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Learning to Listen: Children's Voices Guiding Change in Rural Vietnam

by

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Abstract

Although Vietnam has made notable progress in terms of economic development, the transition from a social to market-based economy has exacerbated education accessibility and availability for individuals who are living in poverty. In efforts to unearth the educational experiences and views of children who are affected by poverty, this study was conducted in Quang Nam province in Central Vietnam where the education of thousands of children has been inevitably affected by limited fiscal resources.

Despite the plethora of research on child poverty, only a small selection of this body of research focuses on the effects of living in poverty on education from the experiences and perspective of the child, and an even fewer amount of the research concentrates on the child's experiences and views within a rural Vietnamese context, where child poverty remains a pervasive issue. Therefore, an integral goal of this qualitative study is to analyze educational issues through the lens of the child by using constructivist and interpretivist approaches.

The results of this study demonstrated that children had pertinent suggestions for education improvement as they were given opportunities to exercise their agency. The children in this study proved to be valuable sources of knowledge where insightful experiences and views regarding child labour, household educational costs, information retention, applicability of knowledge, supportive pedagogy, and child-centred learning were shared. Research findings were placed in the larger context of development discourse and post-development theory to emphasize that in order for development initiatives within the education sector to be implemented in a sustainable and meaningful manner, the most pertinent voices need to be guiding the change: the children's voices.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Child-centred learning is becoming a wide-spread phenomenon around the world. As education stakeholders increasingly acknowledge that centralizing education around the student provides more benefits for learning, teaching, and education overall, efforts to engage children in essential decision-making processes, which is required for successful implementation of child-centred education, is still lacking.

With nearly half of its population consisting of children, Vietnam possesses a wealth of opportunity to involve children as critical co-constructors of knowledge within the education sector. Vietnam has also been recognized by the international community as having exponential increases in school enrollment with simultaneous reductions in poverty. Therefore, the country has been identified by development organizations, academics, and other education actors as the epitome of successful development. However, under more critical investigation, it is apparent that development has only been centred in urban hubs whereas rural areas of Vietnam still face extreme levels of poverty and dropping out of school remains a harsh reality for many children. Taking these factors into consideration, this study was thus conducted in the context of rural Vietnam in order to unearth the educational issues that children in poverty face within the country because they are often left marginalized in both development and education discourses. Highlighting the resourceful knowledge they possess combined with children's wealth of experiences in the education sector, this study emphasizes the need for children to lead education improvement specifically in rural Vietnam. By uncovering children's experiences and perceptions of education's role in their lives, teachers, educational administrators, government officials, development organizations, and other education stakeholders both locally and internationally are thus able to progress towards implementing truly child-centred learning through the eyes of the child.

Purpose of the Research and the Researcher's Position

In 2002, the Vietnamese government introduced a "child-centred" learning approach to the current curriculum and it would be useful to investigate how this is being implemented in Central Vietnam, where the number of children who are leaving school remains quite high, even though the national school enrollment rates are increasing. Since such a significant amount of the children in Central Vietnam

are leaving school, it would be beneficial for this study to include their perspectives on different aspects of education and to compare their responses to those children who are still attending school. Research such as this may serve as a useful resource for non-government organizations (NGOs) operating in Vietnam as they promote child-centred education. Although the government is making efforts to adopt a child-centred approach to education, the curriculum remains heavily centred on exams, and rote learning from text books is still highly prevalent in classrooms (Phelps & Graham, 2010). Even though school enrollment rates are increasing in Vietnam, this does not necessarily indicate that children are receiving quality education and a possible approach for determining whether they *are* receiving quality education is if research incorporates children's opinions and experiences with respect to schooling and learning. Including children's perspectives regarding their education can also enhance their willingness to learn as well as their sense of agency; respecting children as valuable sources of knowledge may also improve their overall attitudes towards learning and school.

Existing studies have emphasized the importance of including children's perspectives and opinions with regards to education and involving them in the research process instead of simply having them serve as research subjects, but few of these studies are performed in Vietnamese contexts. With such a large portion of the population under 18 years of age, children make up a significant amount of the population in Vietnam, and within this cohort, a significant amount of children live in poverty. If research were to incorporate these children's experiences and opinions, then suggestions for both local communities and NGOs (both international and local) can be made so when making efforts to improve the education system for these children, it will be approached from the most helpful and pertinent perspective: the children's. In 2010, a study conducted with *ChildFund Australia* in Northeast Vietnam uncovered the existing challenges children living in rural areas of Vietnam face with respect to their education. Lack of teachers, heavy workloads, and limited financial resources were just some of the issues that these interviewed children disclosed as factors which affected their education. A study such as this would be especially beneficial for individuals living in the region of Central Vietnam since a significant portion of the population experiences poverty and a large division of this cohort consists of children. This research will also be useful for school

administrators, local communities, and local government officials in Vietnam. By including perspectives of children who have dropped out of school, a deeper and more accurate understanding of why some children cease their attendance of school can be attained, especially because it is coming from the perspective of the child him/herself. To extend the usefulness of this study to international contexts, informative comparisons can be made between the perspectives of children in Vietnam to other parts of the world. Therefore, the benefits of this research will span local, national, and international borders.

There exists limited research on children's perspectives of learning and education in rural areas and an even fewer amount of this research pertains to Southeast Asian children who are living in rural areas. One-third to one-half of Vietnam's population consists of children who are under 15 years of age (Harpham, Nguyen, Tran, & Tran, 2005), yet there still exists a lack of inclusion of their educational perspectives and experiences. Since such a significant proportion of the Vietnamese population consists of young individuals, Vietnam remains an ideal place to conduct research which is incorporative of children's experiences of education and learning from their points of view. With regards to child poverty, although research suggests a high need for academic research to address child poverty in Vietnam because children make up a significant portion of the nation's population, there is still a deficient amount of research which in fact pertains to child poverty in Vietnam, let alone research that includes perspectives and experiences from the children's points of view (Harpham, Nguyen, Tran, & Tran, 2005). Although the body of literature is growing with regards to incorporating children's views in educational contexts, the literature is still scarce and a miniscule amount of this scarce research includes Vietnamese children's perspectives of learning and education overall.

A very limited amount of the existing research consults the perspectives of early school leavers in order to gain an understanding of their opinions regarding learning and education or to understand the underlying reasons of why they have dropped out of school. Therefore, this study not only incorporated the children's views of education and learning who were still attending school, but it also integrated the views of children who dropped out of school in rural Vietnam. It is critical that early school leavers' perspectives are included with regards to

education because one cannot assume that schooling is beneficial and meant for all children, and that it will provide them with the knowledge and skills that they desire and need for their futures. Therefore, to achieve a more holistic understanding of the benefits and purposes of schooling, it was essential to also acquire the opinions of children who have dropped out of school in this research.

There is a needed shift from acquiring quantitative information on child poverty to seeking qualitative data which focuses on the insider perspective of children's experiences. Like Feeny and Boyden (2004) mention, "there is a strong need to rework statistics from a child- focused perspective and also to create space for children's agency, not merely through the reporting of their visible occupational roles as child labourers or sibling caretakers in times of crisis (which is about as far as most people go), but in allowing them to tell us their priorities, strategies and aspirations" (p. 11-12). By conducting interviews with children and respecting their views on matters of poverty, education, and learning, children were able to develop their sense of agency as they were given opportunities to share their knowledge in this study. Too often it is assumed that children are not sure of what they want because of their age and/or level of development, but since they are the direct recipients of education, the incorporation of their perspectives and opinions should be sought. If children's perspectives and experiences are not a focus in education and learning, other individuals besides the children themselves will continue to speak on their behalf and children's voices will continue to be silenced. Grover (2004) also suggests that "the research process itself will continue to suffer due to children being but objects of study rather than collaborators in telling the story of their lived experience" (p. 93). Although research is starting to increase its inclusion of children's views, children should be provided with more opportunities to assume integrative roles in the research process instead of simply being subjected to roles in which they are merely "objects of study."

Currently, the Vietnamese education sector is witnessing two phenomena: an increasing presence of development projects that are aiming to enhance education delivery and the promotion of child-centred learning. Although the co-existence of these two phenomena are mandatory in order to improve education quality, the lack of inclusion of locals regarding educational changes that directly affect them will render the implementation and sustainability of development

education projects which embody child-centred learning to exist only in theory rather than in practice. Therefore, to help shift the existence of child-centred learning from theory to practice, the perspectives and experiences of children in rural Vietnam were explored in this study with regards to education, as the following research question was investigated:

> What are the experiences and opinions of children living in rural Vietnam about learning and education?

To address this complex question, sub-questions regarding children's specific experiences and opinions about school were examined, along with questions probing children's perceptions of whether and how education will affect them in the future. Then, responses of children who were attending school were compared to those of students who were not in school in order to see how educational change could occur in a manner which is more inclusive of early school leavers and their perspectives. The specific questions addressing these issues were as follows:

> a) How do children feel about their learning environment, teachers, workload, classroom resources, school subjects, and their relationship with peers?
>
> b) What are children's opinions about attaining an education; what do they see as education's role in their future?
>
> c) How do the opinions of children who are not in school compare to those children who are still attending school?

In order to further immerse the research in Vietnamese contexts, the following question was explored to examine the relevance and benefits of development education in Vietnam through the views of children:

> How can the experiences and perspectives of children living in rural Vietnam be incorporated in education projects and initiatives so that development education is implemented in a way which best serves the interests of learners?

Overall, the set of questions in this study helped emphasize the role of children as co-constructors of knowledge within the education sector, as it drew upon their specific experiences and memories of school.

Lastly, multiple personal connections to Vietnam and its culture have also inspired me to conduct this study within a Vietnamese context. Growing up with a

Vietnamese background has both exposed me to and immersed me in Vietnamese culture. Personal ties to the country, language, culture, history, and customs have seeded the incentive for this research to take place in a Vietnamese context. These personal connections to Vietnam were further enhanced after making multiple recent visits to rural Tam Ky in Quang Nam Province. During each visit, I volunteered with Vietnamese orphans as young as 1 week to 18 years old and in speaking to some of them about their educational experiences, I was able to view schooling through a completely different lens. Personal stories involving poverty, child labour, heavy workloads in school, over-crowded classrooms, and large family sizes were just some of the issues that the children named as factors which influenced their educational experiences. Taking this into consideration, some of these themes and issues mentioned by the children in Tam Ky have provided a foundation for which I have used to frame the design and purpose of this research. In order to limit my researcher bias and increase my objectivity in this study, I interviewed children other than the ones I was already acquainted with from my past visits to Tam Ky. Since I did not have any previous encounters with these children, I was not influenced by prior knowledge pertaining to personal aspects of their lives which thus facilitated a more objective approach to answering the study's research questions. Without previous personal connections to these research participants, I was more able to position myself as an unbiased researcher. Overall, my multiple ties to Tam Ky helped contribute to the setting of this study taking place in rural Central Vietnam.

Development and Poverty

Vietnam has been identified as having one of the highest population densities in the world. With a total of 80 million inhabitants, the country's population density remains at 225 persons per square kilometer (Corpuz, 2007). And out of these 80 million, approximately 16%, which is approximately 14 million people, still live in poverty despite Vietnam's considerable progress in alleviating poverty and inequity (Phelps & Graham, 2010). The country has made notable advancements in areas of poverty reduction, school enrollment rates, and health improvement. However, Swinkels and Turk (2003) assert that there still exist notable inequalities between the rural and urban areas in Vietnam and that these inequalities are increasing within the country despite the developmental gains

Vietnam has made in areas of health, education, food security, and gender equity. Although there has been an overall decline in poverty in the seven regions of the country, the rate of decline in poverty has not been evenly spread throughout these regions (Minot & Baulch, 2002; Swinkels & Turk, 2003), since the 80% of the country's population who live in rural areas still encounter high levels of poverty (Duggan, 2001). Rural areas of Vietnam thus not only experience less significant decreases in rates of poverty, which is an evident contrast to their urban counterparts, but educational development also remains less prominent in these rural areas in comparison to urban areas of the country.

Although Vietnam has recently achieved immense development, most of this development is concentrated in specific regions of the country, thus excluding other areas from partaking in or even benefiting from such national progress. The research identifies Central Vietnam as being one of the least developed areas in the nation especially since economic expansion has been centred in the Northern and Southern regions (Bautista, 2001; Burr, 2002; Minot & Baulch, 2002; Swinkels & Turk, 2003; Vo & Trinh, 2005). According to Bautista (2001), Central Vietnam also accounts for the most of Vietnam's poor, for although the region makes up 28% of the country's population, 37% of the nation's poor live in Central Vietnam. With such a significant portion of the country's population living in poverty that is concentrated in Central Vietnam, the region becomes an ideal setting for investigating how individuals' education are affected by poverty.

Within the Central Region, Quang Nam Province has been identified as one of the poorest provinces in Vietnam (Corpuz, 2007; Management of Strategic Areas for Integrated Conservation, n.d.), yet there is a lack of research dedicated to individuals' experiences of poverty and how this affects their educational experiences and views. According to the PRA Report (2006), "the combined sectors of agriculture, forestry, and fishery contribute only 30.9% of the provincial GDP. Compared to the rest of the country, the people of Quang Nam are relatively poor, with a GDP per capita of VND [Vietnamese Dong] 8.88 million" which approximately amounts to $425 USD (as cited in Corpuz, 2007, p. 7). Consequently, approximately 30% of Quang Nam's population is living below the poverty line (Management of Strategic Areas for Integrated Conservation, n.d.). Quang Nam is one of the poorest provinces among the 53 provinces in Vietnam (Corpuz, 2007), yet most of the

research that involves the prevalence of poverty in the province is based on forestry and agricultural contexts (Corpuz, 2007; Management of Strategic Areas for Integrated Conservation, n.d.). Since poverty is so prevalent in Quang Nam, the investigation of individuals' experiences of poverty in relation to other sectors, such as education, need to be conducted, especially since the Central region of Vietnam has some of the lowest school enrollment rates in the country (Edmonds & Turk, 2002).

The Vietnamese Education System

Until the mid-1990s, Vietnam's education system was segregated into four distinctive divisions: pre-school education; general education; vocational education; and higher education (Duggan, 2001). According to Duggan (2001), "the system was highly fragmented with general education consisting of primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education and vocational education with streams of secondary vocational and technical (lower and upper) education" (p. 194). Currently, the Vietnamese K-12 education system is structured as primary education consisting of grades 1-5 (ages 6-10), lower secondary education including grades 6-9 (ages 11-14), and upper secondary education with grades 10-12 (ages 15-17). With regards to the national curriculum, it is mainly based on textbook content, thus classroom instruction is also intrinsically based on textbooks. For example, "there is often more than one textbook for each subject and each lesson is locked into following the chapter sequence of each textbook" (Duggan, 2001, p. 195). With the curriculum having such dependency on textbook content, access to textbooks is essential in order for learning (Duggan, 2001). In fact, Duggan (2001) asserts that in 1997/98, students in years 6-9 needed approximately 50 text books for each year of school. As a result, such reliance on textbooks as a pedagogical tool poses issues for many students, especially for those students who cannot afford them.

Although provisions for reducing school fees or even waiving them are available for children in particularly difficult circumstances, such as children who are of ethnic minority, have a parent wounded during the US – Vietnam war, live in remote areas, live in extreme poverty, or are orphans (Belanger & Liu, 2008), such governmental financial support remains insufficient for some families to send their children to school because households are still faced with paying overwhelming school fees. Informal charges associated with school fees do vary depending on

whether families live in rural or urban areas and it also differs depending on the child's level of education, but families from low socio-economic backgrounds struggle to send their children to school as their children progress through their academic careers since the higher the school grade, the more the children's schooling will cost. Although poorer households have reduced school fees, they are still burdened with hidden costs associated with school enrollment which put a financial strain on their ability to send their children to school. Therefore, even though poverty alleviation has exhibited some success in Vietnam, it is evident that families with low income still struggle to send their children to school in comparison to wealthier families. Thus, it is critical to shed light on the educational views and perspectives of the children from some of these poorer households especially since they are most likely to be marginalized in these contexts.

Even though increases in school enrollment rates began to surface in 1975, when the unification of Northern and Southern Vietnam's education systems occurred, there were still stark differences in school participation between various populations in the country. In 1991, the National Assembly in Vietnam declared that primary school education (grades 1-5) would be compulsory and free, which led to an even greater inflation in primary school enrollment (Phelps & Graham, 2010). Later, in 1998, net enrollment in primary school, consisting of grades 1-5 was 91% and the net enrollment rate for lower secondary school, comprising of grades 6-10, was 62% in 1997 (Edmonds & Turk, 2002). However, it was noted that despite these increases in enrollment rates, children who came from impoverished backgrounds generally had lower enrollment rates at all levels of schooling during this time period and quality education still remained an issue since it varied depending on geographical region (Edmonds & Turk, 2002). Although enrollment rates are high, the quality of education remains a pertinent national issue across all grades. Compared to some other developing countries, Vietnam is making immense progress in many areas: poverty in Vietnam has been reduced by half over the 1990s, primary school enrollment rates are at 91%, improvements in gender equity have been achieved, there is a decrease in child mortality, maternal health has improved, and efforts to fight against communicable diseases have been enhanced (Swinkels & Turk, 2003); however, equal access to education and quality of education still remain pertinent issues that need to be addressed.

Although Vietnam has exerted commendable efforts to increase school enrollment rates, especially at the level of basic education, there are still major concerns with the quality of education that is being delivered to students. Therefore, Vietnam has now shifted its focus from the improvement of education in *quantitative* measures to *qualitative* ones (Hamano, 2008). In order to establish a monitoring system of education quality in Vietnam, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) considered using such measures of quality:

> The extension of the instruction time to full-day education; reforming the curricula and teaching methods; upgrading facilities; strengthening education management; professional development for teachers; establishing education and training facilities of international standard; and, expanding the use of information technology. (Swinkels & Turk, 2003, p. 19)

Although these criteria can somewhat serve as indicators of quality education, more clarity and consideration are needed in order to ensure that quality education can in fact be adequately measured with this criteria. For instance, simply because teaching extends to occupy the entire day does not necessarily indicate that the quality of education and/or teaching has also increased. Also, curricula reformation can lead to increased education quality, but more clarity needs to be provided as to *how* the curricula will be reformed. For example, whether the curricula would be altered so that it reflects both child-centred learning and teaching needs to be considered. Improving teaching methods would also be beneficial but how will it ensure that all these newly adopted strategies are instrumental in improving the quality of education? The solution is to ask those individuals who are most directly influenced by the delivery of such education: the children.

Multiple issues contribute to the hindrance of delivering quality education to students. Duggan (2001) notes that the quality of teaching in some areas of Vietnam still remains low. Duggan (2001) also attributes some of this low quality teaching to the nature of the national curriculum, for

> it is not based on a prescribed syllabus that sets out such criteria as student learning objectives and outcomes, approaches to learning and teaching strategies and scope and sequence frameworks setting out a plan for coverage of content, skills and problem solving tasks. Rather, the curriculum

> is based on students and teachers working their way through a large number of textbooks in a lock-sequenced series of lessons. (p. 208)

Therefore, subject syllabi are based on textbook content while class lessons are based on the rigid outlines developed from textbooks. Without being able to stray from a heavily textbook-dependent curriculum, teachers are limited in flexibility with regards to teaching methods and strategies which also restricts students' opportunities to engage in problem solving and integrated learning within the classroom (Duggan, 2001). As a consequence, the intrinsic emphasis on exams that is embedded in the Vietnamese education system often leaves teachers feeling restricted by material that needs to be covered on the exam and thus they feel coerced to cater their pedagogical practices to exam content instead of to their students (Duggan, 2001; Phelps & Graham, 2010). Thus, molding pedagogical practices to enhance student performance on standardized tests can consequently undermine the goal of achieving child-centred learning within the education system.

Despite the immense progress in school enrollment rates, many children are still marginalized in the Vietnamese education system which often leads to the termination of their schooling. The research unearths that only two thirds of the children enrolled in primary school in Vietnam complete their schooling (Swinkels & Turk, 2003). In addition, despite high national enrollment and literacy rates, these recorded percentages do not account for prevalent levels of overage enrollment among students, early dropout, and students' limited access to schooling (Duggan, 2001). In 1993, the school dropout rate in Vietnam decreased from 27.7% to 12.4% in 2002 (Vo & Trinh, 2005); however, although there have been notable decreases in school dropout rates, it is equally crucial to take note of the existing differences in dropout rates between different genders and age groups. The literature indicates that girls have a tendency to drop out at an earlier age when compared to boys and that school dropout rates vary across different age groups (Vo & Trinh, 2005). For instance, Vo and Trinh (2005) claim that "the age that saw the largest withdrawal from school increased from around 12 years old in 1993 to 14 years old in 1998 and 2002" (p. 26). However, even though most of the children who dropped out of school came from the primary education level in 1993, 1998, and 2002, when school costs were considered, it was evident that for a child aged 16, it was 3 times more expensive for him/her to attend school than it was for a child aged 9 (Vo & Trinh,

2005). Therefore, the cost of going to school is an especially influential determinant of why older children have higher dropout rates. Overall, Vo and Trinh (2005) suggest that in order for Vietnam to accomplish its educational development goals, "it is very important to understand the dropout trend and its causes" (p. 49), and what better way to understand the causes of children dropping out than asking the children themselves.

Throughout the research, there have been numerous identified reasons that are associated with children dropping out of school and such factors have been classified into individual, familial, and community levels of influence. On the individual level, the likelihood of dropping out of school could be attributed to the child's unique characteristics such as his/her age, time spent working, and personality (Vo & Trinh, 2005). On the familial level, possible contributory factors which can affect a child's decision to terminate his/her school participation involve the number of siblings in the family, parental education, household's per capita expenditure, and cost of schooling (Vo & Trinh, 2005). Vo and Trinh (2005) explain that household factors have an especially significant impact on children's enrollment in school. The researchers state that the more siblings a child has, the greater the likelihood that he/she will have of dropping out of school, especially if household fiscal resources are scarce. At the community level, the quality of education becomes a prevalent concern with regards to student retention. Vo and Trinh (2005) explain that "together with the parents' incorrect perception of and the community's attitude to education values, this may increase the possibility of children's schooling dropout" (p. 2). At the community level, "presence, proximity, and quality of local schools" are also considered factors which affect student school retention (Vo & Trinh, 2005, p. 17). Therefore, there can be many interacting factors interfering with a child's educational outcomes and without consulting the child him/herself, many education stakeholders may remain ignorant of the extent that these factors can have on obstructing children's learning opportunities.

Children's Social Roles in Vietnam

Vietnamese culture places significant value on respect and the level of respect one earns is heavily influenced by age, for younger individuals are expected to treat older individuals with significant amounts of respect. Vietnamese itself as a language exemplifies the magnitude of which Vietnamese people value respect

especially since "Vietnamese uses status pronouns that establish the relative positions of the speaker and the person addressed" and honorifics are embedded in the language to "indicate respect, formality, and a degree of unfamiliarity" (Bankston & Hidalgo, 2006, p. 28). Therefore, this sense of respect that is embedded in the language manifests the degree of respect that is valued in the culture and this honorific system establishes a hierarchy of social positions where children are situated at the bottom since it is intrinsic to the culture that children show respect to their elders; this may cause for little respect to be reciprocated in favour of the child.

Since traditional Vietnamese perspectives place children in such submissive roles in a social hierarchy, it makes endeavours to include children's perspective in educational contexts rather challenging. The social hierarchy of respect, with regards to titles, is also embedded in language that pertains to education. Therefore, this notion of respect is not strictly based on age alone. For example, in the Vietnamese language, the word *thay*, meaning "teacher," is also a signifier of respectful status because it can be used in the compound *thay giao* or *thay hoc* which means both "teacher" and "master" (Bankston & Hidalgo, 2006). Therefore, by having this inconspicuous level of respect embedded in the title of a school teacher, it subjects the student to a position of subordination in relation to the teacher. Bankston and Hidalgo (2006) further explain that

> because hierarchy is so important in Southeast Asian ideas of respect, treating those who are considered in higher positions on a hierarchy as equals is a serious form of disrespect and a source of conflict within many Southeast Asian families . . . Superiors of any sort, particularly teachers for children and adolescents, must be treated with signs of respect. (p. 30)

Since teachers are adults and possess an authoritative title in Vietnamese culture, children are especially expected to pay due respect to their educators which exacerbates the power imbalances that already exist in the student-teacher relationship.

When asked to share their perspectives on school, students often demonstrate reluctance in expressing themselves because they do not want to make it seem as though they are undermining authority. Phelps and Graham (2010) indicate that in interviewing Vietnamese students, "a deep respect for adults,

particularly teachers and parents, was quite evident across all interviews" (p. 93). During their interviews, children constantly emphasized the importance of obeying teachers and parents and how this was an institutionalized norm embedded in their schools which they were expected to adhere to. Even when children were asked to offer criticism or suggestions regarding school improvement, these children did so in a respectful manner such as reverentially critiquing their teachers' teaching methods (Phelps & Graham, 2010). As in Lundy's (2007) study, when asked to provide perspectives on their schooling experiences, students were concerned of being perceived as challenging teachers' authority. Placing teachers at such high levels on the social ladder consequently contributes to children feeling intimidated and unconfident in voicing their opinions regarding educational issues.

