation-based teaching methods that have prevailed since the colonial period (Ssekamwa, 1997) as it was found that an institutional view of learning was coupled with a linear and didactic view of teaching and pedagogy (Willis, 2012). Typically, such views accompany fixed views of potential and capacity (Leach & Moon, 2008), which is a significant finding for this research context as it identifies an area of need for professional learning and development.

4.0 Discussion: Implications for policy and practice

Evidently, teachers in Northern Uganda conceptualised children's learning to be foundationally dependent upon a) their cultural heritage and family background; and b) their education system. *Prima facie,* these two factors seem somewhat opposite in character. The cultural heritage and family background conception is more organic in nature (Beckett, 1999; Robinson, 2009), as children's learning is seen to be a direct product of the security and health of the family unit and the wider community to which the family belongs; and the education system conception is more institutional in character, as there is a strong dependence on processing children through a uniform education system so that learning can be 'perfect.' The institutional conception may seem at odds with the organic conception that a healthy environment grows a healthy child, but upon further investigation this binary perspective is indeed a strength as these two conceptions together make provision for both natural rehabilitation and purposeful interventions. Indeed, data from this study shows that in a post-war context purposeful interventions made by schools compensate for losses suffered by organic structures (like homes and villages) and help expedite natural rehabilitation. Many naturally occurring processes are enhanced or accelerated by purposeful systemic interventions. For example, organic-institutional dynamics are evident in productive farming methods, as depicted in the agrarian metaphor in the graphical abstract. Organic-institutional dynamics evidently exist in children's learning where constructive pedagogic practices enrich learning, and deconstructive experiences stunt learning. (The adverse effects of stress and trauma were part of the wider findings of the research project (Willis, 2012; Willis & Nagel, 2015). These organic-institutional conceptions of learning also add weight to the importance of having strong connections between home and school environments as homes are typically more organic in nature and schools and education systems systemically intervene in the natural process of

human learning. Environmental health in both home and school contexts is vital for the development of educational capital in children.

Both of these conceptions of learning - organic and institutional - are thwart with challenges in Northern Uganda. The demise of the family unit and the breakdown of village life have destroyed the traditional environment. Simultaneously, the pressures of war and poverty have hampered the progress of the education system. Consequently, the collapse of both home and school environments has had adverse reciprocal effects. That is, it is difficult to engage students in meaningful learning when their homes are suffering the effects of poverty and disease; but it is also difficult for homes to be rebuilt when adults have little or no education, restricting the options available for people to provide for their families and contribute to their communities. Therefore, it is evident that efforts to rebuild communities in Northern Uganda need to take a binary approach and simultaneously target both the development of the education system and the restoration of village and home life. This could be described as a concurrent top-down (systemic) and bottom-up (organic) approach. The importance of investment into rebuilding communities on both home and school fronts cannot be understated, as strengthening the educational and social capital of a community has direct benefits for its social and economic capital (Benhabib & Spiegel, 1994; King, 2009). A community can indeed be self-sustaining when it flourishes with knowledge, understanding and skills that can contribute to the development of society. There is a very present need to make significant investments into the education system so this can occur. There is much work to be done to redirect this system from being examination-drive to one that strives for quality learning outcomes. Additionally, the restoration of home environments must also remain a strong priority so that quality learning can be fostered, as healthy home environments provide opportunity for organic learning to take place outside the limits of institutional times and spaces. Hence, partnerships between home and school environments are crucial for redevelopment.

Moreover, considerable evidence exists to suggest that many schools in Northern Uganda function as *new villages* in Northern Uganda today. Many children are growing up without the traditional *wang-oo* fireplace learning where 'the child was for everybody', as communities and families have been fractured by war, poverty and disease. Many teachers and schools are making efforts to compensate for these losses by developing a sense of belonging and family in their schools, and providing opportunities where knowledge and life skills can be shared (Willis, 2012). This is incredibly significant when viewed in terms of Furedi's (2009) assertion that education is the passing down of generational knowledge and wisdom, as in some instances this process would not happen if it were not for teachers taking up this responsibility. Education in Northern Ugandan society is playing a vital role in raising human capital.

5.0 Conclusions

The findings of this study, which point to the importance of institutional education during periods when communities are rebuilding their cultural, social and educational capital, are informative for policy and practice. That is, while the traditional organic structures of the home and village are in disrepair, schools and other institutions have the capacity to 'stand in the gap' to help raise the upcoming generation. It would be fair to say that schools in Northern Uganda have acted as villages and teachers as parents, and that this *pro tempore* arrangement has assisted in times of crisis and post-crisis community restoration. Although the binary nature of teachers' conceptions of children's learning described above appear to be poles apart, these two complementary but contrasting conceptions may well form a foundation for educational development in this context.

There is an evident need to bolster educational and social capital in Northern Uganda. Critical links exist between a community's educational development and human capital and its capacity to sustain positive social and economic activity (Benhabib & Spiegel, 1994; King, 2009). For an education system to successfully invest educational capital into its community's social, cultural and economic capital, it must itself have rigorous injections of resources in this regard. If children's learning is dependent upon cultural heritage, family background and the education system, then it is vital that resources are allocated accordingly during these imminent years of rehabilitation. Consistent investments into families, villages and schools by way of educational, social and economic development could well yield a productive return of increased economic and social security. Therefore, it is imperative that educational leaders take steps toward making investments for the future growth of the region.

Ugandan custody of educational initiatives is vital if community development is to be sustainable. How Northern Ugandan society and its government go about investing into its education system and the rehabilitation of families and villages ought to be determined by the Ugandan people. If culture is to be restored and preserved, all educationally driven rehabilitative efforts should be owned and directed by the stakeholders of that culture. In order for the self- and community-esteem of the Ugandan people to be strengthened, foreign influences must be managed. A firm conviction has arisen from this study that local people are empowered and strengthened when their culture is validated and affirmed (Willis, 2012). In this way, communal security may be reinforced, minds may be 'opened', learning interactions can take place, and lives can be enriched.

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