Teachers’ conceptions of children’s learning in Northern Uganda: A phenomenographic study in a post-war context

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Abstract

This thesis presents the findings of an in-depth study that investigated the conceptions held by teachers in Northern Uganda concerning children’s learning. Through the methodology of phenomenography and an interpretivist research paradigm, this study sought to understand the experiences of local teachers as they were described in interviews. Conceptions of children’s learning were identified in the data analysis process, and these were organised into what are called categories of description. This process culminated in two main research outcomes. First, the categories of description were synthesised to holistically describe the phenomenon of teacher’s conceptions of children’s learning in Northern Uganda. This phenomenon was depicted in a mental model that describes the growth processes of children’s learning. Second, this study has generated understandings about the effects of stress and trauma upon learning that are evident in the research context but also considered transferrable. These findings give considerable weight to the central role that teachers play in the neurological rehabilitation of children who have suffered the effects of stress or trauma. This study also makes strong assertions about the efficacy of phenomenography, the study of experience, in connecting psychological and sociological aspects of learning. Considering these findings together, it is evident that the quality of learning experiences provided by teachers is paramount to healthy psychological and sociological development in children.
Declaration of originality

This paper is the original work of the author and does not contain material that has been previously published or written other than where due reference has been made within the text.

..............................

Alison S. Willis
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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

IDP  Internally displaced persons
LRA  Lord’s Resistance Army
(rebel forces that operated in Northern Uganda, led by Joseph Kony)
MDG’s Millennium Development Goals
NAPE National Assessment of Progress in Education
NGO Non-government organisation
PLE Primary Leaving Exam
UCE Ugandan Certificate of Education
UN United Nations
UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF United Nations Children’s Fund
UPDF Ugandan People’s Defence Forces (the Ugandan army)
UPE Ugandan Public Education initiative

Style.

This thesis has been prepared using a modified version of the APA style, with reference to the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, 6th edition, second printing.
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Chapter 1

Research context, problem and questions

Introduction

Uganda, a country once dubbed “the pearl of Africa” (Leggett, 2001) is now more commonly known for its wartime atrocities. Among the most recent violations of human rights was the abduction of an estimated 30,000 children by the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) rebel forces (United Nations OCHA/IRIN, 2004). These children were forced to serve as child soldiers or sex slaves. The LRA wreaked havoc in Northern Uganda for approximately 20 years between the mid 1980s and mid 2000s (United Nations OCHA/IRIN, 2004). So heinous were the war crimes in Northern Uganda that at the height of the conflict between the LRA and the Ugandan People’s Defence Forces, the head of the International Crisis Group think tank, Gareth Evans, made it clear to the international community that the most dangerous places for children on Earth were countries where they were recruited for war to serve as soldiers or sex slaves (Reuters, 2006). At the time he labelled the LRA and its founding leader, Joseph Kony, the worst offenders.

The effects of such atrocities, where children played a central role, are far-reaching (Mwakikagile, 2009a). Not only were children victims of war crimes, they also became unwilling perpetrators. Communities were repeatedly ruptured by
conflict, terror, disease and poverty. Consequently, Northern Ugandan society has been left with gaping political, social, economic and emotional wounds. Generations of children were born and raised in war and have never known a happy or healthy childhood. Approximately half of the population of Uganda is under the age of 15 (Uganda Demographics Profile, 2011). The effects of poverty and war upon the children of Northern Uganda are devastating in a number of manifestations – health, education, and economic and social security to name a few. When these ramifications are considered in view of the conviction that the way children are raised today determines the society of tomorrow (Grille, 2005), the gravity of the situation becomes apparent.

This study sought to investigate the experiences that teachers in Northern Uganda have had with children and their learning in this context. It was particularly interested in teachers’ conceptions of children’s learning, and therefore used phenomenography as the primary methodology. The guiding questions, based on a phenomenographic approach, were as follows:

What are Ugandan teachers’ experiences of children and their learning?

How do Ugandan teachers describe their experiences of children as learners?

Fundamental to this project was the inherent belief that education can be transformative, both with students (Leach & Moon, 2008) and with teachers and education leaders (O’Donoghue & Clarke, 2010). Education as a catalyst for community and individual transformation is particularly topical in contexts involving poverty (Jensen, 2009). Education and learning based literature shows that for change to be effective, transformation must occur at many levels (for example, Grille, 2005;
illers, 2009; Jensen, 2009). At a societal level, Grille (2005) called for transformation in ways we relate to one another and our environments, stressing that the health of a society is dependent upon the health of its children. At a personal level, Illeris (2009) advocated Mezirow’s concept of transformative learning and the need to change ways of knowing. Transformative learning may require previous schemas of knowledge and understanding to be discarded and replaced with new ones.

It is for these reasons that the aftermath in terms of children’s learning in Northern Uganda is colossal, as successive generations have been denied opportunities for formal learning. Schooling ceased to exist in many cases, and where it is now being restored it continues to suffer the ongoing effects of a post-war environment – social and economic fracture, absence of infrastructure and a dire shortage of adult carers, be they teachers or parents. The disintegration of formal education was compounded by a simultaneous breakdown of homes and villages that has further denied children opportunities for informal learning. This study found that this wide reaching absence of formal education was further complicated by a deficit in knowledge about childcare and development. Nevertheless, learning did not cease entirely; many children learnt survival and combat skills during wartime.

If education is to be transformative (Mezirow, 1991) in Northern Uganda, it would seem that there is a rudimentary need to overcome the effects of years of war, poverty and disease that have resulted in generations of Ugandan people living in survival mode. Although this may seem an immense undertaking, the enormity of the situation in Northern Uganda presents such vast opportunities for proactive research to be carried out to inform government policy, curriculum development and pedagogic
practice, to boost community redevelopment and social capital. This project seeks to make a substantial and original contribution to knowledge by categorically describing Ugandan teachers’ conceptions of children’s learning.

It is apparent that teachers’ predispositions concerning the mind, potential and intelligence affect their practice (Leach & Moon, 2008; O’Donoghue & Clarke, 2010). The conceptions that teachers have about learning may either restrict or expand their perceptions of an individual student’s capacity, thus affecting their interactions with the student. Examples of restrictive conceptions might include the idea that potential is fixed, or the notion that a handicap indefinitely disqualifies a student from certain opportunities. Leach and Moon (2008) argued that attempting to understand the human mind may reduce the risk of educators limiting their students to finite definitions of human capacity widely used around the world (for example, the notion of a ‘full potential’). Therefore, to fathom the situation in Northern Uganda, this study sought to understand teachers’ conceptions of children’s learning giving due consideration to the complexities of a post war environment.

Furthermore, this study found that understandings of learning vary between cultures. Cultural differences in conceptions of learning were unmistakable in the pilot interview, and this pivotal discussion forced a significant change of direction for this project. It became evident in the pilot interview that before issues of pedagogy can be addressed, research in Northern Uganda needs to look first at fundamental beliefs about children and their learning, giving due consideration to their history of conflict, associated poverty and disease. Published literature about children’s learning in African contexts is not as plentiful as what is available in the West. This is especially
so in Northern Uganda due to decades of ongoing warfare. Notwithstanding this constraint, there is much activity in Northern Uganda focused toward rebuilding schools and education systems. This combination of limited available literature and high levels of activity begs the question; upon what is current practice based?

This introductory chapter outlines the case for this research project. It provides a contextual background, an explanation of the research problem, and the research guiding questions that arose from this problem. This chapter also articulates the project aims, provides reasons for the research, and makes a case for its significance and innovation. This chapter concludes by outlining the direction taken by this thesis to answer the research questions.

**Context of research**

Research into children’s learning and education in Northern Uganda is timely. As explained above, for decades children in Northern Uganda have suffered the effects of war and associated poverty and HIV/AIDS and education based research in the region is scant. The armed conflict against the LRA moved beyond Ugandan borders in 2006 so it is an opportune time for academic research to assist in assessing the current situation. This particular project was conducted in the northern district of Gulu, described by Mwakikagile (2009) as “the epicentre of the insurgency launched by the LRA” (p. 54). To better understand this research context, let us first consider the ethnic background of this people group.
The Acholi people of Northern Uganda belong to the ethnic African group called the Luo people. Originating from Sudan, the Acholi people inhabit the Northern regions of Uganda – Gulu, Kitgum, Amuru and Pader, also known as Acholiland – but can also be found over the borders of Sudan to the north and Kenya in the east (Finnström, 2008). Acholiland lies in the northern extent of Uganda and is separated from the capital, Kampala, by the White Nile (Figure 1.1). The political boundaries of Uganda today are remnant of the British Uganda protectorate and were forged by competition for African territory between Great Britain, France and Germany. Consequently, Ugandan borders only loosely reflect the history of the tribes and kingdoms that occupy the land (Leggett, 2001). The regions belonging to these tribes (clans led by chiefs and elders where leadership is based on consensus) and kingdoms (larger societies led by a monarch) can be seen in Figure 1.2. For this project, the Luo people of Northern Uganda are more accurately referred to as the Acholi people. The Acholi people are an ethnic group comprising clans or tribes. Most Acholi people are subsistence farmers or herders (Mwakikagile, 2009a).
Figure 1.1. Acholiland – land area traditionally inhabited by the Acholi people in Northern Uganda

Figure 1.2. Map showing kingdoms and tribes of Uganda
Formal schooling in Uganda has its foundations in British colonialism, but since independence in 1963 it has fallen victim to civil unrest. Today, due to long-term insecurity and subsequent poverty, Ugandan teachers are poorly trained and in short supply (Government White Paper, 1992). In 2008 only 82.4% of males and 66.8% of females above the age of 15 were literate (UNESCO, 2008), and many children were used for labour up to this time. Some teachers in remote villages have no tertiary training whatsoever. Efforts are being made by schools to educate children, but this study shows that it would seem the long-term effects of poverty have the power to thwart education as it is often considered a trivial matter compared to the everyday struggles of survival and the suffocating effect of hopelessness. This mindset is discussed in greater length in the literature review. Furthermore, many children are used for domestic labour rather than being afforded the opportunity of a formal education. Those who do go to school are also at risk of being used for labour while in attendance. Consequently, education is an expense that many parents in Northern Uganda cannot afford, or do not consider.

With this in mind, and the conviction that the way children are raised today will determine the society of tomorrow (Grille, 2005), it was the goal of this research project to understand the fundamental beliefs that Ugandan teachers have about children and their learning. To do this, stories and experiences of Ugandan teachers with children and their learning were sought.
The research problem

This project arose from an invitation from the director of a primary school in Gulu, Northern Uganda, to the researcher (an Australian educator) to come and help train their teaching staff. The possibilities were exciting; however, exactly what professional development schoolteachers in Northern Uganda needed was unknown. It was out of this predicament that the research puzzle emerged. It is duly acknowledged that such a predicament necessitated balancing the tension between taking up a presenting opportunity for research and implementing the principles of empirical social research (Holliday, 2007) as both opportunistic and empirical agendas merged in this project. This notion is discussed in more depth in the methodology chapter.

Another tension that had to be managed throughout this study was the express desire to conduct culturally sensitive and contextually appropriate research. The children of Northern Uganda are known for their traumatic history of exploitation as child soldiers and slaves, and any research or educational developments would need to carefully consider these contextual issues. Furthermore, the tensions between Western and non-Western approaches to learning also needed to be considered. O’Donoghue and Clarke (2010) stressed the importance of carefully considering the implications of transferring knowledge, theories, models or methods between countries or cultures. They argued that in many instances such transnational transfers have been inappropriate (2010), and gave examples of teachers and lecturers being deployed overseas and rushing into a job employing the pedagogies of their country of origin (citing O’Donoghue, 1991). Furthermore, Bartlett and Burton’s (2007) position that “teachers interpret the curriculum within the context of their own situation” (p. 75)
applies to both local and foreign teachers, and in this instance to researchers also. It is appropriate to acknowledge that the potential of this research could have been inhibited by a lofty Western attitude (Willis & Allen, 2011). On the contrary, this research was conducted with the mindset that other cultures could well learn from this community’s story of survival and restoration. Therefore, this study required a methodology that would be flexible and dynamic enough to accommodate cultural differences so that the researcher could fully comprehended Northern Ugandan teachers’ conceptions of children’s learning.

The research design

It must be duly acknowledged that phenomenography was not the original methodology of this project. Due to the cross-cultural nature of the project the original research design had adopted an ethnographic approach. An ethnographic interview schedule was constructed around Leach and Moon’s (2008) work on cross-cultural dimensions of pedagogy, and it was tested in a pilot interview. The findings from this exercise changed the direction of the study as they reframed the research problem for the researcher. The questions had been constructed from a Western paradigm and focussed on pedagogy, but the answers to these questions came from an African mindset and centred on the effects of poverty and disease in a post-war environment. It became evident that conceptions of education and learning were significantly different between the two cultures, and this difference not only had to be accommodated but also had to be viewed as integral to the study. Hence, the pilot interview proved pivotal to the project as it forced a re-think of the research design
After much deliberation and reflection, it was decided that a phenomenographic methodology was the most appropriate approach for the research problem and context as this methodology seeks to describe the experiences of other people to better understand their situations (Marton & Booth, 1997). Therefore, the research guiding questions were adjusted and refashioned accordingly. As the study unfolded, it was found that questions pertaining to experience proved efficacious in revealing a multiplicity of issues that surround children’s learning in Northern Uganda. Phenomenography forced the researcher to a) heavily rely upon local descriptions of a phenomenon, and b) diligently seek to understand the semantics underpinning these descriptions. It was hoped that this research design would minimise the risk of cultural and professional assumptions. Reflections on this cross-cultural research dynamic have been published by Willis and Allen (2011).

The research questions

Careful consideration of the research problem and context, and a deep desire to better understand the experiences and associated perceptions held by Northern Ugandan teachers concerning children and their learning through the methodology of phenomenography, led to the development of the following research guiding questions.

| What are Ugandan teachers’ experiences of children and their learning? |
| How do Ugandan teachers describe their experiences of children as learners? |
These research questions were framed in a phenomenographic light, centring on the experiences of Ugandan teachers with children and their learning. When investigating these experiences, this project sought to understand perceptions of children, intelligence, potential, minds and learning, and the purpose of education and the role it plays in childhood development. This process of sharing experiences in the data collection phase enabled the categorical description of Ugandan teachers’ conceptions of children’s learning in the data analysis phase. Therefore, as the study developed, the focus of the research was narrowed from seeking to understand teachers’ experiences of children and their learning in the data collection phase to describing conceptions of children’s learning in the data analysis phase. This process of semantic fine-tuning facilitated the construction of phenomenographic categories of description that culminated in an outcome space. The data chapters in this paper (Chapters 4, 5 and 6) present teachers’ conceptions of children’s learning that were identified in the data, and the research outcomes and implications chapters present the researcher’s interpretations and analysis of these conceptions in what are called categories of description (Chapters 7, 8 and 9). This project deliberately distinguishes between the terms conceptions and categories of description so the voices of the teachers and the voice of the researcher are not as likely to be confused. Although it is not possible to divorce the influence of the researcher from the organisation of the data at any stage (Holliday, 2007), it is possible to make discernments between the identification of themes in data (conceptions) and the interpretive analysis of themes (categories of description).
Aims of the study

An extensive review of literature revealed that little has been published about the qualitative conceptions that local teachers hold concerning children and their learning in Northern Uganda. With this in mind, together with the research problem, context and guiding questions articulated above, the aims of this project were as follows: (a) to generate knowledge and understandings about Ugandan teachers’ conceptions of children and their learning based upon their experiences; (b) to generate understandings about the purpose of education in Northern Uganda and its role in child development; (c) to establish a circle of learning between African and Australian educators with the aim of giving Ugandan teachers a voice; and (d) to provide a model for educational research in situations that involve researchers and participants from different cultures. Each of these aims is considered in more detail in the sections that follow.

Aim A: To generate knowledge and understandings about children and their learning in Northern Uganda

The first aim of this project was to describe the conceptions that Ugandan teachers hold about children and their learning based on their experiences. By visiting Uganda and conducting in-depth interviews with local teachers, it was hoped that a more circumspect view than is currently available in literature regarding the situations faced by Ugandan children and how their learning is understood and affected can be achieved. It was hoped that such understandings might serve as a foundation for future research within the same population. Such findings should be useful for leaders of learning – teachers and parents (O’Donoghue & Clarke, 2010). An example of a
similar sequence of research in Northern Uganda was the qualitative research conducted by Betancourt, Speelman, Onyango and Bolton (2009) that articulated locally defined mental health syndromes amongst the Acholi people. This research was succeeded by the quantitative research conducted by Sonderegger, Rombouts, Océn and McKeever (2011) that utilised these locally defined syndromes to measure the effectiveness of a mental health intervention. In a similar manner, it was hoped that this research in the field of education would provide a foundation for future research in the region. Indeed, the research outcomes presented in Chapter 7 fulfil this aim.

**Aim B: To generate understandings about the purpose of education in Northern Uganda and its role in child development**

This project was expressly concerned with children and their learning in Northern Uganda, and sought to contextualise research findings within the purpose of education and its role in child development. Therefore, the scope of this study was confined to children and their learning as individuals, members of families, members of communities, and participants within an education system. This approach is premised by a view that education can be defined as human and environmental factors and processes that intervene in the natural human trait of learning (Spindler, 1997). It was hoped that the outcomes of this study could generate understandings surrounding the purpose and role of education as a system that intervenes in child development and learning in Northern Uganda. Understandings about Ugandan education that emerged from this study are presented in Chapter 7, and transferrable contributions to understanding about the effects of stress and trauma upon learning are presented in Chapter 8. The implications of these findings are reflected upon in Chapter 9 and may be useful for leaders for learning – for example, policy makers and academics.
(O’Donoghue & Clarke, 2010). The outcomes of implications of this research may also provide a platform for future endeavours of a similar nature.

**Aim C: To establish a circle of learning between African and Australian educators with the aim of giving Ugandan teachers a voice**

There are many reasons Ugandan teachers are largely without a voice in the academic arena. Due to their history of conflict and associated complications, they lack the physical means to research and report their own contexts. Such deficiencies are not restricted to, but include, social and political insecurity, limited education, health challenges, and limited global exposure and experience. This study found that deficiencies like these are widely acknowledged by Ugandan teachers. To this end, it was an aim of this study to provide a means for Ugandan teachers to share their experiences with the broader education community. Notwithstanding this, Ugandan teachers also belong to a society that has the wherewithal to reemerge in the aftermath of war and associated poverty and disease. It would be foolish to only consider their needs, and not endeavour to learn of and from their strengths. Therefore, it was an aim of this study to form a learning circle between African and Australian educators in the hope that such relationships will have mutual benefits. The dynamics of the relationships that eventuated from this project are explored in depth in Willis and Allen (2011). This paper specifically deals with the need for cross-cultural humility in research situations of this nature.
Aim D: To provide a model for educational research in situations that involve researchers and participants from different cultures

It was an aim of this project to demonstrate an efficacious model of research for education-based studies that involve researchers and participants from different cultures. By using the relatively new methodology of phenomenography, it is hoped that a process for establishing understandings by describing teachers’ experiences and conceptions of children’s learning will better position researchers to respond to foreign invitations for involvement in education development. Research of this kind is foundational. It goes before other research that may seek to intervene or implement programs or policies. Therefore, there is a very real possibility that the methodology and methods used in this study may contribute towards the development of a research model that accommodates the cultural differences between researchers and research participants, particularly within the dynamic of Western researchers and non-Western participants. In response to this research aim, Chapter 7 proposes a phenomenographic interview schedule for similar research projects.

Reasons for the research

This research probes the foundations that underpin education in Northern Uganda, that is, teachers’ experiences and conceptions of children and their learning. It was anticipated that this study would yield rich insights into the plethora of issues and struggles that make up the tapestry of children’s learning and education in Northern Uganda. As the data chapters reveal, these hopes were not disappointed. It is hoped that these insights will in turn help educators and researchers at local and
international levels to better understand the challenges faced by Northern Ugandan teachers and students. At a local level, it is hoped that by articulating understandings of children’s learning, local teachers and heads of schools will be afforded an external perspective of their own situation that they might not have otherwise been privy to due to familiarity with their own context and culture or due to political constraints. (One of the challenges this particular study faced was the combination of Western and African paradigms and cultures. The researcher’s role in this regard is discussed in depth in Chapter 3). At an international level, it is hoped that this research will provide a platform for further research to take place. By describing local conceptions of children’s learning, it is hoped that future research will be able to stand upon this knowledge to further progress education in Northern Uganda in a culturally sensitive and contextually appropriate manner.

Much of the literature surrounding education in Uganda, or the wider region of Sub-Saharan Africa, is concerned with health and hygiene programmes designed to help control the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Or, it is concerned with the mechanics of the education system, rather than the learning that takes place within the system. For example, as Chapter 2 reveals, literature concerning education in Uganda typically centres on numbers of students, teachers, and classrooms; test results; or policy and curriculum initiatives. There seems to be limited literature that specifically focuses on childhood development or learning and the role of education in facilitating learning. This research has endeavoured to generate knowledge and understandings specific to childhood learning and the role of education in learning.
Significance and innovation of this project

It is anticipated that understandings gained from this study will make significant contributions to the wider body of knowledge about children from traumatised contexts and their learning. It is anticipated that these contributions will be numerous and extensive for the following reasons.

First, this research in Gulu is unprecedented. The dissemination of the findings of this project has the unique opportunity to make significant contributions to the intellectual and social capital of the educators in the region. It will provide the education community with research-based evidence for decision-making and policy direction. Furthermore, it will also assist in the etic meta-cognitive analysis of their own situation by providing an external perspective and articulating their collective understandings in an organised fashion (Richards & Morse, 2007). It is also hoped that this study will serve to validate the experiences of teachers in Northern Uganda and build their esteem as a community. Already, opportunities have opened up to share these research findings with Ugandan education policy makers and leaders.

Second, this research may act as a pilot study or basis for future research conducted in the same community. As alluded to above, qualitative research of a phenomenographic nature that seeks to describe or define local understandings may well provide a platform for future research to stand upon. Phenomenography as a research methodology is discussed in more depth in Chapter 3. Notwithstanding this, it is important to consider the significance of this study’s methodology and methods from the outset. By describing local understandings, future research will have access
to critical information that enables context-specific and culturally sensitive applications. It is hoped that the conceptions of children’s learning that have been categorically described by this project will be published in a format that is appropriate to the Ugandan culture. It is envisaged that such a publication will be produced with an attitude of cultural humility (Willis & Allen, 2011), in the spirit of what a Western educator learnt about children’s learning from the Ugandan people.

Third, this research may act as a pilot study or basis for future research conducted by Western researchers in non-Western settings. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, phenomenography has the potential to emerge as a methodology that may assist in the dialogue between cultures. Marton and Booth (1997) claimed that it is particularly applicable to the field of education, and this study aims to build on this premise by demonstrating that phenomenography is an efficacious methodology for cross-cultural education studies.

Fourth, this study is positioned to contribute to the body of knowledge about the effects of stress and trauma upon learning. As this is a qualitative study, the findings from the data are strictly context specific. However, these findings have contributed to the development of a series of illustrations that depict the effects of stress and trauma upon children’s learning. In the first instance, these illustrations were developed to show how the findings from this study relate to existing theories of learning found in literature. As the data analysis phase progressed, it became apparent that this illustrations had the capacity to contribute to the current body of knowledge about learning. These illustrations have already been shared with educators from developed and developing contexts in various university courses, and their reactions to
it have been positive to date. It is hoped that these findings can be published in due course.

Lastly, this project is innovative in that it strives towards a cultural exchange in education. It is anticipated that lessons regarding children in post-war contexts may be taken from this community and transferred or adapted for other contexts. As these findings will be specific to a community that has suffered the effects of war-related trauma, they may be useful for future studies in similar contexts. Already the findings of this study have informed keynote presentations for West Papuan teachers who have experienced the struggles of civil unrest. These findings were favourably received.

**Structure of the thesis**

This chapter serves to frame the research guiding questions within the research problem and context, and within the methodological approach of phenomenography. It makes clear the project aims, the reasons behind the research and the significance of its contribution to the wider body of knowledge. Chapter 2 presents a rigorous overview and critique of current literature surrounding the research topic. The review begins by setting an historic background to learning and education in Northern Uganda, and progresses to expound the detrimental effects of approximately 40 years of successive wars. The current education system is also discussed alongside an exposition of the literature that addresses the ongoing struggles faced by educators in Uganda. The review progresses to consider the wider literature available concerning perceptions of children and their learning around the world to better contextualise the situation in
Northern Uganda. Chapter 3 then goes on to unpack the qualitative methods and related methodology and research paradigm that informed this project. It begins by providing an explanation of the research design process, including the pivotal role of the pilot interview and the unfolding nature of qualitative research. It then proceeds to discuss the methodologies of phenomenography and ethnography, describe the research methods of interviews and observations, and bracket all of these within the overarching research paradigm of interpretivism. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 present the data findings within a phenomenographic framework. It is in these data chapters that teachers’ conceptions of children’s learning are identified and the data is organised and presented accordingly. Chapter 7 synthesises these findings and presents a metaphoric illustration *The growth (doŋo) of children’s learning in Northern Uganda*. (*Doŋo* is the Acholi word for growth). The research outcomes directly contribute to the knowledge about the effects of stress and trauma upon children’s learning, outlined in Chapter 8. Finally, Chapter 9 discusses implications for future practice and research and draws final conclusions about the research project and journey.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

This study is deeply interested in understanding teachers’ experiences of children and their learning in Northern Uganda. Seeking to understand experiences is a starting point in this research process, with the ultimate goal being the categorical description of teacher’s conceptions of children’s learning. Accordingly, this literature review looks closely at what is known about education in Northern Uganda and the struggles associated with raising and educating children in that context. Literature from abroad is also considered to ascertain current perspectives of children and their learning. The purpose of this review was to clearly identify the gaps in literature that exist for this project: that is, locally defined conceptions of children’s learning in Northern Uganda. As outlined in the introduction chapter, it was hoped that by defining such local understandings a foundation will be established for future research or education initiatives, rather than solely relying upon Western practices and paradigms that typically dominate the academic arena.

This review has three main purposes. The first purpose is the contextualisation of children’s learning in Northern Uganda by considering the history of the region in terms of culture, politics and education. The second purpose is a consideration of substantive theory that investigates the effects of poverty, war and disease upon
children’s learning to critique the situation in Northern Uganda. The third purpose is to critique empirical learning theory in view of the history and the struggles in Northern Uganda. To achieve these purposes, this review is organised as follows. First, it begins by giving a summary of the history of education in Northern Uganda, including indigenous Ugandan education and the influence of British colonisation. Second, an overview of the literature that investigates the successive wars that ravaged the region and the consequent effects upon children’s learning is provided. It must be noted that the most recent conflict only ceased in 2006 and due to the associated dangers of war and its after effects academic reports addressing education in this war zone are limited. Accounts from humanitarian organisations that reported their findings during the war are more readily available. Thus, one of the aims of this study is to make a substantive and original contribution to the body of knowledge in this area, as outlined in Chapter 1. The third part of this review provides an overview of education in Uganda today. This section relies heavily on the historical context established in the first two sections that describe the current education system. The fourth part of this review launches from this platform and delves into the current struggles associated with living in Northern Uganda and how these affect education. The fifth part of the review considers the quandary between movements to internationalise and Africanise education in Africa. It seems that Western aid has flooded the nation through non-government organisations (NGOs), but there is a shortage of literature about the tensions that exist between the influence of foreign aid and the preservation of African culture. Finally, the sixth part of this chapter widens the lens of review to explore the findings of other international studies concerning children and their learning around the world. In this way, a backdrop of current international research is established to help contextualise in time and space the locally
described Acholi conceptions of children’s learning, which is the research topic of this study.

A history of childhood learning in Northern Uganda

This section of the review seeks to understand the historic background of Acholi children and their learning in Northern Uganda. According to the Ugandan government, the Acholi people have been marginalised within the nation of Uganda for many years (Republic of Uganda, 2003). They have suffered the effects of ongoing conflicts since the time of Idi Amin’s presidency (1971-1979). This part of the review will begin with an investigation into the traditional African setting from which tribal traditions and values have been derived. It will then discuss the impacts of multiculturalism upon the Acholi culture, particularly the influences of British colonisation in Northern Uganda. By reviewing literature pertaining to traditional indigenous education (which is somewhat sparse in itself) and colonial education, a fuller appreciation of what was lost during consecutive wars is achieved.

African indigenous education

Winston Churchill once dubbed Uganda the “Pearl of Africa” (Leggett, 2001). Rich in fertile soils and well watered by the River Nile, the tribes and kingdoms that originally inhabited the land now known as Uganda were pastoralists and subsistence farmers. In his book *History and development of education in Uganda*, Ssekamwa (1997) described at length indigenous education before European influence. During this era education and learning were not confined to school systems or buildings.
Rather, it occurred all day and into part of the night as children socialised with adult members of their tribes. Indeed, educating children was the responsibility of every adult citizen (Ssekamwa, 1997). Integrated learning took place in the field or around the campfire and included “desirable social behaviour, customs, history, geography, biology, chemistry, agriculture, religion, psychology, philosophy, economics and politics” (p. 2). Ssekamwa (1997) also listed the following topics as belonging to a typical indigenous Ugandan curriculum: cooperation, the environment, belonging to a group, discipline, culture, integrated religion and medicine, and manners. A diverse range of skills was also needed, as there was no automation or industrialisation. Skills were broadly divided by gender. Boys learnt to build houses, manufacture and use weapons, practice animal husbandry, tailor clothes, and trade (Ofori-Attah, 2009). Further, they were also taught principles of leadership and law so they could mature to become tribal elders or chiefs when they were grown. Girls mastered the skills of planting and harvesting food crops, cooking, nursing children and home management (Ofori-Attah, 2009). Boys learnt from fathers, uncles and other men in the tribe, and girls were taught by their mothers, aunts and other women. Ssekamwa (1997) described a generationally integrated society where the young and old lived side-by-side every day. Ofori-Attah (2009) explained this phenomenon:

“Long before the introduction of Western methods of schooling in Africa, every society had established intellectual traditions for preparing young children to become responsible adults. In its rudimentary form, all adults were teachers in one way or another…. The predominant mode of teaching was verbal communication” (p. 152).

Children were very grounded in their villages and had strong connections to the land. This was quite different to European models of education where children were (and continue to be) institutionalised for allotted periods of time.
Ssekamwa (1997) compared indigenous African and Western education systems and contrasted the differences between the two. One of the big differences he acknowledged was the designated times and locations of learning in the West where students are expected to learn between certain hours in allotted classroom spaces. Western models also attracted fees and education was, therefore, not affordable for all families. Conversely, indigenous Ugandan education included every child. Another significant difference was the discrimination of people who could be teachers. In the indigenous model, all adults were expected to be teachers. In the Western model, only specially trained people could fill that role. One of the most notable differences between the two models of education was that indigenous Ugandan education was non-literate. That is, it relied upon oral traditions rather than reading and writing. An excerpt from Ssekamwa’s (1997) work is provided in Appendix 1 to further explain this non-literate approach to education.

Considering Ssekamwa’s (1997) view of indigenous Ugandan education, it would be reasonable to describe this traditional system as ‘organic’, based on Sir Ken Robinson’s definition of education systems in his recent works (2009, 2010). Robinson (2009) also compelled educators to reconsider industrialised models of European education that dominate the Western world, and contemplate ‘organic’ models that create environments for developing children’s strengths. He contended that if the conditions are right a person’s growth would occur naturally. As the research outcomes from this study show, Robinson’s (2009, 2010) espousal of ‘organic’ models of learning proves to be central to the findings of this study as Northern Ugandan teachers conceived cultural heritage to be fundamental children’s
learning. His work is reviewed further in this chapter in the section that investigates current international thought about children’s learning.

Notwithstanding the benefits of indigenous education models, life was not entirely blissful in pre-colonial days (Leggett, 2001). Conflict between the tribes has long existed and even today Ugandan people strongly identify with their geographic tribal regions or kingdoms. Foreign interests in Africa, particularly from Egypt, Israel, Great Britain, France, and Germany, further complicated tribal differences. Foreign traders and explorers looking for the source of the Nile invaded the region as early as the 1830s (Mwakikagile, 2009). Such multi-cultural influences introduced other models of business, economics, politics and education (Ssekamwa, 1997).

Colonial influence was introduced in 1875 when the king of Buganda, the largest kingdom in the region, wrote to the Church of England in 1875 inviting missionary activity (Leggett, 2001; Ssekamwa, 1997). His rationale was to protect his kingdom from colonial conflict (Leggett, 2001; Ssekamwa, 1997). This was the beginning of what would become formal relations with Britain. Such a relationship between Buganda and Britain also meant that the future British Uganda protectorate would centre on the Bugandan kingdom, which resulted in conflict with other tribes and kingdoms, including the Acholi people (Mwakikagile, 2009; 2009a). This tribal unrest created tensions that later erupted in political insecurity once independence was granted (Leggett, 2001). When discussing this turn of events, Mwakikagile (2009a) made strong statements about the risk of ethno-phobia in Uganda. These revelations are significant in light of the civil wars that prevailed over four decades in the North, discussed in the section below.
Schooling during the British colonial period

The British Uganda protectorate was declared in 1894 by an announcement in the London Gazette (Leggett, 2001). Although British colonialists were invited by the king of Buganda to bring their influence to the region, they took an opportunistic approach and set about spreading Anglo-Saxon civilisation (James, 1994). Of course, the introduction of formal schooling made this kind of cultural evangelisation possible. Five years after the declaration of the Ugandan protectorate, Rudyard Kipling would pen the famous poem “The White Man’s Burden,” a poetic commentary on the imperialist perspective of taking up a global responsibility for civilising other cultures (Kipling, 1899). According to James (1994) the British were persuaded that East Africa needed to be rescued from itself. James quoted senior proconsul Lord Lugard, who was employed during the establishment of the protectorate to build stockades and make treaties with the tribal leaders, as saying:

“The African knows no peace. One day you may see peace and plenty, well-tilled fields, and children playing in the sun; on the next you may find the corpses of the men, the bodies of the children half burnt in the flames which consumed the village, while the women are captives of the victorious raiders. Not against the slave-trade alone are our efforts needed… The Pax Britannica which shall stop this lawless raiding and this constant inter-tribal war will be the greatest blessing that Africa has known since the Flood” (1994, p. 290).

Upon the withdrawal of the British Empire and the subsequent independence granted to many African nations, opinions regarding the fate of nations like Uganda were divided. Some blamed the British Empire for its systemic role in the demise of Uganda as independence was followed by political insecurity and the uprising of militia (Mwakikagile, 2009a), while others blamed the native-born people of Uganda
James, 1994). One Ugandan journalist, Mwakikagile, born in the town of Aboke in Northern Uganda talked of British colonial rule as a seedbed for the ensuing conflict involving the LRA. An excerpt from one of his articles is provided here as a contrasting perspective to the above quote from Lugard.

“...during perhaps the worst phase in the two-decade war in Northern Uganda [in October 2004] I finally managed to visit the internally displaced people’s camps… Travelling with a medical aid team for this paper (The East African, October 11, 2004), the tight military regime meant we could only drive into the war-effected [sic] villages after 10 in the morning and had to clear out by 4 in the afternoon; hence the lines of sick people who had not received medical help for over a year, were too long to be served in that space of time. They would have to wait another week when their camp came back on schedule.

“In the meantime, those who failed to reach the doctors on time would continue to die at the rate of 5 a day…”

“Later one of the American volunteer doctors asked me about the war: ‘Is this a tribal war?’

“I thought a while and nodded, ‘Yes.’

“I could have launched into the history of a hundred years of accumulated British divide and rule, into a scholarly explicative of post-colonial collapse, the politics of regional and ethnic hatred that so scarred the country…”

(Mwakikagile, 2009a, pp. 228-9).

Regardless of who was to blame for the unrest, if anyone, the impact of British colonialism has been lasting, especially concerning formal schooling. As has been shown, there was no formal schooling prior to British influence (Ssekamwa, 1997).

“The aims of establishing these schools were many, but the most essential was the desire to socialise Africans with Western values and a European version of
Christianity” (Ofori-Attah, 2009, p. 153). In a discussion of colonial education, Nayar (2010) referred to Marxist critics and how they have shown that power is most powerful when unidentifiable, as the subjects “assimilate the norms and systems of thought that reinforce the power structures… unquestioningly by accepting ideology-laden cultural practices” (p. 48). However, Nayar (2010) also pointed out that many native cultures welcomed the coming of colonial powers. This was most certainly the case in Uganda, as it was also in India. Raja Rammohun Roy’s (now famous) 1823 address to Lord Amberst reiterates this same enthusiasm in India:

“we look forward with pleasing hope the dawn of knowledge, thus promised to the rising generation … we already offered up thanks to Providence for inspiring the most generous and enlightened nations of the West with the glorious ambition of planting in Asia the arts and sciences of Modern Europe …” (Nayar, 2010, p. 50).

Nayar (2010) argued that education was an ironic meeting point for assertions of power - a means for giving the colonials control, and the means for empowering the nationals.

Formal education was introduced in Uganda in the late 1880s by voluntary missionary organisations (Syngellakis & Arudo, 2006). Government involvement in education was delayed due to preoccupation with establishing government administration (Ssekamwa, 1997). By the 1920s the British protectorate came under considerable pressure from missionary organisations for funding. This pressure, combined with the threat that tribal chiefs would send their sons abroad for secondary and tertiary education, compelled the government to take up the responsibility of education (Ssekamwa, 1997). British government-run education began in 1922 following an external report conducted by the Phelps-Stokes fund. During this time
schools were established, but it took 30 years before the first commission for
developing education policy was formed in 1952. The main recommendation of this
commission was to expand schooling facilities. Following Western models of
education that required buildings and qualified teachers meant that the availability of
formal education was restricted. Mainly, education was accessible to the aristocracy
(both African and British), the clergy and tribal chiefs (Syngellakis & Arudo, 2006).
Ssekamwa (1997) also described socio-economic and gender divides in colonial
schooling. While missions endeavoured to educate children from different tribes as
equals to help them forget their differences, Protestants and Catholics, the rich and
poor, and boys and girls remained segregated (Ssekamwa, 1997).

In addition to missionary and government schools, independent private schools
also emerged in the early 1920s, with the first non-missionary private school opening
in 1925 in the Luweero District (Ssekamwa, 1997). According to Ssekamwa, although
missionary schools were also private a central body ran them, and the rise of non-
government non-missionary society schools created a third kind of school.
Independent private schools were run by various privately funded organisations. As
occurred in many colonial countries, the emergence of private schools run by different
religions, churches or persuasions was often surrounded by politics and controversy
(Ssekamwa, 1997). According to Ssekamwa, one of the strong motivating factors
behind the emergence of independent schools was to bring to the fore Ugandan
teachers who had “good and progressive ideas as to how education should be in this
country” and who were “tired of being called and treated like boys” (p. 96). Another
motivating factor behind the rise of independent private schools was dissatisfaction
with the British colonial curriculum that was centred on reading, writing and
arithmetic. Many Ugandan citizens were of the persuasion that such literary education was not adequately preparing their children for trade-based vocations. However, according to Ssekamwa (1997) these hopes of vocational education were not realised by the early independent schools as their clientele demanded white-collar education.

By the 1950s three types of schools were running side-by-side in Uganda - missionary, colonial government and independent. Like many countries with a history of British colonialism, the contribution of the non-government schools to society and the economy was both vital and irreversible. But, like many colonised countries, there were also constant contestations between church and state about what constituted an adequate education. These arguments were religiously, economically and socially driven (Ssekamwa, 1997) and manifested in classroom drills about religion, history and politics (James, 1994). Nevertheless, common to all colonial schools was a didactic approach to teaching and learning that relied heavily upon listening, memorisation and recall.

Teaching was an admirable profession with esteemed social status in the colonial era (Nyakato & Kidimu, 2010). It was also the era of the disciplinarian, where teachers sported canes as tools of classroom control. Comparing the classrooms and pupils of this present time with those of the colonial era, Nyakato and Kidimu (2010) contended that Ugandan teachers today are at the mercy of undisciplined children because of child rights movements. (This claim is debatable in light of the literature that discusses the effects of poverty on psychological and sociological functioning, presented later in this review). Furthermore, although teachers in the colonial period enjoyed esteemed professional status, from the 1940s on they experienced financial
constraints due to poor pay and lack of resources (Ssekamwa, 1997). This study found these constraints prevail to this date.

**The effects of independence upon schooling**

Uganda gained independence in 1962 and in 1963 the Castle Commission was appointed to oversee education. Although Uganda experienced a healthy developing economy during its initial years of independence, Syngellakis and Arudo (2006) reported that the responsibility for availing education was mostly carried by parents, resulting in poorer families not being able to access primary education or dropping out before Year 7 (referred to as P7 (Primary 7) in Uganda). Furthermore, the attainment of a complete education remained a struggle for girls, as their learning was not as valued as that of their male counterparts (Ssekamwa, 1997).

One of the first changes made to schooling after independence was the promotion of the African identity (Ssekamwa, 1997). This was, in part, achieved by the 1963 Education Act that brought all schools under national governance in an effort to promote unity and quell religious denominationalism. Seven years later the 1970 Education Act brought further control to non-government schools, enforcing stricter guidelines for the establishment of a new school. This Act also brought all teachers under one authority, the Unified Teaching Service. Since independence, the admission requirements for teacher education courses have also been raised. This has resulted in many more Ugandan nationals acquiring degrees and diplomas.

Notwithstanding these efforts to unite the nation, educational progress came under significant threat when Idi Amin overthrew Milton Obote’s government in 1971.
Government plans to implement free compulsory primary schooling were nearly thwarted by political instability and civil wars that erupted in the 1970s and continued on for nearly four decades (Syngellakis & Arudo, 2006) in the North. The Acholi people were closely entwined with every conflict as they have traditionally provided the largest numbers of enlisted men for the Ugandan army since colonial days (Mwakikagile, 2009). Eventually, Amin’s reign of terror that cost approximately 300,000 Ugandan lives (Keatley, 2003) was overthrown by Obote in 1979. However, Obote was ousted a second time in 1985, this time by Tito Okello. Okello’s grasp for power was short lived as Yoweri Museveni overthrew his government one year later in 1986. Museveni’s rule restored considerable stability to the capital city of Kampala and the southern districts, and he continues to hold office to this day. By the time Museveni came to power in 1986, the rebel group, the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), had begun to wreak havoc in an intra-tribal war amongst the Acholi people in the North. Conflict continued for approximately two more decades in the North, but it was largely ignored by the South where the Ugandan government was seated. It was not until the early 2000s when the LRA began to move south of the Nile and threaten communities closer to Kampala that the Ugandan government became more actively involved in the war.

By the late 1980s politics had somewhat stabilised in the South and the Education Policy Review Commission, led by Professor W. Setenza Kajubi, was formed to investigate the state of the education system and make recommendations. The Ugandan government released a White Paper in 1992 entitled “Education for National Integration and Development” in response to the Commission’s review. One of the major outcomes of the review was the implementation of the Universal Primary
Education policy (UPE). This bold initiative led by President Museveni abolished tuition fees in government schools for up to four members of each family, two of whom should be girls (Nannyonjo, 2007). Kagolo (2010) reported that since the inception of the UPE in 1997, school enrolment has soared from 2 million pupils to almost 8 million in 2010. Kiyaga (2011) reported 8.3 million students in primary schools in 2011. Such a surge of enrolment has presented further challenges of providing students with lunches, paying and accommodating teachers, and addressing the laxity of school employees - teachers and inspectors included. While progress was made in the South, war continued to rage in the North and teachers in that region had to manage the implementation of the UPE in a war zone.

Another major incentive of the Government White Paper was teacher training. The Minister of Education and Sports, Amanya Mushega, amplified this in his opening remarks in the White Paper, quoting the recommendations of the Commission’s review: “...no education system can be better than the quality of its teachers, nor can a country be better than the quality of its education” (Government White Paper, 1992, p. xiii). Consequently, the White Paper dedicates a chapter to addressing pre-primary, primary and secondary teacher training requirements.

Furthermore, the Government White Paper (1992) also dedicated a chapter to the “Democratisation of Education”, addressing gender equity issues that frequently arise in the education of girls. These included: traditional divisions of domestic labour; early marriages; psychological and physiological changes that “deter them from competing effectively with boys” (p. 163); social and cultural practices where parents prefer the education of their sons; and social problems that are compounded by
inadequate safe and secure accommodation, including “vulnerability to sexual harassment and pregnancy” (p. 163). This remains a topical problem even today. Namusisi (2010) drew attention to the large percentage of girls not finishing school in Uganda, and laid blame upon the symbolic power of language. Namusisi (2010) argued that language used in Ugandan classrooms favoured boys and victimised girls. Furthermore, the government also identified poverty, a lack of female school administrators, a lack of programmes for girls who have become pregnant, a lack of jobs for women, and scarcity of teacher training in guidance and career counselling, as obstacles to girls’ education. The findings from this literature are supported by the data from this research, as presented in Chapter 5.

To conclude this section, it is acknowledged that since independence in 1962 schooling in Uganda has faced significant challenges due to political instability. In summary, it has become evident by studying the literature that formal schooling was imposed over existing indigenous cultural norms during the colonial era and complicated by civil unrest after independence. The next section of this review pays particular attention to the conflicts that have affected children’s learning in the North where this research project was conducted.

The consequences of consecutive civil wars upon children and their learning

This part of the review examines the literature that describes and explains the ramifications of successive civil wars upon Acholi children and their learning from the time of independence to the present day. It grapples with the cause and effect
relationships between political insecurity, war crimes against children and the breakdown of formal education.

Uganda has suffered the effects of multiple politically motivated civil wars since the 1970s. Van Acker (2004) described Ugandan politics as tragic, with authorities resorting to violence and warfare first, rather than as a last means for control. He described patterns of attack and counterattack, suffering and revenge, and divide-and-conquer strategies that have dominated Ugandan politics since independence from Britain in 1962. Notwithstanding this, the review of literature above indicates that inter-tribal feuds have also long ravaged the region. Many of these struggles resulted in coups, including wrestles for power by Obote, Amin and Museveni. Furthermore, independent rebel insurgencies that did not result in coups also troubled the nation, including the Ugandan Peoples’ Defence Army made up of Acholi soldiers exiled to Southern Sudan and the Holy Spirit Movement (Republic of Uganda, 2003). These struggles had lasting impacts upon the progress of education.