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) acknowledges development as a democratic and participatory process where each individual should have the opportunity to fully participate in community decisions and so children also have the right to become involved as co-constructors of knowledge in development initiatives. This way, hierarchies or power imbalances existing between local actors, such as those existing between adults and children, can be emasculated. Therefore, the democratic and participatory aspects of development, as outlined by the UNDP, need to be extended to the educational context in order to diminish the existing hierarchal gap between students and teachers.

Children, Poverty, and Education

Children do have distinct perceptions of self-agency that differ from adults' perceptions of child agency. While adults may assume that children lack both maturity and the capability of expressing their views in an effective and clear manner, children do in fact see themselves as having more agency than adults give them credit for. As a matter of fact, in Phelps and Graham's (2010) study, "children demonstrated a strong sense of autonomy, self-responsibility and agency" where a number of students willingly exhibited self-sufficiency outside of school (p. vi). Many children even "saw themselves – their ability to try their best and to pay attention - as the most important element influencing their learning success" (Phelps & Graham, 2010, p. vi). Therefore, children perceived their individual qualities and potential as primary justifications for their academic success in school.

The fact that children are able to rely on themselves in order to learn demonstrates their strong sense of agency and capacity.

There is often the assumption that children do not have the capacity to formulate constructive opinions regarding serious matters. Depending on a child's age and/or level of maturity, their right to express themselves may not be paid due respect. Since there is the perception that children are young and thus lack life experience in comparison to adults, their views may not be respected or even heard. Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) states that

1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. (as cited in Lundy, 2007, p. 927)

Therefore, according to this Article, a child's age and/or level of maturity do not serve as justified precursors of his/her ability to formulate an opinion (Lundy, 2007). Lundy (2007) notes that although the UNCRC provides children with opportunities to be heard, this sense of child agency is heavily dependent on whether adults are willing to cooperate. Lundy (2007) explains that "adult concerns tend to fall into one of three groups: scepticism about children's capacity . . . to have a meaningful input into decision making; a worry that giving children more control will undermine authority and destabilise the school environment; and finally, concern that compliance will require too much effort which would be better spent on education itself" (p. 929-930). Therefore, simply acknowledging the fact that an article such as Article 12 in the UNCRC exists is not enough; active efforts to ensure that children are involved in decision-making regarding matters that concern them must be implemented. Therefore, Lundy (2007) suggests that Article 12 of the UNCRC be interpreted alongside with Article 5 which states that "adults' right to provide 'appropriate direction and guidance' in the exercise by the child of the rights in the Convention must be carried out in a 'manner consistent with the evolving

capacities of the child" (as cited by Lundy, 2007, p. 939). Society has a legally binding obligation to respect children's views and this obligation also needs to be incorporated into sectors of education, since education delivery directly affects children and thus requires their input.

The UNCRC declares, in Article 28, that children have the right to education, but many children living in poverty encounter numerous obstructions to education attainment. For instance, when households are living in meagre conditions, the cost of schooling can become an overwhelming burden. As a consequence, many children from poor households are expected to terminate their schooling to attain jobs in order to help alleviate the effects of poverty on the household. The cost of schooling can thus prematurely shunt children from stages of childhood into adulthood, especially when children find themselves coerced to take on adult-like responsibilities at early stages in life when they leave school to enter the workforce to financially support their families, for example. As a consequence, their rights to live as children become undermined. Therefore, even though there are existing articles in the UNCRC which are in place to help protect the rights of the child, a more effective way of gauging whether children's rights are being respected or not is to ask the children themselves. For example, Article 32 states that

> State Parties recognize the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development. (UNICEF, 2006)

Although Article 32 promotes children's overall well-being and access to education, some children are still coerced to sacrifice their schooling in order to help contribute to household incomes. Therefore, having these articles in place is critical to ensuring that children and their rights are respected, but a necessary step to investigating as to whether these rights are actually being realized is to involve children in critical decision-making processes which affect them so we can hear from their points of view whether their rights are being respected or not.

Significant amounts of research are conducted regarding child poverty, but only a limited selection of this body of research embodies the perspective of the child and his/her experiences of poverty. Feeny and Boyden (2004) state that "there is still far too little understanding of how a child experiences poverty, what

impoverishment means to them, or how their perceptions/priorities interact with those of local communities and the agendas of international agencies" (p. 1). Although more literature is starting to incorporate the perspective of the child, there still needs to be more emphasis on children's roles as "social and economic actors in the struggle against poverty" (Feeny & Boyden, 2004, p. 1). Research that focuses on child poverty tends to "treat children as attributes of the family rather than a unit of observation in themselves," thus children's personal experiences of poverty are masked by familial experiences, and so, the families' voices are misconstrued as the children's voices, leaving the children's views unheard (Feeny & Boyden, 2004, p. 9). Although children's roles in society are becoming more established, their contributions to society are still ignored or undervalued by other individuals, for children's contributions and roles still remain overshadowed by those of adults.

Theoretical Frameworks

Local Representation through Development Discourse and Post-Development Theory. Although *development* itself was and still remains an ambiguous term, endeavours to modernize specific parts of the "developing world" through urbanization and industrialization often ignore the cultural or social contexts of developing countries. Therefore, different conceptions of development existing between cultures and languages are often completely overlooked, and instead, target populations for development such as people in rural Africa, Asia, and Latin America end up being subjected to Western notions of development instead of constructions of development which are locally relevant to them (Dahl & Megerssa, 1997). The UNDP (1991) refers to *development* as a concept which

> establishes that the basic objective is to enlarge the range of people's choices to make development more democratic and participatory. These choices should include access to income and employment [and that] each individual should also have the opportunity to participate fully in community decisions, and to enjoy human, economic and political freedoms. (UNDP, 1991, p. 47 as cited in Abdi & Guo, 2008)

Development, based on this definition provided by the UNDP, emphasizes the criticality of incorporating local perspectives in the process of development in order for development to intrinsically benefit individuals who are targeted. However, although local experiences and views are identified as essential for locally

"beneficial" development, the active engagement of local individuals required for participatory development to take place is still lacking in many projects implemented by various organizations.

De Senarclens (1997) warns about the dangers of basing development projects on Western constructions of development especially because when it comes to establishing whether a country is developed or not, the criteria that is employed is irrelevant for these non-Western countries. Also, the fact that a country can be simply categorized as *developed*, *developing*, or *underdeveloped* brings up numerous questions: Who determines which category a country falls into?; What criterion are used to establish this?; Are these criterion accurate in determining which label a country adopts?; And is it even possible to make a clear-cut distinction between these categories by slotting individual countries into each classification? To some extent, every country is both simultaneously developed and developing, is it not? Therefore implying that certain countries require aid to implement projects so that they reach some benchmark of development insinuates that the Western world will bring development to developing parts of the world, thus assuming that the notion of development originated in European and Euro-American parts of the world (Abdi & Guo, 2008).

As a result of the West's dominant views of development and development discourse, development itself has been stripped of its cultural components and "universally applicable technical interventions" have been instead implemented in parts of the world where international aid organizations feel they are needed. Escobar (1997) thus asserts that "it comes as no surprise that development became a force so destructive to Third World cultures, ironically in the name of people's interests" (p. 91). Even though the emphasis for participatory development has become more prevalent, such as the UNDP's conception of structuring development using local frameworks, there is still a power imbalance with regards to development initiatives where foreign ideologies and strategies drown out local voices. With the increasing influence of the Western world on the shaping of development in developing countries, space for inclusion of local perspectives diminishes and so when development projects do not accomplish what is expected, a likely explanation can be attributed to the fact that there was a lack of local input on framing development in terms of local contexts.

Historically, there was the belief that modernization was the only solution to driving "Third World countries" towards development (Escobar, 1997) and remnants of this theory still linger in today's development projects that are occurring around the world. For example, with discourses on development and modernization, it is inevitable that one will come across discussions of per-capita gross national product (GNP) as an indicator of the well-being and standard of living of individuals and populations (Latouche, 1997; Tikly, 2004) instead of consulting local communities themselves for indications of development. Latouche (1997) asserts that "the methods used in the [GNP] calculations are too arbitrary and they reduce social reality to its purely economic aspects" (p. 135); simply because a nation or population's GNP is high does not necessarily signify that the quality of life of those individuals is also high. When intrinsically relying on GNP measures to gauge and determine quality of life and development, it is problematic since all production and all expenditure is interpreted as having positive outcomes, when in reality, there can be negative consequences that are not taken into consideration when determining the level of development a country undergoes based solely on GNP calculations (Latouche, 1997). Basing a country's growth and advancement strictly on economic terms assumes that any increase in GNP contributes to its development, when in reality, although the country's GNP is increasing, it could be, for example, experiencing hidden instances of exploitation or financial foreign debt. Also, restricting indications of development solely to fiscal precursors undermines the influences of cultural, social, and political factors on a country's level of growth.

When development discourse revolves mainly around economic frameworks, which is evident with the prevalence of attributing a country or population's degree of development to its GNP (Latouche, 1997; Tikly, 2004), the resulting development culture that is constructed consequently devalues the humanistic aspects of development such as the relationships people have with each other and their environment. The notion of wealth itself is subjective so it does not have to relate to strictly fiscal values in determining the level of development a country has achieved. For instance, N'Dione, de Leener, Perier, Ndiaye, and Jacolin (1997) provide alternatives for the definition of wealth to include the level that people are able to immerse themselves in their natural and spiritual environment or the quality of the relationships they establish with others in their society as opposed

to having wealth be determined by objects or purchasing power. Also, when restricting the definition of development to economic contexts, it fails to acknowledge the subjective meaning that wealth can possess. Some individuals may not see their lack of monetary assets as an indicator of poverty (Black, 2007), nor may they perceive it as a lack of development, so concepts such as wealth and development need to involve other interpretations that are not solely restricted to fiscal definitions. Lastly, confining development within financial frameworks presents another issue in that it makes it seem as though non-Western countries have regressed in their path towards development. Black (2007) states that "in 1980, the debts of the developing world stood at $660 billion; by 1990, they had more than doubled to $1,540 billion" (p. 25). Based on these fiscal measures, if development is depicted in terms of economic terms, then it is obvious that these countries are *not* developed and have strayed further away from reaching a "point of development." Although these countries may have progressed developmentally in other terms, essentializing development strictly to economic contexts subjects these countries to adopting labels of being "undeveloped" or "underdeveloped."

Another result of subjecting developing countries strictly to fiscal indicators as determinants of their level of development is that these countries encounter restrictive paths towards development which epitomizes materialism and consumerism as the only solutions to reaching their desired goal of becoming a "developed" country. According to Escobar (1997), "the advance of poor countries was thus seen from the outset as depending on ample supplies of capital to provide for infrastructure, industrialization, and the overall modernization of society" and since these countries were perceived as suffering from "vicious cycles" of poverty and lack of capital, it was determined that much needed capital had to come from abroad and that "it was absolutely necessary that governments and international organizations take an active role in promoting and orchestrating the necessary efforts to overcome general backwardness and economic underdevelopment" (p. 86). As a consequence of overemphasizing the economic aspects of development, some countries felt compelled to enhance their capital in order to achieve predetermined levels of development, according to Western standards, by relying on foreign actors' resources. Therefore, as international actors take increasingly active roles in development strategies, the perspectives and experiences of

individuals in developing countries remain obfuscated and eventually ignored in any discussions involving development.

Although many development projects and strategies involve children as their target populations, rarely are children themselves consulted or involved in the decision-making processes which affect them. The lack of incorporating children's views and experiences also resonates with international institutions' development projects and strategies. Institutions such as the World Bank have a reputation for imposing its conceptions of development on countries that are set out to seek its financial aid instead of co-constructing meanings of development with local populations. As a consequence of the lack of local input, resources are used in inefficient and ineffective ways which do not benefit local communities as they should. Spring (2009) discloses that

> a large percentage of the World Bank's education funds are used for the purchase of educational technology . . . [where] between 1997 and 2001 that 75 percent of the World Bank-financed education projects included ICT [Information and Communications Technology], education technology, and education management information systems along with courses being taught over the internet as part of distance learning. (p. 48)

Financial resources should be directed towards other investments that would be more likely to help learners by consulting the learners themselves to see what would be most effective in helping them learn. Without consulting the local poor, a "gap between things done in the name of 'the poor', and what they themselves think should be done" is established since "their voice is insufficiently heard in the development discourse however much lip-service is paid to 'participation'" (Black, 2007, p. 29). Therefore, many organizations conveniently attach the label of "participatory development" to their projects without truly adopting strategies to actively engage local individuals in development initiatives where these individuals receive opportunities to assume roles as co-constructors of knowledge.

The lacking inclusion and contributions of local actors as co-constructors of knowledge are especially pertinent in educational contexts. In 1972, UNESCO developed a report on lifelong learning that was sponsored by the International Commission of the Development of Education called *Learning to Be: The World of Education Today and Tomorrow* and it determined that in order to promote lifelong

learning, basic education needed to include: learning to know; learning to do; and learning to be. In these efforts to promote lifelong learning, "learning to know" involved "a broad general education based on an in-depth study of a selected number of subjects [which would] provide the foundation for the ability and the desire to continue learning" (Spring, 2009, p. 70). However, would asking children about their perspectives and experiences in learning and school not also help and possibly may be even more effective in encouraging the desire to learn? According to Spring (2009), "learning to do" relates to the development of "work skills and the acquisition of 'competence that enables people to deal with a variety of situations often unforeseeable . . . by becoming involved in work experience schemes or social work while they are still in education'" (p. 70). However, are skills that children want to learn being taught? What if they want to learn skills that are required by a specific profession which is not taught in school? All these questions exemplify that the incorporation of children's views is critical for designing an education system which truly encourages lifelong learning. It is imperative that education systems mold to fit learners' needs instead of having students mold to meet the demands of the system. Therefore, local perspectives are critical for development initiatives, especially within the education sector.

The Consequences of Ignoring Local Perspectives. When discussing concepts of development and implementing development strategies, more often than not, the most critical perspective is the one that is sought last: the local perspective. Even when it is realized that the most sustainable and lasting method of implementing these development strategies is by basing the initiatives on local lifestyles and views, and allowing for local people to assume some form of control over these projects, these details are only recognized after "expert advice" is sought (Rahnema, 1997) and these "experts" rarely accurately represent local voices. According to Elabor-Idemudia (2002), "the development 'experts,' including academic researchers, tend to promote development programmes that conform to top-down, core-periphery, centre-outward biases of knowledge that afford no conceptual space for the ideals and perceptions of the poor and disadvantaged" (p. 228). Since conceptions of development and growth are subjective, the true "experts" who should assume authoritative roles in the implementation of development projects should rest with local actors. Therefore, Elabor-Idemudia

(2002) opines that

> [grassroots people in developing countries] are able to give their own accounts of what is happening in their lives, what their needs are, what they are doing, what they can do and what they intend to do about their issues . . . Yet many well-meaning development programmes have undermined local peoples' ability to control their own lives and have instead made them the targets of exploitative patriarchal economic systems. Most conventional approaches to development implemented by Western 'expert' researchers and their local counterparts in non-Western 'developing countries' have tended to restrict access to knowledge, especially by the poor, and, at the same time, have neglected to help poor, grassroots peoples to articulate their experiences to the outside world. (p. 227)

The exclusion of local perspectives and this obsession with resorting to foreign "experts" with regards to development results in the establishment of a knowledge-based hierarchy of power where local indigenous knowledge is inferior to Western knowledge. Without including the vision, ideas, opinions, and experiences of local people in the development that is to take place in their own community, exclusionary practices become inevitable since this type of development will exclude "the largest number of people from the processes which serve the interests, the good and the power of the few . . . [thus resulting in the creation] of poverty and exclusion, when it is redistribution that should take precedence" (N'Dione et al., 1997, p. 368). Therefore, the question of whom this "development" is truly being implemented for becomes a pertinent issue.

Education, Development, and Neocolonialism. When discussing education for development, or *development education* as Abdi and Guo (2008) term it, the focus tends to centralize on developing countries although the authors argue that "the case may not always be clear as to who is to be developed, what is development, especially as an inclusive concept and practice, and how one would be certified as developed" (p. 3). Abdi and Guo (2008) define *development education* as a form of education that is inclusive of "all forms of learning that induce in the lives of people better livelihood possibilities that give them more choices and chances in relation to their world" (p. 4). When education is discussed in development discourse and mentioned as a leading factor to "Third World development," usually

formal education assumes a central position in the discussion. Without acknowledging informal and non-formal education, it implies that these forms of education do not provide countries with the same level of developmental benefits or capacities as formal education. As a result, informal and non-formal education are delegitimized and devalued even though they are also forms of development education.

Education is often seen as a tool which provides individuals with the skills and knowledge needed to participate in the market economy (Tikly, 2004; Zerbo, Kane, Archibald, Lizop, & Rahnema, 1997). Consequently, when education is depicted mainly as a tool for development, developing countries invest resources into education in the hopes of their investments will result in some form of economic return. When the benefits of education are strictly centred on the idea of providing individuals with a means of developing in economic terms instead of personal development, education loses its intrinsic value. Modernization becomes something associated with education which devalues traditional forms of knowledge or any form of knowledge that does not result in the development of skills which mold an individual into a competitive contributor to the market economy. Reducing education's value to solely economic contexts also patronizes the relationship between students and educational institutions to that of a strictly producer/consumer nature. This approach to education conceptualizes education as an instrumental commodity and Zerbo et al. (1997) argues that this conception of education is evident in all the "educational strategies" in development discourses. Therefore, in order to evade such fiscal interpretations of the benefits of education, local perspectives and experiences, especially those of students, need to be incorporated into the education system. If built from a grass-roots perspective, education will not only make more sense for the local people it is meant to serve, but it will also be more beneficial for them, especially since it is built from their personal experiences and views.

The value and advantages of education should not be attributed to the sole belief that it leads to economic development. Instead, education should be valued in terms of the opportunities it provides an individual with for personal development. Post-development theory immerses the notion of development in cultural, social, and political sectors that extend far beyond economic contexts, but when education

is stripped from its intrinsic value to become an instrumental tool for helping individuals attain employment opportunities, development consequently becomes centred on modernization that is void of humanistic qualities. The International Commission of the Development of Education, *Learning to Be: The World of Education Today and Tomorrow*, specifically states that education should not be seen as a means to an end where individuals are motivated to learn strictly based on future employment opportunities that their education would earn them especially since it would reduce schooling to a "joyless and boring activity" (as cited in Spring, 2009, p. 68). Instead, the Commission suggested that students should be motivated by learning to learn. Education should thus be centred on the goal of developing the whole person instead of educating individuals based on the needs of the labour market. In order to encourage children to be more motivated to learn for the sake of learning, education should be designed through their perspectives and experiences. If education is trying to be structured in a way which is most intriguing for the students themselves, then why not resort to their input on re-shaping development education? UNESCO itself includes in its plan for development education participatory decision-making where learners are given opportunities to influence decisions on how they are to learn so that development efforts are locally relevant (Spring, 2009). Therefore, as demonstrated by UNESCO, it is crucial that local perspectives, especially those of students, are actively sought and included in development projects pertaining to education.

Education's benefits extend beyond financial ends since education can expose individuals to more opportunities for enhancing their agency as well as increase their life choices and chances for improved livelihood. *Education*, according to Illich (1997), is "the awakening awareness of new levels of human potential and the use of one's creative powers to foster human life" whereas *underdevelopment* "implies the surrender of social consciousness to prepackaged solutions" (p. 97). Education is meant to unravel individuals' new levels of human potential and creativity in multiple aspects, not just through the delivery of formal schooling. However, when one notion of development education is applied to various developing communities, then one simplistic understanding of schooling is adopted and imposed on local individuals, even though other forms of education other than the formal kind can lead to the development of human potential and creativity.

Using formal education for the sole purpose of implementing development in a community may lead individuals to believe that the development encouraged by modern education is the only form of development that will result in an enhanced quality of life even when that is not always the case. For example, modern schooling can instill "alienating values, attitudes and goals," and it may also cause students to "reject or even despise their own cultural and personal identity" (Zerbo et al., 1997). Consequently, Zerbo et al. (1997) argue that children's immersion in modern education may cause students to "acquire a false sense of superiority which turns them away from manual work, from real life and from all unschooled people, whom they tend to perceive as ignorant and underdeveloped" (p. 159). Over-emphasis on modern education as a development tool, with very narrow definitions of development, can lead to an increased cultural gap between individuals in a population. As a result, target populations which development education is meant to "revive" may reject the implementation of such education. According to Abdi and Guo (2008), these cultures may perceive these efforts as possessing disenfranchising qualities which exposes their children to "a world where development education is formal and school-based, and requires already agreed-upon skills that pertain to the dominant project of modernity where tests, credentialization and accreditation are the sine qua none of employment and economic liquidity" (p. 5). Instead, the authors advocate for the "creation of critically less isolationist systems of learning that infuse a lot of culture and related attachments of the indigenous paradigm to actual arrangements" (Abdi & Guo, 2008, p. 5). In creating more inclusive spaces where education and learning are not framed solely in the formal sense, students are able to feel more welcome in their learning atmosphere where their individual backgrounds are not only acknowledged, but also respected.

School systems introduced to colonized countries during the colonial era became one of the main tools used to develop the colony. Depicted as such, education and schooling were presented to the marginalized as "the answer to all the problems of their 'underdevelopment'" (Zerbo et al., 1997). Education had thus become the panacea to the society's problems. However, in reality, schools "fostered unprecedented processes of exclusion against the poor and the powerless, despite their claims to serve as a new instrument of democratization" (Zerbo et al., 1997, p.

158) and such exclusionary practices in the education system are still evident today. Zerbo et al. (1997) note that students who do successfully attain an educational degree end up leaving their homes to pursue careers in bigger cities, therefore, "the poor and the excluded pay the cost of an educational system that . . . deprives them of any possibility of educating themselves" (p. 159). Therefore, given that the poor have to support a system that excludes their perspectives and experiences and remains inaccessible to them exemplifies that marginalization of the poor still is embedded in educational practices. Therefore, although education is seen as occupying a central role in poverty reduction (Tikly, 2004), it instead has increasingly limited the agency of the poor since it does not incorporate their experiences and voices in the discourse of development education. In order to shift from the exclusionary tendencies of colonial schooling systems, education projects that are implemented in developing nations need to incorporate local perspectives so that marginalization can be mitigated and potentially eradicated while an inclusive space that promotes the incorporation of local voices can be established.

Education occupies a central role in development discourse and the dissemination of imperialist and/or neocolonial motives. Tikly (2004) explains that education "only serves to reinforce the new imperialism through further limiting the capacity of low-income countries to determine their own educational agendas" which has led to "mechanisms of poverty-conditional lending, poverty reduction strategies and international target setting," thus contributing to a relationship between lending and borrowing countries that is based on dependency and incapacity (p. 190). A specific example provided by Tikly (2004) to exemplify the imperialistic nature of education draws on the predominance of Western text books, materials, and other resources which disseminate the Eurocentric perspective of education across the globe. Therefore, in order to return power to the hands of the local people, educational resources need to be based on their perspectives, opinions, and experiences. The most effective way of mitigating the prominence of educational imperialism is by including local students' perspectives with regards to education and learning and acknowledging that they too are producers of knowledge. That way, learning resources can be constructed from local students' views and opinions instead of from Eurocentric perspectives.

Student experiences and perspectives can differ from region to region, and from school to school, therefore one cannot assume that educational change occurs uniformly throughout the country and that is why it is especially crucial to involve children as co-constructors of knowledge since, as the direct recipients of education, they have the resources to highlight improvements that need to be made for their respective schools and school districts. Involving children in key processes of regional educational change also prevents the implementation of one model for change for a spectrum of differing regions from occurring. Education improvement thus is directed by local actors who are most knowledgeable about their own contexts which limits the likelihood of power imbalances from occurring between nations, or even between regions, since each region has the power to shape educational change in a manner which is most sustainable and suitable for itself.

Critical Definitions Adopted by this Study from Development Discourse. Terminology regarding the distinction between Northern and Southern countries based on their level of "development" often poses issues. According to Black (2007), "all terms used to denote countries needing 'development' have shortcomings. Axis descriptors- developing/developed, non-industrialized/industrialized, rich/poor- are crude and value-laden" (p. 16). However, Black (2007) acknowledges that "North" and "South" are often preferable labels since they are associated with fewer debilitating connotations. Even though utilizing labels such as North and South still poses issues, Black (2007) uses these terms in various contexts, "in full recognition that none [are] satisfactory" (p. 16). Similar to Black's (2007) approach, this study adopted the terms *developing* and *developed* to more easily facilitate comparisons within development education discourse even though there was acknowledgement that these terms were limited and ambiguous in fully depicting a country's level of advancement.

To clarify the ambiguity within educational contexts, Ghosh (1995) explains that educational programs may be generally classified into three main categories, but are not limited to the following: *formal education*, where learning opportunities are formalized and school-based; *informal education*, where knowledge is attained randomly through social situations; and *non-formal education*, which includes the development of specialized skills that are used by companies, institutions, etc. (as cited in Abdi & Guo, 2008). Ghosh's (1995) distinctions of the three main

classifications of education were pertinent to this study and thus employed in this research.