For example, in their *Encyclopedia of Special Education* Reynolds and Fletcher-Janzen (2007) explained that the efforts of the Ugandan Ministry of Education in the 1970s to provide education for the blind and other people with disabilities were thwarted for two decades by dictatorships and consequent civil wars. They reported that it was not until 1991 that such efforts were able to resume in Kampala. However, by this time war had broken out again in the North; this time it was against the terror of the LRA rebel forces. For years, the LRA menaced the North - raiding and pilfering villages, murdering villagers and abducting their children. This conflict originated as an intra-tribal uprising, but escalated to fighting between LRA
rebels and the government-led Ugandan People’s Defence Force (UPDF), referred to here as the Ugandan army.

LRA warfare was unlike any previous hostilities suffered by the Acholi people, as children played a central role in the conflict (United Nations OCHA/IRIN, 2004). They were abducted from their homes and initiated into the LRA to become labourers, sex slaves and soldiers. The United Nations (UN) Secretary for Humanitarian Affairs, Jan Egeland, wrote, “This is a conflict fought by, with and against children. More than 80 percent of the LRA forces are minors, forced to become child soldiers or sex slaves to their commanders” (UN OCHA/IRIN, 2004, p. 5). While other children and teenagers in Uganda and around the world were sitting in school, thousands of Acholi children were hiding out in the bush in LRA factions. An estimated 30 000 children were abducted during this 20 year long period of terror (UN OCHA/IRIN, 2004). Many were forced to kill their own families and commit other heinous crimes (Human Rights Watch, 2003). Some met their fate trying to escape, others successfully escaped and re-entered their now disorganised communities. For many escape meant integrating into an Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camp, as the Ugandan army forced millions of Acholi people to relocate to the these camps as a counter-strategy for survival. For other returnees, it meant finding a new home in one of the towns, as the villages were too unsafe. Reintegration had its challenges, as did transitioning from a ‘rebel’ to a ‘formerly abducted child.’ Amongst these challenges were a lack of education and economic opportunities (especially in IDP camps), acceptance by families and communities, fear, and dealing with the past (Annan, Brier & Aryemo, 2009). The Human Rights Watch (2003) gave an account of two girls who explained
how they wanted to return to school, but could not as it was not safe to return to their
villages due to a high risk of being re-abducted.

Amid this ongoing conflict, deterioration of school resources and scarcity of
teachers, the Ugandan government adopted the UPE programme in 1997, which
introduced free compulsory primary schooling for every Ugandan child (Syngellakis &
Arudo, 2006). This placed further strain upon schools and teachers in the North.
Schools were targets of LRA attacks throughout the 1990s and suffered increased
attacks in 2002 and 2003 (Human Rights Watch, 2003). Grouped together in one
place, school students were prime candidates for LRA recruitment. James Lomoro, the
Gulu District Inspector of Schools during the war, reported to the Human Rights
Watch in February 2003 that 116 of 234 schools had been displaced, and that only
56% of primary school aged children were attending school. Lomoro related that
parents were reluctant to send their children to school and that instructional materials
were scarce. In a report on the Katakwi district in the North, Rosenberg (2010)
reported that students who did manage to attend school became very unsettled and
their behaviour deteriorated. Schools that remained were reduced to minimal staff and
operated more as temporary shelters than schools (Rosenberg, 2010). Some schools
ceased to exist or were displaced. Displaced schools were grouped together at IDP
camps. For example, Kalongo camp had two sites for hosting 30 displaced schools,
but 55% of the children registered in this area were not attending school (Human
Rights Watch, 2003); and Ngariam Primary School (situated in a camp) had one
borehole and a few latrines for 2 000 families.
IDP camps were another chief target of LRA attack. The LRA treated IDP camp residents suspiciously, assuming their allegiance to the Ugandan government, even though IDP camps were established by forced displacement of villagers. An estimated 70% of the Acholiland population were displaced during this conflict (Human Rights Watch, 2003) equating to approximately 1.6 million people (UN OCHA/IRIN, 2003). Conditions in IDP camps were appalling. Some camps were inaccessible to humanitarian organisations due to armed hostilities. Ugandan Ministry of Health data from two camps in the Gulu district (that were more accessible than those in other districts) showed that in early 2003 somewhere between 16-23% of children under the age of five were suffering from acute malnutrition (Human Rights Watch, 2003). The World Food Program framed these figures in a wider African context by explaining, “above 10% is alarming for an African in-camp population and beyond 15% warrants blanket supplementary feeding for children” (Human Rights Watch, 2003, p.37). A later survey in mid 2003 conducted by Action Against Hunger USA found that the rate of acute malnutrition in two IDP camps in the Gulu district was 41.4% (Human Rights Watch, 2003).

Under such stressful conditions, formal education came to a grinding halt. Learning did not, however. Some Acholi children learnt war tactics in the bush, while others learnt survival strategies in the camps. Some went to schools in towns, but when they did resources were scarce and teachers were stressed and frustrated (Human Rights Watch, 2003). Other children remained in the villages where many schools shut down due to displacement. Of these children who remained with their village families, many worked to support their families (Rosenberg, 2010) and thousands would commute every night to nearby towns to escape nighttime LRA raids on
villages. The UN reported in 2004 that the night commuter phenomenon included approximately 44,000 children, mothers and grandmothers who would trek long distances to towns to sleep in warehouses, bus shelters, schools, hospitals, NGO compounds and the like and then return to their villages on empty stomachs in the morning (UN OCHA/IRIN, 2004).

From 2005 until the present day, one of the largest NGO operations in the North, World Vision Uganda Children of War Rehabilitation Programme (Figure 2.1), processed over 15,000 returned children and resettled them with their families or in IDP camps (World Vision, 2011). Figure 2.2 is an example of some of the illustrations that World Vision keeps on file in Gulu, drawn by former child soldiers in trauma rehabilitation exercises. Although the conflict has ceased, World Vision believes more than 430,000 people remain in the IDP camps.

*Figure 2.1. World Vision Uganda Children of War Rehabilitation Programme building in Gulu.*
Finnström (2008) offered an ethnographic account of the war against the LRA. In his work he referred to an Acholi phrase *piny marac* or “bad surroundings” (p. 4), which became the title of his book. Nevertheless, this researcher described how “life goes on” (p. 14) and how the Acholi people have reconfigured their social worlds as a result of the conflict. Such reconfigurations may well have taken place, but many of the traditions from the Acholi culture and the African setting have been decimated. The loss of human, social and cultural capital is a direct consequence of armed conflict (Kreimer, Collier, Scott & Arnold, 2000), and as this study has been able to demonstrate, such losses have significantly affected children’s learning (as detailed in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 of this thesis). These findings are congruent with Bourdieu’s (1977) assertions about the links between social capital and learning development.
In summary, the consequences of ongoing armed conflicts impacting Acholi children and their learning are not limited to but include: the delayed and protracted implementation of education policies; the challenges and stigmas associated with displacement and loss of parents and other family members; scarcity of human and material resources; and health, safety and security issues. Over these decades of conflict - approximately 40 years from the time of Idi Amin’s terror to the end of the most recent war against the LRA - the displaced child replaced the grounded child that was described in the previous section about indigenous and colonial education. As literature has demonstrated, and as this study’s data shows, villages and families have been fractured and displaced child-headed families are now common. Many of these children live with the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder (Sonderegger et al., 2011). In addition to this, the loss of their families and villages has resulted in diminished self-complexity, as they have lost their support network (Linville, 1987). With so many adults killed by war or disease, children now have to take up the responsibilities of leadership and care within their families with a very limited support. As the data later shows, the security of the African setting and the glory of the British colonial era are but memories in the minds of the few Acholi elders who have outlived these conflicts.

**Education in Uganda today**

Having established the background of education in Uganda - before and during colonialism, since independence and during the wars - this section of the review progresses to consider what is known about education in Uganda today. As this
project was conducted in Gulu in the North, this section takes particular interest in this region, although literature is scarce.

Little has changed or progressed in pedagogic practice in Ugandan schooling since independence in 1962 (Syngellakis & Arudo, 2006). From the literature reviewed thus far, it would appear that ongoing conflict has stunted the development of education in Uganda. In more peaceful times Rosenberg (2010) reported that schools are returning to their core business of education and teachers are regaining esteem. Where once it was difficult for teachers to see the value of schooling, now they consider themselves as “builders of the nation” (Rosenberg, 2010, p. 29). Meinert (2009) reported that, in general, local people view schooling positively, and presented an optimistic case for promoting education in Uganda as a means of modernisation.

According to World Vision statistics (2011), across the entire nation of Uganda, approximately 82% of eligible children attend primary school, or 8.3 million according to Kiyaga (2011). This rate drops considerably in high school with only 16% of eligible children in attendance. In some remote parts of the North that are still recovering from years of war, only 1.3% of Acholi children complete primary school (World Vision, 2011). This statistic affirms the methodological change that this project took as it highlights the need to establish common understandings about children’s learning in the North. Due to this impoverished situation, many NGOs are working to provide education for children that would not otherwise have the opportunity. Foreign influence is strong, and when considered in light of Uganda’s history of colonisation and political insecurity, it ought to be treated carefully. This topic is discussed in the implications chapter of this paper (Chapter 9).
As an example of prevailing NGO influence, in 2010 the Uganda National NGO Forum sponsored the organisation Uwezo Uganda to conduct a learning assessment report entitled *Are our children learning?* (Uwezo, 2010). This initiative conducted numeracy and literacy tests amongst samples of primary school students across Uganda, revealing dire results. The outcomes of the testing are reviewed below, but first, the structure of the Ugandan education system is briefly explained to better contextualise the results below.

As outlined above, formal schooling was introduced in Uganda during the British colonial period, and in many ways the present day education system operating in Northern Uganda reflects these beginnings. Such practices include weekly testing and daily homework activities (Nannyonjo, 2007). The World Bank reported the majority of teachers working with P6 (Primary 6) students in 2007 preferred lecture style classes, where students work as a whole class with the teacher instructing from the front of the room (Nannyonjo, 2007). Fifty-six percent of teachers indicated they use this method every lesson and 30% indicated for most lessons. The next preferred method was individual student work with roaming teacher assistance. The least preferred method was peer tutoring where students work in pairs or groups, with only 2.6% of teachers using this method every lesson and 10.6% in most lessons (Nannyonjo, 2007).

Primary school extends from P1 to P7 (Primary 1 to Primary 7) and is intended for children aged 6-12 years, although it is not uncommon to find older children in primary classes. Class repetition is high with up to 79.3% of students repeating a class
by P6 (Nannyonjo, 2007). At the end of P7 students sit the Primary Leaving Exam (PLE), which is paid for by their parents or care givers. Ugandan education is often described as examination-drive (Earnest, 2004). According to the UPE policy, primary school education is free, although there are some costs that are imposed that have the potential to restrict matriculation, for example, the PLE. Students may then go on to four years of high school, but few tend to do so. High school is followed by two years of ‘A level’ upper secondary school, and then passing students are eligible for tertiary entrance. UNICEF statistics (updated 2010) revealed that a greater percentage of males attend high school (20%) than females (16%). However, since the introduction of the Universal Secondary Education policy in 2007, the numbers of female enrolments have improved (Asankha & Takashi, n.d.; Kavuma, 2011). Tripp and Kwesiga (2002) argued that this historic disparity between males and females is the result of cultural norms and practices where women are subservient to men. These norms have historically been reinforced by patriarchal policy makers (Tripp & Kwesiga, 2002). Nevertheless, gender aside, the overall attendance rates for secondary school are low at only 16% (World Vision, 2011). This may be causally linked to the effectiveness of primary schooling, although research would need to demonstrate this.

At this point, the review returns to the results of the Uwezo study.

The Uwezo study (2010) reported that 28% of all children in their P7 sample could not read and understand a P2 level story. Consequently, the effectiveness of the education system and its ability to prepare students for further study was questioned. In the same study, 98% of children in the P3 sample could not read and understand a P2 level story. In the Gulu district (where this research study was conducted), only 1% of P3 students could comprehend a P2 level story, with 20% of the P3 students not
being able to identify letters of the alphabet. On a countrywide scale, the overall literacy and numeracy proficiency of children in P3 and P6 is below 50% (National Assessment of Progress in Education, 2009). The National Assessment of Progress in Education (NAPE) in 2010 found that few pupils could easily apply what is taught in class to real life situations (Kiyaga, 2011). The NAPE study blamed this finding on the failure of teachers to identify students’ weaknesses.

Of those who actually sat the exam, the pass rate for the PLE in 2009 was 85.6%, and 80.0% in 2008 (Kagolo, 2010). The Uganda Certificate of Education (UCE) for high school matriculation results in 2009 comprised 7.6% passing Division 1, 18.4% passing Division 2, 26.8% passing Division 3, 42.0% passing Division 4, and “only” 4.4% failing (Kagolo, 2010). Kagolo (2010) reported that national exams in Uganda typically suffered the consequences of late deliveries, leaking of content, missing papers and cheating. In 2010 the examinations body hired over 7,000 scouts in addition to “thousands” of invigilators and supervisors to oversee the process (Kagolo, 2010). Nevertheless, some exams were still delivered late and students had to complete them by candle light at night.

Furthermore, Kagolo (2010) reported an increased budget allocation to education from sh899 billion (~AUD$499.5 million) to sh1 trillion (~AUD$500 million), reportedly far higher than that allocated to the health sector. This budget increase was to allow for the purchase of laboratory equipment for the Universal Secondary Education programme. Furthermore, in 2010, 217 secondary schools were constructed or renovated as a part of a World Bank project (Kagolo, 2010).
Regarding curriculum developments, the new middle primary curriculum (P4-P5) was implemented at the beginning of 2010 and a review of the upper primary (P6 and P7) curriculum was undertaken, with a focus on children learning rather than teachers covering content. These developments were staged in three phases, the first phase being the introduction of the thematic curriculum for P1 to P3 in 2007. The second phase was the introduction of the P4-P5 curriculum in 2010, and the third and current phase is the review of the P6-P7 curriculum.

With political stability holding in an election year, government pledges for 2011 were also promising. These included 2,000 extra government sponsored student places in public universities, a tuition loan scheme for private university students, free A level education costing an estimated sh85 billion (approximately $42.5 million AUD), the construction of more teachers’ housing, classrooms, science laboratories and latrines, 20,000 more teacher placements over the next five years, and housing loans for senior teachers who have taught for 20 years (Kagolo, 2010). The Uwezo report (2010) similarly reiterated the government’s commitment to overcoming the challenges of low community participation, inadequate school inspections, poor communication between schools and districts, inadequate instruction materials for the thematic curriculum in lower primary, inadequate institution capacity at a school level for planning, implementation and management, and high drop out rates of students. The next section of this review will consider these ongoing struggles and their causes.

To this point, a close examination of literature that grapples with historical, political and economic issues has revealed multiple layers of challenges and struggles
that make up the present day situation in Northern Uganda. The focus of this review will now turn to consider theories that investigate the consequences of prevailing poverty, psychological damage caused by war, and the ramifications of widespread disease.

The struggles of educating children in Northern Uganda

“For many Ugandan children, simply being able to go to school is a major triumph” (Rosenberg, 2010, online). Having reviewed literature concerning the state of education in Uganda, this section is concerned with specific wide-scale challenges that are faced by Ugandan teachers and children: poverty, war and disease. It is anticipated that this section will provide a solid platform for the later synthesis of prominent learning theories with the situation in Northern Uganda in the part of this review. Accordingly, literature concerning poverty is critiqued in light of children’s learning in Northern Uganda, as are the psychosocial impacts of war and disease.

Poverty

To understand what poverty entails in Northern Uganda, it may be helpful to consider explanations from Acholi people that were included in a government discussion paper entitled Post conflict reconstruction: the case of Northern Uganda (Republic of Uganda, 2003, p. 7):

“it is when children have been abducted or killed by rebels and Karamojong rustlers hence left alone with nobody to help” - widow in Kitgum.
“being born and living in a war affected area” - children, Gulu.

“there is no tomorrow for me so there isn’t any need for me to waste my effort working. The rebels may come and destroy everything in a minute so what I do is just to go and drink” - man, Kitgum.

“Poverty is the constant problem of having no oxen and plough” - male youth, Moroto.

As the discussion paper emphasised, these definitions of poverty extend beyond traditional definitions of poverty that typically centre on scarcity of basic needs for survival, including food, clothing, and shelter. Further definitions and theories of poverty are reviewed below, but first poverty in the Ugandan context ought to be understood. More than 85% of the Ugandan population lives on less than $1USD per day (World Vision, 2011). In 2007 the World Bank reported that 35% of the Ugandan population cannot meet their basic household needs (Nannyonjo, 2007). According to UNESCO’s most recent statistics from 2008, the average life expectancy at birth is 53 years and the infant mortality rate is 81 per thousand (0/00). Although current enrolment rates are high (Kagolo, 2010; Uwezo, 2010), UNESCO (2008) reported that only 56% of students completed a full course of primary school. It would seem that this rate is an improvement on that of the previous generation as a study conducted by the World Bank reported that only 29.8% of mothers and 27.3% of fathers who had children in P6 in 2007 had completed primary school education (Nannyonjo, 2007).

The UNESCO report also revealed that the average pupil/teacher ratio in primary school was 50:1; and public expenditure on education in Uganda was 3.8% of the nation’s GDP, equating to 18.9% of government expenditure (UNESCO, 2008).
Furthermore, the literacy rates for adults who had supposedly passed through Uganda’s education system were 82.4% for males and 66.8% for females (UNESCO, 2008). This is not surprising as 42.6% of mothers and 27.5% of fathers who had children in P6 in 2007 did not complete or did not attend primary school (Nannyonjo, 2007).

Another poverty-related issue faced by Ugandan households is a lack of books. The World Bank reported that 32% of P6 students in 2007 had no books in their homes. Amongst the same cohort of P6 students, a majority of 64.2% only spoke their vernacular language at home (Nannyonjo, 2007). This is problematic when school instruction is meant to be conducted in English from P4 onwards. Furthermore, a memo released by the Ugandan government in 2010 was a telling sign about the state of many Ugandan households, as it proposed eight options for feeding students lunches. This memo was released because parents had failed to provide lunches for their children, even though this is stipulated in the Education Act 2008 (Businge, 2010). It seems that “food insecurity” is an issue that prevails across the nation (Rosenberg, 2010, p. 29).

As an aside, notwithstanding this widespread lack of books, the increased used of mobile technology in Africa has resulted in unprecedented access to information (Davis, 2012). Africa is now the second largest mobile phone market in the world, after Asia (Davis, 2012). This integration of poverty and technology may be difficult for a Western mindset to reconcile, however, this situation again points to differences in conceptions between cultures. In this instance it is a conception of basic needs, as Africans see mobile technology as important for personal security, whereas Westerners
see it as a luxury. This kind of anomaly confirms a need to carry out research of this kind.

At a school level, examples of how children’s learning is suffering the repercussions of poverty include: an average of four pupils per desk across the nation, 47.8% of teachers being without in-service training over a period of three years (Nannyonjo, 2007), and the common practice of teachers being paid low rates and often being remunerated months in arrears (Cummins, 2011). Another recent example of the effects of poverty on schooling is the high rate of school fires in 2010, which claimed the lives of 20 pupils and destroyed many school buildings (Kagolo, 2010). Considering these statistics together, it could be said that Uganda’s education system continues to suffer from the effects of poverty that prevail throughout the country.

The Ugandan government has long been cognisant of the challenges that are present in the North (Republic of Uganda, 2003). A government discussion paper released in 2003 identified the “peculiarities” that present challenges for this region (p.4). These included long periods of insecurity, including five phases of different rebel insurgencies, high volumes of internally displaced persons and refugees, and HIV/AIDS - all leading to “extreme impoverishment of the people in the North” (Republic of Uganda, 2003, p. 4). High levels of poverty have undermined agriculture, production and service delivery (Republic of Uganda, 2003). In 2003 when the Ugandan government released this discussion paper, they identified two key performance indicators for education: pupil-teacher ratios and pupil-classroom ratios. At the time those ratios were 44:1 and 84:1 respectively (Republic of Uganda, 2003). It would seem from the UNESCO report (2008), that pupil-teacher ratios have since
risen to 50:1. In 2011, local media reported ratios of 100+: 1 in some elementary classrooms (Cummins, 2011). High ratios also persist in secondary schools. This challenge was largely exacerbated by the introduction of the Universal Secondary Education policy that saw secondary enrolments skyrocket without the provision of adequate infrastructure (Kavuma, 2011).

"An overcrowded classroom in Akadot Primary School, Kumi district, Teso subregion, Uganda. This classroom has only one teacher. In rural Uganda, classes often include under- and over-age siblings. Younger children join older brothers and sisters because no one is at home to care for them, and older girls attend school when they are released from household chores" (Heijnen-Maathuis & Ichapo, 2011, accessed online).

Figure 2.3. An overcrowded classroom in Uganda.

At this point this review will turn to wider theories of poverty to contextualise the Northern Ugandan situation in time and space. Definitions of poverty are many and varied in literature (Jensen, 2009; Stafford, 2007; Moyo, 2009; Myers, 1999). In his book about children in poverty, Dr Wess Stafford (2007), CEO of Compassion International, offered a six pronged approach to understanding poverty that included the following factors: socio-political, economic development, health and nutrition,
spirituality, environment, and learning and knowledge. He believed poverty - a compounded combination of these factors - to generate fatalistic mindsets. Stafford (2007) described poverty as a progression of feeling overwhelmed, resulting in hopelessness, and ultimately leading to despair where a person feels they have no control of their life or the circumstances around it.

This explanation of poverty is similar to the theories of poverty that Dr Bryant Myers, Vice President for World Vision’s International Program for Strategy, provided in his earlier work. Myers (1999) referred to the theories of Chambers (1983) - poverty as entanglement; Friedman (1992) - poverty as lack of access to social power; Christian (1994) - poverty as disempowerment; and Jayakaran (1996) - poverty as a lack of freedom to grow. All these theories illustrate the intertwined nature of multiple factors that affect human development. Included amongst these were social, political, emotional, physical, environmental, spiritual, and economic factors. Myers’ (1999) conclusions arising from these theories of poverty were two fold. First, poverty is a complex social and relational issue. Second, “poverty is in the eye of the beholder” (1999, p. 81) as what one culture perceives to be lacking another culture may not.

Jensen (2009) offered a universal definition of poverty: “a chronic and debilitating condition that results from multiple adverse synergistic risk factors and affects the mind, body and soul” (p. 6). Jensen suggested there are six different types of poverty. Situational poverty results from sudden crisis or loss. Generational poverty occurs among families that have suffered poverty for more than two generations. Absolute poverty involves people living for day-by-day survival because of scarcity of basic needs. Relative poverty affects families that cannot attain the
average standard of living in a society. *Urban poverty* sufferers are subject to stressors that belong to high density living - crowding, crime, noise, and dependence on unreliable municipal services. And lastly *rural poverty*, involves families that suffer from isolation and a lack of services, including education. Taking these definitions into account, it would seem that the Gulu district where this study took place suffers at least three of these kinds of poverty - generational, absolute and relative. Depending whether people live in Gulu township or in its surrounding villages, urban or rural poverty can be added also. Jensen (2009) described poverty as a cascading phenomenon, where one problem begets another. In his work about teaching in poverty-stricken areas, he identified four primary risk factors that afflict families in poverty: emotional and social challenges, acute and constant stressors, cognitive lags, and health and safety issues. All of these were identified in the interviews conducted by this research project and are discussed in more length in following chapters.

Myers (1999) put forward some stern warnings about assumptions that tend to accompany the study of poverty. One of the assumptions he challenged was that of viewing poor people as helpless, thereby giving the “non-poor” permission to act in the role of a saviour. Another assumption he challenged was the grouping of poor people into a homogenous group and referring to them as an abstract noun - “the poor”. Myers believed, “Whenever we reduce poor people from names to abstractions we add to their poverty and impoverish ourselves” (p. 58). In response to the assumption that the poor are ignorant and uneducated, Myers drew upon the work of Chambers (1983) who asserted, “Their knowledge of local ecology, traditional medicine, and survival skills is considerable. The poor can survive in conditions that
would daunt the non-poor” (p.107). Bruner’s (1966) position on equity amongst races was strikingly similar - no one is more human than another.

Kunjufu (2006) may agree with Myers’ (1999) position, as he rejected educational theory that blamed poverty for the achievement gap in the USA. He argued that poverty theory places too much emphasis on the uncontrollable factors of socio-economic status, and does not give enough weight to the prejudices that policy makers hold toward children from African ethnic backgrounds. He asserted that decision makers often jump to solutions before adequately researching the problems: “...schools [ought to] diagnose causes before offering solutions. This process weeds out the politically correct discussions and reveals what administrators and teachers truly think about students, their families, and the community at large” (Kunjufu, 2006, p. viii). Although this study is not concerned with achievement gaps in the USA, it may do well to heed the warning from Afrocentric academics like Kunjufu (2006) who believe racism and capitalism to be greater contributors to the academic achievement gap than poverty, without disregarding poverty entirely.

Taking Myers’ (1999) and Kunjufu’s (2006) arguments into consideration, it is deemed crucial, then, to approach the Acholi people with an attitude of humility, show due respect to their culture and history, make every effort to minimise assumption, and resist the tendency to view them as victims. The role of the researcher in this regard is discussed at length in Chapter 3.
The lasting ramifications of war

Following on from the discussion about poverty above, this section will discuss the lasting effects of war upon education. It is difficult to separate the effects of war and poverty as they are interrelated in nature and either may lead to the other. Therefore, as the previous section raised issues of scarcity of human and non-human resources and degradation of environments as a result of poverty, this section will look more closely at the psychosocial aftermath of armed conflict upon children’s learning.

Research indicates that children who have been exposed to war-related traumatic events have an increased risk of developing mental health problems (Betancourt, Speelman, Onyango & Bolton, 2009; Joshi & O’Donnell, 2003; Stichick, 2001). According to Joshi and O’Donnell (2003) such dramatic and ongoing disruptions to development trajectories in childhood, like those experienced by child victims of war in Northern Uganda, can result in cascading interruptions or dysfunctions in social-cognitive processes. For example, in their research regarding the effects of exposure to war upon children, Joshi and O’Donnell (2003) reported that infants and pre-schoolers are likely to experience difficulty categorising traumatic experiences and may consequently blame themselves or become confused, and may exhibit clingy or aggressive behaviour. The effects of war upon school-aged children were also explored by Joshi and O’Donnell (2003) and include regression (Osofsky, 1995), stomach complaints, inattentive behaviours at school (Dodge, 1993), and fear for safety or of being alone (Perry, 2001). The role of displacement in interrupting the normal development trajectories in child victims of war must also be acknowledged. Experiences of being driven from homes, villages and parents, and being forced into refugee camps or into exile may involve the effects of compounded loss and grief. The
home environment plays a vital role in child development (Joshi & O'Donnell, 2003) and research has shown that children who lack family support in refugee situations are at higher risk of developing psychological problems (Adjukovic & Adjukovic, 1998).

Of particular concern are post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms and anti-social behaviours amongst youth that have been exposed to war violence (Kinzie, Sack, Angell, Manson, & Rath, 1986; Sack, Him, & Dickason, 1999; Weine et al., 1995). Research demonstrates such tendencies in Northern Uganda (Derluyn, Broekhart, Schuytên, & De Temmerman, 2004). In a qualitative research study, Betancourt et al. (2009) questioned the Acholi people about the most important mental health problems affecting 10-17 year olds in IDP camps. From this study it was found that problems ranged from scarcity of physical resources (lack of food, clothing and capacity to pay school fees) to insecurities (abductions, rape, fighting, dropping out of school) to negative dispositions (stubbornness, disobedience, idleness). Education-specific problems found in the Betancourt et al. study included a diminished capacity to pay school fees, students dropping out of school (15% of the sample) and losing interest in school. This last problem was found to be associated with bad behaviour and rudeness. According to Betancourt et al. (2009) this locally defined behavioural problem shared symptoms with the DSM IV-TR (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th ed., American Psychiatric Association) criteria for oppositional defiance disorder. Typically, students exhibiting these behaviours would be defiant toward teachers and violate social norms or rules at school. The research from Betancourt et al. puts into perspective the previous claims about undisciplined children in Northern Uganda (Nyakato and Kidimu's (2010) comparisons of classroom
behaviour today and during the colonial period, as articulated in the section entitled Schooling during the British colonial period).

Dzepina Prebeg, Juresa, Bogdan-Matjan, Brkljacic and Erdelj-Stivicic (1992) found that child victims of war had difficulty adapting to new education environments after conflict as they longed for their old friends and life. Furthermore, displaced victims of war often delay settling in a new school as they hope to soon return to their old homes (Joshi & O’Donnell, 2003). Add to this situation the demise of educational resources due to ongoing conflict, and children and youths at risk of becoming bored and troublesome - leading to an increase in the destructive behaviours researched by Betancourt et al. (2009) discussed above.

With multiple generations of Acholi people living in wartime, it is highly likely that their neurobiology may have significantly changed during four decades of living in survival mode, as literature strongly suggests that trauma can change biology (Jensen, 2009; Kandel, 2001). Joshi and O’Donnell (2003) presented a strong case about the detrimental effects of violence, trauma and abuse upon the cognitive functioning of children, making specific reference to the need to consider the effects of war related trauma upon cognition. Klimes-Dougan and Kistner (1990) found that preschool children who had suffered trauma engaged in aggressive behaviour more frequently than their non-traumatised peers, and were more likely to interpret their peers’ behaviours as having hostile intent. Known links also exist between childhood trauma and adolescent crime (Herrenkohl, Egolf, & Herrenkohl, 1997) and substance abuse (Joshi & O’Donnell, 2003).
In the Northern Ugandan setting, Sonderegger, Rombouts, Ocen and McKeever (2011) built upon the research of Betancourt et al. (2009) and conducted a wide-scale trauma rehabilitation education programme amongst the Acholi people with significant success (Sonderegger et al., 2011). Symptoms of depression, stress and anxiety reduced significantly, and pro-social behaviour improved as a result of this education-based intervention. Sonderegger et al. (2011) discovered the great capacity of the Acholi people to move forward after such atrocities. So although the circumstances amongst the Acholi people have been dire, their capacity to adapt and rebuild is evident. Finnström (2008) also alluded to this capacity when he related how life seemed to ‘go on’ nonetheless. In the milieu of literature that reports the detrimental effects of war upon children and their learning, it is encouraging for this project to also find literature that demonstrates the positive effects of psychological and educational interventions in this setting.

**Disease**

Linked inextricably with war and poverty, the spread of disease and a lack of medical facilities and providers in Northern Uganda have led to the prominent phenomenon of child-headed families and extreme impoverishment (Republic of Uganda, 2003). Recent calculations reveal an estimated 22.4 million people are living with HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa, as reported by the United Children’s Fund (2012). HIV/AIDS claims the lives of nearly 100,000 people in Uganda every year (United Children’s Fund, 2012). When initially searching for literature relating to education in Northern Uganda, the most frequent finding was HIV/AIDS education programmes in the region. Because of the situation in the Northern Uganda, schools are often used as centres for support and education about the disease (Pridmore, n.d.).
On an optimistic note, Meinert (2009) reported a strong link between the education of girls and child health. But according to Pridmore (who cited Bennell, 2005; Boler & Caroll, 2005; Giese, 2003; Kelly, 2000; Mhlanga, 2008; Rispel et al., 2006), literature shows that there is a need for more open and flexible delivery of curriculum and strengthening of school systems to enable HIV/AIDS education to be more effective. She also called for promotion of children’s rights and child protection legislation to combat the disease. Wane (2009) argued that the African proverb *it take a village to educate a child* is now “a thing of the past” as children are no longer the responsibility of the community as “the social cultural fabric that held many African communities together has been eroded” (p. 76). This research found that many Northern Ugandan teachers see education as an answer to such breakdowns.

Notwithstanding the vital rehabilitative role schools could play, Wane (2009) raised the risks to health that mass schooling presents, including sexual violence in schools. She called for sexual crimes like rape to be viewed more seriously, and made specific reference to the role teachers could play in this regard. Wane’s research revealed that teachers had the opportunity to identify and articulate the social structures that support sexual violence in Uganda and neighbouring Kenya, but that they needed to be sensitised to the problems of sexual violence and methods of higher order thinking to this to be possible. As long as sexual violence in schools is ignored, efforts to educate are thwarted. It seems that the prevalence of HIV/AIDS is a problem compounded by a lack of education, breakdown of society’s cultural norms, and political instability (Wane, 2009), which could be addressed at a school level.
In summary, these three major influences – poverty, war and disease – significantly affect the quality of life experienced by the Acholi people. When the literature presented in this section is viewed in light of Uganda’s tumultuous history, it becomes evident that children’s learning has suffered at large, particularly in the North. Before this review progresses to analyse education-based literature and learning theories in light of the situation in Northern Uganda, the precarious nature of foreign influence must be addressed. Giving due consideration to the history of colonisation and the deterioration of cultural norms due to ongoing warfare, it is important that literature be consulted to ascertain what is known about the preservation of African culture in current times.

**The quandary of internationalisation and Africanisation of education**

This section of the review of literature serves to bridge the previous four main sections about children’s learning in Northern Uganda with the last main section that follows concerning international perspectives of children and their learning. The term ‘international’ is used here to define non-African based research. A review of international perspectives is included to widen the lens of review and contextualise children’s learning in Northern Uganda on a global scale. However, before this review considers current international literature, the tension between Africanisation and internationalisation must first be contemplated. As mentioned in the introductory chapter and later elaborated in the methodology chapter, it is imperative that this research be conducted with cultural humility (Willis & Allen, 2011). To this end, a review of international literature (which is predominantly Western based in the English
language) regarding children and their learning is not a discussion of what should be. Rather, it is a discussion of what is currently being found by research. It is an assumption of this project that any non-Western culture would be somewhat suspicious of Western models and methods. Moreover, it will be remembered that one of the aims of this research project is to provide a model for educational research in situations that involve researchers and participants from different cultures. Therefore, it is imperative that African perspectives of the tension between Africanisation and internationalisation of education be included in this review.

Vorster (1995) described Africanisation as upholding African aspirations, cultural heritage, history, rights, ideals and identity, with the expectation that non-Africans would respect such endeavours. It is an assumption of this project that most countries are keen to hold fast to their cultural heritage, and this is often reflected in their curricula. Uganda is no exception. There is a strong focus on Ugandan themes in policy documents (for example the Government White Paper, 1992). Nevertheless, the current age is one of internationalisation (or ‘globalisation’ as the notion is often otherwise labelled), which raises a multiplicity of issues, discussed below, in light of Africanisation.

Soderqvist (2002) described internationalisation as an influence upon the holistic management of education "in order to enhance the quality of teaching and learning and to achieve the desired competencies” (p. 201). Stone (2006) believed internationalisation to comprise: students and staff traversing national boundaries to study or work; international components in course content; exchange and sharing of resources and curricula; intercultural teaching approaches; and fostering global skills
and attitudes. Hutchison and Wiggan (2009) described the advent of globalisation (or internationalisation) as forces of economic and technical advances that have put pressure upon old human cultures and traditions. Such forces have resulted in the global citizen, or the

“universality of the human being [who is] locally proficient, and yet can fly into any country and still have some level of social and cultural competence. This person, however, is being created largely according to Western standards, and therefore nations around the world are seeking ways to adapt to these standards, as they prepare this global citizen” (Hutchison & Wiggan, 2009, p. 17).

So it would appear that a tension exists between preserving culture and adopting international perspectives, without jeopardising either by the presence of each other. Moja (2004) described this tension as, “meeting global needs at the expense of local needs.” Similarly, Beerkens (2003) articulated the rise of internationalisation in an African context as a perceived threat to national identity, traditional values and cultural heritage. However, other literature promotes the role of internationalisation as assisting in distinguishing local culture and identity (Botha, 2010; Knight, 2004), and therefore sees the two paradigms as compatible. Noah (1986) believed internationalisation to deepen personal perspectives of one’s own society and education system. It seems there is still much to learn around this topic. Botha (2007) identified areas for further research regarding Africanisation, including: understanding the complexity of Africanising the curriculum; investigating the dissonance between the African identity and curriculum; and interrogating the balance between African and non-African content.
In a similar way, but at a personal level, Derek Walcott wrestled with dual heritage in his poem “A far cry from Africa”:

“Divided to the vein
How choose
Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?”

(Quoted in Nayar, 2010, p. 59).

It is fitting at this point to consider postcolonial theory and its applicability to this study.

**Postcolonial theory**

Although this study has not adopted post-colonialism as a methodological or theoretical perspective, it is highly applicable when considering the quandary between Africanisation and internationalisation since Uganda has a history of colonial rule. Although the British colonialists were invited to Uganda and did not take occupation by force (as happened in other colonies), the merging of African and European cultures has had irreversible repercussions in Uganda. For example, where the intent of the colonialists may have been to teach the African people proper use of the English language, instead a new version of African English emerged (Nayar, 2010).

Colonial discourse involves the construction of the “native” and the “European” (Nayar, 2010), with the “native” being constructed as “primitive, depraved, pagan, criminal, immoral, vulnerable and effeminate in colonial discourse” (p. 2); and the European as “strong, competent, ‘modern’ and [a] protector” (p. 49). Although not all literature may agree with these theories in their entirety, the notion of ‘othering’ has been written about extensively. For example, Sikes (2006) discusses the
risks of “othering” in cross-cultural research. It has been asserted that during the colonial era such discourses were reinforced by colonial education, particularly studies of English literature, where social roles were distinguished (Nayar, 2010). Education was described by Nayar (2010) as an ironic meeting point for assertions of power: the control of the colonials over the natives, and the means for acquiring power for the natives. Therefore, postcolonial theorists contend that it was believed that development could only take place through European intervention, for “cultures had decayed to the point that they could not redeem themselves” (Nayar, 2010, p. 38).

A prominent postcolonial theorist, Fanon (1963; 1967a; 1967b), argued that through loss of culture and historical roots Black man had come to see himself only from a White perspective - that is, inferior and without a soul. It was this belief that led to Fanon’s famous phrase (also used as a book title) - black skin, white masks (1967a). Fanon viewed tribal wars as an outcome of African people groups being haunted by their own failure because they were treated so poorly (1963). He argued they came to hate each other and sought a kind of cultural-cleansing through violence. This study viewed this argument with considerable hesitation as most literature about the Ugandan genocide centres on political and economic issues. However, Kunjufu (2006) an African American education consultant raised the same issue: “Why do Black men kill Black men? Is it because they’re poor? No. It is because they hate themselves. Why do they hate themselves? Because they have not been taught their history and culture” (p. 15). Whether or not these views are agreeable, they highlight the importance of considering the preservation of culture in studies of learning. Therefore, cultural influences upon learning are discussed in the sections below about perceptions of learning and intelligence.
Both Fanon (1967c) and Kunjufu (2006) called for a resurrection of Black identity by a return to African myths, history and cultural practices. Nayar (2010) argued that, “Intellectuals have a major role to play in this, but for this they need to first abandon their colonial inheritance. They need to stop thinking of the masses as ‘unthinking’, and elicit and reinforce their self-esteem and belief in their own ideas” (p. 10). It is hoped that this study has achieved this by duly listening to the experiences of Northern Ugandan teachers.

It would seem that Africanisation, internationalisation and post-colonialism are contentious education topics. With this in mind, this review will now consider empirical research regarding children and their learning in light of the context in Northern Uganda.

**Prevalent literature pertaining to children and childhood learning that has received worldwide attention**

This is the final major section of this literature review. Having reviewed literature concerning Acholi children and their learning in Northern Uganda, and recognising the quandary that exists between internationalisation and Africanisation of education thus far, this section now widens the lens of review to consider current perspectives of children and their learning from outside African contexts. This section of the review is not intended to be a comparative analysis of Northern Uganda and the rest of the world, but rather a review of current empirical literature that may assist in
understanding the learning conditions in Northern Uganda. The scope of this section has the potential to be vast, so the research questions and the work of Leach and Moon (2008) serve to guide the direction of this inquiry. In their work, *The Power of Pedagogy*, Leach and Moon (2008) identified dimensions of teaching and learning that are deemed to be cross-cultural. The key dimensions of Leach and Moon’s (2008) work for this study have been identified as follows: perceptions of childhood; perceptions of learning; and respective sections about perceptions of the purpose of education, and intelligence and potential. These key areas serve as the subject headings below.

**Perceptions of childhood**

There is increasing research-based evidence that shows fundamental links between childhood experiences and behaviour in adulthood (for example, Grille, 2005; Jensen, 2009; Szewczyk-Sokolowski, Bost & Wainwright, 2005; Stafford, 2007; Vygotsky, 1978). Most academics, policy makers and child workers would agree that the importance of childhood cannot be over stressed. In his work, *Parenting for a peaceful world*, Grille (2005) cited Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the United Nations in a publication produced by the United Nations Children’s Fund (1998): “To look into some aspects of the future, we do not need projections by supercomputers. Much of the next millennium can be seen in how we care for our children today. Tomorrow’s world may be influenced by science and technology, but more than anything, it is already taking shape in the bodies and minds of our children” (p. 1). Grille (2005) rejected the notions that children are our ‘projects’ or ‘adults-in-the-making’ stating, “They are children, and that is that” (p. xviii). In a similar vein, Robinson (2010) believed all children to be unique and inherently creative. It would
seem that in many contexts around the world responsible adults may need to change their knowledge and understandings of children. The rationale for this assertion follows here.

Buckingham (2000) believed children to be increasingly at risk of growing up without a childhood. Citing the works of Elkind (1981) and Winn (1984), Buckingham blamed stressors like divorce, teen pregnancy, drugs, suicide, religious cults, pushes for education, television, loss of parental control, and premature exposure of adult concepts to be depriving children of childhood. Notwithstanding this, Buckingham (2000) also acknowledged that the notion of childhood is socially and culturally constructed, and that Western constructions of this notion were at odds with non-Western realities. Therefore, Buckingham concluded that the notion of childhood is never neutral, but rather is a socio-culturally constructed ideology, often subject to dominant power assertions by adults. Therefore, defining childhood is complex, and perhaps should be treated at a local, rather than an international, level. Hence the strengths of localised research studies like this one.

Although much literature mourns the loss of childhood and its innocence (Buckingham, 2000; Elkind, 1981; Winn, 1984), there has never been a time like now when so much evidence-based information is available about children and childhood. So it would seem that this perceived loss needs to be scaled against current knowledge. For example, Elkind (1981) lamented the pushiness of current education trends, but these trends also adopt the positive stance of viewing children as capable and competent (New & Cochran, 2007). Similarly, information about biological and neurological development has never been so accessible. For example, Jensen’s (2005)
work about child brain development and implications for teaching and learning bring with it appreciations of developmental milestones and associated behaviours. Notwithstanding these anomalies, what literature does seems to agree upon is the fundamental importance of functional families to the raising of a healthy child (Buckingham; 2000; Elkind, 1981; Grille, 2005; Jensen, 2009; Stafford, 2007; Winn, 1984; Zimmerman, 2004). This is significant when we consider the literature presented regarding the situation in Northern Uganda in the first part of this review.

**Perceptions of learning**

Learning, by all accounts, is a part of human nature (Bruner, 1966; Leach & Moon, 2008; Robinson, 2001; Vialle, Lysaght & Verenikina, 2005; McInerney & McInerney, 2006). One of the assumptions that the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (2004) made in its international comparisons of student performance was that children are predisposed to learn. It seems that learning is constitutional to the human condition, which includes the connectivity an individual has with others and their environments (Leach & Moon, 2008; O’Donoghue & Clarke, 2010; Vialle, Lysaght & Verenikina, 2005; Vygotsky, 1978). Leach and Moon (2008) and O’Donoghue and Clarke (2010) both asserted that learning is a social process made up of collective activities, rather than an isolated phenomenon inside a person’s head. Leach and Moon (2008) put it simply by saying, “One learner needs another learner” (p. 5). They illustrated this point by discussing cases where pedagogy had moved from didactic teaching, memorisation and fact recollection towards pedagogies that encouraged questioning, problem solving, developing and communicating ideas, valuing self-confidence and creativity, and reflecting upon the learning process itself. In order for such change to take place, views of learning had to shift from the belief
that learning occurs ‘in the head’ to understanding that learning is a ‘social’ process that occurs through socio-cultural interactions (Bruner, 1996, cited in Vialle, Lysaght & Verenikina, 2005).

One of the fathers of the socio-cultural approach to learning development was Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky. Vygotskian theory (Vialle, Lysaght & Verenikina, 2005) promoted the idea that childhood development and learning cannot be understood outside historical, cultural and social contexts, but that children grow into the culture to which they belong. His theories attracted much attention, including support from prominent American learning theorist, Jerome Bruner (Gardner, 2004). This socio-cultural perspective has significant merit and application in a war-torn context like Northern Uganda. However, not only do children reciprocate their culture, they also influence their culture by using signs and language (Vialle, Lysaght & Verenikina, 2005). Vygotsky asserted that language as a cultural tool is a cornerstone of learning (Vygotsky cited in Van der Veer, 2007) as it helps a learner to make sense of their experiences through the process of socialisation. Vygotsky (1978, 1986) espoused the concept of the zone of proximal or potential development, where a child accomplishes much more by interaction with more competent others than he or she might independently. Socio-cultural models of learning, as espoused by Vygotsky, share commonalities with other social based theories like Bandura’s (1986, 2001) social cognitive theory, Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecology of human development, or Lave and Wenger’s (1991) situated learning theory.

Leach and Moon (2008) described Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development as a collective, rather than an individual, phenomenon and contended that as a result
learning is not always matched to development. They argued that the social nature of learning has the potential to create a gap between the learning experience and individual cognitive development, the latter typically lagging behind. Leach and Moon (2008) believed this to be the power of collective transformative learning; where individual experiences are transformed into collective knowledge, that in turn creates a vacuum for individuals to grow in knowledge themselves. They believed the most successful learning communities to be those that know how to create this collective phenomenon. Leach and Moon (2008) refer to this as distributed learning. This notion is similar to their concept of distributed intelligence, discussed in the section below.

Notwithstanding the merits of socio-cultural theories of learning reviewed thus far, to understand the connections a child makes with her world, psychological theories of learning become relevant. For the purpose of this review, psychology refers to both cognitive development and neurology. Jensen’s (2005) work regarding the neurological mechanics of learning complements socio-cultural theories, as he explains that fundamental to neural connections are attractions that are sparked by external factors. Neurons use both chemical and electrical signals, and connections are made and synapses formed according to whatever attractions are first, most frequent, and most coherent (Jensen, 2005). Therefore, the socio-cultural environment is inextricably linked to individual brain programming. Such understandings of cognition may be aligned with Jean Piaget’s psychological learning theories of constructivism and structuralism (McInerney & McInerney, 2006). Piaget contended that cognitive development occurs when a child constructs their own meaning by assimilating and accommodating new knowledge in mental structures (Piaget, 1952;
Later learning theorists built upon Piaget’s theories of cognition. For example, Illeris (2009) contended there are four types of learning: cumulative, assimilative, accommodative and transformative (citing Mezirow, 1991). Illeris (2009) argued that learning suffers when interactions (or attractions as Jensen (2005) termed them) between an individual and their environment are inadequate. The example of a school chemistry lesson was used by Illeris (2009) to illustrate such learning dynamics. Although the teacher may intend for students to learn about the content of chemistry, student learning may be derailed by distractions, lack of prior knowledge, or lack of emotional incentive, and the end result is far from the original intention of the chemistry teacher. So although social theorists such as Vygotsky and Bruner may have criticised psychological theorists like Piaget for not duly acknowledging cultural factors in learning (Gardner, 2004), it must be acknowledged that individual psychology may equally affect culture, as culture does psychology.

By way of explanation, in acutely stressful situations, the parts of the brain responsible for learning and cognition, specifically the prefrontal cortex and hippocampus, have considerably reduced activity and blood flow (Jensen, 2009). However, the amygdala, which is the brain’s emotion centre, has increased activity under stressful circumstance. Over time this may reduce the complexity of ‘learning’ neurons, and increase the complexity of ‘emotion’ neurons (Jensen, 2009). This has significant ramifications for learning. The role of the teacher in bridging the psychology and sociology of learning, then, is significant.

‘Scaffolding,’ a term introduced by Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) to describe the act of teaching in the zone of proximal development, offers a child an opportunity
to lean on more competent others, greatly increasing the potential for learning (Vialle, Lysaght & Verenikina, 2005). In these scenarios a learner achieves independent competence that would not have been otherwise achievable without teacher scaffolding. Notwithstanding this, psychological or cognitive patterns will be unique for every individual (Piaget, 1952) and teachers should have an appreciation that students will construct meaning within their own schemes of understanding (McInerney & McInerney, 2006). It could be argued that scaffolding assists in the development of individual learning skills and management. Zimmerman (2004) raised the importance of academic self-regulation in learning. He explained that the processes of attending to instruction and managing personal resources are self-initiated but are also supported by external organisations such as families and schools. Therefore, how a teacher, or more knowledgeable other, views a student is important as this will reflect a philosophy of learning. Robinson (2001) discussed two dominant conceptions of individuals as learners in the West - the rational individual and the natural individual. He argued that education and school systems have traditionally supported the rational individual where education of the mind is considered to be knowledge transferal. In contrast, education of the natural individual takes a different approach by educating the whole person and providing opportunity for unique individual strengths (Robinson, 2001). These two conceptions of learners proved pertinent to the research findings of this study. A ‘natural’ approach to learning requires considerable reflexivity on behalf of teachers and necessitates a view of students as flexible learners (O’Donoghue & Clarke, 2010). Taking these theoretical concepts together, symbiotic relationships between students, teachers and contexts emerge as vital to successful learning. These literary findings are significant in the
context of this research project where Ugandan students have so many struggles to overcome before quality learning can take place.

This review of learning theories has considered the interplay between learning psychology and sociology, rather than separating the two disciplines as is often done by educational literature (for example, McInerney & McInerney, 2006; Schunk, 2012). Central to this approach is the consideration of the function of experience in learning, which is the subject of this study’s methodology, phenomenography. A phenomenographic view of learning accounts for cultural and situational variations across people’s learning experiences (Marton & Booth, 1997). When explaining the origins of phenomenography and the idea of learning as experience and awareness, Ference Marton and Shirley Booth (1997) gave a discourse about the evolution of learning theories since the time of Plato, citing the contributions from Socrates and Meno (Day, 1994), Pavlov (1927), Skinner (1953), Chomsky (1959), Piaget (1952), Vygotsky (1978), and Gardner (1987), amongst others. Marton and Booth (1997) grappled with the perspectives of separated “inner” and “outer” explanations of learning (p. 12). To map a way forward, Marton and Booth reasoned that “The world is not constructed by the learner, nor is it imposed upon her; it is constituted as an internal relation between them. There is only one world, but it is a world that we experience, a world in which we live, a world that is ours” (p. 13). Thus, Marton and Booth (1997) proposed a study of learning from the learner’s perspective, with a focus on how learning occurs rather than what it is. They are more concerned with how learners in different situations and cultures talk and think about learning, with the aim of describing conceptions of learning by studying learner’s experiences. This perspective of learning is elaborated in depth in the methodology chapter.
Perceptions of the purpose of education and the role it plays in childhood development

Having discussed current perceptions of children, childhood and learning, this section will now progress to consider the role of education in childhood learning. If learning is a natural human process, as outlined above, then this project accords with Spindler (1997) who contended that education is the calculated interventions that occur in the process of learning. This project also agrees with Furedi’s assertion that education is the “exercise of generational authority” (2009, p. 52), as the correlation between of a low percentage of adults and low levels of literacy and numeracy in Northern Uganda points strongly toward the need for responsible and educated adults to guide the younger generations. In many ways education is transmission (Spindler, 1997) - cultural, environmental and social - a kind of calculated enhancement to the natural human trait of learning by discerning socialisation. For this transmission or intervention to occur, conditions must be right for quality learning to take place. As such, the external factors to the learner, like teachers, the curriculum, and tools and technologies, are central to this process of calculated intervention called education. However, education is at constant risk of being captured by these factors (teachers, the curriculum, and tools and technologies) rather than focussing on the actual process of learning (Leach & Moon, 2008). It is for this reason that current and prevailing education trends discern the differences between teacher-centred and student-centred learning. Leach and Moon (2008) teased out these differences, comparing the dynamics of didactic teaching styles with student-centred pedagogy akin to the Reggio Emelia approach. They explained that didactic teacher-centred education requires the skills of rote learning and imitation rather than in-depth knowledge and understanding.
of a subject. Freire (1972) referred to this kind of learning as ‘banking education’ - putting information in so that it can be withdrawn at opportune moments, rather than equipping students with the skills and understandings necessary to learn autonomously. The role of the teacher in quality education cannot be underestimated. Indeed, Jacob and Ludwig (2009) argued that teachers are the most cost effective solution to improving education outcomes. It would seem that teachers are a potential solution, not always a guaranteed solution, as their potential for improving education outcomes would depend on their own wealth of knowledge and skills. The work of O’Donoghue and Clarke (2010) links the efficacy of teachers with the efficacy of their schools. They cautioned that teachers interpret the curriculum according to their own context and experience. In his work regarding teaching in situations of poverty, Jensen (2009) provided strategies for teachers to overcome such challenges. The situation is compounded for teachers who come from poverty themselves, as they are more likely to have limited training and education, and therefore limited points of reference for what might constitute a quality education. This is very topical for the Northern Ugandan context as education is not only intervention or transmission; it is development (Meinert, 2009).

Robinson (2009) called for a rethink of education as a whole, arguing that an industrialised, one-size-fits-all approach is drastically inadequate. Instead, he was of the belief that education and learning are more organic than industrial by nature, arguing that children will learn given the right conditions to grow. One of the first academics to deliberate organic learning was Dave Beckett (1996, 1999) who described organic learning as moving beyond ‘cognitivist’ models of systems, networks and rule-following, and ‘empty vessels’ models of knowledge transfer, to an
awareness and deliberation of learning from experiences. The centrality of experience in learning is pertinent to this project given its phenomenographic methodology. An “integration of thinking, feeling and doing” (p. 86) Beckett (1999) explained that organic learning is often hallmarked by mentoring, project management and the development of competence. He proposed that there are three issues at the heart of organic thinking: “creativity,” “artistry of performance” and a “judgement of practical wisdom” (pp. 92-95). Further, Beckett (1999) believed a consciousness of organic learning was often realised through the questions, “What are we doing? Why are we doing it? What’s next?” (p. 87), and “How can we/I do better?” (p. 96). These questions are of a similar tenor to Ghaye’s (2011) driving questions for positive reflective teaching practice: What’s working well? What needs changing? What are we learning? Where do we go from here? Ghaye’s work argues that a strengths-based approach to reflection can be much more productive than problem solving models in effecting positive change. Another recent work that similarly promotes reflective and evidence-based practice is John Hattie’s (2009) Visible Learning. It is evident in recent literature that there is a strong move toward seeking to understand what really works in education programmes and institutions (O’Donoghue & Clarke, 2010; Ghaye, 2011; Hattie, 2009; Robinson, 2009). These themes and the philosophy of organic learning prove to be pivotal in the findings of this study presented in later chapters.

With this philosophy of organic learning in mind, educators must strongly consider the role of environmental settings and their capacity to host intellectual and social capital. Leach and Moon (2008) concurred with the Reggio Emelia philosophy that a learning environment can act as a third teacher. That is, students can learn from each other, their teacher and their surroundings. Therefore, the organisation of
educational settings and the provision of resources are extremely important if learning is to be optimal. Similarly, within the context of advancing this view of organic versus industrial education (Robinson, 2009), it is also noteworthy that Leach and Moon (2008) asserted that learning and associated curricula should not be perceived as linear processes, but as spiral ones. That is, concepts are revisited and built upon continually over a lifetime.

Furthermore, it would seem that there are moves towards more integrated, holistic approaches to education that incorporate academic, social and emotional intelligences (Zins, Weissberg, Wang & Walberg, 2004; Cohen, 2006). Elias et al. (1997) contended that “Schools will be most successful in their educational mission when they integrate efforts to promote children’s academic, social and emotional learning” (in Zins, et al. 2004, p. 3). Similar to Robinson’s (2009) description of education as an organic process, Cohen (2006) referred to the need to design a climate for learning. Cohen’s (2006) argument was that academic learning is greatly enhanced when coupled with social, emotional and ethical education. Current understandings of effective education are far from the didactic and rote teaching techniques of the past. Jensen (2009) emphasised the important role of education in developing social skills in children who do not come from homes that would otherwise do so. He stressed that only six emotions are hardwired at birth - joy, surprise, disgust, sadness, anger and fear - and that every other emotion must be taught. Jensen’s (2009) work grappled with the challenge of teaching the poor, and he concluded that where poverty deprives children of homes that can teach them these social skills then schools must fulfil that role. On this premise, coupled with the above discussion about environmental factors, this
paper asserts that the role of education in childhood development in Northern Uganda is critical.

Perceptions of intelligence, potential and capacity

Having considered perceptions of learning and education, it is also fitting to review perceptions of intelligence and how these influence each other. For centuries the idea of intelligence, as a measure of the capacity of the mind, has been expressed as a quotient. However, as mentioned above, Perkins (1995) proposed an alternate idea of distributed intelligence. Leach and Moon (2008) explained this concept in their work: “intelligence consists of whatever factors contribute to intelligent behaviour … resources that support intelligent behaviour do not lie solely within the mind and brain…” (p. 43). That is, if learning is social, then so is the development of intelligence. Howard Gardner, well known for his theory of multiple intelligences (2006), largely debunked the myth that there is a universal or supreme kind of intelligence that can be measured on a quantitative test (Illeris, 2009; Leach & Moon, 2008). For Gardner, intelligences are linked to subjects or content, rather than being confined to the brain (Leach & Moon, 2008), and definitions of intelligence are “shaped by the time, place and culture in which they evolve” (McInerney & McInerney, 2006). Gardner (2006) believed that three biases typically colour views of intelligence - exalting Western cultural values, preferring human abilities that are readily testable, and believing that there is a best approach to problem solving. As this study unfolds, these biases become increasingly relevant, particularly in light of the residual effects of post-colonialism in Ugandan education.
Multiple experts have challenged the notion of fixed potential or limited capacity and asserted that potential is a living growing human trait that is largely limited by our own perception of such (Dweck, 2006; Ghaye, 2011; Leach & Moon, 2008). Robinson (2009) criticised the misguided popular view of the IQ test being a mechanism that can measure the extent of one’s capacity. In explaining the history of its development, Robinson (2009) reported that the IQ test was created to assess those with learning difficulties, and describe a person’s performance at a current point in time, not to measure the limit of their potential as there is no definable limit. These myths concerning intelligence, potential and capacity seem to prevail in education systems (Leach & Moon, 2008; Robinson, 2009). It seems that much of what comprises formal educational practice - especially in the fields of testing and assessment - is interpreted as defining one’s limits rather than as describing one’s current status. Gardner (2004) discusses such assessment based learning in his work, *The unschooled mind*. Capacity and potential are never fixed (Leach & Moon, 2008; Ghaye, 2011; Robinson, 2009). Leach and Moon (2008) cite a major creativity study that asserted that, “all people are capable of creative achievements in some areas of activity, provided the conditions are right and they have acquired the relevant knowledge or skills” (p. 56). Robinson (2009) would agree, as he asserted that every person is born with great potential but seems to lose touch with this over a lifetime. Jensen (2009) places considerable responsibility on poverty for the propagation of this phenomenon in contexts where stress overrides the joy of learning. Again, these assertions are significant in light of this study.

This section completes the review of literature as it has synthesised empirical learning theory with the history and context of Northern Uganda. Altogether, two
main points have emerged from this review. First, for the sake of their learning, the children in Northern Uganda are in need of considerable investments into the social and intellectual capital of their region. Second, there is an apparent need for empirical research to build up rigorous academic literature that is specific to the needs of the region.

**The remaining gap in literature**

This review has provided, layer by layer, an overview of what is known about children’s learning in Northern Uganda. It has contextualised the situation by considering historical, political and economic factors. Furthermore, the struggles of poverty, war and disease were discussed in light of in attaining an education and the challenges that potentially derail quality learning. Further, this review has discussed the quandary that exists between Africanising and internationalising African education systems as a preface to presenting current research from outside Africa on children and their learning. Finally, empirical literature concerning perceptions of childhood, learning, the role that education plays in children’s learning, and views of intelligence, potential and capacity was critiqued in light of the context of this project.

Nevertheless, the perceptions and conceptions of the Ugandan people concerning children’s learning are not known. Much of the existing literature surrounding education in Northern Uganda is system-based or programme-based and provides little insight into pedagogic practices or views of learning. Literature documenting Uganda’s history and the ramifications of war is prolific, but rigorous
academic literature that deals with how these factors have affected children’s learning in this context is scarce. It is highly likely that the scarcity of literature is a corollary of war in itself. It was difficult to find literature that describes actual teaching and learning in Uganda. What is even less available is published literature that articulates the experiences and conceptions of the Acholi people concerning children’s learning. Furthermore, there is limited published material that demonstrates the links between childhood development and the role of the education system in Uganda. The need for rigorous academic research in Northern Uganda is apparent. The next chapter outlines the modus operandi for this to occur.
Chapter 3

Research Methods

Introduction

This chapter outlines the research design and methods that were used in the research process. It also expounds the underpinning methodologies and overarching research paradigm that informed the research strategy. By way of introduction, the original intent of this study sought to respond to the research problem and context using an ethnographic methodology. However, as the study progressed it became increasingly apparent that this approach was inadequate and that the direction of the research needed to change. This chapter details the events that unfolded and how they steered this study toward adopting phenomenography as its primary methodology. It also explains how this approach yielded such rich data collection and analysis experiences.

To this point, this thesis has investigated what is and what is not known about the research problem. The literature review has detailed the landscape of what is known about Ugandan children, their learning and education. Beginning with literature that contextualised the research problem, the review progressed to critiquing poverty theory and psychosocial theories that explain the effects of war and disease upon children’s development. This was done in light of the situation in Northern Uganda. This in-depth review took particular interest in the ramifications of successive wars and associated poverty, disease and social insecurities on children’s learning. To contextualise the plight of children in Uganda, the review widened the
lens of critique to consider current empirical learning theory regarding perspectives of children, their learning and education, intelligence, potential and adaptability. This theory was synthesised with what is known about the situation in Northern Ugandan and the ramifications of poverty, war and disease upon children’s development. This process identified a gap in literature that this project seeks to fill; that is, the local understandings and conceptions of Ugandan teachers concerning children and their learning. In this way, it is hoped that a platform will be provided for further research surrounding children’s learning in Northern Uganda. It is also hoped that further insights may be gained about the effects of stress and trauma upon children’s learning.

To achieve these research aims, this study conducted qualitative research amongst Northern Ugandan teachers in the northern district of Gulu. Seeking to describe local teachers’ understandings of children and their learning demanded the fluid and dynamic nature of qualitative research (Burns, 2000; Lichtman, 2006). As this chapter shows, the research questions underwent a process of evolution as the study unfolded. To explain this change, this chapter details the research design process, and then goes on to discuss methodologies (phenomenography and ethnography), data collection and analysis methods and the research paradigm (interpretivism). Within this chapter, a rationale is provided for the particular methods employed, which were phenomenographic interviews and ethnographic observations.

This project adopts the notion of a research paradigm, being a loose collection of logically related assumptions, ideas, or propositions, encompassing epistemology, theory and philosophy, that inform thinking and research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; O’Donoghue, 2007; Punch 2009). Such an approach is more fitting to the dynamic
nature of qualitative research. In many ways, this quest to describe local conceptions surrounding children and their learning in Northern Uganda is a story of the interactions between the researcher and the research context and problem. It is hoped that this chapter does this story justice.

The research design process

The relationships between the research questions, chosen methods, and methodologies are somewhat symbiotic in nature, so it is challenging to discuss them in linear form as the process of thesis writing requires. Therefore, this section about research design precedes the unpacking of the chosen research methodologies, methods and paradigm so the journey and evolution of the study can be chronicled.

At the inception of this project, it was thought that an ethnographic methodology would be most suitable for a cross-cultural study. It was the original intent of this project to conduct an investigation into what Western pedagogies could offer African education; and similarly, what Western education could learn from African communities. The research context and problem were no different to what is outlined in Chapter 1; however, the original conceptual framework was quite different. Drawing upon the researcher’s previous experience with education in developing contexts, it was assumed that approaching this context and problem from an ethnographic perspective with a view to understanding pedagogies would be fruitful. Leach and Moon’s (2008) work about dimensions of pedagogies that have been found to be cross-culturally valid served to guide the original direction of this project.
Therefore, a pilot interview schedule was drafted using Leach and Moon’s (2008) research as a guide (Appendix 1).

The pilot interview was a turning point for the direction of this project. It was through this experience that the realisation came that although the project was trying to be culturally sensitive, it was approaching an African context from a Western paradigm. The original ethnographic interview schedule had been constructed from a Western paradigm and focussed on pedagogy, but in the pilot interview the answers to these questions came from an African paradigm and centred on the effects of poverty and disease in a post-war environment. It became evident that conceptions of education and learning were significantly different between the two cultures, and this difference not only had to be accommodated but also had to be viewed as integral to the study. Hence, the pilot interview forced a re-think of the research design.

The role of the pilot interview in the research design process

The pilot interview completely altered the direction of the project. The original ethnographic interview schedule (Appendix 2) included questions about the purpose of education; views of the mind, knowledge, intelligence and learning; educational resources and tools; and relationships between teachers and students. Additionally, questions concerning the anticipated responses of Ugandan participants were included. A willing pilot interview participant was found in Australia: a tertiary educated Kenyan woman who had lived and worked in Uganda for approximately 10 years. This lady was on holiday from Uganda, which was her country of residence at the time. She gladly answered the questions in the interview schedule, but her answers
were somewhat surprising. The benefit of a pilot study is that its primary purpose is not to collect data but to learn (Burns, 2000), and this was the case here.

Although the interviewee answered the questions on the interview schedule, the focus of her conversation was not on pedagogy. Rather, it was on the struggles and challenges that hinder teaching and learning. For example, the opening question on the interview schedule was, “What advantages do you think education can give an African child?” Amongst her responses were the following insights:

To be very honest, I think you will hear more negatives than advantages. And that is because most children are used as labour in northern Uganda... I think from my own point of view, they value education, but they don’t see how far the children get with it. I mean like, some of them will tell you, “Oh we have seen bright kids, we have seen people who have done well but they are here in the village and they don’t have jobs. So what’s the point of me investing money in my child to go to school?” So be prepared for those kinds of answers.

... still people have not embraced the importance of education, and all forms of hope are gone. You know when you have children, most men make the women work the land for just 500 shillings, which is like less than one dollar here, and that is all she will earn in that day, and she will come back and the man has been drinking. So he will get that money and go and drink. So the children are the ones who are used as labour. So when you go and you are telling them knowledge is power, they are happy to hear it but they are telling you, “Why don’t you give me the money? I want to take my child to school but I don’t have the money.” And some will tell you, “I have six children, and I also have the children of my brother who died of AIDS or who was abducted or who was...” You know there are all these stories that you are going to hear.

… My experience in the villages has been that teachers go to school and the children will cook for the teacher. So imagine you send your child to
school but she is in there cooking for the teachers. And they pick the bigger girls and there is a lot of sexual abuse in the schools by the teachers. And that is one way that AIDS is spreading in Africa. So it is a pity. And these children will keep quiet because they are frightened. I remember last year in Uganda I saw a girl crying, was staying in some cheap dirty hotel and I woke up and had to use the bathroom and I saw a very young girl who was sleeping right next to my room. And in the morning I asked what was going on and they said, that is the headmaster, he brings different girls here for the night and he leaves very early in the morning. (Pilot interviewee)

As the pilot interview unfolded, stories of poverty and desperation overrode the intended focus on pedagogic practice. This process was very insightful and demanded the approach to the research context and problem be reconsidered. It was evident that this project needed a methodology that could adequately accommodate cultural differences between the researcher and potential participants, provide opportunity for the participants to guide the direction of the discussion, and make room for semantic clarification.

After much deliberation, the original interview schedule was abandoned and phenomenography was adopted as it allowed for a more open-ended approach to the research problem. In accordance with a phenomenographic approach, the research questions were simplified to two questions:

What are Ugandan teachers’ experiences of children and their learning?

How do Ugandan teachers describe their experiences of children as learners?

It ought to be noted that the research questions drove the direction of this study, not the research methods (Punch, 2009). The original questions were changed when the
problem came to be better understood, and therefore the methodology and methods followed suit.

Moreover, in this process of abandoning the original interview schedule, it should be noted that ethnography was not entirely abandoned as provision for ethnographic observations remained part of the research design. Nevertheless, the evolution of this study demanded that ethnography take a subservient role and give preference to the strengths of phenomenography - that is, describing local phenomena in order to best understand the research context and problem. The relationship between these two methodologies is discussed in depth in the section below, and then the research methods that were used in the field are unpacked in the section after.

**Methodologies: Phenomenography and Ethnography**

In response to the research problem and context and the findings from the pilot interview, this study adopted the methodologies of phenomenography and ethnography. Within these methodologies, the research questions were reframed and the research methods determined. The research methods, as detailed in the next section, were phenomenographic interviews and ethnographic observations. According to Holliday (2007) these two methodologies share the trait of bracketing the taken-for-granted; an intellectual tension between “familiarity and strangeness” (p. 163). Moreover, these two methodologies are synonymous with Marton’s (1981) suggested approaches to conducting research about learning: orientation towards the world with the aim of making statements about it - ethnography; and orientation
towards people’s ideas and experiences in the world - phenomenography. This section will discuss both these methodologies. As phenomenography was the leading methodology in this project it is discussed first. Ethnography is a supporting methodology, so is consequently discussed to a lesser extent hereafter.

Phenomenography

Not to be confused with phenomenology, phenomenography is concerned with describing, conceptualising or categorising the qualitatively different ways people experience and think about phenomena in the world and the meaning they make from these thoughts and experiences (Marton, 1988; Marton & Booth, 1997). According to Hasselgren and Beach (1997) the word phenomenography has Greek etymological roots in the words *phainomenon* (ap- pearance) and *graphein* (description), meaning a description of appearances. Ference Marton (1981, 1988; Marton & Booth, 1997) is often attributed with the rise of phenomenography, from the early 1980s to the present day, and his work is cited extensively in this chapter. Notwithstanding this, other literature traces phenomenography back to the 1950s (Hasselgren & Beach, 1997). Still, it is recognised as a relatively new research methodology (Svensson, 1997).

Marton (1994) 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). Perceptions are forms of description and interpretation (Boyd, 1993; van Manen, 1990) and come from lived experiences. Thus, phenomenography seemed most applicable to this project, as it is an investigation of experience as a means of understanding the relationship between individuals and
phenomena (Marton, 1988). Experience is discussed further below, but first phenomenography should be distinguished from its cousin, phenomenology.

Phenomenology stands out from other human research traditions, like ethnography (a study of culture) or anthropology (a study of humans and their societies), as a study of lived experience (Lichtman, 2006). It is concerned with human-world relations (Marton, 1988). It is deeply rooted in the belief that reality is socially constructed (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Phenomenology has been particularly popular within the disciplines of education and nursing (Lichtman, 2006) as it was developed within the framework of educational research (Marton, 1988). Although it seems synonymous with this project, the reason that phenomenography has been chosen over phenomenology is that this project seeks to describe other people’s lived experiences, rather than deal with (O’Donoghue, 2007) the experiences of the researcher.

Although phenomenology and phenomenography both belong to the same school of thought, they differ in the ways they go about understanding experience (Marton & Booth, 1997). The founding father of phenomenology, Edmond Husserl, believed phenomenology to be the logic that precedes the empirical sciences by laying the foundation of the experiences of the researchers. According to Richards and Morse (2007), phenomenology is upheld by two major assumptions: perceptions are connected to lived experience; and human existence is meaningful due to consciousness. In contrast, phenomenography is more focused on the descriptive ways of experiencing the world, which leads to understanding and describing variations of experience that explain a phenomenon (Marton & Booth 1997; Svensson, 1997).
Because of this difference, phenomenography better serves the purpose of this project. Marton and Booth (1997) would likely agree with this stance as they explained that phenomenology is more likely to be about dealing with the researcher’s experiences, whereas phenomenography is about describing other people’s experiences and reflecting upon them. It is important then the researcher’s own experiences should only act as a light by which to understand the ways others have experienced the same phenomena.

Phenomenography is particularly suited to educational research due to its dependence upon experience and it practicality for solving pedagogic problems (Marton 1988; Marton and Booth, 1997). Learning is a development or shift that takes place and results in a person moving from not being able to do something to being able to do so through experience (Booth, 1997), involving psychological and sociological factors. In her own phenomenographic work Booth (1997) questioned what it was that was being learned and the variation within that process. Such a methodology is fitting for a project that seeks to understand the perceptions of Ugandan teachers with regard to children’s learning. As Marton (1988) explained, “If we understand the relationship that exists between an individual and what he or she is trying to learn, pedagogical opportunities are greatly expanded” (p. 159). Three lines of development for phenomenographic research were described by Ashworth and Lucas (1998): the qualitative differences in approaches to learning; learning within a disciplinary context and associated student conceptions; and how individuals conceive various aspects of life. This project takes the third line, as it seeks to describe individual conceptions (teacher’s experiences) of various aspects of life (children and their learning). As foreshadowed in the introductory chapter, the adoption of phenomenography
contributes to the significance of this project. Phenomenography is a relatively new methodology; however, it appears that it could play a crucial role in establishing a platform for future research to stand upon by describing local understandings. It is believed that this study will be positioned to make significant contributions to the wider body of knowledge in this regard. Therefore, through conversations, this research endeavours to understand the experiences of Ugandan teachers and the meaning that underpins these experiences.

At the onset it is important to note that an experience is the internal relationship between the person and the phenomena; that is, the way a person experiences a phenomenon, and the way a phenomenon is experienced by a person. As such, an experience cannot be categorised as either psychological or physical (Marton & Booth, 1997). Rather, experiences are collective interactions that borrow from social, emotional, physical, historical, rational, abstract and perhaps spiritual dimensions. Experiences are highly dependent upon awareness (Marton & Booth, 1997). To explain an experience, it is vital that the participant is aware of what is taking, or has taken, place, and is able to discern the interacting dimensions.

Experience, although it accounts for the contributions of the senses, is not restricted to the nervous system. Rather, experience is a more autonomous level of description that depicts how a person perceives the world (Marton & Booth, 1997). Experience is a unit of phenomenographic research, but having said this, phenomenography is not a theory of experience alone. “At the root of phenomenography lies an interest in describing the phenomena in the world as others see them, and in revealing and describing the variation therein, especially in an
educational context (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 111). Describing the variation that occurs within people’s experiences of a phenomenon is the goal of the phenomenographer (Svensson, 1997). For the purpose of research, a phenomenographer seeks totality in variations of experience for a particular group of people with the hope of revealing categories of variation (Marton & Booth, 1997). Even though descriptions and categorisations of experiences will never be exhaustive, it should be the goal of the researcher that within the group under investigation nothing is left unspoken. As Marton and Booth (1997) expounded, different approaches to learning spring from different experiences to learning. As this project tackles the experiences of learning in a culture vastly different to the researcher’s own, it ought to be recognised that understandings and perspectives of children’s learning will differ accordingly.

Ethnography

Ethnographic research is concerned with the exploration and description of cultural groups (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Lichtman, 2006; Richards & Morse, 2007). Culture is a flexible, responsive, and adaptable concept (Richards & Morse, 2007). It is not a power, it is a context (Holliday, 2007). Consequently, ethnographic methods are very holistic, contextual and reflexive (Boyle, 1994). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) described the ethnographer’s role to be a sharer of meaning that cultural participants take for granted. It is for this reason that the ethnographic aspect of this project is important, for it may well be that participants take elements of their culture for granted, but the exposition of these may develop understanding of their own situations. Richards and Morse (2007) argued that ethnographic research is best conducted from an etic perspective, that is, by those who do not belong to the group. An etic
perspective allows for comparisons of cultures and behavioural discourses may be more evident. Alternatively, ethnographic research could also be conducted from an emic perspective, where an ‘insider’ takes a critical approach to researching the group. However, Richards and Morse (2007) argued that values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours may not be so easily scrutinised from this perspective as they are embedded in the researcher’s own culture. Therefore, taking these arguments into account, this project, which is etic in nature, was positively positioned for a rich yield of data.

Etic or emic, ethnographic research requires the researcher to become immersed in the culture (Lichtman, 2006). As the data collection period was constrained by time, ethnographic observations were qualified in the interviews and thorough cultural immersion was not possible during this period. Qualitative observation methods are inductive by nature (Walter, 2006), so at times they provided starting points for interview conversations. It must also be noted that ethical constraints also required observations to be discussed in interviews so the interview transcripts were the only data for analysis.

**Research methods**

Having outlined the research design process and the chosen research methodologies, this chapter will now give an account of the research methods used in this project, including data collection, data analysis, and the embedded role of the researcher within these. From the outset, it is noteworthy that this study prioritised the
research questions over the research methods (Punch, 2009). That is, the research methods served the questions, and not vice versa. The research questions were formulated within an interpretivist, phenomenographic paradigm, and the choice of research methods followed accordingly. The methods chosen from this study were based on the assumption that these questions - what are Ugandan teachers’ experiences of children and their learning? and how do Ugandan teachers describe their experiences of children as learners? - would yield knowledge of reality (Punch, 2009), and assist in generating knowledge and understandings according to the study’s aims. As Punch (2009) argued, it is important that there is an appropriate “question-method” fit (p. 19). The sections below provide explanations of the data collection and analysis methods.

**Data collection**

This section details the journey that determined the data collection methods, for the direction of this study changed in response to this journey. Ultimately, the research design process resulted in the selection of two data collection methods. The primary method was phenomenographic interviews and the secondary method was ethnographic observations. This hierarchy of data collection methods was determined by two factors. The first factor was the phenomenographic nature of the research questions. These questions were conceived within a phenomenographic methodology, but as explained above this methodology was also chosen in response to finding from the pilot interview.

The second factor that helped to determine this hierarchy of data collection methods was the ethical constraints that typically surround this kind of human research
in a cross-cultural setting. It was decided that any contributing ethnographic observations would be discussed in an interview and the interview transcript would constitute the primary data. In this way, a local consenting participant qualified observations of people, communities or systems. Literature shows that interviews commonly complement fieldwork observations (Burns, 2000), but in this case it was the other way around as observations were validated within interviews. Holliday (2007) refers to core and peripheral data, and this study is an example of such data classification. This is explained further below.

**In-depth interviews.** Kvale (2007) describes the research interview as an ‘inter-view’ where knowledge is constructed through interaction. It is the process of getting to know another, learning from others’ experiences and understanding their world, and it is deeply concerned with producing knowledge surrounding the human situation (Kvale, 2007). It became increasingly apparent that the research project was venturing into the unknown and there was a need to understand the experiences of other people that belonged to another culture. There was also a transpiring need to minimise potential assumptions and preconceptions associated with structured or standardised interviews that relied upon a list of questions. Lichtman (2006) described in-depth interviewing as more of a process than a predetermined list of questions. Such a process involves building rapport, orienting the participants with the purpose of the research, and engaging in deep conversation. In this way, room could be created for the complexity of a whole phenomenon to be made apparent (Burns, 2000). Phenomenographic interviews should take place at two levels, according to Marton and Booth (1997): on one level, interpersonal contact between the interviewer and
Accordingly, a semi-structured interview schedule was formulated (Appendix 3) to serve as a common starting point. Using this method, the participants would have the opportunity to tell their own experiences in a more open-ended fashion, rather than being potentially restricted by the preconceptions of the previous ethnographic interview schedule. A semi-structured, open-ended interview is not restricted by fixed wording or ordering of questions. Rather, it allows more free-flowing conversation that some would argue produces more valid participant responses as they are able to share their versions of reality (Burns, 2000). Francis (1996) claimed that one of the unique traits of phenomenography is its insistence on capturing conceptions within interviews that are faithful to the individual’s experiences of a phenomenon. Such a perspective is highly dependent upon the security of an interview and the rapport between researcher and interviewees, as the views of the participants ought to be handled in a non-judgmental manner. As the interviews took place, it was found that such an approach was both suitable and efficacious in a context where the people had suffered ongoing political abuse (United Nations, 2003).

Armed with a semi-structured interview schedule and a much more open-minded approach to the research problem as a result of the pilot interview, the researcher travelled to Uganda to meet with indigenous educators and live amongst them for a period. Simply, the research process was to listen, observe, ask questions and then listen again. As Lichtman (2006) stressed, the task of listening is vital to comprehending other people’s understandings. To achieve the dialogue that would
provide opportunity for listening, the researcher was very reliant upon already established relationships with Ugandan residents, particularly those from whom the invitation to visit had come.

Before discussing the methodology further it seems fitting to acknowledge the role the hosting organisation played in opening opportunities for research to take place. Due to their rapport in the community, the researcher was able to visit four schools and talk with 16 different educators. This would not have been possible within the allocated time if it were not for this association. Lichtman (2006) raised some general issues typically associated with interviewing, including identifying participants, developing rapport, selecting a setting and observing surroundings. All of these issues were easily addressed due to the introductions the researcher was given by the hosting organisation.

In the first phase of this research, nine interviews were conducted with 16 participants. Individual interviews were conducted with some participants, but in most cases interviews were conducted with groups of approximately three teachers. This approach seemed to be profitable for collecting rich data, as it seemed the interviewees felt more empowered to talk in depth about the issues they were facing when in groups. While being female seemed to lessen the intimidation that might be associated with a white researcher representing an Australian university, there was still an element of intimidation in the interviews that had to be overcome. Sometimes when the opening question was posed, “Can you tell me about your experiences here in Uganda with children and their learning,” some participants would answer, “I do not know of that one.” At these times there seemed to be a need to reassure participants
that their experiences were valuable and there were no right or wrong answers. Considering this dynamic together with their history of didactic schooling, as raised in the literature review, it was quite possible that the interviewees felt there may have been ‘right’ answers to interview questions. Or, perhaps they were looking to appear knowledgeable in the presence of a visitor by using education language - like “spiral curriculum”, “group work” or “learning styles”. In any event, it appeared that conducting interviews in groups further empowered participants to speak their own thoughts. Not only were they the majority, but they also had opportunities to think while their colleagues talked. Their conversation would trigger ideas amongst each other yielding rich and lengthy dialogue.

It is possible that our different versions of the English language, or the researcher’s Australian accent at times hindered understandings. Having a background in English literature, the researcher was very cognisant of seeking to understand local discourses and social norms by the ongoing clarification of semantics and non-verbal semiotics embedded in language use. For example, it was found an ‘orphaned child’ may or may not have deceased parents, as Acholi people use the word ‘orphaned’ to describe the absence of parents. Another example was the consistent use of the word ‘gap’ during interviews. Time and again, teachers would describe a ‘generation gap’ when referring to the death, displacement or detachment of the current generation of parents. Teachers would similarly use this word ‘gap’ when referring to children’s learning, particularly when they were describing the breakdown of schools, villages and homes. Consequently, this word ‘gap’ became an integral part of the research findings and outcomes.
Selecting participants and building rapport. The process for participant selection was determined during the research design and ethics approval phase. (A copy of the ethics approval can be found in Appendix 4). A suitable participant had to be a local Ugandan teacher who could speak English well. As it happened, suitable participants were abundant, and they were made available to the researcher by the hosting organisation. This was another example of the need to balance opportunism and research principles (Holliday, 2007), as the opportunity provided by the hosting organisation to visit and revisit multiple schools was most beneficial for data collection. The major limiting factor experienced in this process was time. In most cases, participants were only interviewed once. Nevertheless, common themes developed from the process under the circumstances.

The experience of developing rapport was also met with surprisingly relative ease. The Acholi people were very welcoming and hospitable and were keen to talk with an Australian researcher. The pilot interview had revealed that a small gift or a certificate of appreciation would be culturally appropriate. These gestures were received heartily by all participants. The most common hurdle to overcome in the process of building rapport was the participant consent process. Due to a history of political abuse, participants were sceptical about signing a form that guaranteed their non-identification. Privacy or confidentiality did not seem to be such pertinent issues within this culture, but the possibility of being unidentified was troubling to some. It seemed to be concerning that their ideas would not be recognised, but rather be used for someone else’s gain. It was perceived that within their culture, non-identification jeopardised their social security, whereas recognition served to strengthen it. This societal factor was somewhat at odds with a Western consent process. To overcome
this hurdle, the consent process was cast in the light of providing them with an opportunity to withdraw anything they had said at any time, rather than in the negative light of guaranteeing non-identification and privacy. The role of the researcher is discussed in more depth in the designated section below.

Choice of research settings and activities. Sitting under a mango tree in an outdoor ‘staffroom’ while children played nearby in the schoolyard was a suitable setting to conduct interviews at the host school. Teachers came and went as their timetables allowed, and the researcher and her new Acholi friends were able to share food, talk and laugh together. Sharing food and conversation were very culturally appropriate activities, and served to build friendships. At the three other schools, interviews were conducted in the head teachers’ offices or in classrooms. These were simple arrangements with a desk and a few chairs, sometimes a radio, and books and papers. In one scenario an interview was conducted in a classroom with a group of teachers. All settings allowed simultaneous observations and interviews to take place; or put another way, the simultaneous collection of peripheral and core data (Holliday, 2007). In his work, Holliday (2007) differentiated between data that is core to the research study and data that is peripheral. Core data directly answers the research question. Therefore, in this project the interview transcripts are considered core data. On the other hand, peripheral data is more incidental in nature. It may inform the researcher by contextualising the study, or by prompting further investigation into certain aspects of the study. In this is project, observations were considered peripheral data, and when they were discussed in an interview they helped to answer the research question in greater depth.
All but one interview were recorded on the LiveScribe Smartpen, a portable digital device that doubled as a writing pen. Most participants found this amusing but gladly obliged. It served to highlight the vast technological differences between our cultures, but as interviews progressed the recording device seemed to fade into oblivion, masked by the rich conversation that transpired. As it was also a writing implement, the recording device quickly became a natural object in an interview environment. So although its introduction to participants initially reinforced the differences between us, the shape and function of the device helped it to quickly become invisible. Sitting under a mango tree taking notes in a book was much more natural than having a portable recorder sitting nearby. Only one group, comprising three head teachers in a government school, did not allow the interview to be recorded. In this instance the researcher took thorough notes during the interview and then expanded these after the interview on the same day.

Observations. During the data collection period in Uganda a journal of observations was kept. Observations were recorded most days around the topics of children, learning, education, schooling, and the Acholi culture. These observations were considered peripheral data (Holliday, 2007) and were raised within interviews to seek cultural clarification and local perspective. Although there is an important thread of ethnography in this project, the primary methodology was phenomenography - a study of people’s experiences. Therefore, it was important to ratify observations within interviews. This process was also important for ethical reasons so that information used by the study came from consenting participants. Moreover, this process allowed the research to be conducted thoroughly within the time constraints of the researcher. Burns (2000) reported that the most well-known observation studies
required researchers to spend months or years observing communities. In the context of this project this was not feasible, reinforcing the need to interpret observations through interviews. Notwithstanding this, it is also acknowledged that what participants say does not always match what they mean (Holliday, 2007). Therefore, observations provided an opportunity for triangulation so that emerging phenomena could be considered in light of interviews, observations and literature. As Holliday (2007) argued, in many ways everything is data in a qualitative research study. So although observations did not drive this study, they played an integral part of the data that was assembled to map and describe phenomena.

**Participant profiles.** A total of 16 participants from four schools (two private and two government schools) participated in data collection interviews. The details of their interviews and their positions within their schools are outlined in Table 3.1. Pseudonyms for each participant have been adopted to comply with Australian ethics protocols and protect the privacy of the interviewees, despite the concerns that they mentioned.

Table 3.1

**Participant profiles**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Interview arrangement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School A - Private NGO operated school (this was the host school)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emanuel and Lawrence</td>
<td>Classroom teachers</td>
<td>Shared interview. Lawrence only joined the conversation toward the end of the interview.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice</td>
<td>Classroom teacher</td>
<td>Solo interview</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The embedded nature of the researcher’s role

The responsibility that lies upon the shoulders of the qualitative researcher is considerable. According to Kvale (2007) an interviewer should be “knowledgeable, structuring, clear, gentle, sensitive, open, steering, critical, remembering and interpreting” (p. 91). Framed in a phenomenographic paradigm, the main task is for the interviewer to discern intertwined threads of meaning that make up the fabric of the conversations. In this light, the interviewer – the researcher – is the learner, seeking to fathom the schema of a phenomenon (Marton & Booth, 1997). Add to that the
dynamics of building rapport, establishing trust and endeavouring to read cultural differences, and the task has the potential to become very complex.

Holliday (2007) discussed managing the tension between a researcher taking advantage of a presenting opportunity and the research protocols and principles of social science. As alluded to in the introductory chapter, it is acknowledged that this study arose by seizing an opportunity - an invitation from a director of a school in Northern Uganda to the researcher to come and work with her staff. Therefore, the data collection phase had to balance meeting the obligations that accompanied such an invitation and a data collection agenda. Although an interview can be described as a plain conversation (Kvale, 2007; Burns, 2000), it is enmeshed with power relationships and agendas. Kvale (2007) asserted that a professional research interview “is not an egalitarian dialogue among equal partners, but entails a specific power asymmetry where the interviewer sets the stage for the interview, controls the sequence, and uses the outcome for his or her purposes” (p. 22).

In a context that has suffered the effects of political and social abuse, these power relationships needed to be negotiated carefully. Furthermore, Kvale (2007) identified three indicators to ascertain the quality of an interview: the richness of the interviewee’s answers, the length of answers, and the clarification of statements. Much success was experienced in this regard as interviews were rich and lengthy. The remainder of this section will be divided into two sub-sections: the researcher’s personal perspective of the research and what literature reveals about a researcher’s bias.
The researcher’s personal perspective of the research. For this section, the writing style is adjusted from third to first person as my role in the research was, and is, irrevocably personal. Holliday (2007) explained that by adjusting a writer’s voice, a more transparent relationship can be created with a readership, allowing clearer discernment between opinion and fact. Not only am I an Australian teacher, so was able to empathise with the plight of the participants, but I am also a mother. My two young children and husband travelled with me to Uganda and indirectly became a part of the research dynamic.

White children are scarce in Northern Uganda. There are plenty of foreign adults working for government or non-government agencies alike, but due to its hostile past foreign children have not typically visited the region. Therefore, the presence of my children, their blonde hair, clothing and mannerisms were a novelty to the local Acholi people. In some ways the presence of my children opened up insights that might not have been otherwise available. For example, their participation in local classrooms gave me a point of comparison between children from the developed and developing world. Similarly, their close attachment to their father and me became very obvious in a setting where many children grow up without the opportunity to develop attachments to parents. They were a minority, two white girls amongst a sea of Acholi children (as Figure 3.1 depicts), but I felt their presence helped to close the gap between our cultures. Childhood and motherhood are universal (Holliday, 2007). Their presence could have also helped to build my credibility, demonstrating my role as wife and mother in a society that holds tightly to traditional gender roles. Holliday (2007) talks about a similar dynamic in one of his research examples - a non-Muslim
female researcher in Egypt who found that her roles of wife and mother helped to build bridges between cultures.

My role as a mother persuaded me to probe for information concerning the appropriate care of children, and I believe this assisted me in better understanding the trivia of schooling compared to the struggles of survival. This point is elaborated in the discussion chapters. It also helped me to empathise with the breadth and depth of the realities faced by child-headed families. I could not help but draw comparisons between the effects of functional and fractured communities on the healthy development of children. The desperate need for responsible adults to input into the development of children was glaringly obvious to the parent in me.