In this study, whether participants were living in poverty or not was determined with the help of two local informants. These individuals were asked to help identify which children were living in poverty since they were familiar with the local demographic and they were knowledgeable of which contexts would be considered as living in poverty for individuals in Tam Ky, Quang Nam in Central Vietnam. Therefore, definitions of "poverty" in this study were determined by the informants themselves.

For the purposes of this study, an individual was referred to as a *child* as long as he/she was under the age of 18, for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) classifies all individuals under 18 as children (as cited in Feeny & Boyden, 2004). And a child was considered as an early school leaver if "he/she did not continue his/her schooling given he/she had enrolled at least part of the last schooling year" (MOET as cited in Vo & Trinh, 2005, p. 25). Since Vo and Trinh (2005) note that this definition provided by the MOET is not inclusive of children who do not continue to attend school after completing a grade, which can lead to the underestimation of the number of students who drop out of school in Vietnam, I extended the MOET's definition of an early school leaver to also include children who have completed a grade, yet have terminated their overall school attendance.

Lastly, I used the VLSS's (Vietnam Living Standard Survey) definitions of *child labour* in which child labour consisted of both traditional and household work. For instance, if the child worked for pay outside of his/her household, worked for his/her household for agricultural purposes, or worked for his/her household through forms of self-employment or a household-run business, then it was considered *traditional work* whereas *household work* was considered as "chores such as cleaning, cooking, washing, shopping, collecting water or wood, and building or maintaining the house, its surroundings, or furniture" (Edmonds & Turk, 2002, p. 7). The definition of child labour for this study was also adapted from the UNCRC where work that is mentally, physically, socially, or morally dangerous and harmful to children and interferes with their schooling is considered as child labour (UNICEF, 2006). Therefore, if children participated in any form of work that was

detrimental to them in any way, regardless of whether it was traditional or household work, it was classified as child labour in this study.

The Overall Impact of Theory on the Design and Significance of this Study. With the collective influence of development discourse, post-development theory, neocolonialism, and imperialism, this study aimed to embrace a notion of development that embodied more than just a fiscal definition especially with respect to educational contexts. This study was designed in a manner that expanded on the idea of education to include formal, non-formal, and informal forms of learning in order to avoid the hierarchal construction of evaluating different forms of education where formal education tends to be perceived as the only form of learning that provides individuals with lucrative future opportunities and is thus conceived as more valuable than other forms of education. By applying broader definitions to education and framing development in terms of personal development and not just development that is based on fiscal definitions, it restores the intrinsic value to education. Therefore, the process of educating an individual for the individual's needs instead of for the labour market's needs requires the involvement of the individual in critical decision-making processes within the education sector.

Development discourse, post-development theory, neocolonialism, and imperialism have led me to involve locals in this study who are directly affected by development education. I chose to solely involve child participants in this research because they were most directly affected by the delivery of educational services. The lack of using local children's views and experiences to spearhead education improvement is equivalent to resorting to foreigners as "experts" of development initiatives even when they remain ignorant of the direct effects of what individuals experiencing such development are going through. Therefore, not involving children in developing "child-centred" learning is the equivalent of development organizations not consulting locals in development initiatives.

Chapter Two: A Review of the Literature

The focus of this chapter is to introduce existing literature that involves overlapping themes with those that are presented in this study. Bridges between the concepts, themes, and findings between this study conducted in Tam Ky, and research performed in Vietnam and all over the world can thus be constructed.

In addition to the influence that the existing literature had on the design of this study, my discussions from past visits with the children in Tam Ky also helped frame this research. Previous encounters with the children provided me with an idea of what educational issues children faced in rural Vietnam. Therefore, these children's perspectives and experiences were also used to frame this chapter. Overall, an overarching review of the literature helped direct this research as it also served as a reference for comparing this study's findings.

Being Educated in Vietnam

Moving from Traditional Forms of Education to Child-Centred Learning.

Vietnam's education system is witnessing changes which are slowly adopting more child-centred approaches to learning. Traditionally, Vietnamese educational practices have focused on curriculum content that was centred on "rote memorization, passive learning approaches and print-based knowledge from text books" and immense weight was placed on exams (Phelps & Graham, 2010, p. v). With regards to the traditional education system, "learning" specifically referred to learning which took place at school or referred to school work being taken home to complete (i.e. homework) (Phelps & Graham, 2010). New changes in the Vietnamese education system now promote a broader understanding of learning which incorporates knowledge production that takes place outside of school as well as within educational institutions; however, Phelps and Graham (2010) found that Vietnamese children whom they interviewed still defined learning in terms of traditional contexts where "learning" referred solely to academic forms of knowledge production and "only through extensive discussion and prompting did children come to understand the broader definition of 'learning,' as occurring in and out of school" (Phelps & Graham, 2010, p. 96). Therefore, as post-development theory stresses, the consequences of portraying education as a strictly formal activity that mainly occurs in institutions renders forms of informal and non-formal learning as undervalued within traditional conceptualizations of education.

In 2002, the Vietnamese government decided to adopt more "child-centred" approaches with regards to education. These approaches are known as Active Teaching Learning (ATL) and contrasts with traditional pedagogies (Phelps & Graham, 2010). These approaches have also been officially mandated in Vietnam's 2005 Education Law (Article 5) which states that "methods of education must bring into full play the activeness, the consciousness, the self-motivation, and the creative thinking of learners; foster the self-study ability, the practical ability, the learning eagerness and the will to advance forward" (as cited in Phelps & Graham, 2010, p. 16). According to these amendments in the Vietnamese education system, it would seem that children are being encouraged to enhance their personal development through their participation in the education system since there is less emphasis on passive learning and more focus on engaging the student as active learners. Thus, with more involvement of students in their learning, they are less likely to be marginalized, which is especially crucial for low socio-economic communities where the poor often find themselves excluded from development discourse.

Efforts to make curriculum more relatable and coursework more bearable for students demonstrate that improvements are being implemented in the best interests of the student. School textbooks have also undergone revision in order to reflect the government's approach to child-centred learning. According to Hamano (2008), textbooks are including more pictures to make them more engaging for children and redundancy in information in textbooks from multiple subjects have been reorganized so that it is clearer for children to understand. Improvements to the curriculum have led to greater manifestations of child-centred learning in Vietnam, but more can be done to fully implement child-centred education across the country.

Although Vietnam has made efforts to adopt more child-centred approaches to education, there are still some adjustments that can be made to make the system more inclusive of and sensitive to children's perspectives and experiences, especially for those children who are affected by poverty. The national curriculum and teaching practices in Vietnam remain heavily content-based where rote memorization assumes a significant component of learning. A significant amount of the research indicates that teaching in the Vietnamese context is focused on content delivery and an emphasis on memorization as a learning method remains prevalent

in school classrooms (Duggan, 2001; Hamano, 2008; Phelps & Graham, 2010; Vo & Trinh, 2005). As for the Vietnamese school curriculum, Duggan (2001) notes that it is overloaded with subjects for students to learn, for "students received instructional programmes in up to 13 subjects in a school day that amounted to no more than 4 hours, 5 or 6 days a week" (p. 194). Therefore, students are expected to learn and retain all this information from an overwhelming number of subjects all within a very short time frame since their school days are so short. Education that was truly child-centred would be cognizant of children's learning capacities and therefore would avoid overwhelming them with school material. The success of such child-centred education would also be intrinsically dependent on the adoption of teaching methods which encourage students to participate and engage in the classroom.

Preparing Teachers for Educational Change. In order for the successful implementation of child-focused education, Hamano (2008) suggests that teachers need to learn both new content and teaching methods which are supportive of this child-centred approach, which in turn, will help enhance the quality of education in Vietnam. Since new subjects have been introduced into school curricula, teachers need to be provided with sufficient opportunities to engage in training and professional development so that they can gain more experience and knowledge regarding these new subjects such as music, physical education, and art (Hamano, 2008). Hamano (2008) also notes that "the teaching content of major subjects has been significantly increased for every grade" and so "gaining knowledge about these new contents and studying educational tools for this end will be a great challenge [for teachers]" if they are not provided with proper training and professional development (Hamano, 2008, p. 402). Teachers do not receive many opportunities to partake in in-service training or professional development and this is taking a toll on the provision of quality child-centred learning in classrooms across the country (Phelps & Graham, 2010). The traditional method of teaching in Vietnam involves rote memorization which requires students to adopt passive learning roles and attitudes, and although teaching strategies have been known to be inflexible and teacher-centred instead of child-centred (Vo & Trinh, 2005), conscious efforts to promote child-centred learning are still being pursued to benefit Vietnamese students. The Vietnamese government is making endeavours to alter education

provision so that it is more considerate of and participatory for students, but in order for these changes to be successful, teachers need to also be provided with enough resources to implement child-centred practices in the classroom. Therefore, development agencies need to involve teachers as well as students in education initiatives because provisions of child-centred learning involve teachers as key actors in order for this kind of learning to be effective.

Changing teachers' existing attitudes and beliefs regarding educational change is another issue that surfaces in the literature. There is the suggestion that much of the content taught to students in classrooms is heavily dependent on textbook material because teachers feel pressure from parents and/or guardians regarding children's performance on final exams where exam content tends to be based on textbook material (Saito & Tsukui, 2008). Therefore, teachers feel compelled to engage in "one-sided lectures" and require students to partake in memorization and rote learning. In order to gain an insider perspective regarding teachers' values, attitudes, and beliefs in relation to teaching, learning, and students, Saito and Tsukui (2008) attended various teacher meetings at five different schools in the Bac Giang province in Vietnam. The researchers discovered overlapping commonalities between the meetings in that they were centred more on teacher perspectives instead of on the incorporation of students' views of education, even though efforts made by the government to promote child-centred learning have already been implemented across the country. In conclusion, Saito and Tsukui (2008) determined that "changing teachers' beliefs regarding how to conduct lessons is very time-consuming" because "teachers tend to be largely interested in teaching methods, failing to pay adequate attention to the reality of student learning" (p. 582). Therefore, if teachers are provided with the appropriate education, skills, and tools to implement child-centred learning in their classrooms, "the reality of student learning" can become less daunting and more tangible. Although the Vietnamese government has mandated child-centred learning as a national priority, without the support of teachers, child-centred learning in classrooms will be an insurmountable challenge.

The Influential Role of Children's Environments on Learning

How Children's Learning and Schooling Environments Shape their Education. A child's learning environment is another factor that has intrinsic effects

on his/her learning outcomes (Arghode, 2012; Baker, 1999; Fredriksen & Rhodes, 2004; Ogundokun, 2011; Phelan, Davidson & Cao, 1992; Phelps & Graham, 2010). Ogundokun (2011) acknowledges the critical role schools play in children's educational development and progress since "schools are systems in which the environments is just one of many interacting pedagogical, sociocultural, curricular, motivational and socio economic factors" (p. 323). Ozay, Kaya, and Fatih (2004) also mention physical variables such as temperature and air quality, noise, lights, and colour as being especially influential on students' academic performance (as cited in Ogundokun, 2011). In addition, when Phelps and Graham (2010) asked children to identify improvements that needed to be made to their schools, children tended to name physical aspects of school such as enhanced sanitation, cleanliness, and building conditions in general that influenced their well-being and happiness at school. When further prompted by the researchers, the children explained that they would want cleaner washrooms and learning environments, classrooms equipped with more resources, more plants and trees, and better building conditions for their schools (Phelps & Graham, 2010). In general, the literature recognizes that students learn better when they have positive perceptions and attitudes towards their learning environment and it is also apparent from the existing literature that multiple factors need to be considered when understanding children's perceptions of their environment.

Learning through Social Interaction. Since schools are also places for social interaction, networking, and connecting, a child's learning environment also contains social components which can influence his/her education. The relationships a child establishes within his/her learning environment also have immense significance on his/her educational experiences and views. For instance, a child's peers form an integral component of his/her learning environment. Peers often serve as a crucial learning resource for children since children are able to consult peers for academic help (Phelps & Graham, 2010) and many children even identify friends as the main motivating reason for coming to school (Montandon & Osiek, 1998). In fact, some students even share that their level of participation in class depends on the number of friends that are present with them because with more friends surrounding them, the more confident they feel in participating in class. Therefore, emphasizing the role schools play in fostering social interaction

between children can thus restore the humanistic qualities between children and their learning environment instead of having students perceive schools as settings where they attain an education as a means to a fiscal end.

The development of relationships in school has been mentioned numerous occasions by students throughout the research as an influential factor which affects their education. Whether it be with teachers, peers, or parents, student participants in various research studies from all over the world have mentioned that these relationships they establish with these people in their lives have had immense effects on their learning. For example, when interviewed about the relevance of a teacher-student relationship to learning, students "observed that they learned best when they had a strong relationship with their teacher, when teaching made them feel excited about learning and gave them space to grow and understand and when teachers treated them with care and respect" (The Alberta Teachers' Association, 2003, p. 35). Children had a tendency to enjoy school more when they had a close relationship with their teachers because they truly felt cared for as unique individuals (Phelan, Davidson, & Cao, 1992; Phelps & Graham, 2010). Lastly, students also expressed that they valued teachers talking to them as adults because it enabled them to establish a closer relationship with their teachers while also allowing themselves to feel more respected and heard (Phelan, Davidson, & Cao, 1992; Phelps & Graham, 2010). Students thus enjoy feeling connected to teachers by establishing relationships with teachers that extend beyond that of a strictly teacher-student nature.

Parents also play an integral role in students' lives and depending on their level of support, it has certain outcomes on their children's learning and academic achievement. Phelps and Graham (2010) found that most of the children attending school in rural Na Ri, Vietnam reported that their parents assumed relatively active roles in their school through the forms of attending parent meetings and completing voluntary work on school buildings and grounds. When parents exhibited such involvement with their children's school, the children shared that they quite enjoyed it. Although some students indicated that their parents were too busy to be involved with the school, a vast majority of student participants specifically mentioned the value of their parents getting involved with their schooling because parents would be better able to help them with their studies at home (Phelps & Graham, 2010).

Although sometimes parents were not always able to get involved with their children's education or with the school itself, when they were able to do so, it was evident that children felt more satisfied since their parents were making efforts to participate in their education.

Overall, students' responses regarding the significance that relationships have on their learning highlights that the process of learning is a social activity in and of itself (The Alberta Teachers' Association, 2003). Relationships play an integral role in influencing students' educational experiences and attitudes. As a result, when students have supportive relationships with teachers, peers, and parents, they are better connected with the social capital required to engage in meaningful active learning.

Teachers as Integral Components of Children's Learning Environments. Researchers conducted studies in various parts of the world investigating what students valued most in relation to their education and students constantly emphasized the importance of having helpful teachers with effective teaching methods as a significant factor in influencing their attitudes towards and progress in school (Montandon & Osiek, 1998; Phelan, Davidson, & Cao, 1992; Phelps & Graham, 2010; The Alberta Teachers' Association, 2003). Students reiterate the criticality of having a caring teacher, for some students find that "a caring teacher can help to reduce loneliness and isolation- conditions that work against involvement in learning" (Phelan, Davidson, & Cao, 1992). With "low-achieving students," caring teachers play an especially integral role in their academic progress since these teachers can help them overcome personal matters outside of school in order for them to refocus on long term goals within school and life. In a study conducted by the Alberta Teachers' Association (2003), students not only identified teachers' significant impact on their academic lives, but they also commented on how caring teachers were able to inspire them in life outside of school. The report produced by the Alberta Teachers' Association (2003) identified teacher-student relationships as an integral factor affecting students' experience of learning. In fact, Albertan students identified having a good relationship with teachers who engaged them in active forms of participation in the class as equally important as learning itself. Although it is significant to note that there are differences in children's educational experiences and views across the world, there are still stark similarities in what

children value about various aspects of education.

Teachers' pedagogical practices and methods also seem to possess a universal significance on affecting children's learning, especially within the classroom. Since rote learning is such a common phenomenon in Vietnam, it was not surprising that the children in Phelps and Graham's (2010) study stressed the need to memorize and how such passive learning affected their educational experiences. The children stated that they struggled to memorize information from their textbooks which was consequently detrimental to their academic performance at school. Therefore, upon hearing what children are opining about learning strategies and teaching practices, teachers can gain insight on how to involve different aspects of children's learning environments as a part of their pedagogical methods, instead of relying so heavily on textbooks, in order to enhance children's academic involvement in the classroom. In fact, Phelan, Davidson, and Cao (1992) found that when classroom activities were varied, "when students [participated] actively, and when a variety of pedagogical methods [were] employed, students [reported] a high level of interest and engagement, regardless of the subject" (p. 700). Thus, when a variety of engaging pedagogical practices are employed, children feel more engaged in their learning instead of viewing the learning process as a passive process where information is absorbed from textbooks through memorization.

Teachers play a significant role in exposing students to learning methods which best facilitate learning. After conducting a study in Na Ri, Vietnam, Phelps and Graham (2010) observed that teachers did not seem to provide students with "process-based support" such as methods to help them memorize or recall information, even though memorization and recalling are emphasized in the Vietnamese schooling system. In fact, "several children spoke of difficulties they had learning their work (or textbook) from heart, and that they subsequently didn't do well in their tests" (Phelps & Graham, 2010, p. 63). Children stated that memorization through repetition and practice helped them learn, but at the same time, they said that they sometimes struggled to memorize information which caused their academic performance to suffer. Therefore, teachers' helpfulness towards their students' learning depends on how they can support their students in the classroom such as being able to provide students with a spectrum of learning

experiences which allow children to adopt various learning strategies other than memorization.

For students who are at risk of dropping out of school, teachers play an especially influential and crucial role since high quality student-teacher relationships have buffering effects for at-risk students who are struggling academically (Hughes, 2011). Muller (2001) explains that for at-risk students, "perceptions that teachers care may be a function of access to learning" so students "may perceive teacher behaviour that supports access to instruction as caring," especially if these students are at risk of dropping out of school (p. 252). The research suggests that the quality of school staff, especially teachers, has strong associations with children's school success (Behrman & Knowles, 1999; Lee & Burkam, 2003). In fact, Lee and Burkam (2003) discovered that "students attending schools defined by more positive student-teacher relations were less likely to drop out than those who attended schools with less positive student-teacher relations" (p. 381). Teachers played such an influential role on students and their educational experiences that Lee and Burkam (2003) went as far as to associate children's enrollment in school to the extent of how positive their relations with teachers were and the researchers re-emphasized the significance of positive student-teacher relationships on school enrollment even after students' background, school demographics, and school sector were taken into account. Consequently, if teachers disfavour students who do not academically perform as well as their classmates, then this may cause these at-risk students to develop repulsive dispositions towards school and learning which can cause them to drop out of school.

Children's dispositions are inevitably influenced by their teachers. A reoccurring issue within the literature was with children's perceptions of teachers' knowledge of subject matter and how depending on teachers' knowledge of school subjects, it encouraged students to progress academically or to become disinterested in school. When teachers were perceived to have inadequate knowledge regarding subject matter that they were responsible for teaching, students found it more challenging to understand what was being taught to them (The Alberta Teachers' Association, 2003). Overall, it is evident throughout the research that students value teachers who have comprehensive knowledge of school subject matter while also being able to explain this subject matter in ways which are

comprehensible for students. When teachers do not demonstrate such knowledge of school subjects, students are more likely to develop disengaging attitudes towards school and lose interest in learning (Phelps & Graham, 2010).

Teachers need to learn to listen to students by not speaking *for* them but speaking *with* them (Cook-Sther, 2006). Acquiring children's educational perspectives and experiences is not only advantageous for the children, but there are also benefits for teachers. For example, after asking for descriptive feedback from students regarding pedagogical practices, Rodgers (2006) found that teachers started seeing students and their learning as a priority instead of seeing teaching, self, and the curriculum as holding central roles in education. Teachers thus began prioritizing students' learning over covering curriculum content. Consulting students for educational suggestions therefore has the power to lead to the development of truly child-centred learning. In this case, after consulting children's educational perspectives, the teachers in Rodgers' (2006) study turned a pivotal point and instead of putting themselves in the focal position of teaching and learning, they prioritized their students. This development of a collaborative partnership between teachers and students establishes resourceful, knowledgeable communities within schools. Therefore, teachers and students can rely on each other in order to collectively improve education delivery. In fact, in Rodgers' (2006) study, teachers felt "great relief when they [realized] that they [could] ask their students about their experience and their needs rather than having to figure everything out on their own" (p. 229). After teachers received feedback from students, Rodgers (2006) disclosed that teachers started perceiving students as partners who had equal share in power since students were seen as having the capacity to mold their learning according to their experiences and thus establish an active role in shaping their own education. Then when teachers started basing their pedagogical practices on students' feedback and suggestions, a sense of trust started developing between students and teachers. Children's suggestions for education improvement do not necessarily conflict with teachers' interests, in fact, more often than not, students' views of education improvement coincide with those of teachers, which is why student-teacher collaboration can enhance the likelihood of constructive change occurring within the education sector.

Using both teachers and students as sources of knowledge for educational change can also provide development agencies and organizations with valuable resources that can best support locally sustainable development education initiatives. By having teachers make an effort to understand where students are coming from as learners and educational partners, development organizations could replace existing power imbalances within the student-teacher relationship with the cooperation of resourceful educational actors that can lead to the establishment of optimal learning environments for all individuals involved in the education sector.

The Effects of Family Size and Composition on Children's Education

In addition to the obstructions children may face at school in regards to their education attainment, many children encounter even more complications at home that may impede their learning opportunities. The size and composition of a child's family have also been mentioned in the literature as factors affecting children's education even though there is mixed evidence in the research to support whether larger family sizes have debilitating effects on children's education or not. Although Gomes (1984) argues that larger family sizes are more beneficial for children's education attainment, since parents tend to fund the older children's education and by the time the older children are able to work they can then fund the younger children's education, the majority of the literature provides evidence to support the idea that a child's family size does have debilitating effects on his/her schooling (Belanger & Liu, 2008; Buchmann & Hannum, 2001; Desai, 1995; Downey, 1995; Hollander, 1998; Knodel & Wongsith, 1991; Truong, 1998; Truong, Knodel, Lam & Friedman, 1998). Downey (1995) notes that "across a variety of samples, methods, subgroups, and educational outcomes, individuals perform better when they have fewer brothers and sisters" (p. 746-747). However, Hollander (1998) observed that family size was only associated with worse educational outcomes when the family had six or more children. Due to the spectrum of findings that exists regarding the effects of family size on children's education, there is debate as to whether the number of siblings a child has truly does affect his/her educational outcomes or not.

Much of the literature supports the notion that family size has an inversed negative effect on children's school enrollment and a reoccurring mechanism that is used to explain this phenomenon is known as the dilution effect, where as the number of children in a household increases, the household resources available for

each individual child consequently decreases. Downey (1995) discovered that parents with large families still had fewer resources for each child in the household in comparison to parents from smaller families even when parents shared a number of common characteristics such as education level, income, and race. Truong, Knodel, Lam, and Friedman (1998) state that "both unadjusted and adjusted results show that, generally, family size is negatively associated with finishing primary school, entering the secondary level, and finishing upper secondary school, although the association is considerably weaker once other predictors are taken into account" (p. 65). Similar to the results attained from this study, Knodel and Wongsith (1991) assert that there are multiple determinants that influence a child's education attainment other than family size, including "demographic characteristics of the child, social and economic characteristics of the family, and accessibility to schools" (p. 123). Even after considering these other factors though, Knodel and Wongsith (1991) still declare that it "is a plausible mechanism by which family size becomes an important determinant of the schooling that parents provide for their children" (p. 128). Therefore, it is notable to mention that family size affects children's education attainment but it affects different households in various ways.

Although there are mixed conclusions regarding how influential the number of siblings a child has, or sibship size, is on his/her schooling, the trend in the research discloses that, in general, the greater the number of siblings a child has, the more detrimental it is for his/her education. Interestingly though, Desai (1995) states that "[a]lthough an increase in the number of siblings increases the competition for parental resources, it will have a substantial negative effect on children only if parents bear the primary responsibility for providing resources to their offspring" (p. 196). Therefore, if households have extra external fiscal support, the costs associated with school will be perceived as less of a burden for parents. Overall, it is evident that more instrumental efforts need to be made by the government in order to support households which cannot afford to send their children to school, especially because educational costs now fall on individual households due to Vietnam's shift from a socialist to market economy.