Some factors worked in my favour. For example, being a woman reduced the potential for interviews to be intimidating. Men are considered to be the leaders of
society in Northern Uganda, and although women shoulder much of the workload, they are subject to their fathers, brothers, uncles or husbands (Meinert, 2009). Therefore, my gender helped to reduce the potential intimidation that may have come with a white-skinned researcher representing an Australian university. Where my gender did not work in my favour was evident while I was conducting the interviews in that some of the participants were cognisant that my own children were being cared for by their father. In Northern Uganda it is supposed that men who look after children are suppressed by domineering wives. To overcome this I raised the issue with the head teachers, explaining that in Australia my husband worked a full time job in an engineering company to support our family, but that at this time he had taken holidays so I could conduct this research. They were quite open to this, explaining that, “things are changing in Uganda too.” Nevertheless, because of the dominant role that men play in Northern Ugandan society, I felt I had to elevate my husband’s role as provider and leader to validate my own position in their eyes. During the pilot interview I was led to understand that a domineering woman is not held in high esteem in Acholi culture, and this was a stigma I was trying to avoid for the sake of the interview data.

Another factor that worked in my favour was my white skin. I do not use the term ‘white’ loosely here, but am adopting local descriptions of skin colour difference, that is, black and white. Although it may be because of underlying hopes of sponsorship or benevolence, for the most part white people seemed to be treated with respect or favour. There was more than one occasion when we were hastened through a bomb-check process and our Ugandan friends attributed that to our white skin. Furthermore, in many cases it was like an insurance policy against violence or disdain, which seem to be common in wider society. Although I do not agree with such
partiality, it must be acknowledged as this influence was present and active in my role as a researcher.

Furthermore, a factor that worked in my favour was the prior study concerning Acholi culture and history I had conducted before arriving in Uganda. Participants seemed to warm to the fact that I had read about their society. This prior knowledge equipped me with a variety of possible starting points for conversations and building rapport. Marton and Booth (1997) believed a researcher in this position to be more able to reach the unreflected experiences of participants. Notwithstanding this, I would keep telling the interviewees that I was there to learn about them. And I would constantly affirm their culture by recounting some of the interesting or beautiful things I had seen since my arrival. In so many ways many of the Acholi people are battered and bruised by years of conflict and abuse, so I really wanted to convey a message I was there to build friendship and learn, not to tell them what to do. My reflections on this experience are documented in a peer-reviewed article (Willis & Allen, 2011).

Amid all these efforts to build relationships, bridge our cultures and learn from one another, at the same time it was important that I treated the familiar as strange (Holliday, 2007). It was necessary to apprehend reality and take nothing for granted. This was not only necessary due to the nature of qualitative research; it was also imperative because of the cultural differences between the participants and myself. This is an opportune point to discuss researcher bias.

**Researcher bias.** Interviewer bias and prejudice is unavoidable and may well affect the data (Burns, 2000), particularly as the data must pass through the researcher’s mind (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Burns 2000). Although some researchers
try to take object approaches to subjective data, entirely divorcing a researcher from qualitative data is impossible (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Subjectivity is inherent to this kind of research, which explains the lengthy discussion of the researcher’s role in the section above. Notwithstanding this, a researcher’s reflexivity - their consciousness of the embedded nature of their role and their rationale for their relationship with the research setting - is vital to the integrity of a qualitative study (Holliday, 2007). Similarly, it is vital that a researcher remembers to justify their interpretations (Burns, 2000), making the familiar strange.

To conclude this section and introduce the next, it is acknowledged that boundaries may shift and targets may adjust as interviews unfold. In this way, data analysis begins simultaneously with data collection (Marton & Booth, 1997). Data analysis procedures are discussed below.

**Data analysis procedures: Qualitative analysis of interview transcripts**

This project has adopted Huberman and Miles’ (1994) process of data analysis, which incorporates data collection, data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions. Similarly, Kvale (2007) described interview analysis as meaning condensation, meaning categorisation and meaning interpretation. The data collection process has been outlined in the section above. This section summarises the process of data reduction and display (Huberman & Miles, 1994), in which meaning condensation and categorisation took place (Kvale, 2007).

**Data reduction.** Interview transcripts were analysed by coding and re-coding. The aim of this process was to identify common themes in teachers’ conceptions.
Although the dominant themes of poverty, disease, war and corruption seemed to present themselves during the data collection phase, in the first reading transcripts were studied in hard copy format with the view of allowing key codes and themes to become apparent in the data. This approach was taken so that the interpretation of data would not be limited by themes that were discerned at an earlier stage of the research process. This exercise allowed the complexity of the phenomena to develop, rather than trying to make the data fit a model. As it turned out, in the beginning phases of transcript coding new and dynamic themes were revealed that the researcher had not before considered. Rather than being driven by the struggles, it was found in the beginning stages of data analysis that the major phenomenographic themes would deal with the changes that have taken place in society and how these have affected conceptions of learning. Thus, the data led the researcher. An example of a coded interview transcript can be found in Appendix 5.

A code scheme was created to reflect the emerging themes. As analysis progressed, this scheme was reorganised numerous times to move away from merely “describing the data” (Richards, 2009, p. 135) to describing conceptions. This coding experience amplified the difference between describing and analysing data (Richards, 2009), as describing the data simply organised it into themes (for example, poverty, war, trauma, disease), but analysing the information required more sophisticated treatment of the data with reference to the research question - experiences of children and their learning. Once engaged in analysis of the data, it was found that three initial conceptions emerged: system-centred education, schools leading communities, and the trivia of schooling. Over time as the data was reduced, remnants of all three of these codes remained, but only one code graduated to become a conception.
During the early phases of coding and recoding, an opportunity arose to develop a series of illustrations that depicted learning in Northern Uganda. These illustrations borrowed heavily from literature and the preliminary data findings, and are presented in Chapter 8. They are mentioned here as they served to clarify the data analysis process and keep the focus of the study upon learning. The enormity of the context and challenges in Northern Uganda had the potential to side-track the project on numerous occasions, so these illustrations were useful in keeping the focus of the study within the bounds of the research question. Reading and re-reading, coding and recoding continued for five months. Much thought was invested into the raw data before it was transferred to analysis software.

The transcripts were loaded into the data analysis software program NVivo™ (version 8) and the pre-existing codes that had been determined during the hard copy analysis process were used as ‘tree nodes’ within the software. The coding and annotations from the hard copies were transferred into digital format in NVivo™. As the process of rereading and recoding continued, the codes (or ‘nodes’ as NVivo™ terms them) grew from approximately 50 to 66 in two months. During this process ‘free nodes’ were also added to the file to accommodate overarching or underpinning themes or phenomena that could possibly lend themselves more to later discussion topics. The data entry journal noted about these notes, “These may later become discussion themes, or some of these free nodes stand alone and may or may not remain.” Once all the hard copy annotations and coding was successfully transferred to the NVivo™ file and further coding was entered, it was considered that the first round of coding was complete. It was time to go back to working with hard copies.
This time the data was printed according to codes so that the writing process could begin.

The writing process proved to be a significant exercise in data reduction. It showed up anomalies or duplication in data coding. During this process the codes (or nodes) were reduced significantly by merging or pruning and only 25 codes remained. During the writing process, the software programme Inspiration™ was used to assist in the organisation of thoughts, themes and relationships between these. The mind map evolved over multiple versions as it was manipulated to depict the experiences of teachers. The final version can be seen in Appendix 6.

Once the scope of experiences could be adequately appreciated, it was time to begin the process of formalising the teachers’ conceptions and constructing categories of description to analyse these conceptions. This project distinguishes between the conceptions and the categories of description, so the voices of the teachers and the voice of the researcher can be more easily differentiated. Richards (2009) explained that themes, like theories, do not emerge but are constructed by the researcher. This project would assert that the conceptions were constructed to make sense of the data, and the categories of description were constructed to make sense of the conceptions.

On the topic of phenomenographic data analysis, Marton and Booth (1997) stressed that a researcher must keep in mind that people’s experiences are indeed individual, and cannot be viewed as general. Notwithstanding this, NVivo™ tallies were helpful in monitoring the evolution of common themes. Once the categories of description were determined, it seemed timely to return to the original transcripts once
again. The audio files were listened to over and again to re-immers in the context and 
feel of the interviews.

**Data display.** Throughout the analysis process, the focus of this project was 
sharpened so that a clearer picture could come to view (Richards, 2009). 
Metaphorically speaking, the lens was narrowed from collecting *teachers’ experiences 
of children and their learning* to identifying *teachers’ conceptions of children’s 
learning*. This process is outlined more thoroughly at the beginning of the first data 
chapter. However, it is important to note that the chosen approach to data collection - 
having one open-ended guiding question - determined the nature of the data and the 
findings that arose during the analysis process. It was therefore appropriate to hone 
the study during the analysis phase and bring more distinct boundaries around the 
topic. Due to the phenomenographic nature of this project, categories of description 
were constructed to analyse the teachers’ conceptions. Although the researcher is 
indelibly connected with all phases of the study (Holliday, 2007), it is possible to make 
discernments between the identification of themes in data (conceptions) and the 
interpretive analysis of themes (categories of description). Marton (1998) explained 
that “Phenomenographers do not make statements about the world as such, but about 
people’s conceptions of the world (p. 145).” To this end, phenomenographers seek to 
apprehend and categorise the variance within descriptions of people’s experiences by 
identifying conceptions and analysing these conceptions in categories, which become 
the focus of the research findings (Marton, 1998). Marton went as far as dismissing 
psychological models for educational research as they are not “helpful in solving 
practical, pedagogical problems” (p. 155), arguing that phenomenography better 
accommodates relational thinking that is needed in the study of learning, thinking and
understanding. In this argument Marton (1998) contended that experience is the pragmatic relationship between psychology and sociology, and by understanding experience we better understand reality. Therefore, from described experiences the researcher was looking for conceptions that could explain reality.

Upon narrowing the focus of the study to conceptions of children’s learning, six categories of description became apparent. It ought to be noted that these categories, which organise and analyse the teacher’s conceptions, are neither exhaustive nor sequential. To the contrary, they are very interrelated and reliant upon each other. As this the data analysis process progressed, it became apparent that the six categories of description could be grouped together in three broader categories. These categories are colour coded from here on to assist reading legibility. The learning as ‘dependent’ categories are coloured brown as they form the foundations of the conceptions, and show what learning should be. The learning as ‘affected’ categories are green as they describe what learning really is and how it grows and develops. The learning as a ‘means’ categories are coloured blue as they describe the potential of learning, or what it could be. Briefly, it was found that the Northern Ugandan teachers conceptualised learning as dependent upon cultural heritage and the education system, affected by the stressors of war, poverty and disease that have created gaps in children’s learning, and a means for opening minds and community rehabilitation. These three groups became the three data chapters that are presented hereafter.
Reliability of the research methods and outcome

This chapter has outlined in detail the research design, data collection and analysis procedures so that the reader may thoroughly understand the evolution and progression of this project. The reliability of a phenomenographic study, according to Cope (2002), is enhanced by two key qualities. First, a clear audit of the procedures used to collect and analyse the data; and second, comprehensible presentation of research findings so that a reader may engage in informed scrutiny. This chapter provides an audit of procedures, and the next chapter fulfils the requirement of thorough and transparent presentation of research data and findings.

In addition, it has been found that the outcomes of this study have been well received by Ugandan academics to date. This is most pleasing, as opportunities to share the phenomenographic model outlined in later chapters have validated the veracity of the research findings.

Research paradigm: Interpretivism

This last section of the chapter discusses the overarching research paradigm that informed the research strategy - interpretivism. A paradigm is “made up of the general theoretical assumptions and laws, and techniques for their application that the members of a particular scientific community adopt” (Chalmers, 1982, p. 90). For the purpose of this study, the research paradigm of interpretivism was adopted as it best suits the research problem and context. Punch (2009) argued for consistency,
compatibility and integrity between research paradigms, questions and methods. Punch also explained that some studies take pragmatic approaches, where questions determine paradigms, while other studies take paradigm-driven approaches, where questions are developed from paradigms. This study certainly strived for congruity between the research problem, questions and methods, and indeed changed direction so that the research problem could be more appropriately addressed.

O’Donoghue (2007) described interpretivism as “an understanding of the meanings that create, and are created by, interaction between human beings [which are] essential to an understanding of the social world and the myriad phenomena which it contains” (pp. 16-17). An interpretive paradigm of inquiry is suited to research questions that study human understandings and behaviour. Research like this allows for multiple realities and constructions of these (Lichtman, 2006). It also allows for the dynamics of real life research, which Holliday (2007) described as a very human process involving shortcuts, guesswork, opportunism and serendipity. Consequently, the data collected in interpretive studies is often qualitative, like this study, although not strictly so (Willis, 2007). In part, humans are products of their objective environments, but they are also products of their subjective perceptions of their environments. What the world means to people, whether it be a group of people or an individual, is critically important to interpretivist research. According to Wilhelm Dilthey, the goal of social science is understanding (verstehen) and the ‘proper topic’ of this kind of research is the “lived experience of humans” (Willis, 2007, pp. 6-7). Although interpretivism is not experimental, it is at liberty to make propositions about human behaviour and understandings.
Accordingly, this study generated a phenomenographic mental model that both describes and explains the situation in Northern Uganda (Punch, 2009). Punch (2009) explained that this kind of process involves content-based propositions that explain the data by deduction and “if-then” links (p. 20). Burns (2000) described the analysis process to be one of organising, categorising and drawing conclusions, all which seem to occur concurrently. Drawing conclusions in qualitative research is a little like putting a 3-dimensional jigsaw puzzle together; the whole is segmented into parts that can be assembled and reassembled as various rubrics (Burns, 2000), but all the while it is interconnected due to cultural boundedness (Holliday, 2007). Although the data, in a study like this, was unstructured, the outcomes were developed in a structured fashion (Punch, 2009). This entire process is encapsulated under the umbrella of interpretivism.

Willis (2007) proposed that interpretivism combines two essential threads of thought: rationalism and relativism. Rationalism proposes an alternative view to traditional empiricism, arguing that the experience of the senses is not always the best way of knowing something. Instead, rationalism promotes the idea of thinking your way to understanding. An important element of Plato’s philosophy, rationalism makes room for abstract thoughts and ideals, as reality is not only solely available through experience. Many interpretivist researchers prefer relativism to idealism (Willis, 2007). According to Willis (2007) relativism adopts the perspective that knowledge is socio-culturally embedded, reality is socially constructed, and understanding is context specific. Such a view accommodates Leach and Moon’s (2008) position that the process of learning is critically social. What is more, the relativist thread of thought in the paradigm of interpretivism rejects the notion of
absolute truths. Rather than seeking out generalisations, or universal truths, Willis (2007) contends that qualitative interpretivist research takes the position that “the reality we know is socially constructed” (p. 97). Marton and Booth (1997) explained that the relationships between individuals, groups, communities, situations, languages, cultures and societies collectively contribute to social constructivism. However, at an individual level, Marton and Booth (1997) do not believe the world is constructed by the learner, and nor is it imposed upon the learner, but rather it is experienced by the learner. To this end, it is quite possible for the researcher and the research participants to have different experiences of the same world. This presents a challenge to the researcher to take the experiences of other people seriously.

By contrast, positivist research is often concerned with seeking universal truth. Perhaps the differences between positivist and interpretivist research are best explained by the Dilthey’s (see Willis, 2007) use of the German words verstehen (understanding) and erklärung (explanation). Dilthey used these two words to categorise two types of knowledge. He proposed that cultural or social sciences were more concerned with verstehen (understanding), and natural sciences with erklärung (explanation). It would seem that an explanation is an absolute answer to a research question, whereas an understanding is generated from a certain viewpoint of a research question. It is not surprising then that Punch (1998) described social research as highly political.

It could be said that this project embraces an interpretive research paradigm learning toward a sociological tradition. Qualitative research stems from either sociological or anthropological traditions, or both (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Burns, 2000). Although there are elements of anthropology in this study, largely it leans
toward sociology traditions. Sociology “attempts to provide an explanation which is based on the systematic use of evidence” (Lewins, 1992, p. 5). Social science research is characterised by either theory testing or theory construction (Lewins, 1992). This particular project leans predominantly towards theory construction, where understandings are generated and conclusions drawn from the phenomenographic findings that develop from the data analysis. Although, due to the size and scope of this study it cannot be said that theory has been generated, rather understandings have been established that may contribute to the generation of theory at a later date. In contrast, theory testing research presents theory at the beginning of a project. Theory construction may be derived from a dominant trend (most cases revealing the same phenomenon) or a general quality (all cases revealing the same phenomenon) (Lewins, 1992).

Within the interpretivist research paradigm of this project are also elements of symbolic interactionism. Sandstrom, Martin and Fine (2006) described symbolic interactionism as “a perspective in sociology that places meaning, interaction, and human agency at the centre of understanding social life” (p. 2). In many ways, that is what this project aims to achieve - understand the social lives of people in Northern Ugandan (keeping in mind that the literature review established learning as a social process). Symbolic interactionism relies heavily upon the use and interpretation of language (Mead, cited in Sandstrom, Martin and Fine, 2006). Symbolic interactionism brackets the chosen interview methods of this project adequately, as the interviews involved the exchange and interpretation of language as a means to understand and describe the experiences of others. This is particularly important in cross-cultural research as everything familiar must be treated as strange (Holligay, 2007), and local
definitions need to be sought. Blumer (cited in Sandstrom, Martin and Fine, 2006) suggested that if we are to understand people and their behaviour, then we need to know how they define things. We cannot assume that objects, experiences or environments hold the same meaning for all people (Sandstrom, Martin and Fine, 2006).

In conclusion, this chapter has outlined the research design process, explaining the evolution of this research project thus far, and discussed the underpinning methodologies of phenomenography and ethnography. It has also given a detailed account of the data collection and analysis processes. Finally, this chapter wrapped these methodologies and methods in the overarching research paradigm of interpretivism. This thesis now moves to the findings that emerged from the rich data gained in the empirical stages of the student and from the detailed analysis outlined in this chapter.
Chapter 4

Data I: Introduction and conceptions of learning as ‘dependent’

Introduction to the data chapters

This chapter is the first of three data chapters. By way of introduction, the purpose of this research project was to identify the conceptions held by Northern Ugandan teachers so that the phenomenon of children’s learning could be better understood. It must be noted that at this point the research study takes a more defined path. In response to the data, the scope of this study is narrowed specifically to experiences and associated conceptions of children’s learning. As the methodology chapter outlined, in response to the pilot interview the data collection process was deliberately open-ended and non-prescriptive so that the depth and breadth of the situation in Northern Uganda could be best understood. Accordingly, interviews began with the research question, “Can you tell me your experiences with children and their learning?” However, at this point the focus on experiences with children and their learning is now fine-tuned to conceptions of children’s learning. As the interviews were conducted in schools with Northern Ugandan teachers it was found that stories of children were inextricably linked to beliefs about learning. Furthermore, for the purpose of discerning between the presentation of data and the interpretive analysis of data, this project distinguishes between the terms conceptions and categories of description. Although it is not possible to separate the researcher from the management of the data at any stage (Holliday, 2007), it is possible to make
discernments between the identification of themes in data (conceptions) and the interpretive analysis of themes (categories of description). This organisation of experiences, conceptions, and categories of description allows for clearer discernment between the teachers’ voices and the researcher’s voice. This process of data analysis is depicted in Figure 4.1.

![Figure 4.1. A model of the data analysis process that sharpened the focus of the study](image)

By identifying and presenting teacher’s conceptions of children’s learning, these three data chapters answer the two guiding research questions:

- *What are Ugandan teachers’ experiences of children and their learning?*
- *How do Ugandan teachers describe their experiences of children as learners?*

Of note, children’s learning in this study is defined as children’s *organised or formal learning*. For example, these might be experiences that took place around the fireplace when uncles and aunties passed on traditional stories, ‘direct method’
learning where children learnt by the example of their elders, and classroom and school-based learning where students engaged in lessons. Although children’s learning can also be incidental or informal (and this is dealt with later), the dominant discourse for learning in this study is organised and/or formal learning.

Moreover, it must be remembered that the first aim of this study was to generate knowledge and understandings about Ugandan teachers’ conceptions. Therefore, it is important that the reader considers that these findings are particular to the worldviews of Northern Ugandan teachers, and may not be congruent with Western paradigms. Indeed, the pilot interview expressly called attention to such risks and the methodology was adapted as a result. For example, from the researcher’s own experience, conceptions of learning in the West may draw upon learning theories, philosophies and pedagogies. However, this was not necessarily the case in Uganda. In many instances teachers used experiences with wider social phenomena to better explain their conceptions of children’s learning, rather than learning theories. Furthermore, it was found that Northern Ugandan teachers used the terms learning and education synonymously, and in some instances interchanged the topics of learning and schooling without distinction. As the analysis below reveals, some teachers conceptualised learning as schooling or teaching, which ensued the construction of a descriptive category to deal with this (outlined below). All this to say, the focus of this study remains upon children’s learning. In all instances it must be remembered that the research question was concerned with Ugandan teachers’ experiences and conceptions of children and their learning. If interviewees described education or schooling systems, then these ought to contribute to conceptions of children’s learning, regardless of dominant Western thought that distinguishes these terms.
Categories of description

These data chapters present teachers’ conceptions of children’s learning that were identified in the data. To lay the platform for later analysis, these conceptions are organised into categories of description. Notwithstanding this organisation, it ought to be noted that these three data chapters present the data, they do not analyse it. It could be argued that presenting the data according to themes solicits interpretation, and the influence of the researcher in this process is not denied. Nevertheless, evaluative and analytical discussion is reserved for the final chapters of this thesis.

As outlined in the methodology chapter, these conceptions and categories of description cannot be divorced from the embedded role of the researcher. It should be noted that a white Australian female teacher played a lead role in constructing these categories based on her experiences of visiting and interviewing Northern Ugandan teachers. Hence, these findings are both provisional (Bowden, 2000) and context and situation sensitive (Akerlind, 2002). It is acknowledged that other researchers may have constructed different categories of description, come to understand Northern Ugandan teachers’ conceptions differently, or indeed collected different data. Nonetheless, this specific cross-cultural dynamic is inherent to this study and the discovery process.

It should be noted that strong relationships exist between the distinct categories described in this chapter. Although the relationships between these categories are not linear in nature, they are presented in logical sequence for the purpose of reporting, and to provide a framework for describing the phenomenon of teachers’ conceptions of
children’s learning in Northern Uganda. These categories are by no means exhaustive, but they have been constructed to best accommodate and describe the variations in individual and collective experiences.

The six conceptions are colour coded into their categories of description below. In revision, the learning as ‘dependent’ categories are coloured brown as they form the foundations of the conceptions, and show what learning should be. The learning as ‘affected’ categories are green as they show what learning really is and how it grows and develops. And, the learning as a ‘means’ categories are coloured blue as they describe the potential of learning, or what it could be. Briefly, it was found that the Northern Ugandan teachers conceptualised learning as dependent upon cultural heritage and the education system, affected by the stressors of war, poverty and disease that have created gaps in children’s learning, and a means for opening minds and community rehabilitation.

Conception A: Children’s learning as dependent upon cultural heritage and family background

There is a quality in teachers’ conceptions that children’s learning is fundamentally dependent upon cultural heritage and family background. This conception is reminiscent of the old African adage, it takes a village to raise a child.

Conception B: Children’s learning as dependent upon the education system

Northern Ugandan teachers frequently used the terms learning, education and schooling synonymously. As interviews unfolded, it could be seen that there was a
strong reliance upon the education system and government policy to facilitate children’s learning. As such, teaching methods were often a creature of the state.

**Conception C: Children’s learning as fragmented**

This conception includes the “gaps” in children’s learning that were created by loss of the traditional fireplace, displacement, the subsequent breakdown of domestic care, and an underdeveloped education system. Due to ongoing war and consequent disease and poverty, traditional learning has been fractures and many teachers now believe children’s learning to be fragmented.

**Conception D: Children’s learning as hijacked by competing postwar and poverty related stressors**

In many instances, children’s attention and energy that may be otherwise devoted to learning is hijacked by post-traumatic stress, HIV/AIDS and the phenomenon of orphaned children, including child-headed families. In many ways, this conception is enmeshed with Conceptions A and B.

**Conception E: Children’s learning as a means to “open the mind” and overcome fear, shyness and low esteem**

Abstract notions of love, fear and esteem feature strongly in this conception of children’s learning. Teachers’ conceptions of how the widespread prevalence of fear in their communities has sabotaged their children’s learning and their beliefs about the powers of love and encouragement are revealed in this conception.
Conception F: Children’s learning as a means to community rehabilitation

For many teachers, children’s learning is the fundamental starting point for rebuilding their community. This conception incorporates themes of schools leading communities, teachers in parental roles, and hopes for the future. The data in this conception is inspirational.

For the purpose of reporting the data is organised over three chapters. As these chapters reveal, the first two conceptions establish a context for understanding the latter four. This structure is outlined in Table 4.1. Notwithstanding this, these conceptions should not be interpreted in a linear fashion. As the data reveals, they are quite enmeshed and tend to compound each other.

Table 4.1

Phenomenographic conceptions organised by categories of description

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation of Description</th>
<th>Factors contributing to the conception</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Conception A: Children’s learning as dependent upon cultural heritage and family background | Cultural heritage  
Family background and environment |
| Conception B: Children’s learning as dependent upon the education system | System-centred learning  
System-centred teaching methods |
| Conception C: Children’s learning as fragmented | Loss of traditional Acholi fireplace learning  
Displacement  
Breakdown of domestic care  
Uneducated and/or detached parents  
Child labour  
Underdeveloped education system |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation of Description</th>
<th>Factors contributing to the conception</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Conception D: Children’s learning as hijacked by competing postwar and poverty related stressors | Post-traumatic stress  
HIV/AIDS  
Orphaned children  
Child-headed families  
Child-marriage |
| Conception E: Children’s learning as a means to "open the mind" and overcome fear, shyness and low esteem. | Opening the mind  
Fear  
Shyness  
Low esteem  
Love  
Encouragement |
| Conception F: Children’s learning as a means to community rehabilitation | Schools leading communities  
Teachers in parental roles  
Hopes for the future |

As the data unfolds over the next three chapters, teachers’ conceptions of learning begin to find their place in a cyclic phenomenographic model that explains the relationships between the categories of description. Although discussing this cyclic model is premature at this stage, it is provided here in Figure 4.2 to provide a framework for the reader.
Presentation of findings

Findings are presented as excerpts of interview transcripts and are organised according to the conceptions that became apparent in the data analysis process. These excerpts are representative samples of teachers’ conceptions of children’s learning and every effort has been made to leave nothing unspoken (Marton & Booth, 1997). It should be noted that transcript excerpts have been transcribed verbatim and may include unconventional uses of the English language as it is a second language in this
culture. Further, some of the expressions in use are typical of African English. Rather than inserting [sic] repeatedly this report accommodates these differences and relies upon the reader to do likewise. As explained in Chapter 3, every effort was made during the interview process to ensure the interviewer understood the intended meaning of the interviewees. Furthermore, the researcher transcribed the audio files so that the most meaning could be made from the recordings. Where a recording was unclear, but the researcher was able to gauge the intended meaning of a conversation, an interpretation has been inserted in [square brackets] so that meaning is not lost in transcription.

It should also be noted that in one interview participants were not willing for an audio recording to be taken. Therefore, handwritten notes were taken and are presented verbatim from the researcher’s records. Where the interviewer’s thoughts are included in these notes, they are italicised. Should further contextual information be required the reader may consult the participant profiles in Table 3.1 in the methodology chapter.

**Conceptions of learning as ‘dependent’**

The findings in this first data chapter reveal teacher’s conceptions that children’s learning is dependent upon a) their cultural heritage and family backgrounds (community), and b) the education system. These two dependencies almost seem to be in paradox to each other, as one is more organic and the other more industrial in nature (Robinson, 2009). However, as the data unfolds, a greater perspective of teachers’ conceptions about the binary nature of a child’s foundation to learning is revealed.
Conception A: Children’s learning as dependent upon cultural heritage and family background

For many teachers, children’s learning is inherently dependent upon cultural heritage and family background. In the Northern Ugandan context this is problematic for many teachers as many children are without links to their history or culture due to the ramifications of war and disease. This section presents data from nine interviewees and aims to encapsulate the conception that cultural heritage and family background is central to learning. It is organised into two contributing factors: cultural heritage and family background. However, it must be noted that both of these factors could be grouped together under the term community: that is, learning as dependent upon community. Although this phrase is apt, it does not adequately describe this conception so was not used as a title but is worthy of mention as it summarises this conception succinctly. It is here that we see how the old African adage it takes a village to raise a child still resonates in Acholi culture.

Cultural heritage. This section presents data from three interviewees who conceived learning to be dependent upon cultural norms like belonging to a community and listening to elders. Timothy, the oldest interviewee and a respected elder in his community, talked enthusiastically of the traditional “African setting.” He relayed experiences from as far back as his childhood before times of conflict, through the ascensions to power of Amin, Obote, Okello and Museveni, and then his most recent experiences of children’s learning during the conflict against the LRA. As this man had lived through four decades of consecutive wars, and his childhood memories were intact, his account was most insightful and moving. In this excerpt he described
his learning as a child to demonstrate the changes that had taken place in his community. It is provided here as a contextual background for this conception.

That was the first thing about the African setting. He [a new baby] was for everybody. And everyone in that community in the environment was concerned about the child. And that was good. Indeed I grew up in that manner. So that when you see anybody, an elderly person, you need to respect. Regardless of whether this is your real father or real mother, you respect. And that was the way you were brought up … I even learnt from home. I had my elder brothers who were teaching me how to read and write from home. So when I was going to school, I went when I could write and I could count and I could read … Simply because of that kind of teaching and the kind of lifestyle that was at home. And 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. And you find growing up not detached from each and every member of the community. And socially people were really close, they were united. Very close. And that is how I grew up. (Timothy)

In a similar tenor, John talked specifically about traditional values of respect and how this was ingrained in their 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…

*Interviewer: And why are African children so respectful?*

Culture plays that role. We have a good cultures. Respect is one thing, and also sharing. And that is why we grew up eating together, five to six children. Sharing everything. And also taught us to be active. Because if
you’re too slow then others will take the food! So you also need to respect. Because of this same thing, you find that you grow up thinking that you can only live when there is someone with you. You can never go alone in Africa …

Learning by ‘direct method’ - learning by what you are doing. When a father is teaching a child how to act, for example, hunting, you do not go to the theory. You go straight to the field! For example, when this animal is behaving like that and that, they always behave like that, when they do you do this. So young we are taken to the field to learn to keep animals. We do not have spears, we can only shout. So if you shout, the animals take off and you can catch them from the other direction. So we learn from direct method.

Girls are always taken there to learn how to grind and winnow. We learn how to cook at the fire. We don’t need to take the paper, write it down and learn how to cook that way. The mother will take her daughters and the child watches the mother. Even at the time of marriage, the uncles and aunties will teach. The aunties will tell the girl, “You are going to a new home, please don’t a-shame us. When your husband is talking, you need to stand like this. When your mother-in-law is talking, you need to stand like this.” Even wears. You don’t put on any wears to go to your mother-in-law, you have certain clothes for friends, family, etc. This is respect.

*Interviewer: And this kind of teaching by direct method still happens today?*

Yes. Clothes are important to show respect.

*Interviewer: Is that being restored now after the war?*

That is true that the war took some cultures away. But the adults that are so strong, it does not go easy. War alone should not take the goodness of cultures…

Another thing we teach is stories - myths and legends from the ancestors. [For example, a story about how the mountains were formed in Kitgum
that his grandmother taught him]. I like to put these stories into science. It always leaves you with something to think. Now this is a different teaching from the scientific way. This one has been taught with some ethics around it - respect. In so doing this, people learn how to know.

You grow up like that, until when you are fully-grown. (John)

This excerpt from John gives insights into how traditional learning took place, including learning by “direct method” and how this practical learning was organised into gender roles. Whatever the topic, it seems from John’s comments here that ethics undergird all aspects of traditional learning.

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…

So during those years before the war, the fireplace, because you have a homestead, in the middle of that homestead is a fireplace. So that every evening everybody gathers at the fireplace. And you tell riddles, you tell stories, and you even learn how our ancestors moved from Sudan to the place where you are. And other branches moved to Tanzania to Kenya. So you learn. (Abe)

Abe referred to traditional learning as ‘informal’, however this was purposeful and organised learning and is therefore included in this conception. In the next excerpt 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.

*Interviewer: Yes, I can see that, it is incredibly rich. Rich in what way? When you say rich, what do you mean?*

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... There is what is called *mato-oput*, that is resolution. That is what they used to get the rebels back. Because if there has been disputes among society or with a camp, *mato-oput* set the way to bring about reconciliation. (Abe)

Abe went on to share his experiences with the reconciliation processes that had taken place to bring the child soldiers home. They were deeply moving, to say the very least, but fall outside the scope of this study.

*Family background.* Family background was indelibly linked with children’s learning throughout most interviews. It is for this reason that many teachers lamented the breakdown of society and attribute this to the fragmentation of children’s learning (this is brought together in Conception C). Within explanations of how family background affect learning, teachers often made reference to individual differences as a product of family background. This excerpt from Michael and Rose typifies the conception that learning is dependent on family background. They 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 affect learning. As you know, it comes from conception. So when you conceive the baby in the womb.

Michael: That will be because nutrition affects the woman which is making the child to be that way. Eating beans everyday, eating that same thing, which is not a balanced diet. That will affect the baby because of the feeding. Because they say the brain is made up of 60% of fat, of which is there is 60% of fats, the content of the brain is of poor quality which makes the child’s mind slow in thinking, does not act in a [unclear] way.

Rose: Also the mood and the view of the parents may also build how a child should be.

Interviewer: How does that build a child?

Michael: That mood can come about …. Like for example, when a woman’s [interrupted by Rose]

Rose: Like you have a drunkard husband, you don’t want sex, he’s forcing you, he’s beating you, he’s doing all those kinds of things. You are not happy… so that one will also determine.

Interviewer: So you can see that in the children in your classroom? You can see the moods of their homes?

Rose: We can see.

Two teachers from another school, Emanuel and Lawrence, the interviewee of fewest words, also believed children’s learning (at times here referred to as education) to originate in conception.
Interviewer: What can grow a child? What makes a healthy child?

Emanuel: Hmmm, it is obvious that is education. People are educating and saying, “these children you learn, you study.” That is the only key to success. Actually education is the key.

Interviewer: Can you, in your own words from your own experience, tell me what education is?

Emanuel: Education to me, in a simple term I can say, is a continual process of learning.

Lawrence: Experiences, that go through from birth to death. Gained right from conception.

At this point, it is worth noting that some teachers had a fixed view of intelligence, believing it to be predetermined by genetics or circumstance. Emanuel was the first to allude to this conception. His comments here connect a child’s home situation to a measure of intelligence.

Interviewer: And why do you think some children learn at a different pace? Why are some slower and some faster?

I think that one will depend on the child’s background. (Long pause). And I can go as far as saying intelligence quotient. Some have high IQ and they can even read [to] you from the first. That is why for them they can actively participate and they can easily understand faster.

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 being with?
What will I do then to survive? So that will take his concentration.

(Emanuel)

Emanuel went on to explain that there was only one kind of intelligence and he referred to the “intelligence quotient” to explain this.

Also demonstrating a conception that children’s learning is dependent upon family background and circumstances, Mercy, a head of lower primary at a government school, discussed reasons behind children’s intelligence. (The excerpt here is taken from interview notes as this was the interview where participants did not wish to be recorded).

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…

If students have been to kindy and have been introduced to the system from an earlier age they have a stronger foundation. This is a problem of parents in poverty and of a low education themselves. Their kids miss nursery school and miss out on a good foundation if they jump straight to P1.

Nursery school costs money. There are not government nurseries, private only. There are few nursery schools in the villages. If they do exist, they are usually of low quality. (Mercy)

Mercy described the influence of opportunity, or the lack thereof, as a factor of family background upon which children’s learning depends.
John similarly described intelligence with reference to family background, making particular comment about the role opportunity plays in children’s development.

If someone does not have a sound mind you find their children are dull, they do not pick up. Also, environment also plays its role. Because you may find that this child seems bright, but environment affects children a lot. And it is vice versa too. Because of the environment a child might learn how to communicate and learn.

...This doctor told a friend [of mine] … very much bright, he said, please I don’t want you to consider I am very much bright I have just had opportunity. And as for me I don’t measure maybe that this one is bright or dull, that it is simply the way one is born, but whether there has been an opportunity. Some simply did not get the opportunity even though they are very bright. So education cannot measure the mind.

You may think it is how I have studied… It may be that the person did not just get opportunity, but they are very bright. That’s why they do amazing things. And one thing I known in education everyone is bright at certain things. And if we see this one is not doing well at mathematics, they can be good at dancing or music. I have not yet taught a child who is good at everything... So I have stopped measuring children from the perspective of the majority. Just because someone does not do well in one class does not mean they are bright. No, this person could be a farmer. They could dig in the garden and be very prosperous. So I think that is one thing that people have to learn. But only a few people have learnt. (John)

John alluded to the age-old ‘nature or nurture’ debate here in his discussions about intelligence and opportunity, both being factors of family background and fundamental to learning. Notwithstanding this, his perspectives of children’s learning here seem to sit outside the status quo. This is evidenced in statements like, “education cannot
measure the mind” and “I have stopped measuring children from the majority.” John stood out amongst interviewees as a very insightful teacher.

Ernest, another head teacher in a government school, also discussed family background as fundamental to children’s learning, alluding to a fixed conception of intelligence as he mentions bright children have “got the genes now.”

*Interviewer: And why are some children bright? What makes them bright?*

How the child is doing from birth. How that child has been cared. The care for that child from the [home]. And then when they look at the time and the journey [through primary school]. There are some people who have not [learnt] unless they are at school, and so they do not have the foundation that has made other to be what? Bright. And it is my experience also there are some kids who normally perform, they begin from the family, you find out the parents are bright and also they also give back to bright children and then they’ve got the genes now. So that one is also there.

*Interviewer: And when you talk about a foundation - a child’s foundation - what makes up a child’s foundation?*

Normally the first foundation is from the parents; and then the teacher who handles the child at the first class. When the child is in nursery school or K1. That is where the foundation [is]. (Ernest)

Ernest’s comments here link learning to foundations laid in nursery school, as did Mercy. These foundations (or opportunities) are linked to parents’ wealth as nursery school is not a part of the government’s free education scheme. Later in the interview Ernest explained that not every child can be a good citizen and attributed this to family background. He used pilferers as an example.
Like for example, there are some that may [be] pilferers. These children they come from various families. And the way a parent give from those parents, decide who is bright in my family may not give the way a child would be growing in the family. So when the children meet they may be trying to know another one... So it is not inside everybody to be a good citizen [because of] peer influence. (Ernest)

Ernest was implying in this discussion that the ways parents raise their children, including what they can and cannot provide for their children, determines a child’s vulnerability to peer influence. He specifically mentioned that parents “may not give the way a child would be growing,” meaning that parents may not adequately provide for a child’s moral growth.

Alice, the most softly spoken interviewee, also ascribed differences in children’s learning to family backgrounds.

*Interviewer: And where do they come from, individual differences?*

They come from the family they come from. (Alice)

Alice went on to talk about how some families “back them up” others do not, and in this discussion she connected family support and discipline to differences in children who listen and those who cannot concentrate.

Similarly, Alice’s colleague, 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 being with? What will I do then to survive? So that will take his concentration. (Emanuel)

Before progressing, it should also be acknowledged that traditional concepts of children’s learning included the use of discipline. Although the Ugandan government in recent times has outlawed corporal punishment, there were conceptions that discipline encouraged children’s learning. Mercy explained that, “children are more likely to listen when punished. There is an old saying, “The ears of African children are on their buttocks”.” In another interview, Paul ratified this traditional conception.

In those days the beating was really serious. If you did something wrong you were punished. But now days even the government will not allow children to be beaten. So if you are beating a child like this you are committing [a crime]. (Paul)

Paul described the following situation from his own childhood.

There was one there in [unclear] so they asked somebody to maybe come and give something that will make people - energisers - so this one was a … in those days there was a teacher who would come with a teacher. But that one I think discourages you, it discourages the children to learn. Because he comes and says, “What is the capital city of Uganda?” And everyone is raising up their hand. So now the other one who will give the answer may say, “Nairobi” when Nairobi is not the capital city of Uganda. And this teacher instead of beating the one who said Nairobi, he just beat the one sitting near.

*Interviewer: He beat the nearest child?*

Yes, he just beat the one here. So, it has been happening in those days. (Paul)
Clearly, the traditional setting was not entirely utopian. Nevertheless, it was conceived to be fundamental to children’s learning, and children’s learning was conceived to be dependent upon it. Ongoing years of war and subsequent poverty and disease have significantly fractured the traditional setting, and the families that grew therein, and Northern Ugandan teachers now view children’s learning differently, as following conceptions explain.

As interviews unfolded the researcher came to understand that there are two sides to this theme of learning as ‘dependent’. Not only do Northern Ugandan teachers see learning as dependent upon cultural heritage, they (almost paradoxically) see it as dependent upon the education system. The following category of description elaborates this binary conception of a child’s foundation to learning.

**Conception B: Children’s learning as dependent upon the education system**

As Northern Ugandan teachers shared their conceptions of children’s learning, it became increasingly apparent that some view learning, education and schooling as synonymous. In many instances, these terms were used interchangeably, as can be seen throughout this chapter. Indeed, many times when interviews opened with the question “Can you tell me your experiences with children and their learning?” many interviewees would begin to explain their education system. For example, Emanuel believed education to be learning: “Education is a continuous process of learning” (Emanuel). Having a background as a school teacher, the researcher came to the understanding that in addition to the discernible differences between ‘teacher-centred’ and ‘student-centred’ learning in the West, in Northern Uganda there is also ‘system-
centred’ learning. This section presents data that contributes to this conception, including data that demonstrates how teachers hold the system responsible for children’s learning and how their teaching methods reflect the system.

**System-centred learning.** To open this section, a lengthy excerpt from the researcher’s notes is presented here from the interview with three head teachers in a government school. It typifies the conception that learning is systemic.

*Interviewer: Can you tell me about your experiences with students and their learning?*

Godfrey: They start school in P1 (six years old). 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?*

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 [Acholi Luo]. Except subject English which is taught in English. We do not mention subjects, so students do not know when different subjects are being taught according to a timetable or discipline area. Instead, subject are integrated into themes [in P1-P3].

P4 is a transition class. The syllabus for P4 requires all instruction be carried out in English. Therefore, P4 is a very big class as many students who do not know English have to stay here until they can move on. Many students struggle with English transition…

*Interviewer: How do you encourage potential in a child?*

We have a school attendance register - a roll call. We follow them up if they do not attend. And we follow the parents up too. We talk to the
parents about the benefits of education. We also have testing. We talk about testing results with the children and with their parents.

… There is only one government test (the PLE), and teachers drill and mentor students in preparation for this. The trouble with the PLE is that the government did not sensitise parents. They told them it is free. So parents do not want to contribute. But government funding is not sufficient. The same could be said of schooling in general. (Mercy)

In another school, Alice’s initial reaction to the first interview question was similarly systemic.

We have 8 subjects [in lower primary]: English, Mathematics, Literacy 1 and 2 - Reading and writing, RE, Music, PE, Art and craft, and Local language [Acholi - Luo]. These are tested and results are reported as percentages. (Alice)

Alice’s colleague, Paul, opened his interview with a system-based response also.

*Interviewer: Can you tell me your experiences with children and their learning in Uganda?*

In Uganda, the Ugandan system. These children are under changes. Whereby they tend to be very difficult in the P4 classroom. They tend to be very stubborn, very noisy. And these children they are not dull, they are very bright. Except they have a little time to concentrate which makes them sometimes seem as if they are dull.

And let me go to P6. They are also very willing children to learn. What they like is methods like entertainment. They like drama and story telling methods, it suits best for them. They can be very attentive and very eager in your lessons. Also, they also do best in group methods, in group work. They discuss and come out with a concrete result. (Paul)
Timothy also hinted at a system-centred approach to learning, believing that institutions need to take responsibility for learning.

And now the people have gone back home in their own villages, the ministry, the church, the government has a very big role to play. Especially, the way we look at it is if there is any means for change you need to take the line of education. That is the only option. (Timothy)

Paul revealed his conception of the dominant role that the government plays in children’s learning when he gave the example of how the government had to legislate that parents pack lunch for their children for the sake of their academic performance.

So the performance used to be very poor in the Amuru district. 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 Amuru. So these children improved… They sensitised the parents to give some packed food. And with only that one, the improvement came. And the children improved. (Paul)

Paul’s colleague, Walter, commented on the top down approach of the government. This excerpt demonstrates that a conception of learning as systemic may indeed stem from governance itself.

Like these days we have people who are trying to come out with their strategies in education to help. But in the villages there is no sensitisation and their method won’t work. And they are in the top rung. So everything - do it! Whether it is right or wrong you have to do it. They don’t give room to professors to view it and work out if this is really good for our nation. It is my prayer that we have to come to that level one day. (Walter)
Prudence believed learning to be in direct proportion to government policy and enforcement, expressing 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)

Michael, who participated in the same interview as Prudence, believed it was also the responsibility of the government to prepare lesson plans for the teachers and notes for the children.

Some of the challenge would be like if you are the only one teaching, for example, you now teach first in the day [unclear but something about a lot of marking for each class because they have to carry out evaluations all the time].

Interviewer: So there is a lot of marking?

And evaluation. And planning. You have to plan for your scheme of work. It is made by you. All the subjects. Not like you when it is already made for you.

Interviewer: Oh no, we have to make our own.

You have to make yours?

Interviewer: Yes. So we get the documents like you do, like the curriculum, and we have to do our own lesson plans. Oh yes. So we can meet individual children’s needs.

But you do give hand-out notes to the children. (Michael)
In this interview it was revealed that the teachers were of the opinion that in Australia lesson plans and resources were supplied to teachers. They complained of having to prepare their own lessons and make resources and were somewhat surprised when they found out it was the same in Australia.

At this point, this conception of children’s learning as dependent upon the system is expounded by presenting data about system-centred teaching methods.

**System-centred teaching practice.** A system-centred concept of learning means that sometimes teachers “give” their students knowledge, and often it comes from textbooks. This section shows a conception of children’s learning, and subsequently teaching practice, as a process of knowledge transfer that is dependent upon the logistic success of the education system. Comments about how children’s learning is affected by teaching practice ranged from complaining about large class sizes to describing their fears about the possibility of incorrect knowledge transfer due to a lack of resources. This first comment serves to set the scene for teaching practice in Northern Uganda.

... And then also pertaining to the system we have in Uganda - secondary, university, primary - if you visited our classes here you would find our classes so congested. And that one is still a very big challenge to teachers to impart knowledge to the child to a level to bring these children to be bright. Because... the class is congested and one teacher cannot cope with every child.

*Interviewer: So a teacher cannot physically move around to the children?*

Yeah, the teacher will concentrate in the front because there is no space to move. And also the manpower is not there enough. The teachers are
not enough. In our school we have 952 pupils but only 14 teachers. So it is a very big challenge. And also this structure here cannot accommodate all these learners. We have 900 pupils here in this block. (Ernest)

Ernest worked at a government school. It can be seen here that teaching methods (and learning activities) were restricted by congested classrooms, which were seen to be a result of system failure. This is similar to Victor’s lamentations above, reiterated here for this purpose.

In P4 mostly there are 100 students per class. So to get quality test results from the students, teachers need to call parents to help their children to learn so they can move on to/from P4. Govt schools are not allowed to turn away a child, even if parents don’t contribute. This decreases the quality of education. (Victor)

Paul alluded to the idea of “giving” or transferring information when he explained his preferred method of teaching about HIV/AIDS. In Mark and Paul’s interview there was a strong dependence upon government initiatives for the delivery of HIV/AIDS and health related learning.

*Interviewer: And does that form part of your curriculum - health and life skills, safety?*

Mark: Yeah, in our curriculum there is what is called Life Skills Knowledge and Attitudes - they are part of the curriculum. So normally we teach PIASCY - and the government wanted it to be included. Like when you are teaching in the class take part of the program and … tell the children about something concerning AIDS. But my experience is to tell them at a school assembly, where everyone is sitting there and you tell them about AIDS and the war. That way make them think more about AIDS. That way can make them know more about AIDS and the dangers and how we can prevent them.
Interviewer: And what teaching methods do you use in these kinds of lessons?

Paul: Sometime with this one there is discussion. We discuss with them. And finally you bring like posing question. That is, you ask them the question and then they tell you what they think about this. And finally you come with the answers on some of the work they’ve done. So sometimes discussion, sometimes drama, you can dramatise, and they see some role play. These are the ways of teaching them.

Having observed discussion and questioning techniques in action in Ugandan classrooms, it must be noted that references to “discussion” are very teacher and textbook driven. Questions are often closed and only invite short answers.

Prudence’s description of her teaching methods also alluded to this conception of transferring knowledge en masse. Similar to Ernest and Victor, her experiences reflected the challenges of her environment. Although she did not work for a government school, the private schools are also congested due to widespread lack of infrastructure.

Because having a big class, one teacher in the class, you have to teach, control, give out the materials, give out the books, and the others are very stubborn. You stop now, you turn, they do the same thing. You stop now, you turn, they do the same thing. So you have to keep watching. You have to keep watching them. And I think you will find it delays your process of teaching. Because when you teach a word, then you have to stop everyone, you can’t again, and the teaching is not flowing.

(Prudence)

There was a conception that children’s learning was reliant upon the adequate provision of textbooks. As previously mentioned in Conception B, Mark and Walter
both held the government responsible for a lack of resources. Their comments are
provided here in the context of teaching methods and improvisation.

Mark: But last year the government has tried to provide the text books. 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 text book like this one. {Showed me a sample}. Like this one they give it and some other may not have it. [Unclear. Something about ‘achieve’]. Because for learning, I see they learn well when they can see something, when they touch something, they will never forget. They see, they touch, they feel they will never forget. But even the learning materials are not enough...

Interviewer: So do you create your own resources or do you prefer to get them out of a text book?

Walter: Yes, a text book for that particular scenario.

Mark: So you have to be creative for that particular scenario. You have to make up your own stories sometimes concerning certain things without a guide. The guide is very important. The reference books and guides are a lot. If the reference books are not there it will not be easy to use. Some things are very complex.

Interviewer: So do you think it is a good thing to be creative?

There’s a level. Not all human beings are creative. There is a level that they can make up perfect things. Sometimes you can be creative but you need some help in certain areas. So there is a limit because our brains are all made differently… To me I look at it as they have to provide the materials in order to help those ones who are not creative enough.

Again, this excerpt demonstrates a conception that children’s learning is dependent upon the system and the system is failing the teachers which affects their teaching methods. Walter’s comments “some things are very complex” and “not all human being are creative” hint at a lack of confidence in his own ability to facilitate learning.
But this is not the only hurdle. According to Paul, improvisation is dependent upon a classroom allowance.

We improvise. When you are motivated you do that. What we do is what we … in most schools in the district they have 20,000-30,000 shillings…. [for a classroom allowance], so you feel motivated. You improvise as a teacher, you say let me take this [allowance] the school is giving me as a teacher. You can spend your 200 shillings and go buy lemons for instance, when I am teaching about lemons. (Paul)

Again, this excerpt demonstrates the success of learning to be connected with the resources provided by schools, and ultimately the government.

John shared similar experiences of improvisation being restricted by lack of resources. His comments here also indicate a certain perceived security in all students learning “the same thing.”

So when you come to school, we still lack learning and teaching AIDS. Every time you want to teach something there are a lot of hindrances. What teachers are doing to cut down these problems, there is much improvisation. We improvise because the materials are not there. But sometimes improvisation cannot happen because of no materials either. No textbooks. Because sometimes the teacher does not have everything to give, you need the books. But not enough or none. [There are] challenging government education policies. For example, the ‘thematic’ [in P1-3], which is a good thing but not enough funds for the program. It is good for everyone to do the same thing. Children don’t have quality. (John)

Many teachers baulked at the idea of improvising or being creative, as it put a risk to uniformity in education. This is discussed further in Conception C in the section about an underdeveloped education system fragmenting children’s learning,
but data is presented here to demonstrate this preference for systemic teaching practice.

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?*

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. 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].

This section has outlined the conceptions teachers hold regarding children’s learning as dependent upon the education system. Within this conception are references to children’s learning as dependent upon government issued curricula and teaching resources, and physical infrastructure to accommodate learning activities. There was a clear lack of confidence amongst teacher’s comments in this section concerning their own capacity to teach without sufficient resources, as many were looking for uniformity in education so ‘right’ learning could occur. Thus, many viewed creativity with a degree of hesitation. These findings are analysed and discussed further in Chapter 7 in light of colonial and military influences that have prevailed in recent history.
Conclusion

Taking these two ‘dependent’ conceptions of children’s learning together - learning as dependent upon cultural heritage and the education system - a binary view of the foundation of children’s learning becomes apparent. Notwithstanding the industrial or perhaps even military style of learning described above in Conception B, many teachers take a very human, organic approach to learning, as described in Conception A. If a child’s learning could be metaphorically described as a shooting plant, it would be fed by two tap roots - cultural heritage and education. By categorisation, it would seem that these two conceptions together are somewhat of a paradox. However, they may constitute a complimentary mix of ‘ground-up’ and ‘top-down’ influences upon the development of a child’s learning that ought to be attentively considered. This is discussed further in the final chapters.
Chapter 5

Data II: Conceptions of learning as ‘affected’

Introduction

This second data chapter builds upon the first and sets the scene for the third data chapter. It presents the teachers’ conceptions that have been categorised as learning as ‘affected’. This phenomenographic project developed six categories of description for the later interpretive analysis of teachers’ conceptions of children’s learning in Northern Uganda. These six categories were organised into three main groups, for the purpose of reporting, as follows:

Learning as ‘dependent’
Conception A: Children’s learning as dependent upon cultural heritage and family
Conception B: Children’s learning as dependent upon the education system

Learning as ‘affected’
Conception C: Children’s learning as fragmented
Conception D: Children’s learning as hijacked by competing postwar and poverty related stressors

Learning as a ‘means’
Conception E: Children’s learning as a means to “open the mind” and overcome fear, shyness and low esteem
Conception F: Children’s learning as a means to community rehabilitation
This data chapter deals with conceptions of children’s learning as ‘affected’ in two specific categories: learning as fragmented and learning as hijacked. This chapter is not only central by location in this data; the conceptions contained herein are central to understanding the views of Northern Ugandan teachers. In many ways, this chapter pins together the two conceptions discussed in the previous chapter with the final conceptions discussed in the last chapter. The conceptions of children’s learning as ‘dependent’ deal with views of what learning should be, and the conceptions of children’s learning as a ‘means’ deal with views of what learning could be, but this chapter about learning as ‘affected’ grapples with the reality of what learning really is in Northern Uganda - fragmented and hijacked. (These relationships were depicted in Figure 4.2 in the previous chapter).

Conception C: Children’s learning as fragmented

Following on from the first two conceptions, that children’s learning is dependent upon cultural heritage and the education system, many teachers perceived that children’s learning today is fragmented due to war and associated disease and poverty, consequently affecting the establishments of home and school, and therefore the learning that typically occurs in these two domains. They specifically shared experiences of how losing the traditional fireplace and becoming displaced resulted in children’s learning suffering the effects of widespread insecurity. Metaphorically speaking, learning could be likened to a young corn or maize plant. Its roots are cultural heritage and the education system (Conceptions A and B), but its fruit is somewhat underdeveloped because of various stressors. Like an underdeveloped ear
of maize, some kernels are missing altogether. In the teachers’ own words, there is a big “gap” in children’s learning in Northern Uganda. This use of the word “gap” did not infer a difference of understanding, as is the common discourse in the Western world (for example, a ‘generation gap’), but a gap in children’s learning where life skills, culture and history has not been handed down to the current generation. Such pragmatic learning, which was considered fundamental to learning (as described in Conception A), was not passed on because parents were killed by their thousands during LRA raids, or died of war or poverty related diseases. Expressly, this section identifies four contributors to these “gaps” in learning and the conception of learning as fragmented: loss of the traditional Acholi setting, displacement, a breakdown of domestic care, and an underdeveloped education system. Each of these will be considered in turn in the sections that follow.

“Gaps” in learning caused by the loss of the traditional Acholi setting

Two teachers in particular extensively shared their experiences of their community’s loss of traditional learning around the fireplace and how this was a factor of fragmented learning. It opens with Abe’s comments about how today’s teachers need to compensate for such losses.

But we are supposed to start from nothing because the fireplace has been completely destroyed. So people were in the camps for a long period of time and there was no way you could conduct the *wang-o*, the fireplace lessons. So it was lost and that left a big gap. (Abe)

Prior to this explanation of the *wang-o* (fireplace) learning above, Abe made connections between the lack of parental education (discussed later), the loss of Acholi culture, and fragmented childhood learning. In Abe’s school, home visits were a part of their operations to compensate for this fragmentation of learning.
So we go and encourage them to help the children to learn where they come from, where they are going and what was the situation before their parents came to the situation we are in. They begin learning how was it then, before. How did our ancestors used to behave or live? Then how are we now, and where are we going? So that children can even begin to think beyond the problem to the [solution] so they can develop their society …

Let me tell you something. Girls are taught differently at the wang-oo.

There is somebody who is supposed to be… an aunty is supposed to be there. She is the one who is responsible for the girls. And an uncle is supposed to be responsible for the boys. So although everything takes place at the fireplace, and so when they go back [home from school] because the uncles and aunties assume their responsibility - you cannot run away from that. (Abe)

Abe alluded to fireplace lessons being central to the formation of identity, particularly gender roles. Here learning is conceptualised very holistically. It is connected to cultural heritage and identity, and with these factors in demise due to the ramifications of the war and the breakdown of family units, learning is now conceptualised as fragmented.

Timothy also used the word “gap” when referring to children’s learning. He described the loss of the traditional Acholi setting and how this has caused gaps in learning, as elders were no longer present to teacher the children. He first used this word when relaying his experiences after the uprising of Idi Amin.

Yes, after the war when Amin took over the government those [Acholi people] were there in the army, they were all killed. So the killing of those people brought a generation gap. (Timothy)
The term “generation gap” here refers to the loss of the ability to pass down lessons from one generation to another. Timothy went on to explain how people subsequently lost a willingness to learn.

And most of their leaders who were in government were all arrested and some were killed. So it made the local people at home there to live under fear. And so to live under fear was not very easy for them. Now in a community where a person lives under fear, life will never be clear. And it was hard. It was very hard. But that one also made the whole community to drop down and slack down and people were no longer interested in working or showing that they can do something. So that brought a very big gap [in learning] … And then when this government was overthrown, the problems which was already there was still continued because there was already a gap that was created. And people were not willing for their studies. Instead people were willing for revenge. (Timothy)

There is a relationship in Timothy’s comments between decreased motivation to learn and loss of family members. So not only does this gap involve a loss of traditional lessons, it involves a loss of motivation or willingness to study.

Timothy also used this word “gap” when sharing his experiences of the recent conflict, offering a conception of children’s fragmented learning as a product of a “retarded” education system. He attributes this gap to difficulties in educating young people today, making reference to social and behavioural challenges.

And that is what has created a very big generation gap [loss of the ability to pass down lessons from one generation to another]. Many people have lost their cultural principals. The kinds of traditions we had got lost. The kinds of behaviour we had got lost. Socially people became very unruly. That social aspect got lost. Because now nobody cares about who. And nobody cares even for another person. You live on your own. Because
you may be here for today and you are not sure if tomorrow you will be there. So you live in that situation for 15 years. Sister, it has brought a very big gap in our social life. And that is why the level of education in our land has retarded, because it is not a very easy thing. The children who were born [during the war or in the camps] they are now the majority of the community because it is now another 15-16 years. Now if you have grown in that, you don’t have the former lifestyle. And you can now see the kind of generation that we have. So whatever they see, to them it is a normal thing because they don’t have the past. And that is a very hard thing. That is why at the moment the educating of our young ones is very difficult. (Timothy)

This excerpt is vastly different to Timothy’s opening comments about learning in the traditional African setting in Conception A. Evidently, this “gap” in children’s learning involves a loss of healthy social norms.

“Gaps” in learning caused by displacement

As teachers shared their experiences, it became apparent that part of this breakdown of the traditional African setting and subsequent “gap” or fragmentation of learning involved the displacement of Acholi people into IDP (internally displaced people) camps. The excerpt from Abe above links this “gap” in learning with IDP camps. It was found that many teachers shared similar experiences. Four interviewees’ conceptions of how displacement has fragmented children’s learning are presented in this section. The first three excerpts set the scene. Although learning is not directly mentioned, it must be remembered that all responses were given in the context of the topic of children’s learning.

So all of these trends of fighting, internal conflicts has ruined the African setting and how children are supposed to be taken care of. And that is the
time, within those years when the government of Uganda decided to pull away people from their homes and their villages to camp situations, they were put up in the camps. And then the camp life became so hard. And now people have lived in the camps by the way, for all 15 years. It was not a very easy thing. (Timothy)

The IDP camps were overcrowded, so parents had no control over their kids. Add to this equation trauma and poverty. The resettlement process has had its own challenges. Not only were there displaced people, but displaced schools. Some people refuse to leave the IDP camps and go back to the villages, so they become street kids. (Victor)

We used to have protective camps (IDP camps), the father or mother is not there and way they are treated is not in a good way. So they are messing up with our mothers and with our elder sisters. So it does become a problem whereby each and every family violence has touched. (Mark)

From these accounts above it can be seen that displacement from the village and traditional home involved the social insecurities associated with loss of the fireplace lessons, violence and sexual abuse in the camps, the subsequent spread of disease, loss of parental control over children, and an increase of a street kid phenomenon. Sadly, these issues persist today and have an ongoing effect upon learning.

In the context of describing how the loss of the fireplace had fragmented children’s learning, Abe shared his experiences of the ongoing issues resettlement and how the reinstatement of village life is fraught with its own issues. This next excerpt is particularly insightful as it brings together displacement and learning. These comments again reveal a conception that children’s learning has become fragmented due to loss.
There are land issues because many people died and no body knows exactly who owns what site. But they try to settle that with the paramount chief. So hopefully when they settle the land issues then everyone will be settled and reinstate the wang-oo…

There is a particular NGO working on that [restoring the fireplace setting] …

Now the first step for building the homestead, make sure you are back and remind your [children of their history]. But still, even this very child. He is traumatised. And all because of the war. (Abe)

The conception of learning as fragmented was not restricted to the breakdown of physical learning environments of villages and fireplaces, it also included the loss of parents and parental care. Remembering that it was also a common conception that learning is dependent upon cultural heritage and family background (Conception A), this loss of parental care was significant in teachers’ conceptions of children’s learning as fragmented.

“Gaps” in learning caused by a breakdown of domestic child care

In many instances, this breakdown of domestic care was attributed to a widespread lack of education and detachment amongst the current parent population as many of them grew up during wartime and suffer the ongoing effects of trauma, poverty and disease. A comment made by Prudence, one of the interviewees, encapsulated the experiences discussed in this section: “You find the child is not properly cared for. Education becomes totally nonsense to them.” (Here again, the interviewee interchanged the term learning with education; this phenomenon is dealt with in Conception B). To best understand the breadth of this situation this section
about the breakdown of childcare has three parts - detached parents, uneducated parents, and the associated phenomenon of child labour. All of these topics are presented in light of children’s learning.

As an introduction to these topics, some pragmatic factors that epitomise this breakdown of care are presented here, including lack of supervision, untreated sickness and hunger. This data is drawn from four interviews involving five interviewees. The first three excerpts provide a context for this conception of learning as fragmented. The latter two excerpts directly relate this breakdown of domestic care to children’s learning.

There are some challenges when they are sick. And they come without taking any snack in the morning - hungry. With dirty clothes, sometimes they are not bathed.

Interviewer: I heard you talking to them about that just now.

We always remind them [sometimes] we find their fingernails are not cut. And the children are very young, and when they wake up their parents are not there. They just get up in the morning and they know they have to go to school. Sometimes when you ask them they said, “My mamma had ready gone the garden. They left me when I was sleeping.” And the child just gets up from the bed from a sleep, without even taking a shower, without even washing their face. Put on their uniform and go to school because the child wants to learn. But the parents are not encouraging the child to do…

The challenge is parents sending a child to school - the parents get up in the morning and go and do his/her own duty, making the child, thinking a child is normal. As soon as the child is sick, the parents do not even take concern. The child want to come and learn, so the child will come when sick. And sometimes we find a child lying on the road. From school, you think the child is at home. From home, you think the child is not there so
she has gone to school. And yet in the real sense, the child is badly ill. So those are the challenges sometimes we get. And because another always reports to us, hey we find a child lying on the road, we have to take care. Sometimes when the school lacks the drugs for treating them, we find it is hard. (Prudence)

In Prudence’s school, lunch was provided for the children each school day. The experiences of government school teachers were not so pleasant, as Mercy and Victor explained. Here is an excerpt from my interview notes (as this was the interview where permission was not granted for an audio recording).

Students go home for lunch in government schools. Some cannot so they stay and just drink water.

*Interviewer: How do you handle the challenge of hunger?*

We try to encourage the children, but it is hard. Sometimes dinner is the first meal of the day [for many of the children]. (Mercy)

In the context of this interview, it was explained that some children do not go home for lunch as they are too sick or tired, or it is too far. So the alternative was to stay and drink water, albeit untreated water. Just prior to this revelation about children going hungry at school, these teachers explained that their school struggled to cover their running costs, including water and electricity. Here is the excerpt from interview notes, included for the purpose of providing a context to this conception of learning as fragmented. This excerpt includes recorded conversation and the researcher’s on-location thoughts about this information in italics.

Schools are not allowed to demand fees from parents. There is a 10,400 Ush [Ugandan shillings] per term “extra charge” as a contribution towards electricity, sanitation, water and paper. But schools can’t use the word “fees” and cannot demand payment. (Victor)
Paul, a teacher in a private school, also discussed his experiences of children going hungry in the context of their learning. He shared his experiences with the government “lunch package” initiative. So the performance used to be very poor in the Amuru district [the wider area near Gulu]. But now the government came up with a system that is 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 Amuru. So these children improved. By then they were the least in the district last year performance in PLE, they were number last. But these people sat down and they saw what was the cause of this bad performance. So the cause of this bad performance was because poverty was there. These children would not have anything right from morning until evening. How could you perform with no food? So when they realised that problem, they tried to talk to the parents. They sensitised the parents to give some packed food. And with only that one, the improvement came. And the children improved. And Amuru came to a good position last year. (Paul)

Paul’s colleague, Alice, also commented on children who are “not getting everything.” Sometimes they take long without getting uniforms, [unclear], sometimes they take long to pay fees, [lack of resources]… There are others who have guardians, the family and relatives are teaching them but they are not getting everything [food, clothing, shelter] so it also affects their learning. But at home they don’t take care. So when they come to school they are learning, they begin to catch up, begin having friends. (Alice)
In many instances teachers had assumed parental roles and were teaching children basic personal hygiene and safety skills, including cutting their fingernails, toileting and hand washing. (This is explored further in Conception F: Learning as rehabilitation). Some of these teachers belonged to schools that instigated home visits to help “sensitise” the parents, but even this is fraught with problems as children may frequently change homes or carers. To better understand this conception of learning as fragmented, the following sections deal with teachers’ specific experiences of detached and uneducated parents and child labour and how these factors contribute to a conception of learning as fragmented.

**Detached parents.** This section deals specifically with describing the experiences teachers have had with parents who exhibited detached behaviours toward their children. All of these experiences were shared within the context of discussing children’s learning. This data is drawn from four interviews involving five interviewees. Again, the terms of learning and education are used interchangeably here (refer to Conception B to gain a fuller appreciation of this). Following on from the reported experiences above of children waking alone and transporting themselves to school each morning (often without food or bathing), together with her colleague, Rose, Prudence also shared the following experiences about parents detaching themselves from the care of their children.

Prudence: Sometimes we talk to the parents about support. Because they keep coming late, and when the child is coming late we take them aside and ask them to come and share with us what is happening because it is affecting the child’s learning… And we try to make that child to be in the same level as their friends, but the child is a long way behind…
Rose: And there are some, like this one, when I saw there was a girl in the market, the mother was saying, “This one is not normal, she is going to die, so I don’t have interest in her.”

Interviewer: So the grandmother is raising? So if they have that kind of attitude do they think that children are not important?

Prudence: They do think that their children are important but they complain when we talk about the importance of children. They’ll say, “We know that. Teacher, we know that. But you know [it’s hard]” They usually complain about their poverty, all their problems, not getting money. So we try to encourage them; and discourage them from discouraging their children from learning.

This excerpt confirms the belief that parents play a significant role in children’s learning (as shown in Conception A). However, it also shows that parental detachment is a contributing factor to this conception of learning as fragmented. Prudence and Rose were specifically asked what they did in these circumstances. Prudence’s response here alludes to Conception F: Learning as rehabilitation, which incorporates the topic of schools leading communities. Nevertheless, it is equally relevant here as it demonstrates how learning is fragmented by parents who have become detached.

I go to them [the parents]. And for example, when a child has failed to come to school and no report is written I have to follow up with the parents and find out why this child is not coming to school. If sickness, then I understand. If it is because the child doesn’t want to come, we share with the parents and seek how to help this child. (Prudence)

Prudence and her colleagues went on to discuss challenges of getting children to school, including girls dropping out for early marriage (discussed in the section about child-marriage). The conversation came back to a need to engage parents for the sake of the students’ learning.
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...

But really we need people to join forces. Because if a parent has to be forced by the government to do that, but he is not willingly. Because they won’t provide for the scholastic materials. The government makes you go to school, but it is your parents who provide all materials. (Prudence)

Mark shared similar experiences of parental detachment and the subsequent conception of learning as fragmented.

At home some of the parents, let me say in Uganda in some of the villages, the parents are not interested in education. They are not. They don’t bother what their children are doing at home. If their child has gone to school that’s OK. When the child has come home they don’t do anything to check on them. (Mark)

Abe also shared experiences that involved detached parental behaviours, with specific reference to a lack of communication in the home.

The parents they don’t want to listen to their children… They are always saying, “Keep quiet.” So that one affects them so much. Each time they are there… when the dad comes home, when he is still coming the children are talking, laughing. The moment he comes in [silence]. And for the rest of the day that the dad will be home that child will never speak. Because of the fear. You fear your parents… And that affects them in life… (Abe)

In the context of these comments, Abe alluded to aggressive behaviours, hinting at domestic abuse and violence. Evidently, silence in the home does not foster learning.

Due to years of war, the current generation of parents themselves suffer from post-
traumatic stress, which may be evidence in detached behaviours. They also suffer from a widespread lack of education as many of their schools were displaced or shut down during wartime.

**Uneducated parents.** Teachers frequently shared experiences of ignorance or lack of education amongst their parent populations when describing “gaps” in learning. (The terms education and learning are used synonymously in places in this section, see Conception B for a fuller appreciation). Data in this section is drawn from five interviews and six interviewees. In her opening comments, Alice blamed poverty for limited exposure to education at home, as articulated on page 177. Ernest, a deputy head teacher at a government school, shared similar experiences.

And then there are some parents who have not been educated sometimes, and that is the ignorance of the parents. So they just stop the children [from going to school] and they get them to go and do the work in the field. So they don’t want to be educated, their children …because of the activities at home they are not sending their children … So all those. Maybe they come to school weekly, maybe twice in the week that one will now [unclear] not perform well in the class…

The one big challenge we have here is that most of the parents of the children of which we have here have not gone to school. So always we are giving the parents [sensitisation to let their children] participate in learning seriously. That is a very big problem. (Ernest)

The cascading issues of truancy and dropping out of school are raised here by Ernest. These issues are blamed upon a lack of education amongst parents. Of note is Ernest’s comment about having to sensitise parents to they will let their children “participate in learning seriously.” Abe shared similar experiences, explaining that the current generation of parents were not educated due to wartime insecurities.
Because during the war, children were not exposed to [formal education]... in fact very few children had the advantage to go to school. That has been a big hindrance to them…

We do a lot at school in as far as formal learning is concerned. We try to raise their self-esteem but it is a gap when they go back home. Parents these days don’t have that talent to fill in that gap. And that has been the thing I have experienced. That has been my challenge. That is why [this school] has what we call home visits. We go and interact with the parents in the presence of the child and also other members of the family. (Abe)

Abe worked at the same school as Rose and Prudence where home visits were part of their practice.

Most of these parents are not educated and some of them totally don’t know the power of education. Most of them think this child will help me in the future up to when I am old. And most of these kids are living with their grandparents or the step parents, because the mother moves from one husband to another. Maybe the husband died, maybe they take another woman. And the step father may not take much care of the kids that are not his. And other men will even [rape] their children… And you find the child is not properly cared for. Education becomes totally nonsense to them. For example, today we had to send for two kids who [were absent] and we said, “What is wrong?” They said, “My dad is not there. They have not bought me any scholastic materials. And my mum is admitted [to hospital]. So I am living with my eldest sister.” And that girl is in P3-5 and is taking care of this situation. (Prudence)

This excerpt demonstrates the compounded issues that contribute to this breakdown of domestic care that teachers see as causes of fragmented learning.

Paul also discussed this problem of uneducated parents and gave credit to the local radio station for helping to ‘sensitise’ the parents about education.
When we talk of sensitisation about education system, the current education system. I want to thank our radio here. We have a radio station in Gulu. Though some parents did not go to school, but through this sensitisation they talk over the radio how good the education system is, and now they have known the good part of education and they are willing to let their children to study. (Paul)

In sharing his experiences of uneducated parents, Timothy explained when and why people abandoned study (formal learning) and instead took up subsistence farming.

Whatever you needed, essential commodities, was not there so life was so hard. So what the people did, instead of going for studies they trained to go and work in the garden. And that is what you need to learn how to dig so you can live. And it was not a very good thing for us. (Timothy)

Timothy contextualised his experiences with uneducated parents within a moral discussion about learning to value life.

Because those who have lived without valuing their life they are now the majority, and some of them are now parents. Now what do you think that kind of a parent can do when he or she has lived without valuing his or her life? Now they will take the child to live the way he or she has lived, and that is a very big challenge. (Timothy)

These findings make a connection between a lack of organised learning and a low value of life. Timothy stressed the need for traditional institutions like schools and churches to take up this burden of helping to close this “gap” in learning. Notwithstanding this, teachers also considered these institutions to be contributors to the fragmentation of learning. This is discussed further below.
Child labour. This section is specifically apportioned to the topic of child labour, which appears in the interview excerpts above on numerous occasions. Teachers referred to this challenge of child labour when trying to provide a greater context of the issues they grapple with in children’s learning. This section draws upon data from the experiences of three interviewees. Mark shared his experiences of how child labour was related to the orphaned children phenomenon and how these vulnerable children were at risk of exploitation.

Some of them have parents, but most of the children here are orphans. They don’t have a father or mother, so like they are with the relatives. So when they are at home they may be overworked. They may be given work to do somewhere and make them keep on thinking hardships. So that brings some frustrations to them.

**Interviewer:** And do you see frustration in the classroom? Do you see it affecting their learning?

There was one that we had here she tends to sleep in the class. [Unclear but something about the girl working late at night and being beaten]. So she used to sleep in class because at night she wasn’t what? Sleeping. So we tried to help that one out (Mark)

Mark related the topic of child labour with “children who also work at night” and went on to describe the AIDS/HIV education program in his school.

And then these children who also work at night…. [they are willing to be] in this club, known as ABC, they participation in AIDS education, in AIDS programs. They also know some things but they lack some guidance. (Mark)

It is unknown what “work at night” entails, but there is a direct link here to an interest in HIV/AIDS education through the ABC club for those who do. Without ignoring or inferring the possibility that children are being sexually exploited, the point of the
matter here is that children are working at night and this is adversely affecting their ability to learn.

In the section on uneducated parents above, Ernest also raised the topic of child labour. It is reiterated here for this purpose:

And then there are some parents who have not been educated sometimes, and that is the ignorance of the parents. So they just stop the children and they get them to go and do the work in the field. So they don’t want to be educated, their children …because of the activities at home they are not sending their children. (Ernest)

This phenomenon of child labour appears to have strong connections with the phenomenon of uneducated parents, as Prudence demonstrates.

… in the village, people take digging (gardening) being something very special because that is what they eat from.

Interviewer: So they keep the children home to dig?

Yeah. [Because of the war] Most of these parents are not educated and some of them totally don’t know the power of education. (Prudence)

This section about the breakdown of domestic care thus explored the phenomenon of detached and uneducated parents and child labour. These teachers attributed this to the stressors of poverty and disease that cause parents to become detached; and the widespread phenomenon of uneducated parents who lack vital knowledge and understanding of childhood development. Furthermore, it has also been demonstrated that a breakdown of domestic childcare includes the phenomenon of child labour. These factors together contribute to the conception of children’s learning as fragmented. Simply put, there is some learning that simply has not occurred for
some students due to a lack of surviving adults who have the capacity to teach or facilitate learning.

Notwithstanding this, the conception of learning as fragmented is not exclusive to the fracture of the domestic establishments, as has been a commonality in all sections pertaining to this conception thus far. Many teachers also blamed an underdeveloped education system for the fragmentation of children’s learning, as outlined in the next section.

“Gaps” in learning caused by an underdeveloped education system

This subsection presents data that demonstrates that teachers conceived learning to be fragmented due to a defunct education system. To begin, in this excerpt Walter held the government responsible for children’s learning and blamed them for not providing sufficient resources.

And another topic that we have with the government of Uganda is that the education system they keep on modernising it, but the way they do it is they will come out with a good system but the material might not be there. Like the thematic. It is really so good when you teach that one in English, it is really so good. But now as we speak they might give...materials that would help you to make the learning real. It is not there. But they force you to teach. They give you the new curriculum, but there is nothing completely. New curriculum, no textbooks. There is nothing completely. From simple to complex. In addition to that… there are certain topics that are not there in any of the classes. In English you might be learning about a diary. There is no diary in any of the classes. So you have to look for diary and maybe bring your own diary. And bring your own story about a diary. It is not an easy. (Walter)
In the same interview Mark lamented that the failure of the education system was putting the uniformity of children’s learning at risk. He clearly conceptualised learning as dependent upon the education system (Conception B) and blamed a lack of curriculum resources for limited uniformity in learning in Uganda. Mark’s and Walter’s comments about uniformity revealed two things. First, a lack of confidence in the intellectual capital of teachers in Northern Uganda. Second, a belief that knowledge could be categorised as right or wrong, and it was the government’s responsibility to ensure children were learning the right things. For this to happen the teachers needed to be supplied with the right information and resources.

Mark: Because when you solve this one, this one [teacher] may solve it in the right way, this [teacher] 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]. Getting it out from here. Even when they go to the higher level, the same thing [wrong information] will be there. Until maybe somebody correct from somewhere very far… Not only for the children, but also for the nation as a whole. Because this one you are teaching maybe 50 children, and these 50 children suppose this one go to the East, this one to the West this one to the South and this one even goes to London or US, with this same mistake you’ve done. Then you’ve done something very serious…

Walter: The correct thing must be there in order to you to realise that this is a mistake. So if the correct thing is not there you will not realise this is a mistake and you will continue doing it like that…

Mark: But some people may think the thing you are doing is correct. But it is not. So that is not a good situation really.
In addition, Mark explained that not only were the resources and teacher training insufficient, the number of teachers were “not enough.” His comments here exemplify this frustration.

They might have 200 pupils in their class. A school might only have 4 or 5 teachers. I’ve been in a district school and I’ve just come to town. I have been experiencing all this. The children are many and the teachers are very few. Like for us we were about 5. And the children are 1,029. And the rest we get the parents to become teachers. (Mark)

Having parents fill the gaps is problematic in light of the findings about uneducated parents.

Ernest also raised the issues of “congested” classes, holding the education system responsible for hindering children’s learning experiences.

And then also pertaining to the system we have in Uganda - secondary, university, primary - if you visited our classes here you would find our classes so congested. And that one is still a very big challenge to teachers to impart knowledge to the child to a level to bring these children to be bright. Because ... the class is congested and one teacher cannot cope with every child.

*Interviewer: So a teacher cannot physically move around to the children?*

Yeah, the teacher will concentrate in the front because there is no space to move. And also the manpower is not there enough. The teachers are not enough. In our school we have 952 pupils but only 14 teachers. So it is a very big challenge. And also this structure here cannot accommodate all these learners. We have 900 pupils here in this block. (Ernest)

Mark’s and Walter’s colleague, John, also associated children’s learning with the failure of the system when he explained that children are passed from grade to
grade without sufficient learning. His comments here also include the perception that children’s learning is fragmented due to limited teacher training (quality) and low teacher numbers (quantity).

Sometimes they are not as well as you expect, because of the teacher’s qualifications. Because of the number of children, they have to keep moving on. We have challenges - not enough teachers, not enough classrooms. So have to pass children on. The weaker children might not have opportunity given because there are not enough teachers or facilities or learning materials. It is problematic when they have to be passed on.

(John)

Victor also blamed government policy for failure amongst students, making reference to class sizes. His comments here are derived from interview notes.

Every teacher works on sacrifice. E.g. In P4 mostly there are 100 students per class. So to get quality test results from the students, teachers need to call parents to help their children to learn so they can move on to/from P4. Government schools are not allowed to turn away a child, even if parents don’t contribute. This decreases the quality of education. (Victor)

Paul blamed poverty for a lack of teacher motivation and inability to “deliver your best”. This excerpt also demonstrates the collective nature of Acholi society.

I must say that teachers are not committed to education because there is no motivation, poverty is everywhere…

So they are behind because there is no motivation. The teacher only have [little money] and you have many family to support. You have your biological children, you have your brother, you have your mother who paid for your fee and you need that 200,000 Ush also to repay, you have some dependants and their father died they are war victims maybe HIV,
you are taking in around three who need you. So when you come to
school now, you may not deliver to your best. (Paul)

In addition, Mark and Paul together bemoaned a lack of direction in the
education system and believed children’s learning was fragmented as a result.
Mark: Most of the children, when they study, some of them may study
from primary up to senior 6 advanced level, they do not even know what
they are supposed to do. They just study.
… You might have knowledge, but you cannot get a job because of that
knowledge. And now days they say you need experience. They say you
need to have worked for 4 or 5 years. But where are you going to get
experience if you are from school? …
Paul: We have a lot of people with degrees at home. They have got no
job. And those ones that [are earning money] around the bars and kiosks
are year six school leavers.

In a sobering revelation, Abe blamed the government for perpetuating a
poverty mindset amongst Acholi people because of a didactic education system. He
explained that the education system did not allow children to explore their interests.
(This revelation adds a different dimension to Paul’s comments about poverty above).
This conception was revealed in conversation when we were comparing Australian and
Ugandan lifestyles.

You are from Australia right? I am told it is not easy to get to Africa. But
I have my land. I have 20 acres. So who is richer?

Interviewer: Well, you’ve got 20 acres. I’ve got ½ an acre!
I’m richer, but I’m poor in my mind. You see?

Interviewer: Why is that?
It is because of the way, it is because of our education system. Because of the way we are taught to believe that we cannot do beyond that. (Abe)

A fragmented view of learning infers that information has been lost and the systems that support information, like homes and schools, have broken down. There was considerable lamentation amongst the teachers regarding these “gaps” and at times an overwhelming sense of the enormity of the task before them. If this conception were to be described metaphorically, it might be likened to an underdeveloped ear of maize that is missing kernels, and the ‘fruitfulness’ of learning is considerably depleted. In view of building a country’s social and economic capital, this underdeveloped intellectual capital is a significant issue to address. The implications of these findings are discussed further in Chapter 7. As the next category of description shows, learning is not only fragmented. At times it takes second place to the hijacking stressors experienced by children in Northern Uganda.

Conception D: Children’s learning as hijacked by competing post-war and poverty related stressors

This conception of children’s learning as hijacked is directly related to the previous conception of children’s learning as fragmented. Discussion takes place in future chapters; however, it can already be seen in the previous section that children’s learning is fragmented in many instances due to the overwhelming need to survive that takes priority over formal learning. (It must be remembered that the dominant discourse for learning in this study is formal and/or organised learning). Where the conception of children’s learning as fragmented (Conception C) dealt with conceived
gaps in learning (resulting from a loss of cultural heritage; Conception A); the conception of children’s learning as hijacked (discussed in this section) deals with factors that threaten survival in Northern Uganda and veto a commitment to formal learning. These factors could all be described as stressors, and include trauma, HIV/AIDS, and the phenomenon of orphaned children, which encompasses child-headed families and child-marriage.

**Post-traumatic stress as a contributing factor to conceptions of children’s learning as hijacked**

This section draws upon data from two interviews that involved three interviewees. Due to Abe’s background in counselling and working for NGOs that conducted trauma rehabilitation programs, he openly discussed childhood trauma and how it hijacks learning.

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.

... if I don’t smile to the child and show them I am concerned and they think I do not care. So our children from the age of 4, are supposed to go to school up to the age of 12 have suffered trauma in their lives. Most of their experiences have so affected them from the war period in their lives. The war affected them psychologically. And so you have to begin with love, because this child has lost the parents and you as a teacher or a counsellor become, replace the child’s parents. And until you can fill that job even the knowledge you are trying to impart to the child may not have the positive impact that you want...
Imagine a situation where you tell a child, “OK, I want you to draw a picture of your mum.” And the child’s mum is not there.

*Interviewer: Yes, it comes back all the time, doesn’t it?*

Yes. You need to know the individual child and you need to handle them all as individuals. Such as you say...OK, you may ask them, “Who cooks for you dinner?” And the child might say, “My aunt or my grandmother does that.” Then you say, “OK draw for me that one.” Then another child says, “My mother.” So you say, “OK draw for me your mother.” … So that is how the war has affected children …

And then also maybe talking about the different [people] who keep security. Like talking about police, the army. They don’t want to hear about those. The moment you mention that they go, “Oh the army did this, this, this, to us” (Abe)

When I asked Abe about whether the children in his primary school remembered the war (as it had been four years since the LRA had left Uganda at the time of the interview), and whether they suffered direct trauma from wartime violence or if the trauma was more related to the ongoing issues associated with losing parents, he gave the following answer.

That one is traumatised because something happened at their home. That he would have seen. Many people were killed there. And sometimes when you kill the mother of a child and that child is there the child will not know that the mum is dead, and the child may go and again breastfeed. And that will affect them. (Abe)

When an interviewee used the words “that one” he could be referring to a person, a group of people, or an issue. In this discussion of trauma, Abe attributes tragedy in infancy to ongoing trauma in children that subsequently hijacks their energy for learning. John also shared experiences with traumatised children.
You find that many of the children we are teaching are traumatised because of what they’ve seen. And others who are left come from child-headed families. So this will hinder education and learning, in the sense that the child will be coming to school but need to think about what needs doing at home - double minded. (John)

This conception of children being “double minded” aptly describes the conception of learning as hijacked as it highlights the competition for energy and attention between survival related stressors and learning activities. Mark shared a similar conception of learning as hijacked by violence-related trauma.

So it does become a problem whereby each and every family violence has touched. At least one person. Everybody has seen somewhere this problem. Children have seen maybe their aunty, maybe their uncle, maybe their nephew - at least one of them.

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)

Similar to John’s discussion above, Mark went on to discuss another ramification of violence, the pandemic HIV/AIDS disease.

**HIV/AIDS related stress as a contributing factor to conceptions of children’s learning as hijacked**

This section presents data that related HIV/AIDS to the detriment of children’s learning. It shows how students give low priority to learning when they are experiencing HIV/AIDS related stress. Six references from four interviewees were located within the data. Teachers shared their experiences with children who had
sorrows and were deep thinkers as a result of the direct or indirect effects of HIV/AIDS. Here are three examples.

Because when you bring that topic concerning a disease in there it [gets their attention] … Some of them are thinking - you see sorrows, and their heart is like this. Because when we try and explain ABC - abstinence, be faithful, correct use of condom. So there are times we try and bring that topic to the classroom … When you’ve got topics concerning that, they are very willing …

Interviewer: So why do they think they are willing to learn about that?

Because they want to know. Most of them, some of them, will not have these kinds of things at home. Those want to know about AIDS generally. They want to know much about it so they are aware of it. Most of them have a parent who died from it and it is a problem. (Mark)

Others [parents] could be HIV victims, they’ve got AIDS. Then when they [the children] are aware they are the victim now of HIV, they begin to think deeper. Because sometimes somehow somewhere in the class you mention about HIV, that one becomes distracted. They begin to think like that. Those are the ones. (Emanuel)

Because when you look at the kinds of children and how they leak [HIV], and how they are treated, they are always scared, and when they see you come if you call the child to you the child will just take off, run away from you. It is this kind of life, because they think that any stranger is dangerous. And any elderly person who calls you will call you for punishment. So they’ve learnt to just take off. So those are the kinds of things that have already happened. (Timothy)

A person with HIV/AIDS is commonly described as having a ‘leak.’ Although there is medication to control the effects of the disease, many do not have the resources
to acquire it, and are consequently slowly dying. In the account above, Timothy described the associated fear that children bear, particularly if they had been raised in the camps and had HIV/AIDS. It is noteworthy here that he used the words, “they’ve learnt to take off” (referring to running and hiding from adults). This is an example of the type of survival-based learning that children in these contexts experienced and how this took priority over academic learning. It is noteworthy that Emanuel referred to children who have been affected by HIV/AIDS as distracted (from their studies) and deep thinkers.

Not only does HIV/AIDS consume the thoughts of children, it also occupies a space in the curriculum. Mark shared extensively regarding his experiences with this phenomenon.

Yes, we have an initiative through the government called the PIASCY - Presidential Initiatives on AIDS Strategies for Communication to Youth.

_Interviewer: So that is a government policy? And school has to do it?_

Yes. So there are topics for debates related to malaria and AIDS. Because they have discovered malaria is killing a lot of African children. So (for example) we say that malaria is better than HIV and AIDS - it is a topic and they can choose to debate on that. Or abstinence is the best way of avoiding HIV. So they have to debate on that.

Before that came we used to integrate the topics in class, using the ABC (abstinence, be faithful, correct use of condom). So we emphasise be abstinent totally and completely from sex until you are married or planning to get married. And then you what? You have a partner - only one. So we talk about correct use of condom. Use it correctly, correct use of condom.

_Interviewer: So does that come from this presidential initiative?_
Mmm… This one is a club - PIASCY is a club. It is initiated by the government…

_Interviewer: And does that form part of your curriculum - health and life skills, safety?

Yeah, in our curriculum there is what is called Life Skills Knowledge and Attitudes - they are part of the curriculum … But my experience is to tell them at a school assembly, where everyone is sitting there and you tell them about AIDS and the war. That way make them think more about AIDS. That way can make them know more about AIDS and the dangers and how we can prevent them. (Mark)

John shared similar conceptions of learning as hijacked by HIV/AIDS related stress.

Yes, Uganda is known for its fight against AIDS.

_Interviewer: Yes, I read about that.

PIASCY - Presidential Initiatives on AIDS Strategies for Communication to Youth.

Youth are taught how bad it is, how to control it because it is affecting the country, and life skills. We are also launching SAS - Savannah Sunrise Foundation. This is for children. If you can handle children well, and youth well, then we’ll have a new generation. You cannot have healthy community when there are no healthy children.

Education surrounding immunisation. If you can eradicate HIV/AIDS, then we shall have free Uganda.

_Interviewer: And how do they implement these programs? Through schools? Via radio?

Yes, through schools. The best way you can get it out, is through children. Almost every child is in schools. So you need to use schools.

_Interviewer: So you do it here in primary and high school?
Yes. We are using PIASCY, SAS is a new thing. Our children have loved [it]. Have used a moral approach, instead of just scientific. Promoting abstinence so you don’t acquire HIV because it is passed on through intercourse. (John)

Disease is a constant stress that affects children and their learning, and society at large.

John’s opening interview comments aptly summarise this section.

Because of the war there is much AIDS…. You find that Uganda is going down a dark hole because of it. Many children are orphaned. (John)

This leads to an investigation of the topic of orphaned children as a factor of the conception of learning as hijacked.

The orphaned children phenomenon as a contributing factor to conceptions of children’s learning as hijacked

The orphaned children phenomenon was referenced in four different interviews by five different interviewees. The variations of the interviewees’ conceptions of how learning is hijacked amongst orphaned children are presented here.