The Consequences of Limited Fiscal Resources on Children's Schooling

Vietnam transitioned from a socialist to market economy in the late 1980s and part of the existing literature attributes this change to the reason for shifting the

burden of financing education from the state to households (Behrman & Knowles, 1999; Belanger & Liu, 2008; Truong, Knodel, Lam, & Friedman, 1998). Now that households are held mainly accountable for school fees, this cost shift has increased inequity in access to primary and secondary education, with clearly detrimental consequences resulting for poorer households (Lee, 2002 as cited in Belanger & Liu, 2008). When Vietnam still followed socialist policies, schooling was free and "accessible to all" for grades K-12 prior to 1989 (London, 2006 as cited in Belanger & Liu, 2008). However, after the Doi Moi process, which was characterized by Vietnam's economy shifting from a socialist to a market-based economy, school fees were implemented and labeled as a household expense which placed a debilitating financial strain on families, for even textbooks now came at a cost for students when they used to be free (World Bank, 1995 as cited in Truong, Knodel, Lam & Friedman, 1998). Belanger and Liu (2008) elaborate on the extent of this financial strain on households by explaining that "total expenditure on education, as measured by the VLSS, includes money spent on school registration, tuition, private tutoring, extra classes, contributions to the parents' association, school building fund, examination fees, special events, uniforms, purchasing or renting textbooks, school supplies, transportation, lunch and other expenses" (p. 53). Therefore, Belanger and Liu (2008) depict the costs involved in educating one's children as a "relatively comprehensive measure" although "it does not include indirect non-official payments" which can be quite substantial, especially when a household already faces a scarcity in financial resources (p. 53). The fact that educational costs increase immensely as children ascend the educational ladder to higher levels of learning simply exacerbates the inequity of access to education, especially at the lower and upper secondary levels. For instance, Belanger and Liu (2008) provide insight on the extent in which school fees have increased for each school grade by stating that, for the year of 1997-1998, "the average increase [in school fees] within each school level was 4.8% in the primary school years, 17.5% in the lower secondary school years, and 13.3% in the upper secondary school years" (p. 53). In their research, Belanger and Liu (2008) also discovered that for 1997-1998, the poorest Vietnamese households spent an average of 60% of their non-food budget for a child in lower secondary school, while the richest households spent 30% of their non-food budget. Once again, children from poorer households find themselves

marginalized in the education sector which is why emphasizing their voices and experiences is especially crucial when making efforts to achieve child-centred education. When implementing development education initiatives, organizations must also be aware that those living in poverty are especially marginalized in development discourse (Elabor-Idemudia, 2002) and so it is critical to acknowledge, respect, and include their perspectives and experiences in such development initiatives, especially if these initiatives are going to be sustainable for and sensitive to locals' needs.

Entering the Workforce as a Child Labourer

Child labour is a persistent problem in Vietnam, although there has been a significant decrease in the levels of child labour in the 1900s (Edmonds & Turk, 2002). Edmonds and Turk (2002) associate this decline in child labour mainly to improvements in living standards, but children living in the Central Highlands region of Vietnam did not seem to benefit from these improvements that took place during the 1990s. For instance, Edmonds (2001) documents that the probability that a child works in agriculture, a family operated business, or wage employment dropped by 28% between 1993 and 1998, but similar declines in child labour were not reflected in the Central Highlands during this period (as cited in Edmonds & Turk, 2002). Since the Central Highlands of Vietnam has been identified multiple times in the literature as being a region which is especially affected by poverty (Corpuz, 2007; Management of Strategic Areas for Integrated Conservation, n.d.), a significant amount of children make up the labour force in this region, and thus, these children often find themselves withdrawing from school in order to attain jobs so they can help financially support their families (Edmonds & Turk, 2002). Edmonds and Turk (2002) found that regardless of the form of work that children found themselves involved with, as long as they were participating in some form of work, whether it was outside of the household, in a household-run business, or within the household, these children had statistically lower enrollment rates than their counterparts who were not involved in the labour force.

When children are involved with work, it tends to come at the price of their education. Belanger and Liu (2008) discovered that "all other things being equal, children involved in paid work were approximately four times more likely to leave school, compared with those not working for money" (p. 59). This is not to say that

working and schooling are mutually exclusive, since even if some children work, they may still have opportunities to attend school, but work may limit their energy and available time that they could dedicate to school. Therefore, their involvement with the workforce may be debilitating to their education since it can affect their readiness to learn and their alertness in the classroom. Regardless of the fact that improved living standards have allowed children to work less in Vietnam (Edmonds & Turk, 2002), due to the costs of school and its unaffordability for some households, children are still forced against their will to take on jobs and drop out of school in order to help support their families. Edmonds and Turk (2002) concluded that "[t]he evidence from qualitative and quantitative work is that children still working are doing so because their families are too poor to support the basic needs of the family without the economic contribution of the children" (p. 48). Children today in Vietnam thus contribute a significant amount to the household income at the cost of their education.

Often in development discourse formal education is epitomized as a panacea for underdevelopment and lack of growth since it is depicted as a tool for helping individuals attain lucrative future employment. However, for many children living in poverty, the costs associated with attaining a formal education can be the very reason for their involvement with the workforce at early stages in their lives. For example, if families are unable to afford schooling for a child and/or for his/her siblings, the child may be forced to drop out in order to help contribute to the household income in order for his/her family to afford other life necessities and/or so his/her family can pay for the siblings' schooling. After dropping out of school, children may be more likely to be exposed to non-formal and informal education but if formal education is over-emphasized as the only option for development and lucrative fiscal returns, the knowledge that these children gain from forms of learning other than formal education become undermined even though they may be more applicable and useful in children's daily experiences outside of school. It is also noteworthy that although formal education is viewed as a means of providing individuals with employment, it can be the very reason why children are forced to enter the workforce at an early stage in their lives, even against their will, simply because their families cannot afford the costs associated with formal education for their siblings. In addition to the effects of poverty, some children find themselves

especially marginalized within the education sector based on uncontrollable factors working against them such as their gender.

Being a Female in the Vietnamese Education System

There is much support in the research that provides evidence for the idea that gender also plays an influential role in affecting children's education, especially within the Southeast Asian context. The literature tends to demonstrate that girls tend to have a lesser likelihood of attending school (Behrman & Knowles, 1999; Belanger & Liu, 2008; Hollander, 1998; Knodel & Wongsith, 1991; Truong, Knodel, Lam & Friedman, 1998). Belanger and Liu (2008) disclose that "in all age groups, girls have a higher probability of interrupting their schooling than boys" since girls' education is more sensitive to household characteristics, such as income level and level of education the head of the household has received, in comparison to boys' education (p. 58). At almost every level of schooling, boys have a greater likelihood of enrolling in school when compared to their female counterparts. For instance, the results of Hollander's (1998) study provided evidence to support the notion that as the age of children increased, the likelihood of them attending school would decrease and between the ages of 10-18, males were approximately twice as likely as females to be enrolled in school. Within the age bracket of 10-18, Truong, Knodel, Lam, and Friedman (1998) determined that male children are definitely more likely to enroll in school than females. As a consequence of girls encountering more challenges with school enrollment, the schooling of girls is treated almost as a luxury and less of a necessity than is the schooling of boys (Behrman & Knowles, 1999). Overall, the literature provides evidence to support the idea that girls face more challenges when it comes to acquiring an education in comparison to boys.

Chapter Summary

The Vietnamese education system is actively trying to adopt more child-centred practices in teaching and learning but a critical element is being excluded from the discourse of education improvement: the children. There is also an increasing presence of development organizations in Vietnam that are planning to improve education delivery in the country even though they fail to consult local children, teachers, and other education stakeholders. Given that there are a plethora of factors which can affect a child's learning, schooling, and educational experiences, and each child is influenced by these factors in unique ways, it is essential that

children are especially involved and respected as valuable sources of knowledge for the implementation of quality child-centred education. A child's learning environment; teacher, peer, and familial support; family size; household income; and gender are just a few contributing factors which can influence a child's education. Therefore, without the consultation and engagement of children in shaping their own education, the effects of these factors on their education attainment and experiences may be underestimated or even overlooked.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This research took a qualitative approach which provided a number of benefits for this study. Qualitative research facilitates the inclusion of informative and detailed descriptions that provide an insight to individuals' social constructions instead of relying on numbers and formulae (Sarantakos, 2005). The empathetic tendency of a qualitative approach to research also encourages the perception of participants as individuals who should be understood instead of measured (Sarantakos, 2005). Therefore, the research participants are not stripped of their individuality while their views are intrinsically valued as critical sources of knowledge. For this specific study, this perception of the participant helped contribute to the child's overall sense of agency. Qualitative research also enables the individual's context to be incorporated into the study so he/she is not isolated as a separate entity from his/her environment, culture, and society which was essential for this study because these were all influential factors which shaped the individual's experiences and perspectives of education. Since qualitative research "values subjectivity and the personal commitment of the researcher," it encouraged me to perceive the participants as subjects who had active roles in the research process as opposed to serving as passive objects that were observed (Sarantakos, 2005, p. 45). Therefore, participants had more opportunity to engage in the research process as co-constructors of knowledge, which was a central goal of this study.

The small-scaled nature of this study also allowed for the in-depth analysis of each participant's experience and perspective with regards to learning, schooling, and education in general. The participation in this study focused more on suitability from a smaller sample size rather than representativeness with a larger sample size. In addition, including larger sample sizes in the study would have detracted from an in-depth analysis of the data and it would have limited each individual's opportunity to express what he/she wanted to, given the resources that I had to conduct this study. Lastly, the inductive nature of a qualitative approach to research also allowed me to move from specific data that was collected to more general themes which could provide guiding implications for the directions of child-centred education to take place in the Vietnamese context.

"The central principles of [qualitative] methodology could be taken from . . . a *constructivist ontology*" (Sarantakos, 2005, p. 37) which was especially pertinent

for this research since children were depicted not only as actors in shaping their learning but also as co-constructors of knowledge in the field of education. Constructionism, or constructivism, is based on the theoretical basis that reality is constructed and thus considered as subjective since meanings in reality are affirmed based on individuals' interaction with the world. Constructivist theory interprets the individual's role as one which is very active and participatory since the individual is constantly extracting and formulating meaning from his/her "experiential world" which allows for the formulation of multiple "truths, representations, perspectives and realities" (Murphy, 1997, p. 8). Since this theory acknowledges the individual's capacity to use interpretations of and experiences in his/her surroundings to contribute to the formation of knowledge, it suited the aims of this study to unearth the opinions of children in rural Vietnam regarding their educational experiences.

Constructivism contends that everyday reality is a constructed reality in that each individual interprets it in a unique manner, thus giving rise to multiple subjective realities. Therefore, "impressions of reality gained by researchers who listen to respondents talking about their lives are constructions of the constructed reality of respondents; they are impressions of a reconstructed reality" (Sarantakos, 2005, p. 37-38). Since meanings arise from individuals' interactions with the world, constructivism served as a crucial theoretical foundation in this study because it facilitated a meaningful comparison between the perspectives and interpretations of children who have dropped out of school and children who were still in school, especially since each cohort of students experienced different "realities" (i.e. either from being in school or having left school). This theory also acknowledges that there is no one set of reality that exists. Hence, given that "interpretations vary from one person to another, constructed realities are not uniform" (Sarantakos, 2005, p. 38). Therefore, not only were comparisons of interpretations and perspectives possible between the two cohorts of children, but comparisons between individuals in each cohort based on their personal experiences and encounters in the world were also feasible with the use of constructivism.

Constructivism also acknowledges that cultural and social factors affect individuals' constructions of knowledge and interpretations of experiences. Social constructivism especially emphasizes social and cultural influences on the formation of knowledge and interpretations by stressing the impact of socialization on

individuals (Sarantakos, 2005). Therefore, both the individual and his/her culture are acknowledged as having influential roles in the interpretation and construction of knowledge and experiences. Social constructivism especially portrays reality as being based on both cultural constructions and personal experiences. This research study not only focused on the individual child's experiences and perspectives, but it also considered how socio-cultural factors affected children's understanding of education's role in their future. In addition, education was inseparable from social and cultural contexts, thus demonstrating why social constructivism served as an ideal bridge between how individual and socio-cultural factors influenced children's educational experiences and interpretations of learning and schooling.

Interpretivism also served as a pertinent theoretical framework for this study. According to Crotty (1998), "interpretivism, as the framework within which qualitative research is conducted, 'looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world'" (as cited in Sarantakos, 2005, p. 40). Therefore, interpretivism allows for the investigation of cultural and social influences that shapes individuals' perceptions of their surroundings. Hence, using interpretivism facilitated the exploration of education on multiple levels in this research; this also allowed the opportunity to examine how socio-cultural structures constructed the child's role in society and how this affected his/her experiences and views in educational contexts. In this research, individual experiences and perceptions were not and could not be isolated from cultural and social influences, therefore, basing the study's theoretical foundations on interpretivism and constructivism enabled for cultural, social, and individual formations of knowledge to be accounted for and incorporated into the study itself. The interpretivism embedded in qualitative research also allowed for investigations into what children understood as education's role in their future along with how children felt about attaining an education to be analyzed.

Since qualitative research is subject-centred, and it "describes life-worlds 'from inside out', from the view of the subjects" (Sarantakos, 2005, p. 44), the use of qualitative methods enabled the research questions of this study to be answered as closely as possible through the points of view of the participants. Adopting this aspect of qualitative research thus allowed for children to delve into how they felt about their learning environment, teachers, workload, classroom resources, school

subjects, and their relationship with peers.

Even though research validity remains a prevalent issue in qualitative studies, this specific study adopted a number of tools, strategies, and processes to mitigate complications associated with gaining research validity that are often associated with qualitative studies. According to Johnson and Christensen (2012), research validity refers to "the correctness or truthfulness of the inferences that are made from the results of the study" (p. 245). In qualitative studies, validity, or "trustworthiness," is often difficult to assess since most evaluative strategies used to determine a study's validity are associated with quantitative research; however, the trustworthiness of this qualitative study was ensured through 4 critical processes: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Descriptive validity and interpretive validity were both sought by having participants review what had been transcribed, analyzed, and concluded with regards to their interview responses. To further increase interpretive validity, low-inference descriptors were also employed so that descriptions and views of participants were represented in the research report as closely to the participants' accounts as possible. Mechanical recording devices were also originally going to be used in order to record participant responses in verbatim so that responses could be referred to later in the research process when needed; however, all the participants expressed their discomfort with being audio-recorded so manual notes were taken instead. Although manual notes were limited in their capacity to record word-for-word what respondents said during the interviews, steps were taken to minimize the possible inaccuracies during the transcription of responses. Interviewees were given the opportunity to review the translated transcriptions to ensure that the researcher's notes and interpretations were accurate. Interviewees were also able to make any necessary changes, deletions, and/or additions to the transcripts that they felt were needed to accurately convey their opinions and experiences, thus also contributing to the study's overall credibility. My ability to speak fluent Vietnamese also contributed to the study's descriptive and interpretive validity in that loss of meaning in translating the participants' responses was minimized. Data triangulation continued to enhance the study's internal validity, and transferability, in that the involvement of numerous participants provided multiple data sources for this research (Guba, 1981). Attaining the assent of minors also increased the validity

of this study because "insisting that minors participate when they clearly stated that they do not want to can alter their behavioral responses and represent confounding influence on the data collected" (Johnson & Christensen, 2012, p. 111). Therefore, as a part of maintaining high levels of validity for this study, strategies involving seeking assent from minors, using low-inference descriptors, reviewing interview responses with participants, and applying data triangulation were employed.

In addition to data triangulation, a number of additional strategies were incorporated throughout this study to enhance the research's transferability. Although this study included a small sample size of participants, there could be case-to-case transferability where data gathered from one case could be applied to another, therefore strengthening the study's claims. Since multiple interviews were involved in this study, common themes and responses were identified from individual interviews in order to conceive a general understanding of children's educational experiences and views that would be applicable to the larger population of children living in rural Quang Nam. The transferability of common themes such as the effects of poverty, family size, and child labour on children's education attainment from interview responses thus contributed to the study's overall transferability to larger contexts in rural Quang Nam and possibly to other rural communities in Vietnam. Although involving multiple interviews may have meant that the lack of depth in data analysis may be compromised since there were numerous interviews to analyze, this was mitigated by having fewer interview questions so that participants had more time to respond to questions on a deeper level. Overall, the benefits of using collective interviews outweighed the possible disadvantages especially since multiple interviews allowed me to perform cross-case analyses which made the conclusions of the study more transferable.

Another factor contributing to the study's overall transferability rested with participant selection processes. Since two informants were asked to select participants based on restrictive criteria, it was inevitable that children came from different schools and various remote communities within the province of Quang Nam because there was no one community that had enough children to participate in this study who met the criteria for this research. Therefore, the data collected had more transferability potential. For example, children were not from one particular school or community so when there were inter-case similarities identified, these

commonalities had a greater likelihood of being extrapolated to represent rural Quang Nam instead of simply representing the common school or remote community which the participants were from. In addition, the data was also representative of the specific region of Quang Nam because all the research participants were from the same province. The overarching goal of qualitative research is to build on the construction of knowledge in a social context (Guba, 1981). Therefore, this study did not aim for a generalizable conclusion as is the goal for quantitative studies. Instead, this research gained its strength in its ability to provide thick description of the given context to make comparisons possible. In order to create this thickness, this study included interviews, analyses of the schooling and education system contexts within Vietnam, and the investigation of government policies.

Multiple tools and strategies were also utilized to enhance the study's dependability. With regards to researcher bias, reflexivity was applied in that I engaged in critical self-reflection regarding my personal biases and predispositions before, during, and after the study was complete. The design of this study also included the creation of an audit trail which would make it possible for an external person to examine and understand the processes (Guba, 1981) whereby I collected, analyzed, and interpreted the data. As the primary researcher, I also maintained a research journal in which I used to record additional thoughts, reflections, discussions with participants regarding topics that were not a part of the interview protocol, and extra notes describing the environmental conditions in which the interviews took place. Therefore, the incorporation of numerous reflexivity efforts that were built into this research process would ensure that the study findings were confirmable, as well as dependable. All in all, a research journal, combined with necessary self-reflection and an audit trail, helped contribute to the overall dependability of this study.

In regards to biases, building good rapport with participants also became a useful strategy since it helped establish trust which could have led to the production of less biased data since children would be more inclined to answer the interview questions truthfully once they have developed a level of trust with the researcher (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). Adopting such strategies to build foundations of trust between participants and the researcher thus also contributed to the

research's dependability. This study incorporated in-depth research which took place in natural settings so that participants would feel more comfortable which hopefully encouraged them to disclose more information during the interview process. Children were encouraged to choose where the interviews would take place in order to enhance their comfort levels. The informal setting of the interviews thus helped build good rapport between the researcher, and participants and their families. By establishing a trusting relationship between the researcher, participants, and their families, participants were more inclined to share honest responses which contributed to the overall trustworthiness, validity, and dependability of this study.

Overall, an eclectic selection of tools and strategies were adopted during processes of research design, data collection, and data analysis in order to enhance the trustworthiness of this qualitative study. As constructivist and interpretivist approaches were employed to uncover children's educational experiences and perspectives in rural Vietnam, multiple methods were used to ensure that levels of research credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were maintained.

Method

Participants. Participants for this study consisted of children from a rural region in Quang Nam Province in Central Vietnam since this province has been identified as being one of the poorest provinces in Vietnam in terms of rural poverty (Corpuz, 2007; Management of Strategic Areas for Integrated Conservation, n.d.). Purposive sampling was employed to obtain a sample size of 5-7 children who were still attending school and another 5-7 children who no longer attended school. Therefore, the aim was to bring the total sample size of this study to 10-14 participants. In the end, a total of 12 participants were successfully selected for this study.

Age was also a notable characteristic to consider when selecting participants for this study. Since the cost of education increases with level of education, there are higher dropout rates for children in junior high school and secondary school as opposed to elementary school (Tranh & Long, 2005). Since an integral component of this study was focused on comparing the perspectives and experiences of children who still attended school to those children who have dropped out of school,

selecting research participants between the ages of 12 to 16 (the age range when children would most likely be in junior high and secondary school) would yield the most pertinent insight to the views of children who experience the greatest likelihood of dropping out of school. Due to the evidence that there were higher dropout rates for junior high and secondary school students, and it was assumed that children in this age bracket would be old enough to provide elaborative and in-depth responses to the interview questions, students between the ages of 12 and 16 were selected for this study.

Homogenous sample selection techniques were used to acquire a sample of children in order to understand what their perspectives were with regards to learning and education. Efforts were also made to include an equal number of boys and girls in this study. That way, there would be an equal inclusion of both male and female perspectives and experiences on education in rural Vietnam. Lastly, for purposes of practicality and efficiency, locating participants with the help of 2 local informants was the main method used to identify participants. Therefore, the number of students and which schools they were selected from were influenced by pragmatic concerns with regards to travel time, the amount of time that could be spent collecting data overseas, and where the informants would have the most connections within the community. Lastly, the informants were also asked to sign agreement forms to indicate their compliance with maintaining the confidentiality and privacy of participants and their families.

Procedure. This qualitative research study served instrumental purposes. Collective interviews involving children in rural Vietnam, both those who were still in school and those who were not in school, were investigated in relation to topics of child poverty, child-centred learning, children's perspectives of learning and education, and other themes that were mentioned by participants during the interview process. Interviews served as a useful method of data collection for this study because it involved interactive participation from interviewees which allowed children to take on more active roles in the research process. Participants were informed regarding the steps and procedures of the study so that they were well aware of what they were partaking in. The nature and purpose of the research were also disclosed with participants before they were asked to agree to participate. In addition, interviewees were informed that if there were any questions they felt

uncomfortable answering, they did not have to do so. Therefore, the procedures, objectives, and nature of this study were clarified with research respondents before confirming their participation.

One-on-one in-person interviews were conducted using the interview guide approach where topics and questions in the interview protocol were followed but in no particular order yet all the same topics and themes were addressed with each interviewee. The content of each interview was closely framed by questions and themes included in Phelps and Graham's (2010) study with children living in the rural Bac Giang Province of Vietnam. Two different sets of interview questions were presented to participants, depending on whether they were in the group of students who were still enrolled in school or those who were not in school. For those participants who were still attending school, the questions they were asked could be referred to in Appendix A. Then for those participants who were not in school, the questions they were asked were equivalent to those questions answered by students who were still attending school in regards to parts **(b)** and **(c)** in Appendix A; however, instead of being asked to answer all of the same questions as their school-enrolled counterparts in part **(a)**, children who were not in school were asked some questions which called for the reflection of their schooling and learning experiences when they were still enrolled in school while they were also asked to answer questions regarding their current experiences outside of school. The interview protocol for these early school leavers could be referred to in Appendix B. Altogether, interview protocols for both cohorts remained the same for parts **(b)** and **(c)**, and only differed for part **(a)**.

Interview questions were selected and structured so that they helped answer this study's core research questions. Section **(a)** of the interview questions were meant to address sub-question (a) of the research regarding how children felt about their learning environment, teachers, workload, classroom resources, school subjects, and their relationship with peers. Part **(b)** of the interview questions were designed to relate to the second sub-question of the study regarding children's opinions about attaining an education and what they saw as education's role in their future. In order to address the third sub-question of the study regarding how the opinions of early school leavers compared to those children who were still attending school, the similar questions provided for both cohorts to address in parts **(b)** and

(c) of the interview facilitated easier inter-cohort comparison. Lastly, part **(c)** of the interview questions focused on the children's thoughts of including them as sources of knowledge in educational contexts and whether this provided benefits for education delivery. Therefore, not only would the experiences and perspectives of the child be included with regards to learning and schooling, but their overall disposition in relation to incorporating children's opinions in the process of educational change would also be addressed, thus further contributing to children's sense of social agency and value. Combined, these questions gave rise to answers which could be collectively used to investigate the study's central question of what the experiences and opinions of children living in rural Vietnam on learning and education were.

Before engaging children in the research procedure, it was vital to ensure that they were aware of the details of this study. Assent from the participant was sought after the procedures of the study were disclosed to him/her. Once assent was obtained from the child participant, signed informed consent was then sought from the parent(s)/guardian(s) since minors were involved in this study. Participants were informed that they were granted privacy in that if there was information they would have liked to withhold from the parent(s)/guardian(s), for example, then they were free to do so. Child participants and their families were also informed that they had the freedom to terminate their involvement with the study at any time during the study or thereafter without any resultant consequences. Participant confidentiality was also ensured for this study by having those involved with the research process sign confidentiality agreement forms. Multiple measures were thus taken to protect and respect research participants.

Prior to initiating the data collection process and conducting interviews, an ice-breaker activity was originally planned to take place with the participants so that there would be opportunities to get to know the children and families on a more personal level which would allow the children to feel more comfortable confiding in the researcher. However, there was no need to resort to an ice-breaker activity prior to conducting interviews because participants and their families felt comfortable with the interviews. Also, since children were in control of selecting an environment where they wanted to conduct the interviews, the comfort and familiarity they associated with their surroundings would facilitate their willingness

to share personal experiences and views without having to rely on an ice-breaker activity.

After the interviews were completed, participant responses were transcribed and analyzed, and upon completion of data transcription and analysis, each participant received a brief summary of interpretations of their responses to the interview questions in order to ensure that participants' responses were accurately recorded and interpreted. A translator helped translate the summary of findings from the interviews so that the participants and their families could ensure that what participants shared was accurate. Debriefing sessions where the researcher explained what was gathered from the data was also available for participants after the interviews were complete. Such debriefing sessions enabled participants to express any questions, comments, or concerns that they may have had.