Some of them have parents, but most of the children here are orphans. They don’t have a father or mother, so like they are with the relatives. So when they are at home they may be overworked. They may be given work to do somewhere and make them keep on thinking hardships. So that brings some frustrations to them…

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)
Mark associates the phenomena of orphaned children and child labour in this excerpt explaining that the thoughts of these children may be fixated on their hardships. (Child labour was explored previously in Conception C). Mark went on to give a very candid account of alleged rape in the IDP camps and the way that HIV/AIDS has touched every family, specifically resulting in orphaned children. He discussed AIDS education, teaching methods, class sizes and other topics, but he came back to this same phenomenon of orphaned children:

Also some of them have challenges because they are orphaned. Their parents are affected by the war, or some of them have HIV/AIDS, and they have died. Some of them are real orphans. And such ones when they come to school their problems, they cannot learn well. And you see there are a lot of challenges here. So you give them counselling sometimes here and there. So those are happening. (Mark)

Irrefutably, Mark conceives learning as hijacked by various challenges. By way of explanation, a ‘real orphan’ is one whose parents have died. Many orphaned children in Africa are not without biological parents, but their parents are without the means or capacity to raise them. Having observed many abandoned babies in a home in Kampala, I asked one Acholi teacher about this phenomenon and she clarified that orphans do not always have deceased parents.

*Interviewer:* I also saw when we were in Kampala the babies in the babies’ homes weren’t all orphans, some had just been abandoned. Is that the case here also at this school? Have there been kids - does that happen often in Uganda?

Orphanages?

*Interviewer:* Orphanages or just children who have been left by their parents, like in Kampala?
We have some who have no parents, some whose parents have left them, some come from the villages and are taken care of [in Gulu].

*Interviewer: And can you see any effects that that has on children? Can you see if that affects their learning?*

Yeah. Sometimes they [are not learning]. Sometimes they take long without getting uniforms, sometimes they take long to pay fees...

*Interviewer: And does it happen often that children are left by their parents?*

In the wider community they are there. There are others who have guardians, the family and relatives are teaching them but they are not getting everything [food, clothing, shelter] so it also affects their learning. But at home they don’t take care.

So when they come to school they are learning, they begin to catch up, begin having friends. (Alice)

Alice confirmed that orphaned children are both those whose parents have died and those who have been abandoned. In the excerpt above Alice also confirmed that orphaned children were vulnerable to neglect or abuse from their carers, which had repercussions for their learning. This is similar to Mark’s account above and is also confirmed in Conception C under the topic of child labour. Alice also made comment about the important role of schools to help children “catch up” (investigated in Conception F). Keeping to the topic of orphaned children, another interviewee from another school also described this phenomenon of orphaned children whose parents are still living.

...most of these kids are living with their grandparents or the step parents, because the mother moves from one husband to another. Maybe the husband died, maybe they take another woman. And the step father may not take much care of the kids that are not his. And other men will even
[rape] their children because of [unclear]. And you find the child is not properly cared for. Education becomes totally nonsense to them. For example, today we had to send for two kids who [were absent] and we said, “What is wrong?” They said, “My dad is not there. They have not bought me any scholastic materials. And my mum is admitted with [HIV/AIDS]. So I am living with my eldest sister.” And that girl is in P3-5 and is taking care of this situation. So they could not afford to come to school because they don’t have resources. And I said, “Why didn’t you come and tell us?” And they said, “No, teacher, I could not come because I have nothing to come with.” I told them, “Tomorrow you shall be coming to school. We shall find a way forward for you. Because your parents are not there.” ...And if you don’t follow up and no one gives you a report about the child, it is [not known] why this child is failing.

(Prudence)

This description of orphaned children again provides a glimpse into the compounded nature of the experiences Northern Ugandan teachers have with children’s learning as it raises the compounded and interrelated issues of lack of care, poverty, disease, blended families and child-headed families. When the collective impact of these issues is fully considered, the common expression used by the teachers, “it is very hard” takes on greater depth of meaning.

In addition to HIV/AIDS and abandonment due to dire poverty, teachers explained that children have also been orphaned because of war-related violence. Abe shared his experiences of the effects of such violence upon children and how it had traumatised their minds and negatively impacted their esteem. These experiences are also presented in the previous section on post-traumatic stress.

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 love him or her. (Abe)

Abe’s account amplifies the compounded issues of violence, trauma and orphaned children. He goes on to express the need for parental love and how this has been lost due to a dire shortage of adults in the Acholi communities (Conception C). At this point it seems fitting to progress to the associated factors of child-headed families, child-mothers and child-marriage that contribute to teacher’s conceptions of learning as hijacked.

**Child-headed families.** One of the ramifications of integrated war, poverty and disease is that of child-headed families. This topic has already arisen on numerous occasions in the sections above, again demonstrating the enmeshed nature of the factors contributing to these conceptions. Nevertheless, this topic of child-headed families warrants particular study due to its prevalence and strong links with conceptions of children’s learning. Many teachers believed this phenomenon had hijacked student learning. The data in this section was drawn from four interviewees’ experiences. This first data record provides a context to this phenomenon of child-headed families. It is an excerpt from the researcher’s interview notes. This interview was conducted with three head teachers in a government school and they were not willing to have an audio recording taken.

Many parents were killed in the war, and so now students come from child-headed families. This results in bad influences from peers and teen
pregnancies. Many of them live alone in town with no supervision.  
(Victor)

Although it was not possible to take an audio recording, this interview was significant because these teachers discussed the experiences of teaching in a government school where Western aid did not fund school lunches or building programs. The compounded issues faced by these children can be seen in Victor’s account. The issues of teen pregnancies, child-mothers and child-marriages are discussed further in the following section. Above, Victor hints at delinquency as an associated dilemma of child-headed families. Below, Emanuel talks of survival-related stress that these children bear.

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 being with? What will I do then to survive? So that will take his concentration. (Emanuel)

I specifically asked about children from child-headed families during my interview with John as he was explaining how African children needed to learn their culture by stories from the past. His response exemplifies the relationships between conceptions of learning as dependent on cultural heritage (Conception A) and learning as hijacked by stressors (Conception D being discussed here).

African children are taught their background. We learn the future from the past. That’s why we keep on transferring.

: What about child-headed families, do these things get passed on?
They do not. This is the challenge. Some of their parents died when they were too young. Stories were not given. You miss your parents, you lack many things. You have not yet learned your past. (John)

John’s wife, Alice, indicated in a separate interview that their role as teachers was to compensate for this lack.

We need to compensate because some children have no parents. Or some homes have no resources. (Alice)

This theme of teachers in parental roles is explored further in Conception F.

**Child-mothers and child-marriage.** The phenomenon of child-marriage was a shocking finding. This was not because it hadn’t been considered that this would be occurring, but because it was stumbled upon when asking about why some parents were not educated. The data here is derived from four interviewees’ experiences that were discussed in three interviews (two shared one interview). Rose and Prudence explained the reasons for child-marriage, the subsequent phenomenon of child-mothers and how these phenomena hijack learning for girls. (Here again, the terms of learning and education are used interchangeably, see Conception B).

*Interviewer: So when you say the parents didn’t have an education, they don’t value it, they don’t know what it’s good for, is that because of the war? Why are some parents not educated?*

*Prudence: Actually, if you look [closely] this parent is not even bad because of the war. Like when I remember our grandparents used to tell us when we were young, they said for them in those days, especially for women or girls, they said that now your menstruation period has started they want you to go and get married. And what their interest is that girls are just wed [to get the bride price]. So the more girls you have the more [dowry] you get. And so they only considered boys to get educated. That*
is why most of our parents were not educated. Because what they look at is just marriage.

Rose: And ignorance was also very much.

Prudence: Girls did not have a chance. But nowadays, people’s eyes are getting opened to know what education is. So it is for all people now, whether girls or boys.

*Interviewer: So does that still happen today? Girls are not educated? Rather used for work?*

In some instances. 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.

But really we need people to join forces. Because if a parent has to be forced by the government to do that, but he is not willingly. Because they won’t provide for the scholastic materials. The government makes you go to school, but it is your parents who provide all materials. Especially with girls. Like when you are a girl, you reach this age when you need a lot of things, and your parents do not provide and you can be tempted to be in love with some boy or some man who is rich. And so many drop out of school. To get married. Because they are not getting, so now they are married they have what they need. And some parents when they see their girls doing that they say, “Oh that is good you are getting on your own.” But that is bad. There is still a need to sensitise the parents very much so we can help our children.

*Interviewer: So when girls get married early and stop going to school... what age?*

13, 14.

Rose: And when you become older, the age of 18, they say you are old now.
Interviewer: Too old to get married?

Yes.

In another interview Mark also shared his experiences with the phenomenon of child-marriage and how it hijacks learning for girls.

But when they are 15, 14 you find they are getting married. A lot we say. And they go to [dig on the farm]. And so the sad thing that happens is there are other children who will see their friends on the farm, “Hey, why should I consider studying? There are other children who are on the farm. Why should I consider studying?” They leave. It is happening in the villages. And you find that like P7 in the whole school you may not find even 10. If there are 50, 50, 50, 50, [in other classes] you may not find 10. Ten girls.

Interviewer: Where are the girls?

They have gone. Eloped. Some of them go with the young ones. Some of the business people take them. So that is happening in and affecting education in northern Uganda, seriously. (Mark)

The experiences of these teachers show that the phenomena of trauma, HIV/AIDS and orphaned children have cascading repercussions for children’s learning. Indeed, children’s learning, as conceptualised by teachers, is hijacked by overwhelming survival-based needs that consume their thoughts and energy. Timothy alluded to this phenomenon also when he explained that during the times of conflict “people were not willing for their studies. Instead people were willing for revenge.” Formal learning took a proverbial backseat, and survival or conflict related learning took precedence. Intellectual capital, which is directly connected to the quality and quantity of children’s learning, has been significantly affected by the war-, poverty- and disease-related stressors.
Conclusion

When the findings of the two conceptions presented in this chapter are considered in tandem, it can been seen that teachers conceived children’s learning to be both fragmented and hijacked in Northern Uganda. Conception C shows that from the beginning of a child’s life learning is a challenge and many teachers see it as fragmented due to the social fractures that have occurred in wider society, local villages, and family units. In addition, Conception D shows that what learning does occur is at risk of being hijacked by the stressors mentioned above. With this in mind, taking up again the metaphor of the ear of maize, not only are there kernels missing, those that do grow are at risk of being damaged by predators or pests. Thus, it can be seen that the combined effects of these challenges culminate in a significant reduction of Northern Ugandan society's capacity to reinvest back into its own intellectual capital, and consequently its social and economic capital also. This crucial cycle is discussed in greater length in Chapter 7.

This brings an end to this data chapter that presents conceptions of learning as 'affected.' The next chapter brings the findings together that have been presented thus far and investigates conceptions of learning as a means for change.
Chapter 6

**Data III: Conceptions of learning as a ‘means’**

**Introduction**

This is the third and final chapter of data findings that presents teachers’ conceptions of children’s learning. This phenomenographic project developed six categories of description for the later analysis of the teachers’ conceptions. For the purpose of reporting, these six categories have been organised into three main groups:

Learning as ‘dependent’ (what learning *should be* – Data I)

Conception A: Children’s learning as dependent upon cultural heritage and family

Conception B: Children’s learning as dependent upon the education system

Learning as ‘affected’ (what learning *really is* – Data II)

Conception C: Children’s learning as fragmented

Conception D: Children’s learning as hijacked by competing postwar and poverty related stressors

Learning as a ‘means’ (what learning *could be* – this chapter)

Conception E: Children’s learning as a means to “open the mind” and overcome fear, shyness and low esteem

Conception F: Children’s learning as a means to community rehabilitation
To this point data has been presented to show teacher’s conceptions of learning as ‘dependent’ (what it should be) upon cultural heritage (Conception A) and the education system (Conception B), and as ‘affected’ (what it really is) by fragmentation (Conception C) and hijacking (Conception D). This chapter deals with conceptions of learning as a ‘means’ – what learning should be. It was found that many teachers conceptualised learning as a means to “open the mind” (to borrow a phrase that Ugandan teachers used), and as a means to rehabilitate their communities. As these conceptions unfold below, it can be seen that they complete the emerging cycle of the growth of children’s learning. A simplistic version of the cyclic nature of these conceptions is reviewed in Figure 6.1. This figure shows the relationships between what learning should be, really is, and could be. It is elaborated and expanded considerably in Chapter 7 where the connections between these categories are explained in the context of outcomes and implications of the research.

This chapter completes the presentation of research data. At the finalisation of this chapter, the variations in the experiences of Northern Ugandan teachers will be thoroughly described and organised into conceptions. As was explained in the methodology and first data chapters, these conceptions were identified from the data. In the following chapters, the project progresses to analysing and synthesising these findings in categories of description with the view of creating higher order meaning and generating understandings.
Figure 6.1. The emerging cyclic nature of the categories of description

Before this phenomenon can be investigated as a whole, the last two conceptions of children’s learning must first be unpacked - learning as “opening the mind,” and learning as rehabilitation. These culminating conceptions are presented here.

Conception E: Children’s learning as a means to “opening the mind”

Throughout interviews many teachers referred to learning as a process of “opening the mind.” In response, this study has constructed a conception of children’s
learning to reflect this common theme. As the findings reveal, “opening the mind” is an active process. Therefore, the data reported in this section describes types of engagement that “open the mind.” Broadly, this conception of learning is organised into three main sections: emotional, experiential and spiritual engagement.

“Opening the mind” by emotional engagement

Within this conception are understandings of how positive and negative emotions can either open up or shut down a willingness or ability to learn. There was an acute awareness of children’s emotional needs amongst interviewees. For example:

Coming to their lifestyles, they also are at the adolescent stage. So they are so emotional. Especially when we bring topics concerning relationships. (Paul)

Teachers often raised concerns of how learning can be shut down by fear, shyness and low esteem. In a way, this conception is an extension of Conception C (learning as fragmented), as teachers often attributed “gaps” in learning to overwhelming fear that had prevailed due to loss of traditional environments (as outlined in Conception A).

Indeed, throughout the previous conceptions this theme has recurred. Timothy spoke of fear induced by HIV/AIDS. Abe shared experiences of children living in fear of parents. Both these gentlemen shared their experiences surrounding the causes and effects of fear extensively. Notwithstanding this, abstract notions of fear and esteem were often discussed alongside the themes of love and encouragement as a means to “opening the mind”. The data presented in this section will demonstrate teachers’ beliefs in the overcoming power of love to bridge the “gaps” that have occurred in children’s learning by “opening the mind.”
To introduce this notion of overwhelming fear, an excerpt from Timothy’s interview is provided here.

And the most dangerous thing that happened was that people in our community started living in fear. You cannot show that you are somebody who is working. Even those who were working, the level was also reduced because they feared for their lives. So that brought a very big gap. The social aspect of there was destroyed. And people were living in fear. And now what was the end result? People became very poor. So poverty came in…

All this was because they were under fear. And most of their leaders who were in government were all arrested and some were killed. So it made the local people at home there to live under fear. And so to live under fear was not very easy for them. Now in a community where a person lives under fear, life will never be clear. And it was hard. It was very hard. But that one also made the whole community to drop down and slack down and people were no longer interested in working or showing that they can do something. So that brought a very big gap. It was not easy…

And those who were living under fear were not really benefiting from whatever plan he [Amin] had because of the fear of their lives. (Timothy)

Abe spoke more specifically of the effects of fear upon children in his school, frequently relating fear to low self-esteem. Abe also inferred there were strong connections between shyness and self-esteem. He opened this interview with the following statement.

Since the war periods the children’s self esteem has been bad. It has gone down. They feel they cannot do what other children can do from other places. And so it is a big task for the teachers especially, and adults, to try and raise their self esteem to be people who think beyond their surroundings. So that they will be innovative and also become learning to
explore. Because during the war, children were not exposed to... in fact very few children had the advantage to go to school. That has been a big hinderance to them.

But now after the war, now I can see there is some improvement. Like the children can actually can see they are unique. [Less fear now]. They don’t fear you [the researcher], when you come they want to come and interact with you. That’s so great ...

Oh, there is one thing I forgot. The parents they don’t want to listen to their children… They are always saying, “Keep quiet.” So that one affects them so much. Each time they are there… when the dad comes home, when he is still coming the children are talking, laughing. The moment he comes in [silence]. And for the rest of the day that the dad will be home that child will never speak. Because of the fear. You fear your parents… So all our children grow up shy because of such behaviours in our homes. (Abe)

Abe’s accounts were punctuated with references to the need to build the esteem of the children. I specifically asked him about common references to shyness. His response is documented here in a long but rich and telling extract from his interview.

*Interviewer*: I’ve heard people say that children in African are shy.

Yeah, it’s true.

*Interviewer*: Why? How?

That’s why I begun with low self esteem. Let me tell you something. There is something that Africans need to learn. We are all shy because of one thing - you don’t give the child a chance to speak. You don’t give the child a chance to express themselves freely. And even when a child does something, however stupid it is, you don’t degrade the child. You don’t say, “Oh, great. Do you think you can do it better? I think you did great this time.” You don’t do that. I’ll prove that, let me tell you something. They say, “Whatever I do they don’t even appreciate it.” So through that
the child will grow knowing that they don’t give a chance to speak. They
don’t like me probably. Whatever I do is not pleasing. So they become
shy each time. That affects us.

All of us who have studied, we have studied through difficulties and we
have [unclear]. Like I studied from nursery, primary, secondary and then
to university, but they don’t give me the opportunity to tell them what I
want to tell them. So the only way for me when I put something on paper
then they mark it and say, “Hey, this child is bright”, then they see. That
is the only time I can, and that is for examination.

So until I write it down then that is when somebody will say, “This child
is bright.” But what about what I am supposed to say? Even when in
class when I am being taught, nobody tells me to say what I think what
they are teaching. So I went through all these things all the way to
university. I still feel there is a gap…

Maybe you are at school, and you are not allowed to explore beyond
what you are supposed to learn at school…

Even in at the beginning in the interview time when you want a child to
join the school they are shy. They never make eye contact with you. And
you go like, “You can do it. You tell me what’s your name.” And they
tell you. And then you make sure that what you want out of the child
comes out. And when the child gets used to you, they will never fear.
That’s why they find it very easy to … come and visit the head teacher’s
office. They come and tell me whatever they want to say.

But during my time, you will not go there. If you go there (to the head
teacher’s office) you know that there is something

Interviewer: You get beaten?

Yeah. So when they get used to you like that, they find the peace to tell
you. So in our school here, that is why [the director] keeps telling
everybody that we do something different at our school. First of all we
start to know what is supposed to come out of a child by knowing the
child, the child is trained up. Then, the teaching itself exposes them to what they can do. (Abe)

In his discussion, Abe shared his philosophy for education, which had a strong emphasis on unrelenting love as a means to “open the mind”, as the next excerpt demonstrates.

How do you give them the opportunity to know more? By showing them love. And love is the first priority that every person even children should learn to show. Because when you show them love then they also have the [ability] to express themselves freely, interact with you, and through that they are able to know more. So what I said at the beginning is actually affecting the development of our society - when children’s self esteem is low they don’t expect much of themselves when they become an adult…

So my experience, like I said, is it begins with the children. And the stakeholders need to work things out to make sure our children’s self esteesms are raised, they are taught the right things that they need to know, and then the children shall not be exposed to violence. Because that is what has affected them all through the war periods. You should not be taught violence… (Abe)

Abe’s comments here indicate that a child’s mind can indeed be ‘closed’, and that there is a need to ‘open’ it if learning is to occur.

Alice, a teacher from another school, shared a similar philosophy for learning, believing love, security and friendship to be integral to learning.

Love. It overcomes the barriers and brings them close. And then they learn. Love helps facilitate learning… These are helped by love. Slowness is overcome by love. We give them praise if they do something well and a lot of encouragement along the way. (Alice)

Alice’s colleague, Paul, similarly referred to the need to encourage:
That one, you just encourage them to try again. That’s not the right answer, try again. Keep on trying. But then you may use another person to get the right answer. If the next person gets it right then the other one can learn. You can use the other one to get the right answer to the first one. (Paul)

Low self-esteem and associated shy behaviours also ought to be explained to appreciate teachers’ conceptions of learning as “opening the mind”. In a joint interview with Paul and Mark, Walter connected the notions of encouragement, esteem and “opening the mind”:

Like of recent there have been people who are coming out with other strategies of how to encourage children to learn. Education by encouragement strategies. Now there are things that when you educate a child the child will never forget. But to educate an adult who has a lot of things in their mind, it is very hard for you to succeed. So they have come out with those strategies whereby there are based mainly on life skills. Most Ugandans are discouraged, they have no self esteem. So they have come with a way of helping them to realise they are important in life. So when you realise you are important in life you open up your mind to things. That is the way they are coming up with. And it is so good.

*Interviewer: So how do you open your mind?*

Opening up your mind? When you see there is see there is [light] in something you put much of your attention in to know more. That is how you open your mind. You allow things to come in, ideas to come in. Actually you open your heart to learn.

Really, like us human beings we have feelings. Now when you feel like, take for example in the community, they value you, they look at you as something important, that one makes you to open up to people to receive their ideas and that will make learning easier. (Walter)

Timothy also described a holistic appreciation for learning:
We are not only handling the academics. We are handling the whole humanity. We handle the spiritual, the social, the moral, the emotional. Because we train them to learn how to care for one another. So when a person is sick you can see how they get concerned to make sure this person needs help. So those are some of the things we are dealing with. (Timothy)

Notwithstanding this, Timothy was also of a different opinion concerning shy behaviours. He believed shyness to be a thing of the past.

Yes, they are no longer shy. And this is the kind of life we also have when they are at home. They are very free with people, interact, ask questions. So in those days, it was a very difficult thing for me as a child to ask somebody a question…

Ten years ago, I would have agreed with you we were very shy. And when someone talked to you, you just bent down. But these days we encourage children to see the face of the person talking to you. So that means we are no longer the African children of those days. This is a different generation, and the way we interact is different. (Timothy)

Timothy attributed this change to the reinstatement of schools and Sunday schools that teach children to ask questions. His comments about the pivotal role institutions play are also investigated in Conceptions B (learning as dependent upon the education system), C (learning as fragmented) and F (learning as a means for community rehabilitation).

It seems that at times negative emotions are deliberately used to teach children. Here are some comments about punishment as a means to reform or ‘opening their ears’. Mercy explained that, “children are more likely to listen [which equates to learning] when punished. There is an old saying, “The ears of African children are on
their buttocks”.” Below is an explanation from Paul that demonstrates how negative emotions like shame are used to reform a child.

So we look for ways of correcting them. Sometimes we give them [unclear], or some other work, slashing (cutting the grass), but not washing the toilet because washing the toilet needs to be done and should not be a punishment.

: So what sort of punishments would you use then?

Sweeping around the school, slashing, there are so many ways to punish the children. They can stand before the pupils… Especially if they feel ashamed, feel so embarrassed for the wrong thing, you will shame them. Hence they will reform and begin doing the right things. It depends what they do. Sometimes you talk to the person, “what you have been doing is bad, this won’t happen if you do the right things.” And they reform.

(Paul)

Altogether, it seems that Northern Ugandan teachers are very in touch with the affective domain of teaching. This is not only demonstrated in their discussion about engaging emotions, but is also evident in their discussion presented in Conception F below about caring for students and overcoming struggles through love.

“Opening the mind” by experiential engagement

Many teachers discussed the importance of different learning styles and activities that appeal to different individuals and age groups. These comments are akin to the perceptions of learning described in Conception A where children’s learning was dependent upon doing and being amongst village elders. This section opens with Emanuel’s experiences:
I came to understand and realise that children learn differently. There are children who can learn fast, are faster. And there are those who are slow learners. I have realised that there are children who can get well with one particular method and there are others who need a variety of methods…

And another thing I have experienced is sometimes we can even learn from learners.

Interviewer: How can teachers learn from learners? What is your experience there?

You can give a topic. In your guide, your teaching guide, there are points that I’m going to give these students. And you find that when you give these children opportunity… you find that they mention what you put there…

Interviewer: So do they add to what you are saying?

Yes. They add more than what you know and you realise that this one is so so so and this one is so so so - whatever you can…

And sometimes children are more exposed to the environment. They can tell you all the things they did from there. This is the climatic condition, this is what, this is what. And you have never been there. You are a grown man but you have never been. But they say, for me, I am from there. So when you bring that one... real. From what seems to be abstract to real.

Interviewer: When you talk about methods of understanding, they have different ways of learning, what do you mean by that? What are your experiences?

Now I will talk combining those ways and methods. So may find that…(pause)... group discussion. So when you go in the class sometimes a child understand best when they are in groups. So a child will learn from another child. Child-child learning, they can learn best. Rather than sometimes when you get in - Good morning, da ta da - you demonstrate brain storming. So the pupils who don’t want to talk in front of their friends, they are shy, but when you give them opportunity and they sit in groups with their age mate, they speak up. So by that they can
learn. So that is what I was saying when I said we need a variety of methods. We need to change the methods. (Emanuel)

When I asked Alice how students learn, she gave the following response: “Seeing, touching, experiencing.” After this she went on to list school subjects (as reported in Conception B). In a separate interview Mark similarly talked about experience being central to learning.

Because for learning, I see they learn well when they can see something, when they touch something, they will never forget. They see, they touch, they feel, they will never forget. (Mark)

John also commented on how children learn by engaging in a variety of activities.

They also like participation - eg. Games, music they like very much. Practical activities…

Another thing we teach is stories - myths and legends from the ancestors. [John told a story about how the mountains were formed in Kitgum that his grandmother taught him]. I like to put these stories into science. It always leaves you with something to think. Now this is a different teaching from the scientific way. This one has been taught with some ethics around it - respect. In so doing this, people learn how to know. You grow up like that, until when you are fully grown. (John)

Although didactic teaching methods are widely used in Northern Uganda, there was a very present appreciation for learning by experience. This anomaly again hints at the paradox between organic and industrial views of learning, as explored in the first data chapter in Conceptions A and B (learning as ‘dependent’ – what learning should be). This paradox is discussed in the research outcomes and implications chapters.
“Opening the mind” by spiritual engagement

There were many references to spirituality and the role of God in learning in three of the interviews. Accordingly, they are presented here as an aspect of learning as “opening the mind”. When references were made about the need to engage children’s emotions, as presented above, they were often contextualised within spiritual beliefs. The comments here reflect these beliefs and how they relate to learning.

The first comment here was made by Abe, whose commented extensively about the power of love in “opening the mind”.

And I also want to say that children need to know that above all there is a Father God who loves them, no matter what. With the Father’s Love. And through that, no matter what, you will [learn] to work closely with God. Because when someone loves you, you want to please them. (Abe)

To Abe, a knowledge of God was fundamental to learning moral codes of conduct for the betterment of society.

And remember this person knows behaviour, how to conduct himself in society and the person knows above all, God. And then morality will be perfect. And we can get a perfect society. You can never fail at your job. (Abe)

Timothy also talked extensively about the role of incorporating spirituality in children’s learning, and similarly saw it as a necessity for rebuilding society.

For us, as a school, we want to see that if these children here can be brought up in the Christian way, and then they are [in control] of their lives, they know the rules. Don’t you think we can make a difference in our community? So that is what we are striving for… Here in our school,
we want to make sure that our children grow up knowing their role as a community, knowing their importance, and also valuing their lives and the lives of other people. Now how are we doing this? The only thing to do to make sure that these people are valuing people’s lives is the word of God. And we teach our children the word of God. How? Every week here, we teach them to have memory verses… we also have at least 30 minutes of prayer in the school every week. We have organised prayer where the whole community gets involved… we have teachers sharing the word of God, children giving their testimonies, children praying for one another, teachers praying for the children. And that is done every week.

And then the teachers also have a day of prayer and fasting once a week, and that is every Wednesday. We teachers do prayer and fast, instead of eating lunch we read the word of God during lunchtime and then after that 45 minutes of prayer together we go back to classes. Then we break our fast after 4.30 pm and then we eat together and then we go home. So that we find that if we continue doing along that line, we can see that our children are being delivered from demonic forces and then they are being healed. So at least we are bringing in a spiritual [dimension] whereby if it has become our custom and culture, those are the things that will come up in the people who will be living after us [the children]. Because if you live here in that condition, you go to other schools and you continue that kind of life, you will make a very big difference. (Timothy)

Timothy’s comments in the excerpt above show that he believes that incorporating a spiritual dimension amongst his students has the potential to positively affect the wider community. This belief was further confirmed when he explained:

We are not only handling the academics. We are handling the whole humanity. We handle the spiritual, the social, the moral, the emotional. Because we train them to learn how to care for one another. So when a person is sick you can see how they get concerned to make sure this person needs help. (Timothy)
John also expressed a conception that learning was influenced by God when he referred to his own understandings and the diversity of gifts and talents in his students.

I think God helped me learn such a thing about people. Because there is no useless child, there is no dull child. Maybe we can only call them slow learners, but they are not dull. Given the opportunity to express to you what they have in them, then you will see. Others are athletes, they can run. So God’s gifts are all there, but sometimes we don’t utilise them. (John)

John’s beliefs about people’s gifts and talents being given by God were further extended when he discussed the notion of a “calling.”

As a teacher my salary is such a small one, and in a community where people earn more than me, this is problem in Uganda. Respect can be according to the position you have and how much you earn. That affects the value of the person. We respect people with more material possessions. That is a challenge. For me, I put those challenge aside, because I feel called to teaching. They give me a headache, but I still love those kids! When you are a teacher you are a judge, a doctor, a priest! Good teachers are rare. God has chosen the good ones. It is a calling. (John)

“Opening the mind” by “sensitisation”

Although there was talk about differing learning styles and the role of childhood development, as outlined in the section above, when it came to discussing adult learning many teachers used the term “sensitisation” which is a means of systemic knowledge transfer. Whether or not this term has pejorative connotations was not explored. However, what is known is that this term was exclusively used to refer to an uneducated parent population. Although this section does not pertain to
children’s learning per se, it is a good example of how teachers perceive learning to be knowledge transfer or sharing. This is also discussed in the section about teaching practices in Conception B.

When we talk of sensitisation about education system, the current education system. I want to thank our radio here. We have a radio station in Gulu. Though some parents did not go to school, but through this sensitisation they talk over the radio how good the education system is, and now they have known the good part of education and they are willing to let their children to study…

Like these days we have people who are trying to come out with their strategies in education to help. But in the villages there is no sensitisation and their method won’t work. And they are in the top rung. So everything - do it! Whether it is right or wrong you have to do it. They don’t give room to professors to view it and work out if this is really good for our nation. It is my prayer that we have to come to that level one day. (Paul)

The one big challenge we have here is that most of the parents of the children of which we have here have not gone to school. So always we are giving the parents [sensitisation to let their children] participate in learning seriously. That is a very big problem. (Ernest)

This section is only brief as it pertains to adult education, but it does give insight to this conception of learning as an active process of sharing information by engaging the senses. The use of the word “sensitisation” must be considered in the context of the data presented in Chapter 2 that reveals a widespread lack of education amongst the current parent population as they themselves were raised during wartime. Hence, it is apparent that teachers perceive a need to “sensitise” parents for the sake of
children’s learning. This conception alludes to the findings presented in Conception A (learning as dependent upon family background), Conception C (learning as fragmented by uneducated parents), and the following Conception F (learning as a means to rehabilitation, where teachers act in parental roles). At this point it seems appropriate to progress to the final conception - children’s learning as a means to rehabilitation.

Conception F: Children’s learning as a means to community rehabilitation

Many teachers that participated in this study placed significant hope in children’s learning as a means to rehabilitate their communities. For them, this approach of teaching children, both academically and morally (as mentioned in Conception E), is their way of rebuilding their society at a rudimentary level. From all the data presented thus far it can be seen that schools and teachers have in many ways assumed the roles that village communities and parents once predominantly played. Where these traditional establishments no longer stand, schools and teachers now take up leading roles in the communities. This section about learning as rehabilitation is organised into three main parts: schools leading communities, teachers in the roles of parents, and hopes for the future.

Schools leading communities

One of the factors of the conception of learning as rehabilitation is the leading role that schools now play in communities. This is evidenced by the many experiences of teachers whose schools make efforts to work with families. To orient the reader
within this topic, Abe’s experiences of how schools and teachers try to fill the “gap” in children’s learning left by detached or uneducated parents (discussed in Conceptions C and E) are reiterated here.

That is the problem. That is the gap we have. And that is what we are trying to fill in our parents so that they know they also have a responsibility to the development of these children. We do a lot at school in as far as formal learning is concerned. We try to raise their self-esteem but it is a gap when they go back home. Parents these days don’t have that talent to fill in that gap. And that has been the thing I have experienced. That has been my challenge. That is why [this school] has what we call home visits. We go and interact with the parents in the presence of the child and also other members of the family. And it is not only the teachers who go there. Home visits can happen with our team of pastors, including the director [of the school]. So we go and encourage them to help the children to learn where they come from, where they are going and what was the situation before their parents came to the situation we are in. They begin learning how was it then, before. (Abe)

Abe’s school conducted home visits to help bridge this “gap.” His colleagues, Rose and Prudence, also discussed their experiences with this organisational initiative.

Their comments here show their conceptions of learning as a means of rehabilitation.

Sometimes we talk to the parents about support. Because they keep coming late, and when the child is coming late we take them aside and ask them to come and share with us what is happening because it is affecting the child’s learning. Sometimes we come when [a parent] has already gone, and miss. That makes [unclear] very weak. And we try to make that child to be in the same level as their friends, but the child is a long way behind…

I go to them. And for example, when a child has failed to come to school and no report is written, I have to follow up with the parents and find out why this child is not coming to school. If sickness, then I understand. If it
is because the child doesn’t want to come, we share with the parents and seek how to help this child. (Prudence)

And you find, especially when we call these parents at the end of the year, when we have open day, they come and see what their children do. These parents here really enjoy the education of their children. And they are able to tell us that “so-and-so doesn’t want to send their children to school. Teacher, help us to pull a team together.”

Because it is hard. Sometimes we have to go and look for a child and the child is not there. They have changed [homes].

Interviewer: So how has that change happened? How have parents become aware?

Because we are there.

Interviewer: Because you are in the village visiting?

Yes, we talk to them. (Rose)

Timothy’s school is run by an organisation that also houses and cares for approximately 30 of the orphaned children that attend his school. His philosophy of providing a holistic education for his students is outlined in the previous conception (learning as a means of “opening the mind”), but it is reiterated here in the context of schools “reinstating” healthy norms in society and taking leadership in communities.

We are not only handling the academics. We are handling the whole humanity. We handle the spiritual, the social, the moral, the emotional. Because we train them to learn how to care for one another. So when a person is sick you can see how they get concerned to make sure this person needs help. So those are some of the things we are dealing with to make.

And I want to say with all the other background we had [the African setting] and with the challenges we had in the middle [consecutive
conflicts] where there was a big gap. But now we find, we have the challenges but what can we do to reinstate? … Now what kind of people? The one ones to be educated along that line can make a very big difference. Because this children we have here, these are our leaders of tomorrow. So if they have grown up in a way where they respect one another what thing shall we lack? Nothing. So that is what we have. (Timothy)

As Timothy talked about his work, his discussion was fuelled by determination and strong beliefs that positive change was possible. These hopes are discussed in greater length further below. He also shared his experiences of a child-mother who had returned from LRA captivity and was now an adult and a parent of children in his school. In this instance he sees her learning as fundamental to her rehabilitation.

Those who have come back and they were in the hands of the rebels, most of them to me they are no longer children, because they grew up in that and they are now mature. Some of them now are already mothers...

And some of them, those child-mothers have been remarried. And a good number of them are living a simple but good life. Some of them are even parents here, by the way. Yes, but they were trained in some other trade. Like there is one [ex LRA mother] here whose child is in nursery and she is a builder. She has gone through this brick laying, she can build and her life is back. When you look at her you may not know this is a lady who was conceived when she was in the bush. No, but the child is here and she is working.

*Interviewer: Here, everyone is together, I cannot tell who is an ex-rebel.*

No, you can’t. She is now enjoying her life and working. She gets a contract, gets the work done, and she is OK. And that is one way how these people have been reconciled to the community and they are socially working well and they are coping with the environment and they are OK. Now, look at that lady. She has a child, and the child is now learning. Do you think she has made a very big difference? Oh yes. To me, there is no
need to remind her of the conditions she went through. Instead, we have to encourage her to press on. Do it! This is OK. Then as she continues growing, and also maturely she is becoming a big mother, she is forgetting. And she is not asking anybody for money, because she is earning her own living. [There are] others who are tailors within town here, making clothes for people and many other things. And there are others who are making this bread that we eat, and that is how they earn their living. (Timothy)

This comment, and the comments above, show that schools are filling vital roles in educating children and their parents. The conception of children’s learning as a means of rehabilitation evidently includes educating the wider community. This data complements previous findings that show learning to be conceived as dependent upon cultural heritage and community. The analysis of data will now progress to investigating how teachers act in parental roles as a factor of learning as a means to community rehabilitation.

**Teachers in the roles of parents**

Many teachers shared experiences of filling parental roles. As data analysis is well progressed at this point, this factor has already been made obvious in previous sections. Nonetheless, it is outlined here in organised fashion as a factor of learning as a means to community rehabilitation. This section begins with Alice’s comments. An early childhood teacher, she spoke with conviction of how teachers must take up parental roles and provide students with a sense of belonging through love, security and friendships.

We need to compensate because some children have no parents. Or some homes have no resources…
We have some who have no parents, some whose parents have left them (referred to House of Hope children’s home), some come from the villages and are taken care of [in Gulu].

Interviewer: And can you see any effects that that has on children? Can you see if that affects their learning?

Yeah. Sometimes they [something about not learning]. Sometimes they take long without getting uniforms, [unclear], sometimes they take long to pay fees, [lack of resources]. But others who are OK, they [something about food and their learning]…

Interviewer: So school is an answer then? Would you say school is an answer for these kids? It helps these children?

Let me say, the teachers are helping them, teaching them, making them to be ones… but helping them financially, giving them [unclear - something about resources] they are not doing it. Except in the children’s home.

Interviewer: So schools help to give these children love and security, and help them to make friends, but they don’t help them materially...

And from your experiences do most parents think that it is important to have their children close by?

Yes, but it is hard. If they are there they demonstrate their answers and teach their children about their background and what has happened. [Something about not always having what they need to support their children].

Interviewer: So I suppose a school like this can help those children, [by giving] them love and -

Yeah, they come here and treat us like their family. (Alice)

In a similar vein, the next excerpt clarifies Abe’s philosophy of using love to overcome challenges as teachers “replace the child’s parents”. Abe’s comments were presented extensively in the previous category of description.
The child will never learn anything from you unless the child believes that you love him or her… Most of their experiences have so affected them from the war period in their lives. The war affected them psychologically. And so you have to begin with love, because this child has lost the parents and you as a teacher or a counsellor become, replace the child’s parents. And until you can fill that job even the knowledge you are trying to impart to the child may not have the positive impact that you want. (Abe)

In the introduction to the breakdown of domestic childcare (in Conception C), many teachers talked about teaching children things they would not have otherwise learnt at home, including hygiene, safety, using money and health topics. Here, those examples are presented again to demonstrate how teachers fill roles of parents.

When they came most of them tell you they don’t have toilet at home. They each need to know how use the toilet. And some of them through education they have come to learn that those are using the toilet. They are afraid sometimes … but they have come to realise that those kids are using the toilet. And we always make that after toilet you wash your hands. Now most of them know that.

And the same way we pray before we eat food. That is why you see when we have assembly they can come and lead prayer.

… There was a time when the parents would come and say, “you need to bring them home.” But now our children can walk on the road. We are not even surprised. They will not be knocked, they know how to walk on the road. We can send them to the market; they know money. We said, “see that is the goodness of education.” And they are very happy.

(Prudence)

Road safety is a very important thing to learn in Uganda as the roads are lined with commuters, pedestrians and vehicles all sharing the same space. Our party had the unfortunate experience of passing a fatal road accident where two schoolboys had been
knocked down by a bus. This excerpt above shows how teachers conceive organised learning experiences to be crucial to everyday life skills as children are not receiving such opportunities in the home.

Furthermore, some teachers believed their role in learning to be vital as they were teaching children things they would not otherwise learn at home. Timothy shared his experiences of how some teachers were more tolerant of children’s questioning than some parents.

“Why do you ask me like that? Who are you?” and that is a very common thing for the mother. And that is why most of the mothers will feel that the children should remain in the school rather than coming home. And when they come home they look at the children to be disturbing them. Because they ask questions a lot, they want to understand. And now the problem will be, the mother or the father is now tired. They do not want to answer the child. But when they are in the school, the teacher answers the child and give them the guidance. (Timothy)

Paul also indicated that students were “free to talk in class” and ask questions that they would not be otherwise comfortable to ask at home. Similarly, Mark discussed his experiences with how students were learning things at school that they were not being taught at home, especially concerning HIV/AIDS.

Most of them, some of them, will not have these kinds of things at home. Those want to know about AIDS generally. They want to know much about it so they are aware of it. Most of them have a parent who died from it and it is a problem…

See, there are certain things that even at home their parents do not tell them. So in class they are free and we talk about them. Perhaps it may even be the first time they hear the word…
Their parents are affected by the war, or some of them have HIV AIDS, and they have died. Some of them are real orphans. And such ones when they come to school their problems, they cannot learn well. And you see there are a lot of challenges here. So you give them counselling sometimes here and there. (Mark)

As a final comment in this section, John, who was a colleague of Mark, Paul and Timothy, believed that teachers played an integral role in teaching children to value education. This comment is made more meaningful in view of Conception C that demonstrated how children’s learning had been fragmented as parents did not always give priority to organised or formal learning experiences.

They are willing to learn because they have testimonies of the staff that are different to others. Teachers show them the value of education. (John)

Hopes for the future

Throughout the interviews many teachers shared their hopes for the future, frequently referring to the rehabilitative possibilities of learning. It seems apt to finalise this chapter by presenting the data that resonates with hope.

But I believe in a new future to come and changes will take place and learning will be really affective. Because all that people are doing now are trying just to make the learning process to be enjoyable. At the moment they are just trying. But I believe in 5-10 years from now the situation may have changes from what it is now.

… Education would make you aware. Of yourself, of your environment. Make yourself aware of where you are. And secondly, education like in Uganda, many people see it as a sort of getting job, earning a living, white collar job. That is the main vision of what education can achieve -
learning to make yourself aware so that you can get a job. So those are the two areas I see, the reason why. (Mark)

So imagine a situation where a child is properly taught at school, you are completing primary [unclear]. That child has been taught how to handle things on the farm or maybe how to make [saleable products]. That is a primary passion. Isn’t it? A learner’s passion. And that person will fit so well in society. And remember this person knows behaviour, how to conduct himself in society and the person knows above all, God. And then morality will be perfect. And we can get a perfect society. You can never fail at your job.

… But now that the rebels have come back, they came back with their children. And so it is a great task. But I hope in 20 years time we shall be able to reconstruct ourselves.

… We need to identify potential in the children while they are still young. And what are their interests, what are their hobbies and develop that.

… We need to accumulate our wealth. We need to work [unclear] together… And through that we find poverty going out of the window. (Abe)

And now the people have gone back home in their own villages, the ministry, the church, the government has a very big role to play. Especially, the way we look at it is if there is any means for change you need to take the line of education. That is the only option. Because if you bring up a child who can now understand and value his or her life, this child when he or she grows up will make a very big difference. Because those who have lived without valuing their life they are now the majority, and some of them are now parents. Now what do you think that kind of a parent can do when he or she has lived without valuing his or her life? Now they will take the child to live the way he or she has lived, and that is a very big challenge. Of which, we need the church to come in. We
need the education department to come in. So when these two departments come in, then we can create a new generation that can make a difference in our community. It can even make our community to be admirable. And we can begin to bring back the other social aspect of the Acholi … And that is what we need and that is the kind of society that we are longing for.

… So that is what we are striving for. Make a difference in our community, so that our children who is going to be the ones who replace us live in the condition where they value their life and they know that life is very important. So when they value their life, then they can also make other people enjoy the community, enjoy the whole environment. And that is what we are looking for.

*Interviewer:* So what kinds of things are you doing in your school are you doing to restore the African setting?

Here in our school, we want to make sure that our children grow up knowing their role as a community, knowing their importance, and also valuing their lives and the lives of other people.

… So at least we are bringing in a spiritual [dimension] whereby, if it has become our custom and culture those are the things that will come up in the people who will be living after us [the children]. Because if you live here in that condition, you go to other schools and you continue that kind of life, you will make a very big difference. And that is why we feel that if our school had stable accommodation we need to have a secondary section here, so that a child begins that culture from nursery, to primary and then into secondary school. So by the time a child leaves the secondary school when he has fully matured and goes out into the community when he is completely changed. That is our vision and that is our plan that we want to [do] and then we slowly continue and then we reach a level where a person who comes out of our school will go out with a changed mind, a changed heart, a changed vision, even changed activities. And if that has already happened, we can make a difference in our community. So that is who we are. That is what we are doing.
… Now what kind of people? The one ones to be educated along that line can make a very big difference. Because this children we have here, these are our leaders of tomorrow. So if they have grown up in a way where they respect one another what thing shall we lack? Nothing. So that is what we have. (Timothy)

As can be seen by these comments above, learning as a means to community rehabilitation includes spiritual, emotional, moral, civic, pragmatic dimensions. The task is enormous, but not beyond the strong hope that lies within the Acholi people. Already, it can be seen how these teachers are making outstanding differences within their own communities through children’s learning.