Data Analysis. The collected data was first translated into English then transcribed in English. This transcribed data was then coded with relevant themes in order to segment pertinent sections of the transcribed data which related to the study's research questions. Data transcription occurred concurrently with data collection in order to make more efficient use of waiting time in between scheduled interviews; however, data analysis continued after data collection, and any data still left to transcribe was transcribed after data collection was complete. Inductive codes were developed since codes were generated after examining the data. Facesheet codes were also used for each interview with each participant in order to label the participant's gender, age, and any other pertinent information. Also, depending on the participants' responses, a hierarchal system of categories derived from the data was formulated (e.g. relationships→ positive/negative→ parents/teachers/peers) in order to help better organize the data. Well organized data with the identification of themes, codes, and categories also facilitated comparisons between the responses from the group of children who were not in school and those children who were still attending school which allowed a more comprehensive understanding of how these two cohorts of children viewed education and learning given their personal experiences to be achieved.

Chapter Summary

Although research is starting to increasingly involve children's opinions

regarding learning and schooling, the literature remains scarce in including Vietnamese children's perspectives in education and an even fewer amount of the research is focused on unveiling early school leavers' educational experiences and views. Therefore, adopting qualitative research methods combined with constructivist and interpretivist theories enabled this study to use children's voices in educational discourses as indicators of existing inequalities that children encounter in rural Vietnam. Overall, this study involved children, both of whom were still attending school and those who were not in school, as active participants in the research process so that children could exercise their agency and capacities as co-constructors of knowledge, especially within the education sector in rural Vietnam.

Chapter Four: Data

Chapter four of this study unveils responses from participants who dropped out of school and those who were still in school regarding their educational perspectives. Insight on educational issues, experiences at school, supportive pedagogy, and suggestions for education improvement were just a number of topics that participants brought up during their interviews. In order to convey the children's responses in a clear and concise manner, this chapter is organized as follows: the first section will unearth students' in-school experiences and perspectives who were still enrolled in school; the second portion will unveil early school leavers' experiences of both when they were still in school and their out-of school experiences; the third part of the chapter will draw on participants' suggestions from both cohorts regarding education improvement; the fourth section will incorporate both cohorts' opinions about attaining an education and their views of education's role in their future; as the last part of the chapter will encompass both cohorts' thoughts about including children's experiences and perspectives in educational contexts; a table is also included at the end of the chapter for more efficient comparative purposes between the two cohorts of participants. Then, each of the five sections of the chapter is further categorized into sub-sections which represent major relevant themes that arose from children's interviews.

Viewing Education from the Students' Perspectives

Favourite Aspects of School. Children were asked about what they enjoyed most and least about school, and upon answering this question, a majority of the interviewees immediately identified specific classroom subjects as their favourite component of school. Popular subjects among the children were Physical Education, Art, English, Language Arts (Vietnamese), with Mathematics being the most popular. Interestingly, when students named favourite and least favourite subjects, the level of appreciation children had for each subject was heavily dependent on their ability to grasp the subject material. For instance, the subjects that the interviewees identified as their favourites were usually ones that they stated they excelled at and/or subjects that they easily understood. Children also had a tendency to enjoy subjects that their teachers were most knowledgeable about and most skilled at explaining. Overall, the justifications that most children used to explain why they liked the school subjects they did often related to their academic success with the

subject or to pedagogical practices their teachers employed to help make subject matter easier to understand.

A number of respondents demonstrated an affiliation for other aspects of school other than the subjects they learned. For example, one child liked that she was able to spend time with friends and that being at school gave her the opportunity to become better acquainted with her peers and teachers. Another one of the girls simply claimed that she enjoyed going to school and appreciated that her family had given her an opportunity to go to school even though they were poor and so she did not identify one specific thing as being her favourite aspect of school. Although a majority of interviewees had a tendency to associate subjects with what they liked least or most about school, some students either identified social aspects of their schooling environment as favoured characteristics of school or they were appreciative of everything about school because they valued the learning opportunities it presented.

Learning the Curriculum. Children named numerous subjects that they both liked and disliked and the reasons they associated with subject preferences were centred on their ability to grasp the material and the available supports in order for them to learn. Subjects that were identified as being the easiest for children in the cohort of interviewees who were still in school were Biology, Mathematics, Music, English, and Language Arts. Contrastingly, some children claimed that General Science was difficult to understand because the concepts were too difficult to grasp, taking notes in class was challenging, and explanations provided by the teacher did not help clarify the difficult subject matter. In addition, one student stated that Physics was her most difficult subject because the teacher used complex explanations to teach concepts to students. Therefore, it was clear from student responses that their disposition towards grasping subject matter was intrinsically dependent on both their learning abilities and teachers' teaching abilities.

Language Arts came up most often among the children's responses as being both the easiest and hardest of school subjects. Some students claimed that Language Arts was boring and so it was easy for them to lose interest in the subject, and that the grammar components were too challenging to comprehend. Other aspects associated with Language Arts that caused the children to identify it as the

most difficult school subject were that it often involved too much reading and so the children felt over-worked and that sometimes, the reading was at a level that was too difficult for them to understand. On the other hand, one child who named Language Arts as her easiest subject stated that she enjoyed reading because it felt liberating when she immersed herself in reading. Other students associated the ease they had with Language Arts to the fact that they liked their teacher and/or because their teacher taught the subject well. Therefore, it was evident that when inquired about why they liked the subjects they did, students' main explanations were centred on teachers' effectiveness of teaching the material and/or students' own success with grasping the subject.

Children identified both personal factors and external influences to their academic achievements in the classroom. Although students associated their own agency in academic success with particular subjects, they also emphasized the impact that learning support, such as from teachers, had on the facilitation of their learning in the classroom. Without the availability and accessibility of such learning supports, school had the potential of becoming overwhelming for students.

Balancing Workloads. Most of the interviewees in the cohort of children still in school shared that they usually received appropriate amounts of work at school. During certain times throughout the academic year though, children found themselves stressed and overloaded with work. Although children often relied on themselves to complete their work, they found it helpful and useful to have other individuals whom they could depend on for assistance.

Overall, a majority of the children who were still in school stated that they received a manageable amount of homework and one student said that although she usually received an appropriate amount of homework, when it came time for exams, she tended to receive extra work to complete at home from teachers in order to help her prepare for exams. One student specifically said that he usually received a lot of homework and that it was tiring for him. He further explained that for all school subjects, teachers would make students work ahead with very little guidance which made the workload even more challenging: "We would have to work ahead in our textbooks so we would end up working on things we have not yet learned in class and I struggled because I did not understand the material" (Ben, 15 years old). Therefore, the lack of teacher support combined with an intimidating workload

contributed to Ben's feelings of exhaustion in regards to school. Without teachers' guidance, students had a greater tendency of feeling overwhelmed with school work.

There was a mix of responses in regards to whether children received help with their homework or not, even though most of the children interviewed did share that they received help with their homework, usually from an older sister or friends. Two children stated that they did not receive help with homework and that they completed it on their own, where one of the children clarified that although she did not usually receive homework assistance, she did ask her mother for help once in a while. Unfortunately, since her mother did not understand what she was learning in school, her mother was unable to help her with school work. Therefore, she usually completed take-home work on her own. Another student stated that if he understood his homework, he completed it himself. Otherwise, if he did not understand his homework, he asked his friends for help. Also, he shared that it was common in Vietnam to copy homework from friends who had already completed the work. Even though the respondents were quite independent with completing their homework, when they needed assistance, they often tried to resort to others for help when they could.

For the most part, children tended to try to figure out their homework on their own. Children did not always have someone to rely on for assistance so completing school work independently became a vital skill for academic success. When children did have individuals whom they could rely on for homework assistance, they usually resorted to parents, siblings, and/or friends; interestingly though, none of the participants identified teachers as resources for homework help.

Hearing, Doing, Learning. A majority of interviewees learned best by hearing and doing. Usually teachers provided students with verbal explanations followed by examples for them to complete during class. Then, students often received take-home work to further apply the knowledge they attained in school. From participants' accounts, it seemed that the three-step learning process involved verbal explanations, in-class examples, and homework.

Five out of the 7 children interviewed in the cohort of participants who were still attending school stated that they learned best by hearing, and that in class, the teacher usually provided verbal explanations for students while also writing out

examples for them to complete so they had the opportunity to learn by doing too. Students also associated homework given by teachers as opportunities to learn by doing independent work. Another student claimed, "I learn best by hearing and repetition from teachers because it helps me remember new information best" (Tina, 16 years old). She continued by sharing that teachers provided verbal explanations and gave examples for students to complete in class so they could learn by doing. Therefore, it was evident that the two main ways that children learned best were by hearing and doing, where learning by hearing mainly took the form of verbal explanations from the classroom teacher and learning by doing occurred mainly through examples provided in class for students to do on their own and through take-home work.

A combination of explaining material verbally in class and providing students with examples to complete on the board were common methods of teaching and encouraging student participation in classrooms. Students valued opportunities to receive verbal explanations from teachers, followed by examples to further explain subject matter in class, and more examples for students to complete on their own either at home, in school, or both.

Feelings at School and Treatment by Teachers. The majority of participants associated happiness with being at school. The most common factor that mitigated these feelings of happiness was mainly attributed to worrying about challenging and/or uncompleted school work. Lastly, unequal treatment of students in the classroom also contributed to students' negative dispositions towards school.

Overall, most of the children said that they felt happy to be at school although a number of the children did share that they tended to feel worried or scared to go to school when they did not complete their homework. One student shared, "I feel normal and not especially happy at school because I worry about my homework being too difficult for me" (Jon, 12 years old). Therefore, workload played an influential role in affecting children's perception of school. Another student shared Jon's anxiety about school work by disclosing, "I worry when I am at school because when I do not complete my homework, I worry that the teacher will call me up to the board to do an example from the homework on the board and I haven't finished it" (Ben, 15 years old). Other than that, Ben stated that he felt happy because sometimes students were called to school to clean the school grounds and

bathrooms so when it was his turn, he got to meet friends at school to talk and joke with them instead of only seeing them in class and not getting the opportunity to socialize. Overall, there were multiple factors which respondents took into consideration when evaluating their usual feelings from being at school.

Most of the children recounted that teachers treated them well. One child spoke about how she received equal treatment as her peers by her teachers and that sometimes teachers were nice to her, while at other times, they raised their voices at her. Another student explained that teachers treated her the same as other students in class; teachers did not yell at students, and teachers were generally supportive of students and so she felt cared for at school. Although some interviewees had a positive perception of their classroom teachers, others mentioned pejorative factors which contributed to their less-than-positive experiences at school. For example, one student mentioned favouring in the classroom as an impinging factor affecting the equal availability and distribution of teacher support for students since "[the teacher] tends to favour students who ask her for extra paid-tutoring outside of class so those students who do not seek such help don't get treated as well and they don't get as high marks as those students who get tutored by her" (Ben, 15 years old). Therefore, as a student who did not seek extra help from his teacher outside of school, he felt that he was not treated as well as his peers who were tutored by his teacher. Thus, students internalized how teachers treated them so that it affected their outlooks on school.

The main feeling students associated with being at school was happiness. For the most part, children looked forward to attending school, especially when they received opportunities to socialize. However, children also expressed anxiety while being at school. When participants felt academically overwhelmed and/or unsupported by teachers, positive associations with school dissipated. Therefore, as long as children perceived that they were receiving fair amounts of work, and equal treatment from teachers, they tended to be happy at school.

Insights on Education from an Early School Leaver's Perspective

Reflections on Past Schooling Experiences. Early school leavers in this study immediately displayed positive dispositions towards formal education when asked about their experiences about being in school. In fact, most early school leavers interviewed for this study showed their enthusiasm with the mentioning of

school by eagerly stating that they wanted to continue their education. To add to their positive experiences at school, children stated that teachers usually treated them well or equally to their peers. When reflecting on their past schooling experiences, early school leavers rarely had negative things to say.

When still at school, all of the children stated that they liked school and that they felt happy when they were still attending. For Ann, due to her physical disability, she had never attended a formal school. Instead, she attended classes taught by a certified teacher who used to instruct at the orphanage she resided in, thus she was also identified as an early school leaver for this study. Upon reflecting on her past schooling experience, she too claimed that she was happy in the classroom because she had the chance to learn. Overall, all the children said they were treated well, or many participants described teachers' treatment of them as "normal," while they were still in class. Ann raved about how her teachers even treated her like their own daughter which led her to perceive them as maternal figures, while another student stated that although his teachers treated him well in class, they would yell if students misbehaved. Hence, children tended to be treated well by teachers unless they behaved poorly at school.

Receiving opportunities to learn in educational settings were highly valued by early school leavers. When asked whether they wanted to return to school, most participants in this cohort shared that they truly wanted to continue their education. On average, children also had more positive perceptions of treatment from their teachers in comparison to their peers in the cohort who were still in school. Where some children still in school felt that teachers disfavoured them, early school leavers stated that teachers usually treated students well or "normally." Such positive reflections of past schooling experiences thus contributed to most early school leavers' yearning of returning to school.

Barriers to Schooling and Future Aspirations. There were multiple factors that resulted in the termination of school attendance for early school leavers in this study. The most prominent factor that affected the children's schooling though was the limited availability of financial resources. Although some of the children listed other factors that contributed to the termination of their school attendance, limited fiscal resources was a common underlying factor that all the children mentioned in their interview responses as a hindrance on their education.

For a number of interviewees, multiple factors contributed to the termination of their education. For instance, 16-year-old Jordan who dropped out of school in grade 6 stated that he stopped attending school because his father passed away and so the household income was consequently insufficient for him to continue his formal education. Also, he explained that due to his heart condition, he had to miss many classes when he was still in school and so his teacher suggested that he stopped attending since there was too much material for him to catch up on and continued interruption of his attendance would be detrimental to his progress in school. Therefore, in Jordan's case, numerous detriments obstructed his ability to attain an education, in addition to limited economic resources.

There were multiple more stories of obstructed schooling from early school leavers which resembled that of Jordan's. Although 16-year-old Ann had a physical disability that impeded her from going to school at a formal institution, she also shared that her mother was poor, which was why she was currently residing at an orphanage. Therefore, since her mother did not have the fiscal resources to support Ann, she also did not have a means of transporting Ann to school. Instead, Ann's mother was working to support the family and so she did not have time to take Ann to school from the orphanage. Although Ann used to attend classes at the orphanage, she no longer does because the orphanage does not have sufficient funds to pay for a certified teacher to come and instruct the children. Therefore, in Ann's case, transportation along with the unstable availability of financial resources were contributory factors in the termination of her schooling. Tim, a 15-year-old who terminated his schooling in grade 7, stated that his family was facing difficult financial circumstances so they did not have enough money to send him to school. Tim explained, "I also have two younger siblings who are still in school and so I need to help my parents make money so that they can keep attending school" (Tim, 15 years old). Gayle, who was 16 years old, shared a similar story since she disclosed that the main reason for her school termination was due to insufficient financial resources because her parents' income was funnelled towards sending her younger sibling to school. Therefore, since her parents were already fiscally burdened with her sibling's school fees, she felt guilty relying on her parents to pay for her schooling, hence her dropping out. Another interviewee also claimed that having a younger sibling placed a financial strain on the family and because after having his

younger sibling resulted in the combined earnings of his household being insufficient for him to continue attending school, he ended up having to drop out. Overall, in addition to scarce economic resources, transportation, location, and family size led to the termination of schooling for these children.

None of the students wanted to drop out school in this cohort. They all claimed that they liked school but due to certain circumstances, they were compelled to drop out. Thus, their decision to cease their school enrollment was one of coercion rather than one of choice. One student said, "I never originally wanted to drop out of school because I truly enjoyed it" and when asked about what aspects he liked most about school, he responded, "I liked everything about going to school. I liked learning, spending time with friends, everything" (Jordan, 16 years old). In Ann's case, she claimed she never wanted to stop attending classes at the orphanage because she liked learning and she dreamed of attending school at a formal institution one day so that she could continue learning and meeting new friends. Early school leavers in this study perceived being in school as providing them with opportunities to meet friends, learn, and be happy, which was why most of them never wanted to leave.

Specifically, 4 children who were not in school stated that they would return to school if given the opportunity. Ann shared that she would either like to continue learning at the orphanage or to actually go to school at a formal institution. One of the other early school leavers, Vince, dropped out of school in grade 4 and was currently working . Vince found that he would rather work than go to school because then he would be able to support his family. He shared that, "Because I am expected to help support my family now, it is difficult for me to leave work to attend school" (Vince, 16 years old). He then said that if his family did not need his financial contribution to support the household then he would want to return to school. Tina, who dropped out of school in grade 10, also shared positive insights about receiving an education since she perceived education as being very valuable because it provided one with more life opportunities and she eagerly stated that she would return to school because she missed it and enjoyed it. Lastly, Tim found that if given the chance to return to school, he did not think he would. He claimed he dropped out already so he did not see the point of returning to school. Although Tim had no desire to return to school, the rest of his peers in this cohort expressed their

eagerness to go to school if only obstructions to their educational pursuits did not exist.

Although multiple factors contributed to children's termination of school, including transportation, location, and family size, a common underlying factor leading to the end of schooling for each and every one of the early school leavers in this study involved unstable fiscal resources. All the participants who ended their schooling eagerly wanted to return because they missed being with friends, they enjoyed learning in classroom settings, and they missed having learning opportunities.

Education Improvements from a Local Pertinent Lens

Teaching for the Student from the Student. When asked what suggestions they could provide to help teachers become better teachers, most of the research participants in the cohort of students still in school had a difficult time conceiving responses whereas when early school leavers were asked the same question, for those who could answer the question, suggestions regarding student support, participation in professional development, and providing learning opportunities for students were offered. Ben, a particular student still in school did specifically vocalize that it was difficult for him to answer this question because he had never been approached by teachers for his opinion on how teachers could improve their teaching. After some thought though, he stated that teachers should treat students equally. He explained by disclosing, "my teacher favours and always pays more attention to those students who excel in class while those students who are struggling are left ignored and so I believe that this is wrong and that all students should receive the same amount of help and attention from their teacher" (Ben, 15 years old). Fair treatment was a constant theme that surfaced in both cohorts of participants. In the group of early school leavers, Gayle specifically hinted to teachers' favouring of certain students as being something that teachers needed to avoid in order to become better teachers. She mentioned that only some students were privileged enough to have the financial resources required to receive extra tutoring from their teachers outside of the classroom and these students tended to be the individuals who received higher marks. Fairness was also an issue with teachers' time allocation in the classroom. For instance, one student who was still in school suggested that teachers should invest more time explaining what they were

teaching in class so that students who were struggling could understand key concepts without having to feel left behind. Two other students also stated that teachers needed to explain material in a manner that helped every student grasp difficult and/or new concepts more easily. Therefore, it was evident that in order to promote fairness in the class, and thus enhance children's educational experiences, teachers needed to: provide equal student support, especially to those students who were struggling academically; avoid favouring some students over others; and explain subject matter in a manner that ensured students of all levels were able to comprehend.

Appropriate workload was another concern that participants mentioned and perceived as a pertinent issue that was instrumental for teaching and/or teacher improvement. A number of students who were still in school noted that in order for teachers to improve their teaching, teachers should give homework that was at a comprehensible level for students so that they could more readily use what they have learned in class to complete their work. Students expressed that, in general, if teachers spent more time on providing clear explanations and assigning appropriate amounts of work that were also considerate of students' academic abilities, students would be less likely to feel overwhelmed with school work. On the other hand, although some participants in the cohort of children who were still in school expressed their tendency to feel overworked at school, some early school leavers felt that more homework was required in order for them to apply and retain the knowledge they were taught in class. However, regardless of how children from either cohort felt about the amount of school work they received, one common perception was shared by both groups when it came to making suggestions for teacher improvement: the children believed that teachers should support students and offer them help when they needed assistance with school work.

Although a number of participants found it challenging to conjure up suggestions for teachers to become better teachers, after a bit of prodding, some children were able to conceive suggestions for pedagogical improvement. Centred on concepts of fairness, children felt teachers should: treat students equally; provide students with equal amounts of attention and support; explain concepts to students so students can easily comprehend them; and give students manageable workloads.

Bettering Schools Externally and Internally. External improvements to

school were usually initially named by children as opportunities to better schools. After some thought though, internal aspects of their schools were recognized as also needing improvement. Accommodations required to ameliorate physical characteristics of schools, educational resources within schools, and learning supports throughout the entire school structure were emphasized by children as being vital for optimal learning conditions.

The children, for the most part in both cohorts, found it difficult to make suggestions for school improvement and thus 3 early school leavers were unable to name any improvements that should or could be made after reflecting back on their schooling experience, and 2 children still in school were unable to offer opinions for school improvement. Although a number of participants still in school asked for more time to answer the question or struggled to provide a response, the majority of these participants were able to suggest changes to their school's physical environment. In fact, 2 of the interviewees in the cohort of children still attending school made specific suggestions for schools to provide large soccer fields for children to play on. Ben claimed, "schools for grades 1-5 and 6-9 tend not to have large fields for children to play on and so [children] do not get enough exercise. Therefore, schools need large grass fields and these fields must be maintained so that they can be of good use for children" (Ben, 15 years old). Another student still enrolled in school also believed that schools should make an effort to plant more green trees. Concerns for improving the external environment of schools were also expressed by early school leavers, for 1 interviewee believed that the physical structures of schools were important and so he found that they should be maintained and that school grounds should be kept clean and litter-free. When it came to making suggestions for school improvement, children from both cohorts tended to identify needed changes with the overall physical appearance of their schools, although a few children did mention the need to improve internal aspects of their schools.

Resources were a valued asset that children from both groups believed schools should be well equipped with. Whether these resources came in the form of better quality supplies such as notebooks and textbooks, or the opportunity to use learning resources in their schools, children seemed to highly value the availability of educational resources and saw the increased availability of such resources as a

means of improving their schools. For example, a student still attending school specifically mentioned libraries as an integral opportunity for school improvement to take place. He expanded on this thought by stating that school libraries should be readily accessible for students because the library at his school was often closed. Hence, he felt that "instead of having libraries for the benefit of students, schools often had libraries just so schools could upkeep their appearance and reputation as being resourceful for students" (Ben, 15 years old). When students had easy access to school libraries, they were able to borrow books. Ben shared, "At my school, it is difficult for students to take out books from the library because it is a very long process with many rules and restrictions. For example, only a designated student from each class will be granted permission to borrow books from the library on behalf of the entire class and I find this problematic because the books that my classmates borrow are not always of interest to me" (Ben, 15 years old). This particular interviewee concentrated on the availability and accessibility of specific resources for students as a means of improving school whereas a number of students commented on bettering the overall support system of schools as a way of enhancing students' educational experiences.

Providing student support was understood by a number of participants from both cohorts as a school-wide responsibility in order to facilitate optimal educational experiences for students. One 16-year-old student still in school believed that schools should be more supportive of students. For example, she opined that "for those students who have to take time off from school to go home to help their parents during the holidays, teachers should help them make smooth re-integrations into class when they return to school. Teachers should also provide these students with work to do during the time they spend away from school to ensure that they are still able to keep up with their peers" (Tina, 16 years old). She also advised that those who worked at schools should not be harsh with students and should instead try to see things from their perspectives. Sixteen-year-old Gayle who dropped out of school also mentioned the criticality of available support systems in schools as an essential factor that would foster improved education for students. However, although Gayle showed concern about supportive learning environments being an issue for students, she was more focused on the promotion of academic competition as a means of enhancing students' schooling experiences.

For example, Gayle believed that "schools should offer a wider spectrum of courses for students with a selection of courses at a more advanced level. This way, students are given opportunities to compete with each other" (Gayle, 16 years old). She further emphasized the importance of competition by opining that schools should help students organize events such as academic contests. Lastly, she also believed that schools should connect students with beneficial employment opportunities, and thus serve as a liaison between the workplace and students at school. Therefore, although participants from both cohorts focused on the availability and accessibility of resources as a means of enhancing one's educational experience, Gayle, from the cohort of early school leavers, took a slightly different approach as she centred her suggestions for education improvement on schools' promotion of employment opportunities and academic competition that would result from attending school.

After initial struggles with naming school improvements, children were able to identify critical educational changes that needed to be implemented in their learning environments. Aesthetic changes such as increasing greenery on school grounds, establishing soccer fields, and keeping school grounds clean were suggested. In order to encourage students' academic success, children highlighted the criticality of resource accessibility and availability as well as healthy academic competition as tools that schools require to promote optimal learning opportunities for students.

Conceptualizations of Education

Forms of Learning Within and Outside of School. Although both forms of learning, within and external to school, were understood to provide benefits, children were more likely to associate personal development and employment opportunities to formal learning whereas forms of education outside of school were understood as valuable because participants believed it presented them with more relatable, applicable knowledge. In fact, the main indicator children used to determine the value of various forms of education and learning was relatability.

More than half of the children who were still in school directly stated that they did in fact consider learning outside of school as forms of education. However, when asked what they themselves learned outside of school, many children were unable to provide any responses while 2 children even said that they did not learn anything outside of school. For the children who dropped out of school, all except for

1 participant believed that learning outside of school was in fact forms of education. Most of the early school leavers who stated that learning that occurred external to the school environment were types of education associated specific criteria to each kind of education. For example, 2 of the interviewed children distinguished between learning outside and within school by the fact that one received homework in school whereas one did not get extra work to complete outside of school; however, regardless of this difference, both children believed that both forms of learning were still types of education. Vince, an early school leaver, elaborated by stating, "What you learn outside of school is very different from what you learn in school because in school, you get homework to complete, but outside of school, you simply use common sense" (Vince, 16 years old). However, regardless of the fact that forms of learning outside of school did not require one to complete extra work at home, Vince believed that forms of learning that took place outside of school were still forms of education. Learning that took place outside of school was generally perceived as forms of education even though some respondents acknowledged that the types of learning that occurred within and outside of schools were very different.

Students still in school claimed that the kind of knowledge they gained from outside of school was generally more relatable for them because they were able to apply it in different contexts. For instance, one student said:

> I believe that the things you learn outside of school such as learning to cook, sew, and farm, simply involve imitating what you see being done, but in school, you actually have to think about the work that you're doing. The learning that takes place outside of school is easier than the learning that takes place in school because outside of school, you have more opportunities to apply your knowledge whereas in school, it is easy to forget what you have learned because there are not as many opportunities to use the knowledge that you have acquired in the classroom. (Ben, 15 years old)

Although he associated a more cognitive presence with the kind of learning that occurred at school, Ben found the learning that took place outside of school as being easier to retain because he felt that he had more opportunities to apply the knowledge he had acquired. Similar to what Ben said, another interviewee in the cohort of children still attending school stated, "Daily experiences outside of school are more relatable to me than what I read from textbooks because it involves the

application of knowledge instead of passively reading about something from a book" (Tina, 16 years old). It seemed that for many participants in this study, the applicability of knowledge acquired was often used as an indicator of: how useful the knowledge was; how engaged they were in processes of acquiring such knowledge; and the retainability of the knowledge.

Although early school leavers also felt that learning which occurred external to school were forms of education, the majority of these interviewees stated that what was learned in school was more important than what was learned outside of school for various reasons. One child affirmed that what one learned from school was more important since one could make a greater impact in the world if one had a formal education while another child expressed that learning that took place in school was more important than forms of learning that occurred outside of school because she believed formal education was more helpful in letting one improve oneself so that one could learn more about the world. Gayle was the only interviewee in the cohort of early school leavers who believed that things learned outside of school were more important than what was learned in school. She said that when she worked as a waitress while she was in school, she met a lot of people which gave her the opportunity to interact with different individuals, thus enabling her to learn more from others in comparison to what she was able to learn in the classroom. However, Gayle claimed that she did not consider the things she learned outside of school as forms of education. Therefore, early school leavers had the tendency to associate more value to formal education in comparison to informal and non-formal education, aside from Gayle. Where children still in school saw the value of forms of learning that took place outside of school as being more useful since it involved the acquirement of more relatable knowledge, most early school leavers tended to associate more value to learning that occurred within schools since they believed formal education was more self-empowering and valuable.

All of the children still attending school confirmed that what they had learned in school was useful for what they wanted to do in the future. For example, one interviewee believed that "the things one learns in school are useful for one's future because one can use knowledge from school to help oneself in day-to-day life" (Janice, 12 years old). If children found that they could not apply the knowledge they attained to present circumstances, then they felt that this knowledge had no means

of being useful in the future, thus rendering this knowledge as irrelevant. For instance, Ben shared that he aspired to work in the information technology (IT) sector. He explained that he did consider the things he learned in school as being useful for what he wanted to do in the future because in order to pursue a career in IT, he planned on continuing his education and he saw what he had learned in school so far as forming the foundation for higher levels of learning and schooling (even though this statement of how what he has learned so far forms the solid foundation for his future academic pursuits in the IT field contradicted his earlier disclosure of how he kept forgetting what he learned in school). Another 2 children in the cohort of interviewees still in school wanted to be a police officer and an engineer in the future, and they too believed that what they had learned in school was useful for their futures.

The value of things learned in school was validated by their usefulness and applicability in daily life, which was also a valued aspect of knowledge acquired from formal education for early school leavers. For example, Jordan expressed that he did not feel that what he had learned in school, when he was still enrolled, was useful for him now nor would it be in the future because he stated that he had already forgotten what he had learned. Since Jordan was unable to retain the information he learned from formal education, he believed that it was of no use to him. However, in the cohort of early school leavers, 4 out of 5 children believed that what they had learned in school was useful for what they wanted to do in the future. Vince, being one of the 4, specifically stated that the Mathematics he had learned in school was useful and that he still used it today in the line of work that he was in while Tim said that things he had learned in school were useful for what he was doing now because, for example, he still used what he had learned from Applied Skills in his daily life even after dropping out of school. Knowledge acquired in the classroom was also perceived as a means of attaining future employment for Ann. She shared that she wanted to find a job in the future that suited her and that she enjoyed. Although she did not have a specific job in mind, she did affirm that the things she had learned in the classroom at the orphanage would be helpful for her in the future. As long as the learning that children were exposed to had a purpose and/or were relatable, children perceived such learning as useful and valuable.

All of the children who were still enrolled in formal schooling shared that

they applied what they learned in school to their lives outside of school. Mathematics and Language Arts were identified as being most applicable to life outside of school. Knowledge attained from Language Arts was often used by children to communicate with others and one child even said, "I apply the things I learn in Language Arts in life outside of school because I can use my linguistic skills to talk to those who are living in poverty in order to educate them on how to be healthy" (Janice, 12 years old). Another student, as an example of how she used school-related resources in life outside of school, explained that if she were to see someone who was not as well off as her on the street, she could "use resources from school to help the individual, such as providing textbooks for children who could not afford them" (Tina, 16 years old). In addition, she stated that writing in school helped her communicate with family members and with other people she encountered in daily life. Overall, Language Arts was deemed especially useful by students because it helped facilitate avenues for communication in their lives outside of school. English was also identified as useful in daily communication outside of school by one student. Mathematics was named by multiple students as also being very helpful outside of school in order to complete daily mental calculations more efficiently. Lastly, one student claimed to apply what she learned from Home Economics to life outside of school since she said it taught her helpful life skills such as cooking, thus demonstrating how much value children associated with knowledge, skills, and subjects which they could apply in their lives outside of school.

In contrast to how the children still in school felt about the applicability and usefulness of formal education, one early school leaver believed that what was learned outside of school was more important than what was learned in the classroom because he believed it was more relatable to everyone's everyday lives while a student still in school stated that because her father passed away when she was young and her family lacked financial stability, she was expected to learn how to farm, cook, tend to farm animals, and sell products at the local market in order to help support her mother and her many siblings. She thus perceived these skills and chores as mundane and so she did not consider these things that she had learned outside of school as forms of learning. However, she admitted that the skills she developed from performing these expected skills were just as important, if not, more

important than the skills she attained from school. She clarified by saying that "daily chores teach you necessary life skills. For example, some of my friends do not have practical skills because they are not exposed to some of the work that I am expected to do at home" (Tina, 16 years old). Although Tina does not consider the knowledge attained outside of school as forms of education, because this knowledge tends to be associated with the completion of mundane chores, she still values the skills resulting from this knowledge as much as she values the skills that she gains from school.

Two of the children in the group of early school leavers were either unable to answer the question of how they applied the knowledge they learned in school to their lives outside of school. On the other hand, one child said that she used what she had learned in Language Arts when she conversed with people in Vietnamese and another child said that he used Mathematics to complete measurement calculations at work. Similar to the cohort of students who were still in school, the children in this cohort named both Language Arts and Mathematics as being subjects that were useful to them outside of school. In addition to these school subjects, Gayle specifically mentioned political theory as something that she used in her life outside of school or at least found useful for people in their lives outside of school. She explained that "knowledge in the field of political theory teaches one about the nation's political structure which could thus inform individuals on how to improve their quality of life in their respective hometowns" (Gayle, 16 years old). Possessing this body of knowledge would also enable individuals to inform the nation and/or government about any changes that were necessary to enhance people's quality of life, according to Gayle. Like some of the other participants, Gayle also used applicability to gauge the value of knowledge attained from formal education while also extending the benefits of formal education beyond its assumed provision of future employment opportunities.

It was vital to emphasize the prevalence of respondents who acknowledged education's value beyond its potential of providing one with economic returns. A couple of the children still in school thought of what they learned in formal institutions as being specifically useful for helping others who were living in poverty, or similar to their own living conditions. Tina stated that she would use her resources from school to help those who were less fortunate than her. As an

example, she stated that if she encountered children who were less fortunate than her, she could give them her textbooks. Therefore, when asked how she applied the knowledge she gained in school in her life outside of school, she associated this with the distribution of material resources instead of the application of knowledge. Another student also depicted knowledge as a form of empowerment where she said that she applied the things she learned in Language Arts in life outside of school since she could use her linguistic skills acquired in class to allow her to have educational conversations with those who were living in poverty so she could teach them about maintaining good health. From these participant responses, it seemed as though education had not only contributed to their personal development, but it had provided them with the tools to help others develop. Therefore, when implementing development education initiatives, perceptions of collective development should be encouraged because if education is promoted strictly as a means to a fiscal end, then it strips education of its intrinsic value. Consequently, if an individual is unable to reap fiscal benefits from attaining an education, then education is simply deemed as useless. When conceptualizing education as an intrinsically useful tool that can be used for holistic collective development, education's value is restored and manifested as being advantageous beyond fiscal means. Both Tina and Janice used knowledge and educational resources as tools to instigate development which thus restored aspects of development that extended beyond economic facets; aspects which are often neglected in development discourse.

Most of the participants in this study perceived learning that took place outside of school as forms of education even though a majority of early school leavers and children still in school believed the knowledge acquired in school was more valuable. Children from both cohorts saw the main instrumental value of formal education as leading to enhanced future opportunities as well as providing them with avenues for personal development. On the other hand, the learning that took place outside of school was seen as useful because they found this knowledge more relatable and applicable than knowledge they gained in school.

Thoughts about Including Children's Perspectives and Experiences

Why Consult Children? Children had positive dispositions when asked how they felt about involving children in critical decision-making processes in the

education sector. Overall, children still in school showed more enthusiasm about sharing their opinions in comparison to their counterparts who had dropped out.

When inquiring the cohort of children still enrolled in school about how they felt about being asked for their perspectives and experiences, the children only had positive feedback to share. Four children felt that it was important and necessary to ask children about their opinions and perspectives while 2 other students said that they felt good about being sought for their opinions and views. Tina explained, "I feel good about having children being asked about their perspectives and experiences because I feel that if we do not ask children for their opinions, we will not know how they are feeling and what they are going through. I believe that if you wants to help children, you must seek their opinions in order to truly do so" (Tina, 16 years old). Ben expressed, "I believe that seeking children's views is important because children are honest. While children say whatever is on their minds, adults tend to hide the truth when it is ugly so they are not as honest as children" (Ben, 15 years old). Ben felt that the most effective way of gaining insight on required educational changes was to consult children. Most of the participants valued being consulted as sources of instrumental knowledge, yet they felt that children were not sought enough as they should be, especially when it came to matters of education.

Children emphasized that in order to gain an insider perspective of what educational issues children were experiencing, children themselves must be consulted. One 12-year-old participant even stated, "It is important to include children's educational perspectives and experiences because others are able to learn what kids like and do not like about school through the perspective of the child" (Janice, 12 years old). Another child shared, "It is crucial for children's educational perspectives and experiences to be included because it helps others who are not children to understand what they are going through" (Dylan, 12 years old). The children in this group felt that one could use children's opinions and experiences as instrumental tools to improve schools and teaching methods by collecting many students' perspectives in order to see what their suggestions for educational improvement were, and then acting on their collective suggestions to produce change.

Early school leavers did not have as much to share about how they felt in regards to incorporating children's perspectives in educational contexts. Two of the

children who dropped out of school believed that it was normal, and not anything extraordinary, to ask children about their opinions whereas one child stated that asking children's opinions with respect to education was especially important and another child felt good about asking children regarding their opinions and experiences. Then when these early school leavers were asked to explain why they felt the way they did about having children's perspectives and experiences be considered for educational change, most of them were unable to provide explanations. Overall, there was more enthusiasm about having children be consulted for their educational experiences and perspectives from the cohort of children still in school in comparison to those children who were no longer in school.

Although most participants in both cohorts valued the opportunity to share their educational perspectives and experiences, children felt that they were not often considered as useful sources of knowledge even though they were the direct recipients of education delivery and thus could provide pertinent suggestions for education improvement through first-hand accounts. It was stressed that in order for educational change to be truly instrumental for those who are affected by its implementation, educational change must be approached from the student's lens.

How do Children's Opinions Measure against Adults' Opinions? Many participants saw the intrinsic value children's opinions possessed especially in the education sector; however, they doubted the likelihood of children's opinions being actualized into constructive action to improve education in Vietnam. Therefore, although a number of participants personally believed that children had valuable knowledge to share with adults in the education sector, they felt that the lack of reverence for children's views and experiences rendered their opinions as less influential than those of adults.'

Respondents disclosed an eclectic array of opinions when explaining whether they felt children's or adults' views held more value. In total, for the group of individuals still in school, 1 child believed that adults' opinions were more valuable than children's, 1 child found that adults' perspectives were more important than children's, 4 children stated that children's perspectives were equally critical as those of adults,' and 1 child stated that sometimes children's opinions were more important than adults' and sometimes it was the adults'

opinions that mattered more. There was also a mixed response as to whether children's perspectives were more, less, or equally important as adults' in the group of students who were no longer attending school where some interviewees expressed that children's perspectives were not as important as adults' and others believed the opposite to be true. All in all, when approached about whether adults' or children's views possessed more value, children had extremely mixed responses.

A commonality between the two cohorts of participants was the participants' shared skepticism of children's perspectives leading to constructive educational change, thus causing them to believe that children's views were not as important as those of adults' in educational contexts. Vince, an early school leaver, opined that the true power required to instigate and sustain education improvement remained with adult figures in the education sector. Vince found that children's perspectives were unnecessary with regards to education because "in the end, decisions lie in the hands of teachers, principals, and other authoritative figures" (Vince, 16 years old). Therefore, he believed that the opinions of adult figures in educational settings held more weight and thus overpowered the voices of children. Although he did share that he found children's opinions to be just as important as adults,' he believed that it was pointless to include children's experiences and views in the educational context since he did not find that children's views held as much potential as adults' in producing constructive action and results. To reinforce Vince's depiction of the hierarchal distribution of power within the education sector, one child still in school who believed that adults' opinions held more value stated that "although children's views often lead to good ideas, their opinions are often based on imaginary or ideal situations and so it is adults' perspectives that are truly important because it is adults who have the power to turn ideas into action" (Ben, 15 years old). According to this interviewee, since adults' opinions were more practical, logical, and concrete, they seemed to be more valid than children's opinions. This child believed that adults' opinions did in fact hold more value than those of children since he felt that adults' perspectives could lead to the development of ideas which were attainable and productive, even though he questioned the integrity of adults' views because he felt that children tended to be more honest in expressing themselves. Although the children recognized that adults' perspectives were important, this specific student felt that

children's views were especially necessary if one wanted to be exposed to the truth instead of fabrications of the truth. Even though some participants were well aware of the value children's opinions possessed, they became discouraged when contemplating the likelihood of children's opinions being used as a catalyst for educational change.

The fact that adults used complicated jargon validated their perspectives as being more valuable than children's perspectives. According to one interviewee who was still in school, since "adults tend to speak about important things, using big words that children are not able to understand," adults are able to express themselves more eloquently, and so their thoughts possess more sophistication than those simplistic views of children (Natasha, 12 years old). Therefore, the combination of adults' eloquent delivery of their ideas with their social status and positioning in the societal hierarchy led some participants to believe that adults' opinions held more value than children's and that adults' perspectives had more capacity to result in action to improve education. The intricacy of adults' opinions thus trumped children's opinions since children had restricted understandings of complex issues.

In addition to the skepticism expressed by participants regarding children's views leading to tangible education improvement, a few early school leavers also perceived children's lack of experience and knowledge in comparison to adults' as a hindrance working against their ability to propel educational change. For example, Ann directly stated that "children's perspectives are not as important as those of adults because adults have more knowledge and experience in comparison to children, which thus validates their opinions" (Ann, 16 years old). Tim also expressed similar thoughts to Ann in this regard, where he believed that "adults' perspectives are more important than children's because although children have some knowledge, it cannot compare to the amount of knowledge that adults have" (Tim, 15 years old). However, Tim still acknowledged the value and necessity of consulting children regarding educational matters because he felt that "one needs to ask children about their perspectives regarding education because since the children are the ones who are receiving the education, what they like and do not like and what they need should be considered, from their own perspectives" (Tim, 15 years old). Ann also believed that children's opinions could have the potential to

improve schools and teaching even though she previously mentioned that adults had more experience and knowledge than children. Therefore, for these 2 participants, apprehension regarding their opinions' ability to seed education improvement were based on their perceptions of children being inferior to adults in regards to life experience and knowledge; however, even though they felt that adults' opinions held more value than children's, they still acknowledged that children still had the capacity and knowledge required to spearhead education improvement.

Although some children felt that their opinions were insignificant in comparison to those of adults,' some of the participants did believe that children's perspectives and experiences needed to be sought in the education sector because children's perspectives held as much value as adults'. In fact, the majority of participants in the cohort of children still in school believed that children's perspectives were as equally crucial as adults' in educational contexts.

A small portion of children highlighted the criticality of incorporating and utilizing children over adults as knowledgeable sources for educational change in Vietnam. Gayle, a respondent who dropped out of school, believed that children's perspectives were actually more important than those of adults' especially when it came to educational matters because she found that only from asking children could one truly understand why some children had dropped out of school. She believed that children needed to be sought in order for people to really enhance their understanding of children's views. And lastly, one child who was still in school shared during the interview that she found many opinions that children had could surprise adults because sometimes adults underestimated children. Children recognized that their opportunities to be consulted and involved as resourceful voices to guide educational change were scarce and they stressed the necessity of allowing children to share their educational views and experiences if education improvement was meant to stem from a pertinent lens.

Adults' privilege of having more revered societal status combined with their ability to incorporate complicated jargon to express their opinions made children feel as though their opinions could not be valued to the same degree as those of adults. Even though the content of children's suggestions for education improvement may have been more useful, adults' eloquent delivery of their ideas

caused children to feel inferior to adults, thus causing some children to delegitimize their opinions and experiences. Regardless of some participants' perceptions of adults' opinions being more sophisticated and tangible, children still believed that they had the capacity to lead meaningful change in the education sector because they possessed unique educational knowledge and experiences in comparison to adults.

Comparing Educational Experiences and Perspectives between Early School Leavers and Children still in School

There were both overlapping and distinguishing responses from each cohort of participants. For a portion of section **(a)**, all of section **(b)**, and all of section **(c)** of the interview, children in both cohorts were asked the same questions. Therefore, Table 1 exhibits participants' answers, from students still in school and early school leavers, in order to more easily facilitate the comparison of responses between both cohorts.

Table 1

Comparison of Cohorts' Responses.

Topic/Question	**Responses for Children still Attending School**	**Responses for Children not in School**
a)Children's Educational and Out-of-School Experiences		
Feelings when at school	Worried, happy, normal, scared	Happy
Treatment by teachers in class	Not well, well, normal, caring and supportive	Good, normal, very good
Suggestions for teacher improvement	Give students manageable amounts of homework, treat students equally, explain subject matter better, provide students who are	Participate in professional development, treat students equally, be more understanding of students, provide sufficient amounts

	struggling in class with more attention and support, be more understanding of students	of homework so students can apply their knowledge, provide students with support
Suggestions for school improvement	Have large fields for children to play and exercise on, equip libraries with readily accessible resources for students, plant more green trees, provide better school supplies for students, provide opportunities for students to catch up to peers if they take an extended leave of absence from school	Enhance the physical structure of schools, keep school grounds clean
b)Children's Opinions about attaining an Education/ Children's Views of Education's Role in their Future		
Is learning outside of school forms of education?	5 participants stated *yes* and 2 participants stated *no*	4 participant stated *yes* and 1 participant stated *no*
Are things learned in school useful for the future?	All 7 participants stated *yes*	1 participant responded *no* while the rest stated *yes*
Are forms of learning outside of school	None of the participants answered this question	2 participants did not answer, 1 participant

more important/less important/as important as forms of learning in school? How do you apply knowledge attained from school outside of school?	 Use of English and Vietnamese to communicate with others, Mathematics to do every day calculations, Vietnamese to help those less fortunate, Home Economics to learn life skills such as cooking	stated they are more important, 2 participants stated they are less important Use of knowledge from politics could help one understand the country's political structure and to enhance one's quality of life, Mathematics to do calculations at work, Vietnamese to communicate with others
c)Thoughts about including Children's Perspectives and Experiences Feelings about being asked for your opinion How can children's educational views and experiences be included in educational contexts?	 It is important, good, necessary, it uncovers the truth about what children experience Children's views can be used to improve schools and teaching methods, children's views can be collected to survey what some suggestions for education improvement are and then acting on these suggestions	 It is important, good, necessary, normal, neutral, it allows individuals to see what children (dis)like about education and school They cannot because final decisions always lie with adults, actually seeking children for their views

	to produce results	
Are children's perspectives as important/more important/less important than adults'?	1 participant stated sometimes children's views are as important as adults' but sometimes they are not as important because children may only be thinking of themselves, 4 participants stated children's views are just as important as adults,' 2 participants stated children's opinions are less important than adults'	2 participant stated children's views are as important as adults,' 1 participant stated children's views are more important than adults,' 2 participant stated children's views are less important than adults'

Chapter Summary

Children named a number of critical factors which intrinsically affected their schooling and learning. An especially integral component of children's education was teachers since every respondent in this study mentioned teachers in regards to their experiences at school. Therefore, teachers had immense influence on children's experiences of and dispositions towards school and learning. Participants of this study often attributed their ability to grasp subject matter, along with the ambience of their learning environment to their teachers' treatment of them; children tended to associate suportful, comfortable learning environments with teachers who practiced empathetic pedagogy as they implemented fair treatment of students within the classroom. Stemming from the role of teachers, children also valued other components of their education when it came to their learning, such as: appropriate workloads, being treated equally to their peers, green and clean school grounds, and having available and accessible resources within their schools.

An especially marginalized group that is often excluded from education discourse is early school leavers. Without consulting these children on their educational experiences when they are still in school, it leaves for the generation of

misconceptions regarding their educational experiences and views. In this study, almost all of the early school leavers found themselves terminating their education in order to enter the workforce to support their families. Even though none of these children wanted to leave school, they were compelled to do so in order to help provide educational opportunities for their younger siblings and to help contribute to the household income. Providing these individuals with space and opportunities to share their stories can facilitate the development of an education system which is more sensitive to early school leavers' specific needs, thus encouraging their reintegration into the system if these children decide to return to school.

Although some children in this study acknowledged that children's opinions were useful, the children also realized that the feasibility of turning children's ideas and opinions into constructive change was not very likely. Thus, the process of transforming ideas into action was a rare process in their views, especially when the ideas originated from children. Participants' references to children's opinions as being based on "imaginary" or "ideal situations" consequently led some participant to believe that the potential of children's ideas or thoughts being manifested in the form of instrumental action are limited and unlikely. Therefore, although a number of participants recognized that children's opinions may be more honest, these participants expressed that children's ideas were limited by their ability to produce attainable and realistic change. Although some children may find it challenging to lead meaningful, sustainable, and realistic educational change, most participants who were unable to conceive suggestions for educational improvement struggled to do so because they were never approached for their opinions. Therefore, in order to ensure that children feel safe and comfortable about offering their opinions for education improvement, more opportunities for them to do so must arise.

When child respondents were consulted for their views and experiences, every child had constructive, useful opinions to share. Suggestions such as involving early school leavers in efforts to improve education were highlighted because children felt that these marginalized former students needed to be involved so that people could understand their true reasons for leaving school. Hence, it is even more crucial that development organizations partner with children when implementing development education initiatives since children have the knowledge to guide these projects so that they are sensitive to local children's needs while development

organizations are equipped with other resources that children may lack in order to implement these projects (e.g. fiscal resources).

Chapter Five: Findings and Discussion

The themes presented in this chapter were not only inspired by the major themes that reoccurred throughout the relevant literature, but they were also the main topics and issues brought up by research participants in this study. Taking what respondents from both cohorts of children who were in and not in school mentioned during their interviews, respondents' opinions and experiences were categorized into the themes presented in this chapter. Therefore, within each thematic section of the chapter, participant responses from both cohorts are included, compared, and contrasted.

Influential Factors Embedded in Children's Learning Environments which Shape their Education

Teachers' Pivotal Roles in Children's Education. Teachers may have a more influential role in their students' education than they imagine. Teachers were identified both by participants in this study and by the existing literature, as having indubitable influence on children's enjoyment of and success with school subjects. Teachers' impact on children's educational experiences also extended to the nature of their relationships with students where empathetic connections with students led to increased positive dispositions to learning and education from students.