**Conclusion**

This final conception of learning as rehabilitation feeds right back into the foundations of a child’s learning. If a child’s learning is a means for community rehabilitation and “opening the mind” then it has the potential to bring restoration to the very foundations of society that were described in Conception A - cultural heritage and family background - that were further described in Conceptions C and D as fragmented or hijacked. Northern Ugandan teachers see children’s learning as essential to rebuilding their society. This chapter has shown they have clear hopes of rebuilding the social and economic capital of their society by building the intellectual capital of this next generation. The implications of these data findings are discussed in Chapter 9.
In concluding this chapter, the cyclic nature of this greater phenomenon of teacher’s conceptions of children’s learning is completed - what learning *should be* grouped together in the learning as ‘dependent’ chapter; what learning *really is* grouped in the learning as ‘affected’ chapter; and what learning *could be* in this last data chapter that deals with learning as a ‘means’, which links right back to what it *should be*. This completes the description of experiences and the variations within such. The following chapters take this study to a higher level of analysis by synthesising these conceptions with each other and with a critique of current literature. The researcher’s interpretation of the study’s findings in categories of description in the next three chapters is differentiated from the teachers’ conceptions that are presented in these three data chapters so that the voices of the Northern Ugandan teachers and the researcher are more readily distinguishable. Again, although it is not possible to divorce the influence of the researcher from the organisation of the data (Holliday, 2007), it is possible to make discernments between the identification of themes in data (conceptions) and the interpretive analysis of themes (categories of description). The forthcoming research outcomes are two-fold: a metaphoric representation of the teachers’ conceptions of children’s learning in *The growth (دة) of children’s learning in Northern Uganda* (Chapter 7); and, a series of illustrations that synthesise the findings of this study with current literature pertaining to the effects of stress and trauma upon learning (Chapter 8).
Chapter 7

Research outcomes I: Categories of description illustrated in an outcome space

Introduction

This chapter takes the research process on to a higher level of analysis. Expressly, it moves towards adding another dimension of meaning to the study by engaging in interpretive analysis of the conceptions articulated in the data chapters. The identification of these conceptions answered the research questions: what are Ugandan teachers’ experiences of children and their learning? And, how do Ugandan teachers describe their experiences of children as learners?

The phenomenographic process makes meaning by identifying teachers’ conceptions though the study of experience, and the subsequent analysis of these conceptions in categories of description in a manner that accommodates variation of experience. The nature of phenomenography – the graphing of a phenomenon through the description of experience – requires that the categories of description be brought together in a mental model to form a graphic representation of the phenomenon (Bowden, 2000; Marton, 1981, 1988; Marton & Booth, 1997. This project has chosen metaphoric representation of children’s learning, which is presented at the end of this chapter.
This chapter reviews the validity of the categories of description as the research outcome. Comment will be made concerning the applicability of a phenomenographic research methodology in a developing education context. Claims are made concerning the study of experience and how it connects the psychology and sociology of learning. Following on from this methodological reflection, the categories of description are brought together in an outcome space. The structure of this outcome space is analysed in depth according to the categories of description and in view of current literature. Ultimately, the outcomes of this research are synthesised in metaphoric form in *The growth (doŋo) of children’s learning in Northern Uganda* (Figure 7.6). Doŋo is an Acholi word for grow (up). This metaphor that depicts conceptions of children’s learning provides a platform for discussing the implications of this research in the next chapter.

**Review of the research outcome: Categories of description**

Categories of description are not merely a means for sorting data; they are “structurally significant differences that clarify how people define some specific portion of the world” (Marton, 1988, p. 149). Indeed, the main outcome for phenomenographic research is categories of description that are constructed from the data and together construct a mental model of a phenomenon (Bowden, 2000; Marton, 1981, 1988; Marton & Booth, 1997). Adhering to the phenomenographic genre of this project, the mental model proposed in this chapter is termed an *outcome space*. An outcome space is a graphic metaphoric representation of the phenomenon, mapping the
logical connections between the conceptions (Marton & Booth, 1997). The construction of six specific categories has enabled comprehensive and varied descriptions of conceptions of children’s learning, which are brought together at the end of this chapter in the outcome space entitled *The growth (doŋo) of children’s learning in Northern Uganda*. In review, these categories of description are presented again in Table 7.1.

Table 7.1

*Review of the categories of description: Conceptions of children’s learning in Northern Uganda*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories of Description</th>
<th>Factors contributing to the conception</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning as dependent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Conception A: Children’s learning as dependent upon cultural heritage and family background | Cultural heritage  
Family background and environment |
| Conception B: Children’s learning as dependent upon the education system | System-centred learning  
System-centred teaching methods |
| Learning as affected      |                                        |
| Conception C: Children’s learning as fragmented | Loss of traditional Acholi fireplace learning  
Displacement  
Breakdown of domestic care  
Uneducated and/or detached parents  
Child labour  
Underdeveloped education system |
| Conception D: Children’s learning as hijacked by competing post-war and poverty related stressors | Post-traumatic stress  
HIV/AIDS  
Orphaned children  
Child-headed families  
Child-marriage |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories of Description</th>
<th>Factors contributing to the conception</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Conception E: Children’s learning as a means to “open the mind” and overcome fear, shyness and low esteem. | Opening the mind  
Fear  
Shyness  
Low esteem  
Love  
Encouragement |
| Conception F: Children’s learning as a means to community rehabilitation | Schools leading communities  
Teachers in parental roles  
Hopes for the future |

**Reliability and validity of the research outcome**

Chapter 3 provided a thorough account of the research design, methodology and methods employed in this study. It explained that according to Cope (2002), reliability in a phenomenographic study is achieved by a clear audit of research procedures and the thorough and transparent presentation of research data and findings. Chapters 3 - 6 meet these requirements. Data was cross-checked between multiple interviewee’s accounts of their experiences with children and their learning. Thus, it can be said that the conceptions of children’s learning presented in this chapter reliably belong to the 16 Northern Ugandan teachers who participated in this study, and collectively they establish valid context-specific understandings.

**Methodological reflections**

When reflecting upon the rich nature of the research data in this project, the appropriateness of qualitative, open-ended, phenomenographic interviews and
accompanying ethnographic observations becomes apparent. It is even more obvious now that the abandonment of the previous ethnographic interview schedule (mentioned in the methodology chapter) was a discerning and reflexive decision, as the depth of Northern Ugandan teachers’ experiences could not have been as readily accessed using this original tool. Not only have phenomenographic methods produced a rich yield of data, they have also demonstrated a capacity to bring together social and psychological aspects of learning in the study of experience, and as the rest of this chapter will show, to make meaning of the teachers’ conceptions with regard to learning.

In regards to methodology, the research findings from this project strongly suggest that experience is the nexus between the psychology and sociology of learning. When organising educational research and theories, literature has traditionally separated the disciplines of psychology and sociology (for example, Schunk, 2012). However, this study shows that a pragmatic, real world approach to understanding learning considers the interplay between psychology and sociology, and one of the major connections between these two disciplines is experience. Marton (1981, 1988) has defended the use of phenomenography in educational research on numerous occasions, justifying its usefulness over psychological models on the basis of validating human experience. Additionally, this study asserts that not only is phenomenography just as useful as psychology in the study of learning (Marton, 1988), but it also has the capacity to bring psychological theory into sociological application by contextualising it within experience. This study has demonstrated how both individual and collective experiences are interwoven with psychological and sociological factors. This finding keeps with Bandura’s social cognitive theories and his work on reciprocality (1986, 2001). It is also congruent with Bronfenbrenner’s
(1979) ecology of human development, but the key difference here is the express focus on experience. Without doubt, this study has demonstrated that experience inextricably links learning psychology and sociology. Figure 7.1 depicts this relationship between experience, psychology and sociology in pictorial form. The findings from this study demonstrate the symbiotic relationships between experience, psychology and sociology, as many interviewees described how individual learning was directly related to external factors. For example, the relationship between post-traumatic stress and disengagement in class was described within the context of the recent war and the subsequent breakdown of domestic childcare or parental detachment and its effects upon children’s learning were discussed within the context of poverty and disease. Experience fortifies psychological and sociological theories with real world events.

**Figure 7.1.** Experience: The link between the psychology and sociology of learning
Therefore, this project asserts that phenomenography (a study of experience) may prove fruitful for other educational research in similar contexts. Accordingly, a phenomenographic interview schedule specifically designed for cross-cultural educational research in developing contexts is proposed in Appendix 7. Questions on this interview schedule should undergo thorough discourse analysis for each culture and context and be tested for reliability and validity before implementation by way of pilot interviews.

With regard to understanding teachers’ conceptions of learning, it would be very productive to continue research into the applicability of phenomenography in developing educational contexts and to also find out whether the research findings from this study share common elements with findings from other contexts. Being a qualitative study, the research findings from this project are strictly context specific and non-transferable. Nonetheless, further research may identify similarities in conceptions of children’s learning between different contexts or cultures.

Mapping an outcome space

As frequently mentioned in the data chapters, the categories of description are very interrelated and interdependent. Therefore, it is appropriate that they be developed into an outcome space to logically map the relationships between them. This study’s outcome space is metaphoric in nature and is a synthesis of Northern Ugandan teachers’ conceptions of children’s learning, literature in the field, and the researcher’s experience of visiting and conducting research in Northern Uganda. This
research space of amalgamated Western and African influences is what Holliday (2007) termed the “culture of dealing” (p. 140). That is, the outcomes of this researcher are neither Western nor African; rather, they are irreversibly both. It depicts an organic (Beckett, 1999; Robinson, 2006), socio-cultural (Bruner, 1966; Vygotsky, 1978, 1986; Zimmerman, 2004) and psychological (Jensen, 2005, 2009; Joshi & O’Donnell, 2003) view of children’s learning that is unique to the experiences of Northern Ugandan teachers. As mentioned above, this outcome space is dubbed *The growth (doŋo) of children’s learning in Northern Uganda*. An agricultural metaphor was deemed appropriate given the agrarian-based society in Northern Uganda. Moreover, it accommodates an organic philosophy to learning where the health of a child’s learning is a direct indication of the health of his environment. Healthy children grow, as does their learning, and if given opportunity, growth can be maximised.

**Structure of the outcome space**

To provide a solid background for this project’s outcome space - *The growth (doŋo) of children’s learning in Northern Uganda*, presented at the end of this chapter - the six qualitatively different categories of description are discussed in this section. The six categories are organised into three major sections: learning as ‘dependent’ (what learning *should be*), learning as ‘affected’ (what learning *really is*), and learning as a ‘means’ (what learning *could be*). This study has found that these categories are interdependent and can be organised in a cyclic fashion, as teachers’ conceptions of what learning *should be* (dependent upon cultural heritage and the education system) is
foundational for understanding how Northern Ugandan teachers conceptualise what learning *really is* (fragmented and hijacked). In turn, these two categories set a platform for understanding Northern Ugandan teachers’ conceptions of what learning *could be* (a means for opening minds and rehabilitating communities). This is expanded considerably in the designated outcome space at the end of this chapter, but this relationship is described in preliminary form in Figure 7.2 below. In this section the categories of description are synthesised with the literature presented in Chapter 2 to set the scene for drawing conclusions and making recommendations in the implications chapter (Chapter 9).

*Figure 7.2. A preliminary model of the cyclic nature of the relationships that exist between the categories of description*
The first group of categories: Learning as ‘dependent’

The two categories of description in this group can be described as fundamental or foundational to children’s learning. In simple terms, Northern Ugandan teachers conceptualise children’s learning to be dependent upon a) their cultural heritage and family background, which can be typically located in the home; and b) their education system, which is typically outworked at school. As demonstrated later, all other conceptions stem from or return to these. In many ways these ‘dependent’ conceptions describe what Northern Ugandan teachers conceive learning should be like. Considered together, these two conceptions form a binary view of learning that is somewhat paradoxical. Dependence upon cultural heritage and family background is more aligned with organic learning (Beckett, 1999; Robinson, 2009); whereas, dependence upon a school-based system which is examination-driven evokes a more industrial or mechanistic approach to learning. Robinson (2001) discussed similar opposing view of learners in his descriptions of the natural individual and the rational individual. This binary opposition is unpacked here.

Conception A: Children’s learning as dependent upon cultural heritage

The data analysis revealed a strong conception that cultural heritage and family background are fundamental to children’s learning. This conception reveals a strong tendency of Northern Ugandan teachers to gravitate toward sociological theories of learning (for example, Leach & Moon, 2008; Gardner, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978). The data reveals that cultural heritage and family background were considered fundamental to identity, security, safety, and the perpetuation of social norms, all of which are
thought to be foundational to a child’s learning. Clearly, social capital was considered vital to children’s learning. Not once was learning described as an isolated experience. Rather, it was always described within the context of community, whether at home, school or church. This conception is highly compatible with Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development model (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986).

Furthermore, whenever Northern Ugandan teachers referred to the psychology of learning, it was embedded within a social context. Clearly, social structures - including the family, village and wider society - were considered fundamental to a child’s learning according to what they said. These structures involved environmental and human elements. The environmental elements described included the fireplace, the village, homes, farms, granaries, churches and schools. Notwithstanding the importance of these environments, learning was not confined to certain times or spaces; rather it was an ongoing, naturally occurring process (Ssekamwa, 1997) that underpinned the teaching of values like respect. In addition to teachers, other people that were described in the learning support network included village elders, parents, aunts and uncles, and older siblings. All of these people held responsibility for a child’s learning as “all adults were teachers in one way or another” (Ofori-Attah, 2009, p. 152). Timothy’s comments encapsulated this phenomenon when he explained:

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.

This view of children’s learning is in contention with Wane’s (2009) claims that the African adage it takes a village to raise a child is a thing of the past. Although Conception C shows that this maxim is not being outworked in many situations due to
the breakdown of family and community structures, the data from this study shows that Northern Ugandan teachers still adopt a very collective view of children’s learning and a collegial sense of responsibility. As Conception F demonstrates, the old adage is still alive because of the efforts of schools and teachers to keep it so. It could be argued that in many instances school communities have become the new villages in Northern Uganda. This idea is discussed further in the implications chapter.

Altogether, it can be seen that Northern Ugandan teachers considered the wellbeing of a child to be an index of the condition of a community. This conception of children’s learning as dependent on cultural heritage is akin to Robinson’s (2009, 2010) assertion that learning ought to be viewed as an organic process. That is, a child’s learning grows by virtue of the health of her environment. This is a very sobering finding in light of the child soldier and night commuter phenomenon that prevailed until 2006 (United Nations OCHA/IRIN, 2004), and the child-headed family phenomenon that persists today (Republic of Uganda, 2003). The very foundation of children’s learning was and is under threat due to harsh external factors that destroyed homes and families. The foundational nature of cultural heritage has been amplified by its very demise. This approach to studying the loss of cultural heritage may be likened to Bruner’s (1966) approach to better understanding the human condition by studying people groups subject to the least amount of social variables (for example, agrarian-based societies). That is, the importance of cultural heritage and family background to children’s learning becomes screamingly obvious by its loss. This is evident in the data where teachers lament deficiencies in children’s learning from home environments. For example, 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 of low levels of self-esteem amongst many children as a result of loss of culture. Clearly, cultural heritage and family background is foundational in teachers’ conceptions of children’s learning.

**Conception B: Children’s learning as dependent upon the education system**

Time and again, teachers would refer to their 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. As explained in the data chapters, many times teachers interchanged the terms learning and education as they saw them as synonymous. Undoubtedly, many conceptualised learning as systemic. Such a conception becomes somewhat political when one understands the education system is indelibly linked with the political system. This conception 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. The packed lunch initiative really summed up such 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…

(Paul)

From so many angles, data pointed to children’s learning as dependent upon the government’s ability to deliver resources or legislate social and educational processes. Within this dependence was a strong view of the need for uniformity in education, hinting at a tendency toward an industrial, one-size-fits-all view of children’s learning (Robinson, 2009). This was revealed in the data when many
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teachers lamented a lack of curriculum documents and textbooks that should have been issued by the government. When asked about improvisation, many hesitated as they preferred to teach the ‘right’ thing from the textbook. There was an evident conception that learning was either ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ and some teachers indicated a fear of ‘lack of uniformity’ in Ugandan education due to a lack of resources. These comments raise a particularly vexatious issue as they reveal a fixed mindset (Dweck, 2006) concerning learning and education, and an inclination toward viewing learners as rational beings to whom we must transfer bodies of knowledge (Robinson, 2001). 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 a systemic view of learning was coupled with a systemic view of teaching and pedagogy. It may be that the current universal primary education (UPE) policy perpetuates these views, as Leach and Moon’s (2008) work discusses similar views of learning that prevail in other instruction-based educational contexts. Or it could be surmised that military dominance in the region for the last four decades has also influenced fixed views of learning.

Notwithstanding the importance of further researching the causes of this systemic view of education in Northern Uganda, the findings from this particular study can confirm that indeed this conception exists and that it is somewhat similar to Robinson’s (2001) description of the rational individual. Data presented in the previous chapters reveals that within this conception is a degree of scepticism toward creativity and proneness toward academic-based views of intelligence. Typically, such system-centred views of learning are coupled with fixed views of potential and capacity (Leach & Moon, 2008), which is a significant finding for this research context.
Taken together, these two conceptions of learning as ‘dependent’ form the basis for understanding all other conceptions of learning. If they were to be described metaphorically, they may be likened to two tap roots growing on a plant called ‘children’s learning’ as depicted in Figure 7.3. However, one side of this plant’s foundation is more organic or natural in character and the other side is more industrial or rational. The implications of this paradox are discussed further in the last chapter.

Figure 7.3. A metaphoric representation of learning as ‘dependent’

Note: Maize seedling sourced from Google Images.

The second group of categories: Learning as ‘affected’

The two categories grouped together here describe teacher’s conceptions of children’s learning as ‘affected’ by the social and familial insecurities associated with war, famine, poverty and disease. If the previous group of categories described what
learning should be, then this group describes what learning really is. As the data reveals, teachers conceive children’s learning in Northern Uganda to be fragmented and hijacked. The fragmented conception deals more with physical and environment losses that have fractured learning, and the hijacked conception tackles the stressors that can disengage learning. This middle group of conceptions relies upon the understandings established in the first group outlined above, and gives meaning to the last group outlined below.

Conception C: Children’s learning as fragmented

In many ways, this conception is core to the research findings as it has direct relationships with all other conceptions (explained below in the outcome space). Teachers frequently described gaps in children’s learning and attributed these to the destruction of the village environment and fireplace learning, displacement, the breakdown of domestic childcare, and an underdeveloped education system. Years of political and social insecurity have destroyed the traditional setting described in both the review of literature (Chapter 2) and in this study’s data (Chapter 4). These gaps were identified in the literature review, but can now also be confirmed as belonging to a conception of children’s learning as fragmented amongst Northern Ugandan teachers. This representation of fragmented learning in Northern Uganda is depicted in Figure 7.4 and elaborated further in the section below on contributions to current learning theory.

This conception shows how gaps form in children’s learning when society and family security breaks down as it has in Northern Uganda. In the absence of parents, culture and history cannot be so readily passed on. Consequently, the role of the
government has become increasingly important to children’s learning, which further explains the above conception of learning being dependent upon the education system. However, Northern Ugandan teachers conceive their education system to be underdeveloped and contributing to this fragmentation of learning. There is a clear lack of confidence in the system’s ability to compensate for the “gaps” which have occurred in learning as a result of war and associated poverty and disease. However, it appears that in addition to the “gaps” described by the teachers, there is a considerable gap between knowledge of childhood development and the education system itself.

As this conception reveals, many children in Northern Uganda have not had the opportunity to grow in nurturing or supportive environments. The struggles they face are compound in nature. Many of their parents grew up in IDP camps and were not afforded the opportunity of formal education themselves. Teachers explained that in such insecure and unhygienic conditions, where people passed the days living on food rations without any purposeful kind of occupation, crime and delinquency prevailed. Northern Ugandan teachers reported accounts of rape, teen pregnancy, and delinquent behaviours such as theft and running away, and blamed these conditions for the spread of HIV/AIDS in their society. The Human Rights Watch reported that in 2003 between 16-23% of children under the age of five were suffering from acute malnutrition in camps in the Gulu district. As this study revealed, the current generation of parents grew up in such conditions and are consequently without healthy or functional references for family or community life. Nor were they educated. Their learning was survival-based, and Jensen (2009) would assert that their neurological patterns would now reflect this. These children have now grown to have children of
their own, although not all of them are yet adults (child-headed families are discussed in the next conception). It is no wonder, then, that interviewees frequently referred to “very big gaps” in children’s learning. Timothy’s comments about the impact of the war and displacement upon parents and subsequently their children encapsulate these findings:

Because those who have lived without valuing their life they are now the majority, and some of them are now parents. Now what do you think that kind of a parent can do when he or she has lived without valuing his or her life? Now they will take the child to live the way he or she has lived, and that is a very big challenge (Timothy).

Although villages are being rebuilt and fireplace learning is being reinstated in some places, Ugandan society has permanently changed. As interviews revealed, many people not knowing any other existence than the IDP camps have chosen to remain there, and many children have been forced to live on the streets as they are without a village or family. There is much pressure on the education system to fill these gaps in society. Where once schools supported communities, now they lead them. This is apparent in the teachers’ reports of having to care for the children and teach them basic skills of bathing, toileting and cutting their fingernails. Educating children in schools is difficult when classes are so congested that teachers cannot move from the front to the back of the room. Mark reported a ratio of 5 teachers to 1,029 children in one scenario. Ernest, a deputy head at a government school had 14 teachers for 952 students. Victor, another deputy head in a government school reported that most P4 classes had approximately 100 students. The education system itself is drastically underdeveloped to cope with demand.
Compounding this situation even further is the teachers’ own background of didactic style education, where they were without the opportunity to explore, investigate or express their ideas. Coming through an examination-driven system themselves with only two years of Teachers College training, many teachers exhibited little confidence to take initiative in lesson planning when curriculum resources were inadequate. When their own gaps in learning are considered with the gaps they described in most parents’ education, it is understandable that they conceive children’s learning to be fragmented as a result. These findings are sobering in light of literature that promotes the importance of developing positive climates for learning (Cohen, 2006; Leach & Moon, 2008).

**Conception D: Children’s learning as hijacked**

In addition to being fragmented, children’s learning in Northern Uganda is oftentimes blatantly hijacked by the distractions that come with stresses of being orphaned and having to fend for themselves and raise their younger siblings, or watch their parents and other loved ones die of HIV/AIDS. In addition, many of these children live with the effects of war-related post-traumatic stress (Sonderegger, Rombouts & McKeever, 2011). Interviewees revealed that some children still live with the memories of their villages being raided and their family members killed and explained how such trauma disengages a child from formal learning. All of these factors act like predators to learning, exacerbating the “gaps” in knowledge and understanding as described by the teachers. As demonstrated in the literature review, learning does not necessarily cease under stress, but what is learned is changed (Joshi & O’Donnell, 2003). The plasticity of children’s brains in such environments is significantly affected (Jensen, 2009).
In other instances children’s attention is hijacked by a priority to survive, especially if they have been orphaned or they are the oldest surviving member of their family and now have to care for their younger siblings or cousins. Teachers associated these phenomena of orphaned children and child-headed families with the atrocities of war and the subsequent spread of disease. This is worsened by a lack of medical facilities and providers, which Ugandan authorities believe has led to extreme impoverishment in the region (Republic of Uganda, 2003). An estimated 23 million people are living with HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa (Wane, 2009). Prudence’s story embodied the tragedy of this situation:

You find the child is not properly cared for. Education becomes totally nonsense to them. For example, today we had to send for two kids who [were absent] and we said, “What is wrong?” They said, “My dad is not there. They have not bought me any scholastic materials. And my mum is admitted with [HIV]. So I am living with my eldest sister.” And that girl is in P3-5 and is taking care of this situation (Prudence).

It could be said that many of these children have lost their childhood. It could also be said that there is a gross shortage of responsible adults to adequately care for children in Northern Uganda. Data presented in the previous chapter shows that orphaned children are at risk of abuse, neglect and being used as labour, and teachers explained how these scenarios distract their learning.

In addition to learning being hijacked by trauma and stress, it can also be hijacked by circumstance, for example, being a female in poverty. Many parents do not or cannot afford feminine hygiene products for their girls when they reach puberty, so they encourage early marriage to alleviate the expense of caring for girls. One
interviewee explained that it is common to find only 10 girls in P7 classes (approximately 12 years of age), whereas there might be 50 girls enrolled in younger classes. Early marriage and subsequent teen pregnancies perpetuate the problem of uneducated parents. This data is significant in view of Wane’s (2009) claims about the correlations between the education of girls and the improvement of community health. (This argument has long been the campaign of organisations like The Girl Effect movement - www.thegirleffect.org).

As the literature review outlined, gender equity issues in education for girls were identified by a government White Paper in 1992 and included: traditional divisions of domestic labour; early marriages; psychological and physiological changes that “deter them from competing effectively with boys” (p. 163); social and cultural practices where parents prefer the education of their sons; and social problems that are compounded by inadequate safe and secure accommodation, including “vulnerability to sexual harassment and pregnancy” (p. 163). Laying blame on the language used in classrooms, Namusisi (2010) argued that Ugandan education favoured boys and victimised girls.

If children’s learning as ‘affected’ were to be represented metaphorically, it could be likened to a plant that is suffering stunted growth due to pests and predators. Its fruit would be underdeveloped due to the effects of stress, as depicted in Figure 7.4. This figure shows that the very roots of learning (which were identified as cultural heritage and the education system in the first two categories of description) come under attack from war, poverty and disease. As a result, the fruit of learning is stunted in growth and development, or as the Northern Ugandan teachers explained, learning has many “gaps”. Further, metaphoric predators, including post-traumatic stress, the stressors of HIV/AIDS or living as an orphan, hijack the fruit that is produced. If
children suffer extreme stress they may withdraw from formal learning altogether. This has been illustrated as a ‘failed crop’ in the metaphor in Figure 7.4.

![Figure 7.4](image)

**Figure 7.4.** A metaphoric representation of children’s learning as ‘affected’

*Note:* Images sourced from Google Images and Inspiration™ software.

Considering learning as fragmented and learning as hijacked together, it is apparent that Northern Ugandan society is struggling to invest quality intellectual capital back into its own community. This was alluded to in the review of literature,
but it is confirmed here in the synthesis of data and literature. A lack of intellectual capital due to fragmentation and hijacking, as described above, has an impact on upon a community’s capacity to build its own social and economic capital also. This concept is enlarged in the section below on contributions to current learning theory. This is significant in light of the imposing foreign influences that can prevail in the northern region of Uganda. The issue of foreign influence is discussed at length in the next chapter.

The third group of categories: Learning as a ‘means’

This final group of two categories brings together views of learning as ‘dependent’ and ‘affected’ by analysing conceptions of learning as a ‘means’ for development. This group of categories is both insightful and inspiring as they contain teachers’ hopes for what learning might achieve and restore. Teachers clearly saw learning as a means for generating individual and community change. These conceptions included views that learning could “open the mind” and rehabilitate communities.

Conception E: Children’s learning as a means to opening the mind

Teachers regularly used the phrase “opening the mind” when discussing children’s learning. As interviews unfolded, it became evident that the process of “opening the mind” transpired through emotional, experiential or spiritual engagement. There may have been remnants of didactic concepts of teaching in this expression, as often it is the teacher who ‘opens the mind’. Nevertheless, this conception gives
weight to the heart-head connection in learning. These three kinds of engagement are discussed below.

Teachers had much to say about the power of positive and negative emotions in children’s learning. They clearly believed that fear could paralyse an individual and a community. Timothy’s comments are reiterated here:

And the most dangerous thing that happened was that people in our community started living in fear… Now in a community where a person lives under fear, life will never be clear. And it was hard. It was very hard. But that one also made the whole community to drop down and slack down and people were no longer interested in working or showing that they can do something. So that brought a very big gap. (Timothy)

Notwithstanding this, the Northern Ugandan teachers also believed that love could overcome the effects of fear and trauma. For many, demonstrating love to students was the starting point for learning. Providing them with a sense of security and belonging was imperative to building trust, which they saw as vital to learning or “opening the mind.” The literature reviewed around the effects of war-related stress upon learning would agree with this position. When discussing the repercussions of war on children’s learning, Joshi and O’Donnell (2003) included inattentive behaviours at school (Dodge, 1993), and fear for safety or of being alone (Perry, 2001). Furthermore, research has shown that children who lack family support in refugee situations are at higher risk of developing psychological problems (Adjukovic & Adjukovic, 1998). Therefore, by striving to provide children with a sense of safety and security, Northern Ugandan teachers are working to overcome these challenges so that children can “open their minds.” Incorporated into this philosophy were endeavours to teach morals and values, as many teachers were of the opinion, and
indeed this study shows, that moral decline was another by-product of years of conflict.

Another key finding in this conception was the belief that learning was negatively affected by low self-esteem, which was a product of social insecurities coupled with an examination-driven curriculum. Walter explained this cause and effect relationship when he said,

Most Ugandans are discouraged, they have no self-esteem. So they have come with a way of helping them to realise they are important in life. So when you realise you are important in life you open up your mind to things. (Walter)

The roots of such low esteem amongst the Acholi people and their communities is discussed in greater length in the next chapter in light of the tension that exists between foreign influences and the need to rebuild Acholi culture.

Abe shared similar sentiments to Walter, believing that the prevalence of fear of either punishment or failure in both home and school arenas (described to be foundational to children’s learning in the first two conceptions) produced low self-esteem amongst Acholi children. He believed that low esteem produced an overriding lack of confidence that disengaged students from organised learning. He used his own story to get this message across.

That’s why I begun with low self-esteem. Let me tell you something. There is something that Africans need to learn. We are all shy because of one thing - you don’t give the child a chance to speak. You don’t give the child a chance to express themselves freely… They say, “Whatever I do they don’t even appreciate it.” So through that the child will grow knowing that they don’t give a chance to speak. They don’t like me
probably. Whatever I do is not pleasing. So they become shy each time. That affects us.

...Like I studied from nursery, primary, secondary and then to university, but they don’t give me the opportunity to tell them what I want to tell them. So the only way for me when I put something on paper then they mark it and say, “Hey, this child is bright,” then they see. That is the only time I can, and that is for examination. (Abe)

Abe’s sentiments reflected Leach and Moon’s (2008) conviction that, “One learner needs another learner” (p. 5). Leach and Moon illustrated this point by discussing cases where pedagogy had moved from didactic teaching, memorisation and fact recollection (as is often the practice in Northern Uganda) towards pedagogies that encouraged questioning, problem solving, developing and communicating ideas, valuing self-confidence and creativity, and reflecting upon the learning process itself. In order for such change to take place, views of learning need to shift from the belief that learning occurs ‘in the head’ to understanding that learning is a ‘social’ process that occurs through socio-cultural interactions (Bruner, 1996, cited in Vialle, Lysaght & Verenikina, 2005).

When discussing the importance to experiential engagement in “opening the mind” teachers described how children’s individual learning styles and needs should be accommodated through diverse pedagogic practices. These findings seemed to be somewhat of a contrast to the systemic conceptions of learning described in Conception B, again highlighting the conflict that exists between organic and industrial views of learning that cohabit in this context. Such views of “opening the
mind” through experiential engagement are more congruent with traditional view of learning discussed in Conception A.

Spiritual engagement did not feature strongly throughout the interviews, but it did abound nonetheless. This aspect of “opening the mind” tends to sit outside traditional views of learning presented thus far, as it is reliant upon the intervention of a supernatural God. Therefore, when it is represented metaphorically in The growth (doŋo) of children’s learning in Northern Uganda below, it is likened to rain, a powerfully important, but uncontrollable force of nature that affects growth. In this way it can be seen that some Northern Ugandan teachers conceive children’s learning can be enhanced by spirituality.

The idea of “opening the mind” conjures the idea that minds can also be closed. As this conception reveals, closed minds can be opened to learn given opportunity for emotional, experiential or spiritual engagement. In many ways, this conception shows that when the mind is “opened” that there is opportunity to repair faulty foundations, or strengthen the good foundations that have triumphed over years of conflict.

**Conception F: Children’s learning as a means for community rehabilitation**

Time and again Northern Ugandan teachers shared examples of how their schools were taking lead roles within the community and teachers themselves were compensating for detached, uneducated, absent or deceased parents. Amid what seemed at times to be grave situations, their hope shone through for better times when their children could again be raised in their communities without fear, poverty or disease. They conceded that Uganda had permanently changed, both due to years of
ongoing conflict and the introduction of foreign influences. Nevertheless, they believed that children’s learning was the starting point for raising a generation of young people who possessed healthy reference points for functional and autonomous living.

To achieve this, some schools instigated home visits amongst families where they sent their teachers out to “sensitise” the parents about childcare and the importance of education. Other schools were part of organisations that also housed and cared for orphaned children, so that all children in their school have an adult carer to go home to. In some ways, the roles that teachers and schools are playing in communities today builds upon previous restorative works of organisations like the World Vision Uganda Children of War Rehabilitation Programme. Instead of resettling children in communities, teachers today have the task of resettling minds and hearts so that the social and intellectual capital of reinstated communities can be strengthened. In some situations, schools have become the new village, a communal meeting place for raising and education children. When considering the implications of this dynamic, research and theory surrounding educational leadership, like that of O’Donoghue and Clarke (2010), becomes pertinent. This theme will be discussed in greater length in the final chapter.

Timothy’s position, reiterated here, summarises this conception of learning as a means for rehabilitation, and champions the cause of education in Northern Uganda. Where communities and families are lacking the impetus to teach their children, schools and teachers are stepping up to the challenge, hoping that their efforts will be rewarded with healthier stronger families in the next generation.
And I want to say with all the other background we had [the African setting] and with the challenges we had in the middle [consecutive conflicts] where there was a big gap. But now we find, we have the challenges but what can we do to reinstate? … Now what kind of people? The ones to be educated along that line can make a very big difference. Because these children we have here, these are our leaders of tomorrow. So if they have grown up in a way where they respect one another what thing shall we lack? Nothing. (Timothy)

This comment summarises the interconnected nature of the three groups of categories of description that have been evaluated above. A holistic approach to education is evidently vital in this community as a means of boosting local intellectual capital so that capacity to invest into wider society’s social and economic capital is also expanded.

These categories of description that deal with learning as a ‘means’ to opening minds and rehabilitating communities describe what Northern Ugandan teachers think learning should be. That is, the ‘fruit of learning’ should grow to its fullest potential so that individual lives and communities can be restored to peaceful, secure and prosperous living. Teachers see children’s learning as having exponential potential to bolster the social and intellectual capital of a community as the ‘fruit of learning’ could be harvested and reinvested within the community. In this process of community rehabilitation, schools are taking up the responsibilities that the traditional Acholi villages once fulfilled, and in many cases teachers are acting in parental roles. Figure 7.5 illustrates the metaphor.
Figure 7.5. A metaphoric representation of learning as a ‘means’

Note: Images sourced from Google Images and Inspiration™ software.

At this point, it is fitting to amalgamate all three groups of categories into a metaphoric representation of the phenomenon of teachers’ conceptions of children’s learning in Northern Uganda.
The outcome space: The growth (doŋo) of children’s learning in Northern Uganda

The assembly of the categories of description into a single mental model provides a bigger picture of the situation in Northern Uganda. It can be seen here in Figure 7.6 that because the fundamentals of learning (cultural heritage and education system) have come under attack and stress, the development of children’s learning has become significantly impeded. Clearly this has ramifications for the ongoing development of society. An agrarian-based model has been developed to accord with the agrarian lifestyle of the Acholi people. This model relies upon the discourses associated with agriculture to enhance the meaning of these findings for Acholi practitioners. ‘Doŋo’ is the Acholi word for grow (up).
Figure 7.6. The outcome space: The growth (domo) of children’s learning in Northern Uganda

Note: Images sourced from Google Images and Inspiration™ software.
This phenomenographic model gives equitable weight to environmental, social and psychological factors, as it demonstrates that the breakdown of an environment can impede neurological development. These findings contribute to the body of knowledge about the effects of stress and trauma on learning, and are presented in the next chapter.
Research outcomes II: Contribution to the current body of knowledge about the effects of stress and trauma upon learning

Introduction

This chapter is an extension of the research outcome space presented in the previous chapter as it illustrates the effects of stress and trauma upon children’s learning by synthesising the research findings with current literature. Expressly, this chapter is designed for practitioners as it points to the central role that teachers play in helping students manage or overcome the effects of stress and trauma. Keeping with phenomenographic convention, the illustrated effects of stress and trauma upon learning are staged over a series of figures, as there are multiple layers to this understanding. At this point, I wish to once again take advantage of the use of a first person point of view and extend the previous discussion about the embedded role of the researcher that was first introduced in the methodology chapter. First person voice was adopted in Chapter 3 to describe my personal experiences as a researcher and how these were inextricably linked to the research process. This time, I wish to briefly convey my personal experiences as a practitioner to further ratify the understandings being presented here.

This illustration of the effects of stress and trauma upon learning was first developed in response to the literature and the research process that was undertaken in
Northern Uganda. However, I have also observed its applicability in many different contexts throughout the duration of this study. At the beginning of this project I was working in a clinical psychology practice, which heightened my awareness of the psychological effects suffered by children in stressful or traumatic circumstances. During this time, I was acutely aware that the learning processes of many Australian children are similarly impeded by stressors that are out of their control. Although the stressors may be different between Australian and Ugandan contexts, many of the observable effects share commonalities. For example, children in many countries and cultures disengage from their studies in times of stress, even though the causes of the stress may differ. A child in Uganda may be suffering the repercussions of armed conflict, whereas a child in Australia may be suffering the ramifications of cyber bullying. Therefore, although it may seem obvious, it ought to be stated that the impacts of stress and trauma upon learning are transferable across contexts. Further, stress and trauma may manifest differently between individuals depending on their circumstances and psychological and physiological health (as can be seen in psychological studies such as Betancourt et al, 2009 and Sonderegger et al., 2011).

In another professional role, I had the opportunity of working with Indonesian teachers from remote and developing parts of Papua and West Papua over a period of three years. My role as a university lecturer included conducting courses on pedagogies and curriculum. Many teachers that participated in these courses had experienced firsthand the consequences of political upheaval and social insecurities, many of which still exist up to this time. On many occasions in lectures and tutorials I illustrated the effects of stress and trauma upon learning, synthesising psychological, neurological and sociological theories to make sense of stressful learning scenarios.
(These illustrations were earlier versions of the more refined illustrations presented below.) My Papuan and West Papuan colleagues indicated on numerous occasions that they could identify with these illustrations. Many students in developing contexts constantly suffer the effects of stress and trauma upon their learning. These illustrations may well prove efficacious in helping education professionals to better understand the impacts of stress and trauma upon children’s learning in developing contexts around the world. To this end, these illustrations may also be useful in situations that involve refugee children who have fled hostile environments and are confronted with the challenges of displacement and integrating into foreign societies.

As a classroom teacher in secondary schools, I have repeatedly seen students disengage from learning experiences due to the distractions associated with stress. Alternatively, I have also seen students enthusiastically embrace learning in supportive environments. A student’s sense of security is paramount. Whether it is friendship, family cohesion, relationship or bullying issues, the death of a close family member, estrangement from parents and siblings, or different kinds of abuse - students who have been exposed to overwhelming stress become disengaged from their studies (this observation is confirmed in Jensen’s 2009 work). One parent, who had been diagnosed with cancer multiple times explained that schooling becomes ‘trivial’ in comparison with the gravity of the life and death situations faced by some students. As a classroom teacher, I can testify that the effects of stress and trauma and learning are not confined to Northern Uganda. These experiences further confirm the cross-contextual applicability of the illustrations presented in this chapter.
Accordingly, it is argued that these illustrations of the effects of stress and trauma on learning are transferable to other contexts. It is most pleasing that this qualitative project that has produced context specific findings, has the capacity to make a substantive and original contribution to knowledge about learning in a more extensive sphere.

**Contribution to current knowledge about the impacts of stress and trauma upon learning**

Significant insights concerning the effects of stress and trauma upon learning become apparent in the synthesis of literature in the field and the research outcomes presented in the previous chapter. The understandings expressed here build upon the assertion that experience is the nexus between the psychology and sociology of learning (previously depicted in Figure 7.1). Findings concerning the effects of stress and trauma upon learning are considered transferable as the illustrations presented in this chapter may be applied in other education contexts where stress or trauma exists. Due to the many layered tenets of these illustrations, they are communicated here in stages to graphically depict the complexities between psychology, sociology, stress and learning.

The first layer of the illustration shows the internal elements of learning (Figure 8.1). It draws upon multiple brain-based and psychological learning theories and organises these into three dimensions that are argued to be inherent to individual learning: physical health, psychological and emotional health (referred to as mental health).
health), and belief systems. Figure 8.1 synthesises many learning theories that contribute to this understanding of the internal factors that contribute to learning. From the outset, it must be noted that this illustration is based on the principle that learning never occurs in isolation, but rather it occurs in the interplay between individual psychology and collective sociology. Therefore, further below in this chapter these internal dimensions of learning are placed within sociological theories that give weight to the external influences derived from communities of practice. Nevertheless, at this stage it must be acknowledged that a learner’s neural programming is a direct reflection of their unique situation. Many factors may influence neural programming - culture, belief systems, physical and psychological health, esteem, experience, and social and economic capital, to name a few. Similarly, neural programming influences human behaviour and thereby influences the aforementioned factors as well. This illustration contends that there is strong reciprocity between internal and external factors that contribute to learning.
The second layer of understanding introduces the sociological dimension of learning (Figure 8.2). This study contends that the wealth of an individual’s environment will directly influence their learning opportunities (Bourdieu, 1977; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Building upon Vygotsky’s (1978, 1986) theory of the zone of proximal development, this layer illustrates the importance of context in learning. Specifically, it introduces the conception of ‘more knowledgeable others’ (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986). Significant more knowledgeable others in a learner’s life can develop ‘scaffolds’ for a learner to make connections that would not have been otherwise possible alone (Wood, Bruner and Ross, 1976). Connections between people increase possibilities for reciprocal learning. A higher number of more
knowledgeable people in a learner's world increases opportunities for learning. Furthermore, clinical research demonstrates that increased social complexity bolsters an individual’s resilience as they have multiple points of reference for support in the event of a crisis (termed ‘self-complexity theory’ in clinical psychology, Linville, 1987).

**Figure 8.2.** Layer 2: The contribution of others to a learner’s experiences and resilience

*Note: Images sourced from Google Images.*

This diagram shows how being connected with knowledge and experience of others expands a learner's world. Although individual schemas of knowledge and understanding are unique, there will be commonalities between learners in a
community. This sharing of knowledge fortifies the cultural, social, economic and intellectual capital of a community (Bordieu, 1977).

Layer 3 introduces the influences of government, policy makers and professional bodies (Figure 8.3). These influences are directly linked to intellectual capital due to their role in maintaining political and economic security so that resources can be allocated to knowledge development. This in turn affects social security at local community and familial levels, as literature demonstrates the links between education and health (for example, Jensen, 2009; Moyo, 2009; Myers, 1999; Stafford, 2007). Therefore, political influence on learning is crucial. This study has demonstrated how political instability and the demise of healthy cultural norms have adverse effects upon learning environments.
Figure 8.3. Layer 3: The influence of government, policy makers and experts upon learning security

Note: Images sourced from Google Images.

Layer 4 shows the interplay between an individual and the environment. Experience and engagement links the psychology and sociology of learning. This is illustrated in Figure 8.4 by images of bridges and scaffolds. The quality of these connections is dependent upon the health of an individual and the health of the environment. It could be said that learning occurs at this point of interaction between an individual and the environment. This was alluded to in the literature when Vygotsky’s assertions regarding the impacts of culture on a child, and vice versa, were mentioned (Vialle, Lysaght & Verenikina, 2005). When the findings from this study
are viewed in light of the body of knowledge contained in literature, it could be concluded that learning is a direct product of engagement with the world through experience. That is, learning occurs in the interplay of psychology and sociology; it is both an internal and external process. Further, experience is made sense of through systems of language (Vygotsky cited in Van der Veer, 2007). Therefore, many of the scaffolds constructed for a learner involve systems of language so that experiences can be categorised and mean can be made.

Figure 8.4. Layer 4: Experience and engagement as the nexus between the internal and external factors that contribute to learning

Note: Images sourced from Google Images.
The illustrations proposed in this chapter show how the quality of a learner’s experiences and the extent of their engagement are dependent upon personal health and the security of the environment. For a learner to be willing to engage with his environment, his mental and physical health must be strong and the environment must be secure. Insecure environments may result in a learner withdrawing and minimising their participation in learning experiences, which weakens connections with more knowledgeable others. Similarly, if a learner’s health is poor, or they suffer a mental or physical disability, their capacity to engage may be diminished. It is for this reason that Figure 8.5 includes the depiction of a learner’s neural programming. A learner’s neurological patterning is a direct product of his or her individual health and the health of the environment.
Figure 8.5. Layer 5: A learner’s neural programming as a product of his individual health and the health of his environment

Note: Images sourced from Google Images.

Should a learner’s health or environment come under pressure, the effects upon learning can be significant. Layer 6 shows many of the possible stressors that can affect learning, and how these stressors are often compounded by each other. For example, economic instability can have direct effects upon domestic security. Or, social security can have direct effects upon family health. Again, parenting style may directly affect a child’s neurological development. All of these aspects are linked to the learning process. As the literature review and the data chapters from this study demonstrated, stress and trauma can hijack and fragment children’s learning. Stated
simply, toxic or insecure environments are detrimental to learning. Figure 8.6 shows how this is so, making use of symbols and shades of colour to illustrate the breakdown of the learning process.

*Figure 8.6. Layer 6: The breakdown of a learning network due to political, social or economic insecurities, producing gaps in knowledge, understanding and skills*

*Note: Images sourced from Google Images.*

Figure 8.6 was originally developed to illustrate the complexity of the situation in Northern Uganda at a time when I was trying to make sense of the situation.

Having children of my own provided a point of reference during the data collection
phase for considering how being raised in a secure environment shapes children’s learning. Upon returning from Uganda, I developed this series of illustrations to show my colleagues how insecurity affects children’s learning in Uganda. To assist in more fully empathising with the situation in the North, I will nominate a fictitious name for the child in Figure 8.6 and create an artificial scenario. Imagine Adam (not a real person) lives in Gulu, Northern Uganda. His family comes from one of the surrounding villages that were destroyed by the LRA during an attack that killed his father and older brother. Adam was only a toddler, so he escaped abduction, but some of his cousins were abducted and have never been heard of since. Adam’s mother suffers from HIV/AIDS and the effects of post-traumatic stress. She finds it difficult to sleep, so often leaves the hut where they live to go and dig in the garden long before Adam and his sister wake. Adam and his sister take themselves to school each day on empty stomachs. Not only is Adam hungry at school, his thoughts are also distracted by worry for his mother. He is not sure if she will be home at the end of the day, so he is trying to think of a way to feed his sister that night. If Adam attended an NGO school he may be fed lunch, but if he goes to a government school he may only have access to untreated water. When the Ugandan teachers repeatedly told me “life is hard,” they were referring to the compounded and cascading nature of the issues that fragment and hijack learning.

In stressful or traumatic situations, parents often detach themselves from their children, family members may disband, resources become scarce, health may suffer, and children are often left with a shrinking network of others to learn with and from. This is devastating to intellectual capital. It is also devastating to the child’s experiences and willingness to engage, as depicted in Layer 7 (Figure 8.7). This last
layer shows how stress and trauma can cause great damage to the quality of a child’s learning, by illustrating the reduction of a child’s learning network. This last diagram also highlights the vital role of teachers, as it can be seen that teachers are amongst the few remaining ‘more knowledgeable others’ in traumatic circumstances. Hattie (2009) would agree with this claim about the crucial role teachers play in learning, as his work has ranked the effect sizes of variables in children’s learning, and teachers are amongst the variables that have the greatest effect. In addition, this illustration of the effects of stress and trauma upon learning shows that when a child’s network is depleted, teachers are often the ones who remain more constant. In many instances, teachers compensate for tragic loss by taking up the responsibility to nurture and parent a learner. In the artificial scenario about ‘Adam’ created above, his teachers are likely to be in a better position to pass on life skills than his mother is as she suffers the effects of poverty, disease and poor mental health. Adam’s life has become very insecure, and the most constant and stable environment that he knows may be his classroom. Having said this, electricity is unreliable and vital resources like paper and pens are scarce. This broad-scale insecurity is depicted in Figure 8.7.
Figure 8.7. Layer 7: The losses to learning caused by stress and trauma

Note: Images sourced from Google Images.

A student who is suffering the effects of insecurity in any one of these areas depicted in Figures 8.6 and 8.7 may suffer considerable stress. The significance of the situation in Northern Uganda, which these figures attempt to convey, is the compounded nature of multiple stressors that have adverse effects upon learning. The multiple sources of stress and/or insecurity in a child’s life make stress inescapable in many cases.
Conclusion

Altogether, it is evident that stress and trauma create significant insecurities in student learning. It is also evident that insecurities contribute to stress and trauma. Each individual scenario will be unique, but there are some principles concerning the interplay of psychology, sociology, stress and trauma that are observable here. One of the greatest fears for students who have suffered the effects of tragedy or critical incidents is the repercussions of this kind of exposure on their capacity to resume or develop healthy learning and lifestyle habits. The impacts of trauma and stress upon learning are sobering in view of the knowledge that a child’s neural programming is affected by their experiences and the quality of their environments (Jensen, 2009). Stated simply, a dysfunctional environment has greater potential to cultivate dysfunctional learning patterns. Therefore, the crucial nature of the role of teachers in the rehabilitation of children who have undergone stressful or traumatic situations cannot be understated. These issues are discussed in greater depth in the final chapter about implications of the research for practitioners.
Chapter 9

Implications for research and practice: Lessons from the research outcomes

Introduction

This final chapter outlines implications for practitioners in three broad sections. First, it draws conclusions about the conceptions held by Northern Ugandan teachers concerning children and their learning and discusses implications for future research and practice concerning these in the Northern Ugandan context. Second, transferable principles pertaining to the impacts of stress and trauma upon learning are discussed. This contribution to the current body of knowledge is submitted to the international academic arena for consideration by practitioners. Third, this chapter finalises the research process by reflecting upon the research aims in view of the research questions and outcomes.

The research questions, which are fully addressed in the previous research outcomes chapter, and the aims of the study, are reiterated here. The research questions were: what are Ugandan teachers’ experiences of children and their learning? And, how do Ugandan teachers describe their experiences of children as learners? The aims of the research were: (a) to generate knowledge and understandings about Ugandan teachers’ conceptions of children and their learning based upon their experiences; (b) to generate understandings surrounding the purpose
of education in Northern Uganda and its role in child development; (c) to establish a
circle of learning between African and Australian educators with the aim of giving
Ugandan teachers a voice; and (d) to provide a model for educational research in
situations that involve researchers and participants from different cultures. This thesis
concludes with final reflections on this research journey.

**Implications for future research and practice in Northern Uganda**

This section brings to light significant implications that have arisen from the
research outcomes and proposes a way forward for education professionals, policy
makers and researchers in understanding Northern Ugandan teachers’ conceptions of
children’s learning. The implications that have become evident include the discovery
of binary oppositions in the fundamental conceptions of children’s learning. As the
discussion below reveals, there is an apparent juxtaposition of organic and industrial
conceptions of learning (Beckett, 1999; Robinson, 2009). Nevertheless, this
combination of dependence upon cultural heritage (organic type learning) and the
education system (industrial type learning) in the current climate of community
rehabilitation brings the roles of schools and teachers to the fore, as was highlighted in
the previous chapter and is further elaborated below. Another implication discussed
below is the role that teachers play in the neurobiological rehabilitation of children’s
minds by providing meaningful learning experiences. This is significant in view of the
claims this study has made about the role of experience in linking the psychology and
sociology of learning. The final implication discussed in this chapter is the need to
bolster intellectual capital in Northern Uganda for its investment into the social and
economic capital of the community. This would help to forge a path toward self-sustainable community development and the discerning management of foreign influences. These implications are discussed at length here.

**Binary oppositions in the fundamental conceptions of children’s learning: A paradox**

It has become evident throughout this study that Northern Ugandan teachers conceptualised children’s learning to be directly dependent upon two factors: first, their cultural heritage and family background; and second, their education system. As raised in the first research outcomes chapter, these two factors are 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 level of security and health of the family unit and the wider community to which the family belongs. In contrast, the education system conception is more industrial in nature, as there is a strong dependency on processing children through a uniform education system so that learning can be “perfect” (to borrow a term from the dataset). This ‘cookie cutter’ conception could also be described as somewhat mechanistic in style and seems to be at odds with the organic conception that a healthy village environment grows a healthy child. But perhaps this binary opposition is indeed a strength of the teachers’ conceptions of learning, as these two conceptions together allow for the natural rehabilitation and purposeful interventions that industrial or military style governance is more likely to achieve. Notwithstanding the possible benefits of rolling out programmes or curriculum initiatives at this phase of post-war rehabilitation, it must also be acknowledged that although military style leadership can be productive in a crisis, long-term sustainable development requires initiatives that
promote the development and rehabilitation of individuals so they can invest back into their own communities. It is for this reason that organic models of learning, and particularly the need to reinstate village life and restore cultural heritage, are crucial. With this in mind, these conceptions of learning also add weight to the importance of building strong links between home and school environments.

Furthermore, both of these organic and industrial conceptions of learning are thwart with challenges. The demise of the family unit and the breakdown of village life have destroyed the traditional environment that once raised a healthy child. Similarly, the pressures of war and poverty have “retarded” the education system (drawing upon descriptions from the data). Consequently, the dissolution of both home and school domains has had adverse effects upon each other. That is, it is difficult to engage students in meaningful learning when their home environments 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 life. Indeed, efforts in this regard by the Ugandan government and non-government agencies can already be observed. The importance of investment into the rebuilding of communities on both home and school fronts cannot be understated as strengthening the intellectual capital of a community has direct benefits for its social and economic capital. A community can indeed be self-sustaining when children’s learning flourishes with knowledge, understanding and
skills that can be reinvested back into the development of society. As discussed further below, there is a very present need to make significant investments into the education system so that this can occur. Remnants of colonial style education and decades of military occupation in the North are evident in the current education system. 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 facilitated. The partnership between home and school environments is crucial. This study found that this need to simultaneously rebuild communities through the education system and reinstate healthy family life could be largely achieved through schools. Where village life is yet to be re-established, schools and teachers compensate, as the next section demonstrates.

**Schools: the new villages.** Considerable evidence exists to suggest that schools function as the *new villages* in Northern Uganda today. Many children are growing up without the traditional *wang-oo* fireplace learning and village life where “the child was for everybody” (Timothy), as communities and families have been fractured by the effects of war, poverty and disease. However, many teachers and schools are making efforts to compensate for these losses by developing a sense of belonging and family in their schools. Where once people met together to share stories and learn around the fireplace, now schools have become gathering places where knowledge and life skills are shared. Although there is a dire shortage of adults in Northern Uganda, with approximately half the population of Uganda under the age of 15 (Uganda Demographics Profile, 2011), teachers are taking up the responsibility to pass on legends, traditions and culture to the children in their care. Many of these
children are the heads of their own households as parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles have fallen victim to the war or HIV/AIDS. So the roles that teachers are playing in children’s learning is crucial. In many instances teachers are the heroes in this story of community rehabilitation, and the schools to which they belong have become communal hubs. 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 this process would not happen in some instances if it were not for teachers taking up this responsibility.

**Education as community leadership.** The role of education in Northern Ugandan society is one of vital leadership. Schools are instrumental in reinstating healthy cultural norms and raising the intellectual capital of the region. Data from this study shows that many teachers have taken up responsibilities like teaching basic hygiene to young children and demonstrating the power of education to those in the upper grades. They are vital role models and examples in a community where many children are without healthy reference points for quality living or learning. Although other literature criticises government initiatives in schools that bypass parental involvement (for example, Furedi, 2009), in this situation the very lack of parents necessitates initiatives from the government, schools and teachers that directly intervene in children’s learning. These interventions are vital to the restoration of healthy community norms after years of living in conflict where the primary purpose of existence was survival. These implications are important for leaders of learning - parents and teachers - and leaders for learning - policy makers and researchers
(O’Donoghue & Clarke, 2010). These implications are further discussed in the review of research aims below.

Neurobiological rehabilitation through experiential learning

Taking into consideration the neurobiological research presented in the literature review (Adjukovic & Adjukovic, 1998; Dodge, 1993; Jensen, 2005, 2009; Joshi & O’Donnell, 2003; Osofsky, 1995; Perry, 2001), evidence suggests that teachers in Northern Uganda are playing an imperative role in helping to rehabilitate the plasticity of children’s brains by teaching them healthy norms for living and learning. By facilitating learning around topics like hygiene, safety and values, teachers are making opportunity for children to establish neural pathways for understanding how to live peaceably and productively. Knowledge and experience of this kind was previously hijacked by competing needs for survival during times of conflict, but now that the war is over there is opportunity for new norms to be established. As this study has shown, teachers believed that children’s learning is key to this level of rehabilitation. It can be seen from the experiences teachers shared that the learning activities provided by teachers develop a child’s thinking about his environment, which in turn provides opportunities for neurological development. In this instance neurological development does not only involve development of children’s minds, but also involves the rehabilitation of children’s minds and behaviours as many of them have suffered the effects of war related trauma and the stresses of poverty and disease. Rehabilitative efforts include counteracting potentially poor patterns for living passed on from uneducated or detached parents, as discussed in the research outcomes. It is on this same premise, that many children’s minds are in need of rehabilitation, that Sonderegger et al. (2011) have conducted trauma
rehabilitation programmes in Northern Uganda and experienced such widespread success. These findings together show that education is critical to individual and community rehabilitation. In this context it is very apparent that the sociology and psychology of learning are connected by experience, as reiterated below.

On the basis of the above discussion, it is evident that the quality of an education system is paramount to a child’s learning and healthy development, especially in a situation where cultural heritage and family units have been destroyed. Again, the interdependence of these two fundamental factors in children’s learning is apparent. For an education system to successfully invest intellectual capital into its community’s social and economic capital, it must itself have rigorous injections of intellectual capital. Such investments may come from the local community, government resources and external professional bodies. The stakeholders and the modus operandi for such an endeavour that seeks to increase intellectual capital ought to be determined by the Ugandan people.

**The investment of intellectual capital back into a community’s social and economic capital**

This study has found critical links between a community’s capacity to generate intellectual capital and its capacity to sustain positive social and economic activity. These relationships are depicted in the outcome space *The growth (doṇo) of children’s learning in Northern Uganda* (Figure 7.6). If children’s learning is dependent upon cultural heritage, family background and the education system, then it is vital that the institutions that support these factors (homes, villages and schools) be resourced.
during these imminent years of rehabilitation. Recent history in Uganda has already proven the devastating effects of the demise of these institutions upon children’s learning, but given the opportunity, the reverse could also be true. Consistent investments into families, villages and schools by way of intellectual, social and economic capital could well yield a productive return of increased economic and social security. Therefore, it is imperative that authorities take steps toward making such investments for the future growth of the region.

**Managing foreign influences and internationalisation in the restoration of Acholi culture.** Exactly how Northern Ugandan society and its government go about investing into its education system and the rehabilitation of families and villages ought to be primarily 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. This is problematic in many instances as the education levels of the Ugandan people have been adversely affected by consecutive conflicts over the past four decades. This situation may hamper the passage of knowledge from generation to generation. Nonetheless, Ugandan custody of educational initiatives is vital if community development is to be sustainable. These claims are made on the following premises. First, although the education of the current population of Ugandan adults has suffered due to war, poverty and disease, their resilience and adaptability is evident. Therefore, capacity to learn, grow and develop must be assumed. The positive outcomes of the education-based trauma rehabilitation programmes conducted by Sonderegger *et al.* (2011) confirm this claim. Never should policy makers or academics fall into the trap of racist or biased presumptions about human capacity like those expressed in Kunjufu’s (2006) work.
Kunjufu (2006) places considerable weight on racism for the achievement gap amongst Afro-Americans, as was discussed in the review of literature. Second, in order for the self- and community-esteem of the Ugandan people to be strengthened, foreign influences must be managed. This assertion stems from postcolonial theory that criticises Westerners for viewing African people as victims (Nayar, 2010) in a process that academics have termed ‘othering’ (Sikes, 2006). It also stems from the paradigm adopted by this project concerning the role of a Western researcher in an African context. These experiences have been documented in an article that deals with these dynamics:

“I was of the persuasion that to position myself as a benefactor had the potential to undermine the opportunity to build the esteem of my interviewees by allowing them to teach me about their culture. I found that within secure friendships, the esteem of the interviewees was encouraged. I did not want to risk reducing dialogue to honorary rhetoric by positioning myself as more powerful than my participants… Amid all these efforts to build relationships, bridge our cultures and learn from one another, it was necessary to apprehend reality and take nothing for granted. I felt there was no greater respect I could pay or gratitude I could show than to treat the interviewees as fellow professionals” (Willis cited in Willis & Allen, 2011, pp. 116 & 117).

A firm conviction that has arisen out of this study is that by validating and affirming the strengths of their culture, the Acholi people may feel more confident to take pride in their own culture and stories. Where this sense of belonging is reinforced, communal security is strengthened and minds may be “opened” (to borrow a term from Conception E). Thus, this discussion returns to the crucial role of learning.
Although this study is primarily concerned with children’s learning, the quality of such is directly linked to the need to uplift adult learning also. Accordingly, this two-fold approach to community development through learning by engaging the home and school now becomes four-fold to include both children and adults. Nevertheless, exactly what and how these investments should be made is left to the discretion of the Ugandan people. Undoubtedly, foreign contributions and influences will inform educational policy, as happens in most countries. The influences of internationalisation are somewhat inescapable in this current age. Nevertheless, as the intellectual capital of a country grows, so should its social and economic capital, and dependency upon foreign aid should decrease. Again, the importance of quality education is apparent so that it can prepare people for productive work. Education should increase the capacity of a community to invest into its own sustainable development. This theme is elaborated further below.

The centrality of the role of the teacher in scenarios where stress and trauma have impacted learning: transferable principles for practitioners

This study has repeatedly demonstrated the meld between the psychological and sociological factors of learning in stressful or traumatic situations. This enmeshing occurs in the everyday experiences of learners. The findings of this study would contest that experience is the link between internal (psychological) processes and external (sociological) functioning (Figure 9.1). Therefore, experience plays a central role in the development of schemas of knowledge and understanding. Marton and Booth support this assertion in their numerous works surrounding the process of
learning and the merits of studying experience (Booth, 1997; Marton & Booth, 1997; Marton, 1981).

Data from this study demonstrates that one’s capacity to make sense of an experience is proportional to the complexity of one’s prior knowledge and understanding. For example, teachers who demonstrated a greater capacity to describe in depth their experiences with the effects of trauma upon children’s learning had also had greater exposure to restorative processes in their communities (like trauma rehabilitation programmes, the restoration of village fireplaces, or the processes for reconciling returned child soldiers). It was evident that teachers with greater breadth of experience had developed more complex schemas of knowledge and understanding, and accompanying systems of language, to make sense of and communicate their
experiences. This again demonstrates that language is a cornerstone of learning (Vygotsky cited in Van der Veer, 2007), as it helps a learner to make sense of their experiences.

This is where the centrality of the teacher’s role in children’s learning becomes glaringly obvious, as teachers have the capacity to assist a child in building schemas of knowledge and understanding to make sense of their experiences by virtue of providing the language for a child to do so. Through learning experiences, involving multiple kinds of intelligence, a teacher may provide a child with building blocks of knowledge and understanding, by offering systems of language, so the child has the capacity to construct their own meaning. This process is illustrated in Figure 9.2.

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 9.2.** The centrality of the role of the teacher in constructing meaning and building schemas of knowledge and understanding

*Note: Images sourced from Google Images.*
Therefore, it can be seen that experience without understanding and reflection may be much less profitable for learning than experience that is reflected upon. Thus, it is argued here that the role of teachers is central to the learning experience as they have the capacity to facilitate reflection and the construction of meaning. Considering the findings of this study and current literature together, the evidence points to the potential that teachers have to facilitate neurological development and rehabilitation through the provision of quality learning experiences is compelling.

For that reason, the learning experience is paramount. Of concern is that stressful events and circumstances can forge neurological pathways and lay down negative patterns of behaviour (Jensen, 2005, 2009; Joshi & O’Donnell, 2003). Therefore, the power teachers have to assist in rehabilitating young minds and helping to build resilience cannot be understated. Teachers are not just facilitators of knowledge transfer; rather, they help connect the psychological and sociological factors of learning and assist students in building schemas of knowledge so they have a greater capacity to view situations circumspectly. In this way, teachers are also builders of esteem, security, and health. They are the vital link in community rehabilitation, as other significant adults may be otherwise absent.

Where learners have suffered the effects of stress and trauma, their support network may be considerably reduced. Three different scenarios have been chosen to illustrate the effects of diminished support networks, and the central roles that teachers play in helping children overcome difficulties (depicted in Figures 9.3, 9.4 and 9.5). The first example (Figure 9.3), illustrates a child who has been displaced from their
traditional home and is living as a refugee. In a foreign environment, the child’s zone of development becomes unfamiliar and uncertain.

*Figure 9.3.* The stressors of displacement and how they may have an impact on learning

*Note:* Images sourced from Google Images.

Taking on board the understandings presented in Chapter 8, the illustration in Figure 9.3 depicts the challenges faced by displaced learners who find themselves in refugee situations. Moving a child from their home and placing them in a foreign environment places considerable stress upon their capacity to function as a learner, regardless of whether their home environment was secure or insecure. When cultural and social conventions are unfamiliar to the learner and their family members, the need
for more knowledgeable others from outside the family unit becomes apparent. In this instance, the role of the teacher is paramount. However, other professional roles may also be necessary, including health and mental health practitioners, as many displaced learners suffer the effects of post-traumatic stress (Betancourt et al., 2009).

The second example of the effects of stress and trauma upon learning relates to a family crisis situation (Figure 9.4). It can be seen from this illustration that a family tragedy may significantly adjust a child’s sense of personal security, marginalising their ‘safe places’ to contexts outside the home.

Figure 9.4. The stressors of family tragedy and how they may have an impact on learning

Note: Images sourced from Google Images.
Figure 9.4 again shows the cause and effect relationships of stress upon learning. Domestic stress may significantly affect a child’s engagement in learning activities, and the framing of their experiences. When considering the effects of stress and trauma in a situation of family tragedy, it is evident that a learner needs a complex support network. This notion of self-complexity (Linville, 1987) is crucial to a learner’s resilience, for if the availability of a significant person ceases, then there is an immediate need for others to step in and support the learner to compensate for this loss. Again, Figure 9.4 shows that learning is a complex social process. It is more than the transfer of knowledge. The learning process is more aptly likened to an organic growth process where the health of the environment impacts directly upon the health of the learner (as demonstrated in the outcome space in Chapter 7). Should a significant person in a learner’s life become estranged or deceased, then the need for other healthy adult reference points becomes apparent. This illustrates the sobriety of the old African adage *it takes a village to raise a child*.

The third example illustrates the effects of tension in a friendship group upon learning and how a child may become estranged from support networks at school (Figure 9.5). Although adult assistance is still available for a child who has peer group challenges, their willingness to access help amongst their peers at school may be depleted. Thus, the scaffold between the learner and the teacher in Figure 9.5 is somewhat faded to illustrate this decrease in connections between internal and external factors. Moreover, a child in this situation may be without the benefits of peer group conversations about schoolwork and related topics. The stress associated with bullying, for example, may disengage learning at a neurological level in a similar way
to the disengagement experienced by children who have suffered the loss of a family member or experienced drastic displacement. In acutely stressful situations, the parts of the brain responsible for learning and cognition, specifically the prefrontal cortex and hippocampus, have considerably reduced activity and blood flow (Jensen, 2009). However, the amygdala, which is the brain’s emotion centre, has increased activity under stressful circumstance. Over time this may reduce the complexity of learning neurons, and increase the complexity of emotion neurons (Jensen, 2009). This has significant ramifications for learning.

Figure 9.5. The stressors of friendship breakdowns and how they may have an impact on learning

Note: Images sourced from Google Images.
Figure 9.5 applies the lessons learnt about the impacts of stress and trauma upon learning to a scenario that involves dysfunctional friendships at school. This illustration shows the diminished proximity of family members at school, and highlights the importance of the teacher’s role in supporting an individual’s learning. In this instance, the learning may concern social dynamics, assertiveness, resilience and friendships. It can be seen here that teachers play vital roles in remedying toxic environments so that learners’ confidence, motivation and esteem is preserved.

All three of the scenarios in Figures 9.3, 9.4 and 9.5 apply the principles of the impacts of stress and trauma upon learning that were unpacked in Chapter 8. In all scenarios, the key implication for practitioners concerning the impact of stress upon learning is the centrality of the role of the teacher. These illustrations show that when support networks are reduced, the role of the teacher increases in prominence to address these deficiencies as they relate to learning. For example, political tensions may put pressure upon families, which in turn creates hostile environments for children. Or, natural disasters may threaten basic needs for survival. Nevertheless, in most stressful situations the role of the teacher remains. For many children, their teachers are their only consistent reference for healthy living and learning habits. As this study has shown, this was certainly the case for many children in Northern Uganda, as Abe’s comments demonstrate:

The child will never learn anything from you unless the child believes that you love him or her… Most of their experiences have so affected them from the war period in their lives. The war affected them psychologically. And so you have to begin with love, because this child has lost the parents and you as a teacher or a counsellor become, replace
the child’s parents. And until you can fill that job even the knowledge you are trying to impart to the child may not have the positive impact that you want. (Abe)

Considering the impacts of stress upon learning, the gravity of Prudence’s comment from the data set, “Education becomes totally nonsense to them,” becomes apparent.

Moreover, the effects of stress and trauma are not confined to one location. This study would argue that teachers in many situations are fulfilling the crucial responsibility for establishing healthy norms for children who are suffering the effects of stress and trauma. Further, teachers and school communities are often all that remains for children who have suffered loss in traumatic circumstances. Therefore, relationships are paramount. The teacher is the vital catalyst that sparks engagement in a stressed or traumatised learner. A discerning and reflexive teacher who is providing consistent care for a learner will scaffold quality learning experiences. In light of this discussion, the gravity of Alice and Timothy’s comments from the data set become apparent. When asked how she overcame the challenges of trauma and stress amongst her students in a post war environment, Alice replied, “Love. It overcomes the barriers and brings them close. And then they learn. Love helps facilitate learning.” Timothy also explained, “We are handling the whole humanity. We handle the spiritual, the social, the moral, the emotional. Because we train them to learn how to care for one another.”

Research points to the vital role that teachers play in student performance. For example, Hattie’s (2009) work claims that teachers are amongst the most effective variables in student performance. However, these findings go beyond the importance
of a teacher in student performance. This study has spotlighted the invaluable role that teachers fulfil in linking the psychological and sociological domains in a child’s learning, and therefore their neurological programming. As outlined above, teachers have the potential to facilitate neurological rehabilitation and development in a learner by modelling safe and functional relationships, organising secure and stimulating learning environments, and facilitating quality learning experiences. Furthermore, teachers offer children systems of language to organise and make sense of their experiences. Altogether, experience is central to the social and psychological development of a learner, and teachers play a leading role in the quality of experiences. Teachers who reflect upon their practice and the learning of their students (Ghaye, 2011) are more positively positioned to facilitate neurological rehabilitation and development in their students.

Review of the aims of this study

Having outlined the implications for future research and practice that have arisen from this project, the aims of the study will now be reviewed according to the research outcomes and implications that have emerged. The realisation of these aims brings closure to this project and the contribution to knowledge as detailed above.

Generating knowledge and understandings about children and their learning in Northern Uganda

It was an express aim of this project to describe the conceptions that Ugandan teachers hold about children and their learning based on their experiences. By visiting
Uganda and conducting in-depth interviews with local teachers, it was hoped that a more circumspect view than is currently available in literature regarding the situations faced by Ugandan children and how their learning is understood could be achieved. The data presented in Chapters 4 - 6 and the outcomes presented in Chapter 7 have made considerable progress toward meeting this goal. It was found that teachers’ conceptions of children’s learning could be organised into six categories of description: a) children’s learning as dependent upon cultural heritage and family background; b) children’s learning as dependent upon the education system; c) children’s learning as fragmented; d) children’s learning as hijacked; e) children’s learning as “opening the mind”; and f) children’s learning as community rehabilitation. Together, these six categories of description were metaphorically illustrated in *The growth (doŋo) of children’s learning in Northern Uganda* at the end of Chapter 7. It is hoped that this phenomenographic model might serve as a foundation for future research amongst the same population. Such findings should be useful for leaders of learning - teachers and parents (O’Donoghue & Clarke, 2010).

**Generating understandings about the purpose of education in Northern Uganda and its role in child development**

This study aimed to generate understandings about the purpose and role of education in Northern Uganda. Specifically, the above section that considered the implications of the research outcomes took opportunity throughout to discuss the crucial role of education in child rehabilitation and development. Such understandings will serve to inform leaders for learning - for example, policy makers and academics (O’Donoghue & Clarke, 2010), and provide a platform for future research in this area.
Expressly, the crucial role that teachers play in the processes of learning has been discussed. These findings may help to inform future directions for educational development in Uganda.

Education, the organised and calculated interventions in the natural human process of learning (Spindler, 1997), is now playing a leading role in a society that is being rebuilt. Where once the education system reflected the values of village life, in many instances today’s education is now setting the benchmarks for healthy living and learning practices. The devastating effects of war, including the loss of family members and the destruction of villages, have derailed the passing down of traditions and community values. This is a noteworthy finding in light of Furedi’s (2009) assertion that education is the exercise of adult responsibility to pass down generational wisdom. Therefore, without the interventions of schools and teachers, many children would be without examples or role models, and consequently without knowledge and understanding.

This study has also found that education is paramount in the psychosocial rehabilitation of children and their families. Through education teachers and schools are re-establishing patterns for peaceful living and learning. By facilitating learning, schools are making long term investments into the intellectual capital of Northern Ugandan society. These investments are of utmost importance. By bolstering a community’s intellectual capital, the potential to restore social and economic security is also increased. Should quality education increase in Northern Uganda, the balance of power may tip in favour of local people making investments of intellectual capital
into their community over and above foreign aid and the influences of foreign policy makers and ideals (Moyo, 2009).

Notwithstanding this, exactly how the education system should be directed and resourced ought to reside within the power of the Ugandan people so that they can fashion a system for their particular requirements. Following on from the findings of this study, if Northern Ugandan teachers see children’s learning as dependent upon cultural heritage and the education system, but due to the fracture of these foundations also see education as fractured and hijacked, then how can these foundations be repaired? How can education bring restoration to family units and the villages to which they belong, and how can the education system be improved to better serve the needs of the community? Further, if teachers also see education as a means of “opening the mind” and rehabilitating their communities, then how can education policy, curriculum and practice be improved so that this is better facilitated? How can Ugandan educators foster healthy environments (home and school) to grow healthy children? From what has been learnt from this study, the researcher holds the strong conviction that these answers lay within the Acholi people. Although they may draw upon foreign examples, their solutions will be unique to their particular situation.

**Establishing a circle of learning between African and Australian educators with the aim of giving Ugandan teachers a voice**

Although some academics may argue that the notion of giving voice to non-Western research participants evokes the notion of ‘othering’ (Sikes, 2006), this project contends that where research seeks to empower participants by respecting them
as equal professionals, that the risk of the negative practice of ‘othering’ is decreased. Experiences from this project showed that teachers themselves came to better understand their own situations by having opportunity to reflect upon their situations in open-ended interviews. On more than one occasion, interviewees expressed gratitude to the researcher for “opening their minds.” It seemed that providing them with opportunities for telling their stories enabled the therapeutic release of otherwise unreflected experiences (Marton & Booth, 1997). All of this took place within interviews that were conducted in an attitude of camaraderie and respect for each other as fellow professionals. A detailed account of these experiences has been published in a peer-reviewed article in the *International journal of innovative interdisciplinary research* (Willis & Allen, 2011).

**Providing a model for educational research in situations that involve researchers and participants from different cultures**

One of the most exciting outcomes of this study was the development of an efficacious model of research that is suitable for cross-cultural educational research involving Western researchers and non-Western participants. Although the conceptions that have been described within this thesis are context-specific, the methodology may indeed be useful in other similar projects. Furthermore, the methodological reflections section in the research outcomes chapter proposed a phenomenographic interview schedule that could be used to assess the cross-cultural applicability of the conceptions of children’s learning discovered in this study. This interview schedule (Appendix 7) should undergo thorough discourse and content analysis prior to implementation within other contexts. Altogether, this study has
made significant advancements towards understanding the conceptions of the local people concerning children’s learning. Kunjufu (2006) argues that this ought to occur more often, as he criticises decision makers for offering solutions without first seeking to diagnose or understand the problems. It has been an objective of this study to make notable advances in this regard in the Northern Ugandan context.

**Epilogue: Reviewing the research journey**

This research journey began with so many unknown factors. Uganda was an unknown context to the researcher, phenomenography was a relatively unknown methodology, and the findings were entirely unknown. However, as the study unfolded and the researcher’s understandings developed, so much has become clearer. A stronger understanding of how Northern Ugandan teachers conceptualise children’s learning and the implications these conceptions have upon their practice has been achieved. It is also now understood that despite a horrific history of war that intimately involved children in battle and slavery, the Acholi people value their children highly and see them as their future and as instrumental to community rehabilitation. It has also become evident that the Northern Ugandan teachers see education as vital to this process. One of the greatest findings of this project is that the Acholi people hold the seeds of hope and change within them, and that regardless of foreign influences, welfare or aid, that they have the necessary vision to carry them forward into the future. As all good educators do, the Acholi people may choose to solicit professionals or experts from further afield, but the fertile soil of learning is
within their possession and is ready to be cultivated. The Acholi culture has the capacity to withstand the horrific ramifications of genocide, and their willingness for restoration and reconciliation has positioned them for recovery.

The resilience and fortitude of the Acholi people is astounding. It has become evident that the links between social, intellectual and economic capital are vital to the reconstruction of a society. This is significant in a region that falls under the spotlight of the United National MDG’s (Millennium Development Goals). Although this study has not focused on the MDG’s, it may be proposed that the achievement of MDG’s 1 and 2 regarding the eradication of poverty and the provision of primary education are interconnected as economic capital is directly linked to intellectual capital.

The usefulness of phenomenography in developing educational contexts has become apparent, and proposals for its future use have been made. The possibilities for further cross-cultural research studies in developing contexts are exciting. Throughout this project, it has become evident that experience is a key connection between the psychological and sociological domains of learning. Moreover, the study of experience serves to bridge cultural differences in a pragmatic approach to educational issues.

Through all of these discoveries, revelations about the impacts of stress and trauma upon learning were also brought to light. This study shows that teachers are powerfully positioned to facilitate neurological rehabilitation and development in learners who have suffered the effects of stress and trauma. This finding is compelling. Although the outcomes of this qualitative study in the Northern Ugandan
context are non-generalisable, the understandings about the effects of stress and trauma upon learning are believed to be transferable. The illustrations that depict these understandings demonstrate that learning is a complex social process. Considering the phenomenographic model of teachers’ conceptions of learning in Northern Uganda in Chapter 7, and the transferrable understandings generated in Chapter 8, it can be seen that learning is a complex process that can be aptly likened to organic growth. This conclusion is underscored by the principle that the health of the environment reflects directly upon the health of the learner. Should a learner’s psychological or sociological domains come under threat of stress or trauma, then their willingness to engage in learning experiences may also be put at risk. In these instances, the need for an extensive support network is apparent. This understanding reinforces the gravity of the old African adage; *it takes a village to raise a child*. Student relationships with teachers are paramount.

...the child is for everybody and whatever happens to a child affects the whole community… (Timothy)
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Appendix 1: The difference between Western education and the Uganda indigenous education

“The approach to teaching in these new schools was quite different from that of the Ugandan indigenous education which existed before the coming of these Missionaries. It was carried out in schools unlike the Ugandan indigenous education which was being carried out mainly in homesteads and anywhere people engaged in economic, political and social activities. The learners in this Western education studied mainly in classrooms, while the learners in the Ugandan indigenous education followed part of their studies at night, sitting around fire-places in the living houses. This Western education has regulated hours of attendance say from 8.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. while that of the Ugandan indigenous education before, went on uninterrupted throughout the whole day and part of the night.

Teachers in this new Western education had to be specially trained in particular schools before they began to teach in the schools. Yet in the Ugandan indigenous education which existed before, every intelligent and responsible citizens of the society taught the young people the basic knowledge and the basic skills necessary for them to be useful to themselves, to the members of the family and to the rest of the members of society in which they lived.

Only a few young people went to attend these new schools while everybody had to go through education in the Ugandan indigenous education system. This was so because every member of the society needed to acquire the basic knowledge and skills in order to be useful in society. Those young people who did not attend these new schools along the Western kind of education were called uneducated and ignorant. They found life difficult because they had to live in a new situation where the white man had introduced new values, knowledge and skills, and he was demanding that those new aspects be acquired through his schools. A person who did not go to these new schools of the Western type to acquire those above aspects was at a disadvantage. Yet the new situation which had been introduced by the white man demanded equally that even those young people who had not joined his schools had to behave according to the new situation. Decidedly, they had to pay his taxes. For example, if a person did not know how to read and write, he could not read signs on roads or any other warning materials written in letters. When there were jobs requiring a person to know how to read and write he could not go and do them. And quite many jobs began to appear from this period onwards both in government departments, in missionary establishments and in companies which required a person to know how to read and write.”

Appendix 2: Original ethnographic interview schedule

This was the original interview schedule compiled before this project changed its approach to adopt phenomenography.

Schooling after trauma: Ugandan understandings of pedagogy

Pilot interview guiding questions

Phase 1
Introduction: Demographic/background information
Personal education history
Likes and dislikes about school
Favourite teacher
Favourite subject/activity

Phase 2
Questions regarding understandings of pedagogy:
(These questions were developed from the seven dimensions of pedagogy that cross cultural particularities identified in Leach and Moon’s 2008 work).

The purpose of education.
What advantages do you think education gives an African child?
Why do you think people want to become teachers in Uganda?
Comment on how this direct question for Ugandan teachers will likely be received: Why did you choose teaching as a career?

Goals for schooling.
What do you think teachers hope to achieve with their classes?
What do you think makes a good teacher in Uganda?
Comment on how these direct questions for Ugandan teachers will likely be received: What do you hope to achieve with your classes?
How do you know if you have done a good job?

Views of mind and knowledge.
What do you think is the difference between a high achiever and a low achiever?
What do you think students need to know for a successful future?

Views of learning and learners.

If students need to learn something new, a new concept, what would be the best way to go about teaching them this new thing?

What strategies would you use to help students learn?

What do you think the qualities of a successful student are?

Learning and assessment activities.

How do you know if students have learnt something at school?

What kinds of activities do teachers give students to help with their learning?

Comment on how this direct question for Ugandan teachers will likely be received:
Do you carry any metaphors about teaching or learning that guide your practice?

[Interviewer’s reference only:
A petrol pump attendant who ‘fills’ the learner with ‘refined’ knowledge delivered by ‘textbook tankers’.
The teacher as a parent bird (regurgitator) who organises learning in digestible chunks for the learner chicks.
The teacher as a sculptor, moulding passive learners into the right shape.
The teacher as a watchmaker, building learners for a purpose.
The teacher as a gardener, where all growing is done by the student ‘plants’.
(Leach & Moon, 2008, p. 54).]

Roles and relationships.

How does the community perceive the role of a teacher? Valued/respected?

If you were to write the job description for a teacher, what would their role involve?

How would you describe the trust relationship between students and teachers in northern Uganda?

Discourses in educational settings.

What kinds of classroom rules did you have when you were a student at school?
Comment on how this direct question for Ugandan teachers will likely be received: What are your classroom rules? Routines? Traditions?

Tools and technologies.

What resources would you expect to find in a classroom in Northern Uganda?

Comment on how these direct questions for Ugandan teachers will likely be received: What resources do you have available to aid teaching and learning?

- Human resources:
- Non-human resources:

How do you put these resources to use?

Phase 3

Evaluation of the interview questions

How do you think Ugandan teachers will receive these questions? Will they be comfortable?

What are some ways to help Ugandan people relax so that they do not think an interview like this is threatening in any way?

Do you foresee any problems surrounding the use of the English language?
Appendix 3: Revised phenomenographic interview schedule

This is the interview schedule that was taken to Northern Uganda.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>INTRODUCING:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are Ugandan teachers’ experiences of children as learners?</td>
<td>Can you tell me about experiences of children as learners you have had?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do teachers describe their experiences of children as learners?</td>
<td>Do you remember a time when you were having such an experience(s)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do teachers conceptualise children as learners?</td>
<td>Could you describe in as much detail as you can an experience you think or thought was one in which a child was learning?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SAME QUESTIONS – DIFFERENT CONTEXTS**

**CONCRETE SITUATIONS BETTER THAN HYPOTHETICAL OR THEORETICAL QUESTIONS**

**WHY AND WHAT BEFORE HOW**

**MIX DIFFICULT AND EASY QUESTIONS**

**FOLLOW UP:**

**KEY ON INITIAL RESPONSES**

**PROBING:**

Could you say something more about…
Can you give a more detailed description of …
Can you think of any times when…

**SPECIFYING:**

What did you think then?
What did you (your class) actually do…

**INDIRECT:**

How do you think other teachers might describe experience of children as learners?
How would you describe an excellent learning experience?

**TOWARDS END OF INTERVIEW IF NECESSARY**

**DIRECT:**

Have you ever…
When you mention…do you then think…
Appendix 4: Ethics approval documentation

25 September 2010

Ms Alison Willis
PO Box 7044
Sippy Downs Qld 4556

Dr Bill Allen
Associate Professor Michael Nagel
Faculty of Science, Health and Education

Dear Alison, Bill and Michael

**Expedited ethics approval for research project: Perceptions of children and their education in Northern Uganda: Lessons from a traumatised community (S/10/284)**

This letter is to confirm that on 15 September 2010, following review of the application for ethics approval of the research project, *Perceptions of children and their education in Northern Uganda: Lessons from a traumatised community* (S/10/284), the Chairperson of the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Sunshine Coast granted conditional expedited ethics approval for the project. You have since satisfied the specific conditions of approval, and so can now commence your research.

The Human Research Ethics Committee will review the Chairperson’s grant of approval and the conditions of approval at its next meeting and, should there be any variation of the conditions of approval, you will be informed as soon as practicable.

The period of ethics approval is from 25 September 2010 to 17 May 2013. Could you please note that the ethics approval number for the project is HREC: S/10/284.

The standard conditions of approval for this project are that you:

1. conduct the research project strictly in accordance with the research proposal submitted and granted ethics approval, including any amendments required to be made to the proposal by the Human Research Ethics Committee (except as subsequently amended and approved by the Committee or approved by delegated authority exercised by the Chairperson or a Sub-committee)

2. inform the Human Research Ethics Committee immediately of anything which may
warrant review of ethics approval of the research project, including; serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants; proposed changes in the protocol; unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project; and a written report of any adverse occurrence or unforeseen event that might affect the continued ethical acceptability of the research project must be submitted to the Chairperson of the Human Research Ethics Committee by no later than the next working day after recognition of an adverse occurrence/event.

3. provide the Committee with a written Annual Report on the research project by 15 September 2011 and 15 September 2012, and on completion of the project on 17 May 2013 using the proforma “Annual Report on Approved Research Project Involving Humans”

4. If the research project is discontinued, advise the Committee in writing within 24 hours of the discontinuation.

5. make no change to the project as approved in its entirety by the Committee, including any wording in any document approved as part of the project, without prior written approval of the Committee for any change.

6. Comply with each and all of the above conditions of approval and any additional conditions or any modification of conditions which may be made subsequently by the Human Research Ethics Committee.

You are advised that failure to comply with the conditions of approval and the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans may result in withdrawal of approval for the project.

You are required to advise the Committee in writing within 24 hours if this project does not proceed for any reason.

Should you require an extension of ethics approval, please submit a written request for this purpose using the proforma ‘Annual Report on Approved Research Project Involving Humans’ (see Section 9).

An Annual Report on this activity will be due by no later than 15 September 2011.


Information provided to the Human Research Ethics Chairperson can go to the Research Ethics Officer via internal mailing (ML26), email humanethics@usc.edu.au, or in person (room B105 first floor B Block). If mailing then the address is Research Ethics Officer, Office of Research, University of the Sunshine Coast (ML26), Locked Bag 4, Maroochydore DC Qld 4558.
If you have any queries in relation to this ethics approval or if you require further information please contact the Research Ethics Officer by email at humanethics@usc.edu.au or by telephone on +61 7 5459 4574.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

Barbara Palmer
Manager, Office of Research
Appendix 5: Example of a coded interview transcript
child will come when sick. And sometimes we find a child lying on the road. From school, you think the child is at school. From home, you think the child is not there so she has gone to school. And yet in the real sense, the child is badly ill. So those are the challenges sometimes we get. And because another always reports to us, they say we find a child lying on the road, we have to take care. Sometimes when the school lacks the drugs for treating them, we find it is hard. When I, for example, if the ____ has gone for some work outside, it is very hard for the teachers to travel because we are only 1 teacher in the class. If a child is found on the road, the rest have to be remaining without anyone. And these are the challenges we have.

The number of teachers is not enough.

Because having a big class, 1 teacher in the class, you have to teach, control, give out the materials, give out the books, and the others are very stubborn. You stop now, you turn, they do the same thing. You stop now, you turn, they do the same thing. So you have to keep watching. You have to keep watching them. And I think you will find it delays your process of teaching. Because when you teach a word, then you have to stop everyone, you can’t again, and the teaching is not flowing.

And that’s because of big classes?

Uh ha. Unless if you have a co-teacher. When you do something they can help you controlling. If you have a co-teacher you will find your work will be easier.

So when you talk about parents not wanting to send their child so to school, is that because they want them to be home?

No. Naturally, especially in the village, people take digging (garden) being something very special because that is what they eat from.

So they keep the child home to dig?

Yeah. (Because of the war) Most of these parents are not educated and some of them simply don’t know the power of education. Most of
them think this child will help me in the future up to when I am old. And most of these kids are living with their grandparents or step parents, because the mother moves from one husband to another. Maybe the husband dies, maybe they take another woman. And the step father may not take much care of the kids that are not his. And other men will even rape their children because of ____. And you find the child is not properly cared for. Education becomes totally nonexistent to them. For example, today we had to send for two kids who ___, and we said, "What is wrong?" They said, "My dad is not there. They have not bought me any scholastic materials. And my mum is admitted with _____. So I am living with my eldest sister. And her girl is in P3-5 and is taking care of this situation. So they could not afford to come to school because they don't have resources. And I said, "Why didn't you come and tell us?" And they said, "No, teacher, I could not come because I have nothing to come with." I told them, "Tomorrow you shall be coming to school. We shall find a way forward for you. Because your parents are not there. And there is no way ______. And if you don't follow up and no one gives you a report about the child, it is why this child is failing. This is why I'm planning to go to some parents.

And what will you do to those homes?

I go to them. And for example, when a child has failed to come to school and no report is written. I have to follow up with the parents and find out why this child is not coming to school. If sickness, then I understand. If it is because the child doesn't want to come, we share with the parents and seek how to help this child.

So when you say the parents didn't have an education, they don't value it, they don't know what it's good for, is that because of the war? Why are some parents not educated?

Actually, if you look ____, this parent is not even bad because of the war. Like when I remember our grandparents used to tell us when we were young, they said for them in those days, especially for women or girls, they said that now your menstruation period has started, they want you to go and get married. And what their interest is that girls are just wed (to get the bride price). So the more girls you have the more $ you get. And so they only considered boys to get.
TEACHERS' CONCEPTIONS OF CHILDREN'S LEARNING IN NORTHERN UGANDA
Appendix 6: The mind map that served in the data reduction process
Appendix 7: Proposed phenomenographic interview schedule for understanding teachers’ conceptions of children’s learning in cross-cultural research contexts

The following research questions should undergo discourse analysis by way of pilot interviews to validate the appropriateness of the language in use. Language may be adapted to best suit the research context.

1) What are your experiences with children’s learning?

2) Is children’s learning dependent upon culture and family?
   a) Yes or No
   b) Why?

3) Is children’s learning dependent upon the education system?
   a) Yes or No
   b) Why?

4) Would you consider children’s learning to be fragmented or broken? Are there gaps in children’s learning?
   a) Yes or No
   b) Why?

5) Would you consider children’s learning to be hijacked or overtaken by distractions or stressors?
   a) Yes or No
   b) Why?

6) How does learning occur? How would you describe the process of learning?

7) Do you consider children’s learning to be instrumental in community development?
   a) Yes or No
   b) Why?

8) What are your hopes for the future?

9) Is children’s learning involved in your vision for the future?
   a) Yes or No
   b) Why?