Teachers play an integral role in shaping children's educational views and experiences because children tend to associate which subjects they like most in school to their teachers' ability to teach the material in a manner which is easy for students to understand (The Alberta Teachers' Association, 2003). Numerous studies conducted all over the world regarding students' values of their education demonstrate that students highly valued having helpful teachers who used effective teaching methods since it enhanced their school attitudes and academic progress (Montandon & Osiek, 1998; Phelan, Davidson, & Cao, 1992; Phelps & Graham, 2010; The Alberta Teachers' Association, 2003). Participants from this study also attributed the grasp they had with certain subjects such as Language Arts to their teacher, thus providing further support for the literature which highlights the amount of emphasis students place on their teachers in relation to their success and enjoyment of a subject in school. Phelps and Graham (2010) also discovered through interviewing children attending school in rural Vietnam that the subjects they liked most tended to be ones which teachers demonstrated the most

knowledge in because then teachers were able to provide students with more support, hence enhancing their understanding of the school subject being taught. The students in my study explained that they found Language Arts the easiest of all their school subjects specifically because they liked their teacher and/or they felt that their teacher had enough knowledge regarding the subject matter to deliver information to students in a manner which facilitated easy comprehension of the subject. One student even stated that he found English the easiest to understand amongst all his subjects due to his teacher's pedagogical methods. On the other hand, one student provided insight on her difficulty with Physics and explained that she especially struggled with this subject because the teacher used complex methods of explaining concepts to students. Thus, a teacher's ability to decipher and explain subject matter to students intrinsically influenced how students perceived their success with regards to the subject, thus affecting whether they enjoyed the subject or not.

The dependence of participants' educational dispositions on teachers was also reflected in Fredriksen and Rhodes' (2004) study where the researchers found that "supportive relationships with teachers may augment students' motivation to learn and actively participate in subject domains that have traditionally held little interest for them" (p. 46). While although students' teachers in my study did not necessarily enhance students' interests in specific subjects, the students from my study did accredit their success in some subjects to their teachers and their pedagogical practices, especially since a handful of students who were interviewed based what subjects they enjoyed on whether their teachers did a successful job of explaining the subject matter or not. It was evident from this research study and the existing literature that the relationship children form with their teachers is an especially integral factor in affecting a child's educational experiences and disposition.

Teachers have intrinsic effects on children's educational experiences and perspectives. Four out of the 7 children interviewed in the cohort of students who were still in school wanted to be teachers in the future. Both this study and the research provide evidence to support the idea that children are extremely impressionable and so "children learn specific skills as well as attitudes and beliefs regarding schooling and school attainment through their relationships with

significant others, including teachers" (Baker, 1999, p. 58). This impressionable characteristic of children, which was also mentioned in a study conducted by the Alberta Teachers' Association (2003), demonstrates the potentially extensive influence caring teachers can have on students especially since in my study, teachers were able to affect some of the participants' future aspirations. For example, as a child, one specific student wanted to be a doctor, but now she wanted to be a teacher because she wanted to be able to "teach students things that will have a lasting impact on their lives" (Tina, 16 years old). It was thus apparent that this respondent had high regards for teachers and thus wanted to emulate the positive impact her teachers had on her by aspiring to be a teacher herself.

Similar to the cohort of students still enrolled in school, early school leavers mentioned the influence of teachers on their learning multiple times and after analyzing their responses, it was evident that students regarded teachers as an intrinsic part of their learning environment. In Ann's case, she described her schooling experience with more references to a home-like environment and she shared that she perceived her teachers as maternal figures since her teachers treated her like family. Therefore, the fact that her teachers acted more like maternal figures to her may have led her to perceive her learning atmosphere as more of a home than an institution. This home-like association with her learning environment may have also been because the learning and schooling Ann experienced took place at an orphanage instead of at a formal learning institution, which would support the idea that one's learning environment plays a crucial role in shaping one's schooling experience and perception of learning (Arghode, 2012; Baker, 1999; Fredriksen & Rhodes, 2004; Ogundokun, 2011; Phelan, Davidson, & Cao, 1992; Phelps & Graham, 2010).

Apart from Ann, the early school leavers in this study, similar to the cohort of participants who were still enrolled in school, said that teachers treated them "normally" other than when teachers would yell at students if they misbehaved. Therefore, these "at-risk" students were not treated specifically worse than students who were not at risk, like Lee and Burkam (2003) found. However, at the same time, the at-risk children in my study were not necessarily doing poorly in school but had to drop out because of mainly financial issues, which was not necessarily true with Lee and Burkam's (2003) study since the participants in their study were at risk of

dropping out of school due to their low academic achievement. Although Lee and Burkam (2003) emphasize the extent to which positive student-teacher relations can have on a student's school enrollment, regardless of his/her background and school demographics, the results of my study demonstrated that although most of the children in this cohort seemed to have positive relationships with their teachers, it was due to their economic situation and many other active factors which forced them to drop out of school.

Although most interviewees disclosed that they had positive relationships with their teachers, a few concerns were brought up by participants in both cohorts regarding teachers' fairness in the classroom. One respondent directly mentioned forms of injustice that occurred in the classroom where he felt that teachers tended to favour students who sought private tutoring at their teachers' homes. Although private tutoring has been identified as an influential factor in noticeably enhancing a student's schooling performance (Dang, 2007), participants in this study associated disadvantageous outcomes to private tutoring. For example, one respondent attributed private tutoring to encouraging teachers' favouritism of those students who had enough expenditure to enroll in private tutoring with their classroom teachers. The Vietnamese government has recognized that such favouritism is a common problem resulting from private tutoring offered by classroom teachers and so it has "issued several legal documents at the ministerial levels prohibiting compulsory and mass-scale extra classes [outside of school settings]" (Decree No. 242/Prime Minister 1993 as cited in Dang, 2007, p. 6) and "stipulating the ranges for extra class fees that schools can charge students" (Circular No. 16/Prime Minister-Interministerial 1993 as cited in Dang, 2007, p. 6). In fact, many of the students that I came across while conducting my research in Vietnam informed me that it was now illegal for teachers to hold private tutoring sessions in their homes. Ben claimed he noticed that his peers who received such extra tutoring had a tendency to receive better treatment and higher marks by teachers. This opened avenues for favouring, thus causing some students to feel left behind in class and disadvantaged. In fact, when asked for their suggestions regarding how teachers could become better teachers, one student suggested that teachers should provide each student in the classroom with equal amounts of academic assistance and

attention, regardless of the student's academic level and whether they sought extra tutoring from teachers or not.

In both cohorts, children vocalized that supportive teachers were essential in promoting student learning. Gayle, a child who dropped out of school, mentioned that teachers should be fair and should avoid favouring specific students in class. Like some students in the cohort of children who were still in school, Gayle mentioned the issue of private tutoring at teachers' homes and how this led to favouritism since these students were the individuals who tended to receive higher marks from teachers. Whether she attributed this improved academic performance to favouritism or the actual academic benefits of tutoring was unclear. She continued by explaining, although she shared that she did not want to directly say this, that in order to become better teachers, teachers should treat students fairly and be more understanding towards students. Her hesitance in conceiving suggestions for teachers to improve their pedagogical practices and disclosure of the fact that she did not want to directly share her suggestions may have been due to her respect for teachers that is culturally expected of her as both a child and student. Gayle may have been reluctant in stating how teachers could improve their teaching because she may not have wanted to come off as being disrespectful and ungrateful which was what Phelps and Graham (2010) encountered in their study in rural Vietnam with their research participants.

Favouritism also arose in the literature in multiple interviews as an issue that students faced with teachers. Baker (1999) found that teachers tend to unintentionally behave differently toward high- and low-achieving students where "high-achieving students typically receive (and perceive) more positive and supportive interpersonal interactions and higher expectations for performance from teachers" and although "low achievers often obtain compensatory instruction and increased teaching effort . . . this is coupled with more negative affect and negative interpersonal interactions from teachers" (p. 59). The issue of teachers' unequal treatment of students in the classroom was brought up multiple instances during interviews in my study, both by interviewees who did and did not academically perform well in class. Pomeroy (1999) stresses that "equally important to teaching ability is the willingness to provide students with the help and attention they need in order to learn" (p. 471). Ben reinforced Pomeroy's (1999) findings by specifically

voicing his concerns about how some teachers would give students who sought them for extra private tutoring more attention. Once again, the teacher played an integral role in affecting how children perceived their educational experiences, and in turn, affected their opinions regarding matters for education improvement.

It was clear that from some interviewees' accounts, teachers played an especially influential role on their education. One respondent, Jordan, claimed he dropped out of school partially because of his heart condition which caused him to miss many classes and so his teacher suggested that he stopped attending classes since he was absent for so much material that she thought it would be impossible and pointless for him to catch up to his peers. In this case, the teacher played an especially pivotal role in shaping the child's schooling experience and views because for Jordan, his teacher suggested that he terminate his schooling because he kept missing classes due to his heart condition; she used his lack of attendance based on health concerns as a justification for his permanent termination of school and so he consequently took her advice into consideration and followed through by dropping out. Although there were other active factors that led to his dropping out, it was evident that the teacher's voice still had significant influence on the decision to terminate his school enrollment since he mentioned her opinion as part of the reason why he decided to drop out. Phelps and Graham (2010) imply that "caring teachers may be in a pivotal position to influence students who are teetering between involvement in school and withdrawal" (p. 698-699), and in Jordan's case, the teacher played a significant part in leading to his withdrawal from school by openly discouraging his attendance. Jordan's condition caused him to miss a significant number of classes, and instead of providing necessary learning supports for him to catch up to his peers, she perceived his unique situation as being an inconvenience and thus encouraged him to stop attending class.

Meeting the various learning needs and accommodating different learning styles are heavily dependent on teachers' pedagogical practices. From interview responses, it was clear that teachers tended to provide students with opportunities to learn by hearing, seeing, and doing. Five out of the 7 respondents in the cohort of children still enrolled in school claimed that they learned best by hearing which was useful since verbal explanations from teachers were prevalent for learning new subject matter in the classroom. Children then usually received opportunities to

learn by doing since teachers would give students examples to do in class and take-home work to complete on their own time. Tina specifically mentioned that she learned best when teachers used repetition in their pedagogical practices which was contradictory to most of the existing literature which portrayed repetition as an ineffective learning mechanism (Duggan, 2001; Hamano, 2008; Phelps & Graham, 2010; Vo & Trinh, 2005). Although most participants in this study preferred more engaging methods of learning in the classroom, we need to be wary of completely overruling repetition as an ineffective pedagogical tool since this student did find that it was useful for her retention of information. Each student has unique learning styles, capacities, and strengths and weaknesses so teachers must be as accommodating as they can with their pedagogy in order to enhance the likelihood of each student's individual academic success.

Multiple participants from both cohorts mentioned that teachers needed to be aware of and sensitive to students' individual learning styles, needs, capacities, and abilities. Therefore, in order for teachers to improve their teaching, students stressed that teachers should not challenge students too much because children tended to feel frustrated if given work that was beyond their comprehension level. Therefore, teachers should be more understanding of students' capabilities if they wished to improve their teaching methods and teachers should not only be understanding in relation to matters of workload but also in regards to fair treatment of students. For instance, Tina expressed that if teachers wanted to improve their teaching, they could try to be more understanding in the sense that students worked at different paces and so teachers needed to spend more time with students who were struggling in class while also providing more explanations in class so that they could better cater to struggling students' needs. When teachers incorporated empathetic approaches into their pedagogy, students ended up perceiving their educators as caring, which has been proven to motivate students both within and outside of academic settings (Phelan, Davidson, & Cao, 1992; The Alberta Teachers' Association, 2003). Also, since each student has and prefers a different way of learning, when teachers vary their teaching methods from time to time, the likelihood that each student's learning style is catered to increases.

In order to truly demonstrate that teachers care about a student's progress, he/she should make efforts to connect with students on a deeper level in order to

demonstrate genuine concern and empathetic understanding towards students (Arghode, 2012). One participant especially attested to this statement since she shared that she felt teachers she encountered were supportive of students and so she felt cared for at school. When asked how teachers could improve their teaching, most participants mentioned that teachers needed to be more understanding of students and their circumstances. It was evident in the literature that it was vital for teachers to understand and relate to their students (Gannaway, 1984; Howe, 1995 as cited in Pomeroy, 1999) and the findings from my study further supported this. Phelan, Davidson, and Cao (1992) also found that students seemed to feel frustrated when teachers did not understand the pressures and stresses they faced with academic, social, and emotional aspects of their lives. Therefore, based on the responses of participants in my study and in the literature, it is evident that empathetic pedagogy leads to academic advantages for students.

When children struggle to offer opinions for education improvement, it is often misconstrued as their lack of maturity, knowledge, or experience which hinders their abilities to offer an opinion. However, one student in this study had difficulty conjuring suggestions for teachers to become better teachers because he had never been approached by teachers for his perspective on how teachers could improve their pedagogy. Therefore, the fact that many assume children do not have anything constructive to say about improving education is not necessarily true; some children may not have constructive suggestions for educational amelioration because they have never been approached for their opinions. In their research, Phelps and Graham (2010) also noted that children demonstrated a deep sense of respect for adults and that "school played a very important role in transmitting and reinforcing dominant social norms and values, such as respect and obedience" (p. vi). The cultural expectation that children must pay adults, especially teachers, a deep sense of respect and obedience may have contributed to the struggle participants in my study had with conjuring suggestions for teacher improvement since it may have been perceived as a form of disrespect towards their instructors which was also observed by Phelps and Graham (2010) in their interviews with children in rural Vietnam. Therefore, if children were sought more often for their views and experiences, then some of the things they have to say would be more instrumental. Without hearing what students are experiencing in class, from the

perspective of the students themselves, how are teachers supposed to become more understanding of students' feelings about workload and of how students feel they are being treated in class? Overall, in regards to suggestions for teacher improvement, it was notable that students' perspectives tended to relate to amounts of homework given by teachers, thorough explanations in class from teachers, and fair treatment of students.

Although teachers had immense impact on children's disposition towards experiences of school and learning, their influence over at-risk children's school attendance was not as prominent as discussed in the literature. However, teachers did affect how children perceived fairness in the classroom, how children felt about going to school, and whether children felt emotionally stressed or not. Suggestions for pedagogical improvement which were appreciated and encouraged by children included: professional development, understanding students, being fair, accommodating different learning styles and levels, and adopting overall empathetic pedagogical practices.

Managing Workloads and Emotions. Debilitating factors associated with learning such as being overworked and receiving minimal support can take a toll on children's educational outcomes. Children recognized that school work provided them with opportunities to apply and relate to the knowledge they attained from school, but when workloads exceeded children's abilities and capacities, it resulted in feelings of overwhelm, anxiety, and stress.

In order for a child to have positive associations with learning and school, he/she needs to feel comfortable and supported in his/her learning environment. Students value an emotionally supportive learning atmosphere where they do not have to be concerned about feeling unconfident with their learning (Phelan, Davidson & Cao, 1992). In my research, when it came to inquiring about workload, 15-year-old Ben stated that he usually received a lot of homework and that completing the workload assigned from his teachers left him feeling exhausted. He expanded on his struggles with school work by explaining that teachers tended to expect students to independently work ahead in their textbooks, which was problematic because he was expected to complete assignments on material that he did not learn yet from his teacher, and thus did not understand. If child-centred strategies were to be successfully implemented in Vietnam, then the lens of the

learner would need to be adopted by decision-makers in the education sector. Without hearing what children are saying about their school workload for example, teachers and other authoritative figures remain ignorant of what educational issues children are encountering.

Without consulting students about their workload, students became overwhelmed with their school work which often led to their emotional debilitation. Sixteen-year-old Tina mentioned that although she received a manageable amount of work from her teacher, she felt that the workload became too much when it was near exam period because teachers would give her extra work to complete at home. Accounts like this from the interviewees highlighted the criticality of the teacher's role in shaping students' attitudes and perceptions of school. While positive reinforcement, encouragement, and academic guidance can instigate positive learning outcomes for children, the lack of such qualities in the learning atmosphere can lead to detrimental consequences such as feelings of anxiety which can adversely affect students (Ogundokun, 2011). Although anxiety can be beneficial when it manifests excitement and enthusiasm in the learner, anxiety can exert unfavourable effects when it causes worry, confusion, fear, and the undermining of self-esteem (Arch, 1987 as cited in Ogundokun, 2011), which was a result of receiving overwhelming amounts of work combined with limited support for many of the participants in this study.

The participants spoke about overwhelming anxiety when they did not finish their homework or when it came to exam period. For example, one participant disclosed, "I worry when I am at school because when I don't finish my homework, I worry that the teacher will call me up to the board to do an example, but I won't be able to because I didn't do the homework" (Ben, 15 years old) whereas another respondent mentioned being stressed during exams. Participants' feelings of anxiety in relation to homework and exams coincide with Ogundokun's (2011) findings which highlight that "test anxiety when not properly managed has a significant negative effect on learning outcome of students" (p. 331). Struggling with material they had not been taught yet may also lead to students' feelings of frustration and anxiety which may turn students away from school and learning. In fact, when asked how they felt when they were at school, a number of the respondents in my study shared that they tended to feel worried or scared to go to school when they failed to

complete their assigned work. A student in the cohort of individuals still in school disclosed her anxiety by stating, "I do not especially feel happy at school because I worry about the level of my homework being too difficult for me" (Natasha, 12 years old). Children found themselves concerned about receiving heavy workloads and/or homework that was beyond their academic abilities and so they were often consumed with anxiety which demonstrated that teachers and educational authoritative figures need to take into consideration the amount of work that is suitable for each grade level so that children do not feel overwhelmed at school and so that their concerns with completing their work do not overcloud their overall experiences at school. School should embody a supportive learning environment for students, but when children start associating anxiety and stress with school, it can have extremely detrimental effects on their learning and attitudes towards school, not to mention it would also inhibit their personal development.

Both cohorts of children also valued opportunities to apply what they have learned in the classroom to their lives outside of school. One student who no longer attended school suggested that students should have sufficient amounts of homework in order for them to have ample opportunities to apply their knowledge. Therefore, a balance of workload needed to be available for students; children needed a manageable amount of school work which provided them with sufficient opportunities to apply their knowledge from school which did not overwhelm them and was appropriate for their academic abilities at the same time.

School work provides students with opportunities to develop their academic skills and build on the knowledge they acquire in school, but manageable amounts of work are optimal for student development. Manageable amounts of work led to the greatest likelihood of establishing a comfortable learning environment for children since they received adequate opportunities to apply their knowledge without having to feel overwhelmed, anxious, or stressed.

Educational Support in the Form of Social Capital. Education overall has a number of social components embedded within it. Participants often relied on various social networks, including family and friends, as resources for educational assistance. Also, a few interviewees associated socializing opportunities with school and even identified socialization with friends as a motivator for attending school.

A child's social networks, in the form of human capital, could serve as an essential resource for educational support. During the interview, Natasha stated, "although I do not usually receive help with homework, I do rely on my mom for help once in a while if need be" (Natasha, 12 years old). She did further explain though that she rarely asked her mother for assistance with work because her mother was unfamiliar with what she was learning about in school and so this restricted her mother's ability to help her with homework. In Phelps and Graham's study (2010), the lack of parental involvement was often due to parents' lack of time to become involved with their children's education, but in Natasha's case, her mother's lack of involvement was mainly due to her inability to understand Natasha's school work. Regardless though, it was necessary for parents and guardians to get involved with their children's education so that students were aware that they had their parents' and guardians' support. Therefore, development opportunities were also unequally available for children depending on their available human capital.

Friends also provided children with valuable sources of knowledge and support in their academic pursuits. Peers often serve as an important learning resource for children since children are able to consult peers for academic help (Phelps & Graham, 2010) and in my study, 2 participants named peers as useful resources for collaboration in regards to homework assignments. Ben even stated that if he did not understand his homework, he resorted to his friends as the primary and main source for help. Friends and peers thus played an essential role in students' educational experiences in this study. As a part of the learning atmosphere, they helped make a student feel comfortable at school, and some of the children interviewed even identified friends as an active factor in making school more appealing to them, which was also evident in the existing literature (Montandon & Osiek, 1998; Phelps & Graham, 2010). After gathering the participants' responses regarding whom they sought for homework help, it was evident that children's friends also served as a support network when children felt they needed to rely on someone for academic assistance which was also discovered in interviews with children living in rural Vietnam by Phelps and Graham (2010). In other regards to the role of friends in a child's life, one student mentioned, "I look forward to cleaning the school grounds and bathrooms because even though it is

hard work, I enjoy it because I see it as an opportunity to socialize with my friends" (Ben, 15 years old). This student's response further related to the significant role friends played in a child's attitude towards school. Social interactions with friends made school seem more like a ground for socialization instead of strict learning, and thus made students more willing to go to school and have more positive associations with schooling. Therefore, socialization opportunities restored the humanizing aspect of school since students were encouraged to associate the formation and development of relationships with their education environment. With the prevalence of benefits from attaining a formal education constantly being framed within fiscal frameworks, it consequently writes off the relationship between students and educational institutions to one of a producer-consumer nature, but when children associated their desire to attend school with opportunities to socialize with friends and teachers, it restored the humanistic aspects of learning to education.

Although some students viewed their peers as sources for support and networking, others saw peers as academic competition. Competition is often encouraged and sometimes over-emphasized in classrooms. Phelps and Graham (2010) discovered that "[s]chools made use of display boards and 'titles' to acknowledge students who achieved high marks" in the area they conducted their study and so this sense of competition in the classroom consequently served as a form of motivation for some children (p. 68). In my study, Tina even admitted to using friends as points of reference to gauge how well off she was and to reflect on how lucky she was to have some life skills which her friends were lacking. She stated, "I can compare myself to my friends and I realize I should be grateful for what I have because I'm actually better off than some of my friends" (Tina, 16 years old). Multiple times, the influence of friends came across in interviews and for Tina, she admitted that she used her friends as a source for comparison and self-evaluation. It is evident that friends play an integral role in children's educational experiences, but in Tina's case, it was specifically for comparative purposes. Students should be motivated to learn for reasons of personal developmental, but Tina identified competition as a main motivation for learning. From the competitive perception of education, the likelihood of collective development becomes minimal. The competitive nature existing within the education system mirrors the pejorative

nature of children feeling as if they must compete in the market economy for employment. Therefore, students focus on competing for resources instead of engaging with each other to provide mutual support for each other.

Depending on the available social capital children had at their dispense, children were presented with unequal opportunities for receiving educational assistance and support when they needed it. Even though most children were capable of independently completing school work, for example, children often resorted to parents, siblings, and/or friends if they could in order to receive extra learning support. The availability of social capital that children had also affected their experiences at school since a few interviewees relied on friends for academic competition or socialization opportunities.

Internal and External Characteristics of Schools and their Influences on Children's Learning Environments. The ideas children disclosed in their interviews for school improvement were either centred on the betterment of the school's physical characteristics or internal aspects of the school. Many of the participants commented on changes that were necessary for school improvement which involved bettering the school environment as a whole, thus demonstrating that a child's learning atmosphere held immense value as a part of his/her educational experience.

Many components of the school's environment had an impact over students. Numerous researchers highlighted the effects that physical characteristics of the school's overall structure have on children's learning (Ogundokun, 2011; Phelps & Graham, 2010). Two children in my interviews made specific suggestions for ameliorating the physical appearance of schools by establishing green soccer fields for children to play on while another student suggested that more green trees needed to be planted on school grounds which was also a specific concern voiced by participants in Phelps and Graham's (2010) study, and that school grounds should be kept free of litter.

Other interviewees also made suggestions to improve schools internally. For example, children mentioned better quality school supplies such as textbooks and notebooks, and better equipped libraries as being crucial for school betterment. Not only should such educational resources be available for students, but one child stressed that such materials should also be made accessible for students to use.

Overall, every suggestion that participants had for school improvement would contribute to the holistic betterment of their learning environment, in one way or another since suggestions often involved internal and/or external improvements to schools.

In general, many of the children in the cohort of participants who were no longer enrolled in formal education had difficulty identifying school improvements that needed to be made, similar to what was observed with the cohort of children still enrolled in school and in Phelps and Graham's (2010) study. Ann was one of these children who were unable to name necessary changes that needed to be made by schools and the fact that she had some difficulty answering this question may have been due to the fact that she had never gone to school at a formal institution and so she was not sure of what changes were necessary for schools. As for the other children who were not in school and were unable to answer the question, it may have been because it had been too long since they were in school or they may have not spent enough time in school so they were unable to make any suggestions for school improvement.

There was an over-lapping value of maintaining the physical appearance of schools in both cohorts of interviewed children when it came to making suggestions for school improvement. Where the cohort of children still in school mentioned planting trees and establishing soccer fields in schools, the cohort of children who were no longer enrolled suggested that school grounds should be well maintained so they would be clean and litter-free. Therefore, it was evident through interviews in both cohorts that one's learning environment played an integral role in one's learning and educational experiences. Physical structural changes along with increasing learning resources for students formed a holistically ideal school in the eyes of children. The maintenance of an aesthetically pleasing external learning environment combined with well-equipped learning resources that were readily available for students' use formed participants' ideas of necessary characteristics for an ideal school within the formal education sector. Children generally had pertinent and instrumental responses when asked for their opinions about needed educational changes, thus demonstrating that they should be included in critical development education discourses, instead of marginalized from such discourses.

Gender Equality in Education

Females are often recognized as being especially marginalized in the education sector in Vietnam. In order to thus gauge the effects of gender on children's education, there was a conscious effort for equal gender representation in this study so a total of 6 girls and 6 boys were interviewed. Even though the literature shares that girls have a greater likelihood of dropping out of school in comparison to boys (Behrman & Knowles, 1999; Belanger & Liu, 2008; Hollander, 1998; Knodel & Wongsith, 1991; Truong, Knodel, Lam & Friedman, 1998; Vo & Trinh, 2005), the results of this study were not able to confirm these findings or testify against them since there was not any mention of gender as a direct factor affecting children's education by participants in either cohort.

Although gender was never explicitly identified as a factor which affected children's education, one student in the cohort of children still in school did unintentionally mention gender roles when trying to make distinctions between different forms of learning and what was considered as learning. When asked whether she took into account the things learned outside of school as forms of education, she framed her response in reference to performing domestic chores as opportunities for learning. She stated that although these chores required specific skills, she did not associate chores such as gardening, farming, tending to farm animals, and cooking as forms of learning simply because "as a girl, it is expected of you to help your mother with these things" (Tina, 16 years old). Since these duties were expected of her gender, she did not classify the completion of such tasks as learning opportunities.

Although Tina considered performing daily tasks as providing her with useful life skills, she did not conceptualize them as providing her with learning opportunities and so she did not think that performing such chores were forms of education. However, when it came to what she considered as mundane chores, she did not find that they involved learning because they were seen more as duties to be completed instead of learning opportunities, and when it came to domestic chores specifically, she associated these tasks with gendered norms. Because these tasks were perceived as socialized norms that were expected of females to perform, she almost saw these tasks as being innate skills that women should be able to complete instead of as learning opportunities for both genders that occurred outside of school. Therefore, although the existing literature identified the greater likelihood of

girls terminating their education in comparison to boys, that was not necessarily true for the girls in this study. Instead of gender, other active factors had a greater inhibiting impact on children's education attainment.

The Fiscal Burden of Educating Children

The grade level in which children dropped out of school spanned over an eclectic range for this cohort of participants. Based on the interviewee's responses, there seemed to be a child who dropped out in each of these grades: 4, 6, 7, 10, and 11. Therefore, there were individuals who dropped out at the elementary, lower secondary, and upper secondary school levels. Since the sample size of this cohort only consisted of 5 participants, there was insufficient data to determine, as children ascended the school grades, whether higher costs associated with higher levels of schooling led them to drop out of school, as presumed by the literature, or not. However, after analyzing all the interviewee's responses, it was clear that scarce financial resources in general played a significant role in leading to school termination for these children, regardless of their education level.

Four out of the 5 early school leavers who were interviewed believed that what they had learned in school was useful for what they wanted to do in the future. Therefore, although there was mentioning in the literature that children often choose to drop out of school due to the perception of low quality education and the acquisition of useless and irrelevant knowledge, this was not mentioned by these participants as a factor contributing to their termination of schooling. Instead, they attributed the end of their schooling to mainly financial factors. Therefore, an underlying issue that was apparent in all of the interviews was limited fiscal resources, as was expected from examining the existing literature (Swinkels & Turk, 2003; Vo & Trinh, 2005). This was significant because in development discourse, enhancing one's economic situation is perceived as a means of engaging in development initiatives (Tikly, 2004; Zerbo et al., 1997). However, it was evident from speaking with these participants that their economic situation was the very factor which hindered their ability to develop. Therefore, this further supports the notion that development should embody more than just fiscal frameworks so that it is not detrimental to individuals' self-perceptions and so it does not restrict their options for engaging in development opportunities.

The Vietnamese government does reduce or even waive school fees for children who face adversity such as children of ethnic minority, children who have a parent wounded during the US-Vietnam war, children who live in remote areas, children who live in extreme poverty, or children who have been orphaned, but both the literature and the responses from participants in this study demonstrate that such financial assistance from the government is insufficient for allowing some children to attend school. Swinkels and Turk (2003) highlight that affordability remains as one of the main reasons for children not being in school which was reinforced by the results of this study.

Overall, all of the children who were no longer in school disclosed that they liked school and felt content when they were still enrolled. In fact, none of them wanted to drop out of school and so the termination of their formal education was one of coercion and not of choice. When asked whether they would want to return to school if provided the opportunity, most of the children in this cohort were enthusiastic about returning, especially since these interviewees never wanted to leave school in the first place. Only one early school leaver stated that he would not return to school even if he had the chance to. He felt that he had become accustomed to working so he would rather continue working instead of returning to the unfamiliar academic world that he had been removed from for so long. Therefore, although this respondent shared that he did not want to return to school, he never initially wanted to terminate his schooling, but he now finds himself obligated to remain in the labour force and thus continues to work instead of returning to school, as did all the other early school leavers in this study.

Multiple active factors obstructed children's education attainment. Regardless of the unique combination of influences which affected each child in this research, every participant who ended up dropping out of school did so due to scarce fiscal resources in some form or another. Although all except for one early school leaver wanted to return to school, limited finances prevented them from doing so. Thus, even though government supports are in place to equalize education opportunities, especially for those students who are economically disadvantaged, it is apparent from these participants' accounts that more needs to be done to provide equal education opportunities for every child.

The Hindering Potential of Family Size and Composition on Children's Education

Older children in households often found themselves sacrificing their education to enter the labour force in order to help financially support their families. Almost all of the early school leavers in this study were coerced to drop out of school to help generate income for younger siblings to attend school. Although the literature provided evidence to support the theory that sibling composition within a household had an especially significant effect on a child's education, for the interviewees in this study, a child's positioning within the line of siblings had a greater likelihood of predicting his/her educational outcomes.

It was evident that the more siblings a child had, the larger the financial strain on the household. In Tim's case, his termination of school caused him to work in order to financially help his parents so that his two siblings could continue to pursue an education. Gayle was another student who had to sacrifice her studies so that the household income could go towards her younger sibling's education instead of hers. And with Vince, although he initially disclosed that he preferred to work rather than attend school, after further prodding, he explained that the only reason he chose work over school was because he found himself in a position where he was forced to financially help his family and so he felt obligated to work. He even stated that "if my family had enough money, then I would not hesitate returning to school, but because I have younger siblings who need to go to school, I have to sacrifice my education to work and help my family earn a living" (Vince, 16 years old). Therefore, Vince's response, along with many other early school leavers in this study, aligned with the literature stating that some children who drop out of school consequently find themselves committed to financial obligations that are unwillingly imposed on them by their families (Edmonds & Turk, 2002). Thus, hcildren were often coerced to drop out of school to help support family members, especially younger siblings.

In regards to Gomes' (1984) research, where larger family sizes may be beneficial for children's educational attainment since older children are able to provide another source of income for younger children to go to school, it was evident that from Tim, Gayle, and Vince's accounts that although having larger families may benefit younger children in the family, it came at the price of the older children's schooling. Also, the notion that having more family members can lead to

increased financial security for households which are struggling to send younger children to school was questionable because having larger families in the first place was what resulted in older children participating in the workforce to help support their large families. Therefore, is it really true that having larger families benefits children? If families had fewer members, then children such as Tim, Gayle, and Vince may not have found themselves coerced to work in order to support their families. Although there were multiple factors which contributed to a child's termination of school, it was clear in all the interviewee responses that limited financial resources played a major role in obstructing their school attendance.

Overall, based on what early school leavers shared, it was evident that the resource dilution phenomenon was in effect since the more siblings children had, the more it seemed to limit household fiscal resources, thus affecting older children's schooling (Knodel & Wongsith, 1991). Often, when resources are limited, parents become selective about where they invest their resources in order to receive the greatest gain. For example, Gomes (1984) conducted his research in Kenya on the effects of family size on children's education and found that "parents will maximize the return on their investment outlays not by equalizing investments in their children, but by investing in some children, preferably those most likely to succeed, at the expense of others" (p.649). Although in the Kenyan context, the financial resources tend to get funneled towards the first-born or oldest child in the family in order to reap the earliest benefits possible (Gomes, 1984), it was notable in the Vietnamese context that, from the accounts of early school leavers in this study, the oldest children in families tended to be the ones who dropped out of school to help contribute to the household income in order to help pay for their younger siblings' school fees. Although Hollander (1998) stated that family size only served as a debilitating factor on children's education when the child had 5 or more siblings, the results of my study also demonstrated that although the participants came from remotely small families, with the largest family having 3 children, the interviewees still considered their education as being affected by the presence of few siblings in the household.

Hollander (1998) identifies family size as one of the main causes for children ceasing their school attendance and thus terminating their secondary education. Even though the calculations involved in Hollander's (1998) study demonstrate that

family size was only associated with worse educational outcomes when the family had 6 or more children, the early school leavers who were interviewed in my study came from remotely small families with 2 siblings at most and even with the presence of fewer siblings, participants still found themselves terminating their school enrollment in order to work to help support their families. On the other hand, those participants in the cohort who were still in school never mentioned family size as an influential factor on their formal schooling. Therefore, unlike the results Hollander (1998) came across, it was evident that in this study, family size was only recognized as an especially influential factor on education attainment for those children who dropped out of school. Overall, both cohorts of children mentioned finances as an influential factor on their education and so this confirmed what much of the literature says about financial costs still consuming a significant portion of households' incomes regardless of governmental support; however, it was notable that only early school leavers explicitly mentioned family size as an impinging factor affecting their education.

Participants shared their lack of choice in quitting school during interviews by claiming that it was the only option in order for them to assist their families. Coming from low-income homes caused these children to leave school at young ages in order to enter the workforce. The 3 early school leavers who were professionally employed in the workforce were the oldest children in their families. Therefore, it was expected that they would serve as additional sources of income for their households if their younger siblings were to go to school. Even though respondents came from remotely average-sized families, with 3 child members within the family at most, this was enough to restrict household resources, thus causing participants to unwillingly drop out of school, and for the oldest children, this meant sacrificing their own education for that of their siblings.' Hence, if families were finding it this challenging to provide their children with an education, more structural supports need to be made available and accessible for marginalized families in rural Vietnam.

From Working to Learn to Learning to Work

None of the interviewees in this study who were currently employed wanted to leave school to enter the workforce. Due to certain circumstances that they encountered though, these children found themselves unwillingly terminating their schooling. Even though the literature mentions some benefits to working for

children, it was clear that employment in the workforce impeded participants' educational opportunities.

Sometimes having children involved in the workforce can be advantageous since children are given opportunities to enhance their sense of agency, since they can help contribute to the household income, or even increase their feelings of responsibility; however, none of the participants in this study who were currently employed shared that they had an increased sense of self-agency or responsibility. Instead, all except for one participant shared that they would rather return to school. Although some of the literature acknowledges that there are benefits for children who get involved with the workforce, such as how they can use work as "a vehicle for self-actualisation, economic autonomy and responsibility" (Woodhead, 1998 as cited in Feeny & Boyden, 2004, p. 40), it is evident from my research that working had debilitating effects on children's education especially since it interfered with their school enrollment.

Although it was critical to realize that working was not always disadvantageous for children, it was equally vital to recognize that working became detrimental for children when it prevented them from going to school, especially if attaining an education was what they truly wanted to do. In this study, 3 out of the 5 early school leavers were currently employed outside of home and 1 was working at home. The 3 children involved with paid employment outside the home were working as a car mechanic, welder, and seamstress whereas the child working at home was expected to care for his mother and sister's children. When children are coerced to cease their education to work, they find themselves working against their will and sacrificing their education in return (Belanger & Liu, 2008), such as most of the interviewees in this study who had to drop out of school in order to take up jobs to help support their families. Although working may have presented children with many benefits, there were also numerous consequences that were associated with children entering the labour force at such a tender age. For instance, working could be detrimental to children's emotional, physical, and mental development, depending on the demands of the job itself; children may find themselves working at a job that they did not truly want; and most pertinent to the participants' responses from this study is that working could interfere with their educational opportunities.

Additional supports needed to be provided for children and their families who were from low-income households. When economic resources were scarce, children often found themselves leaving school to enter the workforce so they could help contribute to the household income. Although work could provide children with benefits, it was evident that most of the participants from this study preferred to go to school over work. The value of formal education is often associated with providing individuals with employment opportunities, but it was evident that in this study, most early school leavers simply wanted to receive an education because they enjoyed learning.

Traditional versus Child-Centred Approaches to Education in Vietnam

When inquired about the kinds of learning that occurred outside of school and whether they perceived this as forms of education, students tended to make one major distinction between the different forms of learning that they were exposed to: the type of education that provided one with knowledge and skills which could be used in one's daily life outside of school and the type of education that allowed one to attain knowledge from books, the kind of education that the students tended to associate with school or formal education. When discussing formal education, many children associated it with enhancing employment opportunities whereas other forms of education that did not take place in school were perceived as providing children with practical life skills.

Remnants of Traditional Conceptualizations of Education. Although efforts to implement child-centred learning have surfaced in Vietnam, specifically after 2002, traditional conceptions of education still persist. The majority of early school leavers valued formal education more than informal and non-formal education along with a number of children still in school. Children affiliated the superior status of formal education in comparison to other forms of education because they believed formal education granted more tangible opportunities for them to not only attain employment, but to also engage in personal development.

It seemed that participants fabricated a hierarchal relationship between different forms of education that they have been exposed to. The theory that the tendency to favour formal education over other forms of education strictly based on the likelihood of benefitting from future employment opportunities, as noted by Tikly (2004) and Zerbo et al. (1997), did not necessarily apply here though. Since

the majority of early school leavers in my study were already working, it did not seem as though children perceived formal education as the main tool required for providing one with employment, unless formal education was still perceived as helping these children attain specific jobs other than the ones they already possessed, then the theory of formal education serving as a means to a fiscal end still applied.

In the cohort of early school leavers, there was more variety in the responses of whether children saw the things they have learned in school as being useful for what they wanted to do in the future or not, in comparison to the children's responses who were still in school. A couple of respondents who had dropped out specifically stated that what they had learned in school was useful for them in regards to seeking future careers while the children in the cohort who were still enrolled in school used the applicability of knowledge gained from school to their future careers as a validation of whether the knowledge attained in school was useful or not. Just like the literature, some children viewed education as serving a means of employment because they believed the education they attained in school would help them find future careers (Montandon & Osiek, 1998; Phelps & Graham, 2010) while other children found that education itself provided them with intrinsic benefits (Phelps & Graham, 2010). Based on the analyses of interview responses, it was evident that children from both cohorts did associate formal education as providing them with both extrinsic and intrinsic benefits. The participants shared that one could use knowledge gained from school to help oneself in day-to-day life and that receiving a formal education could help one make a "bigger difference in the world." Another child also mentioned attaining a formal education allowed one to have access to educational resources which could be distributed to others who were less fortunate. Although children mainly perceived the advantages of formal education with helping them secure future employment, a few children also associated the attainment of formal education with opportunities for self-improvement and helping others, thus these children were able to relate more humanistic aspects of education to schooling.

Two early school leavers thus chose to specifically associate a sense of bettering oneself and expanding one's views of his/her surroundings to forms of learning that occurred within school and in fact used these reasons as justifications

for why they felt forms of knowledge attained in school were more important than knowledge gained from out-of-school experiences. It seemed as though according to these children, the learning that specifically took place in formal settings was the only form of learning that had the potential to expand one's perceptions of and influence in the world. However, these 2 participants did seem to acknowledge the intrinsic values of education, although these values were only associated with formal education, because they associated the attainment of a formal education with forms of personal development other than with opportunities for employment and fiscal development. The fact that these 2 early school leavers related formal education with opportunities for overall personal growth restored the humanistic aspect of learning that learners should share with their learning environments in order to avoid education being perceived solely as a modernization tool for enhancing one's financial security (Elabor-Idemudia, 2002; Tikly, 2004; Zerbo et al., 1997)

There were participants from both cohorts who tended to frame education in the traditional sense of formal schooling and overlooked learning that took place outside of school as forms of education where traditional forms of education frame "learning" in solely academic forms of knowledge production that occur in formal institutions (Phelps & Graham, 2010) and usually result in enhancing future employment options. For example, although Gayle was the only early school leaver who found that things learned outside of school held more value than what was learned in school, she stated that she did not consider the things she learned outside of school as forms of education. Therefore, Gayle's traditional perceptions of education, the kind of education that takes place in a formal institution and results in the reception of some sort of certificate, may have been what other children in this study used to qualify forms of learning as education. Gayle found the skills and knowledge one learned outside of school were more relatable for her yet she associated increased life opportunities only with the attainment of formal education. Therefore, it seemed that credentials were the only solution to enhancing one's life opportunities even though the knowledge one attained from being educated in a formal institution may not have been as useful and applicable as the knowledge acquired in day-to-day experiences which was a concern that was mentioned by numerous participants. The distinction between what children learned within and

outside of school, in regards of applicability, demonstrated their perceptions of education and its benefits. For example, many children perceived education as a means to an end, serving the purpose of qualifying them for future careers instead of seeing education as a valuable process in and of itself. The children in this study viewed the education they attained from formal schooling as being useful to them in the long term whereas the knowledge they have attained outside of school was perceived as providing immediate benefits in their daily experiences.

In general, the level of importance that students associated with what was learned outside of school was determined by its relatability to everyday life and its ability to help individuals develop useful life skills. When one student shared that she had to perform tasks such as farming, cooking, tending to farm animals, and selling goods at the local market at a young age in order to help support her family since her father passed away, she did not think of these tasks as learning opportunities that had taken place outside of school, even though she acknowledged that these tasks provided her with equally useful skills as the skills she had acquired from school. As mentioned in the existing research, children's limited perceptions of learning opportunities outside of formal institutions may have been due to children's conceptualization of traditional forms of education as being the only kind of "true" education (Phelps & Graham, 2010). The participants in this study had very particular associations with specific forms of education, but another clear distinction they made throughout their interviews was between *education* and *forms of learning*. For instance, although some participants considered things they learned outside of school as forms of learning, they did not necessarily classify these forms of learning as education.

Children had difficulty identifying what they learned outside of school even though during the interview they stated that they did in fact consider forms of learning that occurred outside of school as forms of education. Since the traditional education system in Vietnam depicts "learning" as strictly learning which occurs at school or from school work that is taken home to complete (Phelps & Graham, 2010), this may have been a reason why children found it difficult to identify forms of learning that took place outside of school as types of education. The findings from this study slightly coincide with Phelps and Graham's (2010) discoveries from their research since although most of my participants were able to adopt a broader

perception of learning by recognizing that forms of learning that occurred outside of school were still kinds of education, unlike the participants in Phelps and Graham's (2010) study, they were still limited in their understanding of what kind of education which took place outside of school would resemble. This may have been the result of overemphasizing the importance of formal education over other forms of education and so when children were asked to think about other forms of learning that took place outside of school, they struggled to identify what that kind of learning entailed.

All early school leavers except for one considered learning outside of school as forms of education, which was the same number of participants in the cohort of children still enrolled in formal education, and this may have been because they left school already, so they found themselves encountering more learning opportunities outside of school. Although most of the participants in this cohort found that learning that occurred outside of school were still forms of education, the majority of them stated that the knowledge attained in school was more important than the knowledge one gained outside of school. Even though these early school leavers were no longer in school and were exposed to forms of knowledge in daily life outside of formal learning institutions for longer periods of time than their counterparts who were still in school, the early school leavers in this study valued education attained in school as being more important than other types of education. Although early school leavers either terminated their formal schooling or never attended formal school and most likely had more exposure to other forms of learning than their peers who were still in school, the majority of these children still valued formal education over informal and non-formal education.

Participants from both cohorts generally had a positive perception of education and its role in their lives. Gayle was an early school leaver who especially projected an idealized and extremely positive conceptualization of formal education in that she believed it provided individuals with a greater abundance of life opportunities, thus supporting the theory that individuals tended to perceive formal education as the only form of learning that can grant an individual with promising development opportunities over other forms of education (Elabor-Idemudia, 2002; Tikly, 2004; Zerbo et al., 1997). For the group of respondents still in school, some children truly conveyed their appreciation of being given the opportunity to attain

an education during their interview. For instance, one participant disclosed that there was not one specific aspect that she liked most or least about school because she simply valued the opportunity to attain a formal education despite her low-income background. These students recognized that although they had enough money to go to school, they considered themselves quite fortunate because they were aware that many students were not able to go to school since they could not afford it. Therefore, their lack of financial stability caused these children to conceptualize education as a privilege instead of as a right.

Participants' perceptions of formal education coincided with development discourse's portrayal of formal education. Within development theory, especially in relation to educational contexts, there is an over-emphasis of formal education as being the only form of education that can lead a developing country to the same levels of "development" as developed countries so this can cause individuals to consequently undermine non-formal and informal education within their communities. Although Phelps and Graham (2010) discovered that informal and non-formal learning tended to be under-valued by their interviewees, the children in both cohorts in my study did seem to value the knowledge they had gained outside of formal schooling; however, some of them did not see such learning as forms of education. Therefore, it was also necessary to consider that simply because the participants did not label the knowledge they attained in their daily lives outside of school as "education," it did not necessarily mean that they did not value what they had learned from their out-of-school experiences. However, if formal education is constantly framed as a panacea for under-development, then non-formal and informal education will continue to be undervalued even though individuals in this study found that these forms of education did in fact provide them with advantages that formal education did not. Overall, children from both cohorts truly valued opportunities to engage in formal education. Whether it was because they perceived formal education as presenting them with a plethora of opportunities for employment and personal development over non-formal and informal education, or they considered formal education to be a privilege rather than a right, participants in this study usually placed formal education on the highest rung of the "education ladder" in relation to both informal and non-formal education. Traditional perceptions of education as the kind of learning that occurs in formal institutions

within classroom settings was the main conceptualization of education that participants had. Even though multiple interviewees commented on the knowledge and skills they acquired outside of school as being more useful to them, children still had a tendency to value learning associated with formal education over other forms of learning.

Using Children's Voices to Design Child-Centred Education. Taking into consideration what these children shared, it seemed as though children needed more opportunities to apply the knowledge they gained from school. Therefore, altering education curriculum and delivery to reflect what children want and value from their learning experiences would help shift education from taking a traditional to a more child-centred approach, which has been a central goal of the Vietnamese government since 2002 (Phelps & Graham, 2010). In order to truly implement child-centred education though, children need to be provided with opportunities to design the education themselves.

Although children had sufficient opportunities to learn in school, they did not have the same number of opportunities to apply what they had learned in the classroom. For example, one student opined that the learning that took place outside of school was easier than the learning that took place in school because one had more opportunities to apply what one learned outside of school in day-to-day life. Another child even commented on how what she read from textbooks was a form of passive learning and left little room for relatability in comparison to the learning she did from immersing herself in daily experiences outside of school. When students were unable to connect to what they were learning in class, the relationship they had with school had a greater likelihood of stemming from a producer-consumer nature. However, if children were able to immerse themselves in what they were learning in school, and the material was relatable to them, then the intrinsic value of education was restored as well as students' motivations for personal development.

Conscious efforts have been made by the Vietnamese government to reform textbooks so that they encourage students to apply what they have learned to the "real world" and their everyday lives. From the perspective of one student in this study, she mentioned that the learning that occurred outside of school was more relatable to her than the knowledge she acquired from textbooks because she felt that she became more active as a learner in applying the knowledge she gained from

outside of school, whereas in the classroom, she felt that she was passively absorbing information from textbooks. This participant's appeal to active forms of learning aligned with the findings from the literature which affirmed students' tendency to value engaging learning opportunities over passive learning from textbooks (Phelan, Davidson, & Cao, 1992; The Alberta Teachers' Association, 2003). Instead of memorizing information from textbooks, children valued being given opportunities to apply what they had learned in school which is supported by Phelan, Davidson, and Cao's (1992) study since the students in their study expressed the same dispositions towards active learning. If education were delivered in a manner that was sensitive to children's views and experiences, they would also be more engaged in their learning for reasons other than for the reason that education can potentially provide them with future fiscal benefits. Overall, similar to the existing research, the participants in this study had a tendency to indicate that they valued opportunities to engage in active learning in the classroom as opposed to passively acquiring information from textbooks.

Information retention remained a prevalent issue since it was mentioned in numerous interviews in both cohorts when children were asked about whether they saw things they have learned in school as being useful for what they wanted to do in the future or not. One early school leaver directly stated that what he had learned in school was not useful because when recollecting on what he had learned, he could not recall any information that he had successfully retained. Measures should have been taken to provide children with more opportunities to apply what they learned in school so that they were more likely to retain the knowledge and information presented to them, even after they dropped out, especially since the applicability of what they learned was used as a criterion by numerous students in both cohorts to gauge how useful the things they had learned in school were. Therefore, if successful child-centred learning was implemented, it would incorporate these thoughts that children were sharing about how to improve education.

Even though the existing literature identifies low quality education as a possible cause for children dropping out of school, none of the participants in this study directly mentioned quality of education as an issue. Instead, children identified a number of other educational issues they experienced which they felt needed to be addressed. Increased amounts of student engagement with learning,

enhanced opportunities for information retention, and promoting overall child agency within the education sector in Vietnam were raised by participants as changes that needed to be made in order to truly implement child-centred education.

Including and Respecting Children as Co-Constructors of Knowledge in the Education Sector. It was evident that in order to initiate change that most benefitted children, we needed to hear *their* voices in implementing education improvement, especially when children seemed to be so eager to share their opinions and had such positive attitudes about doing so. Therefore, participants believed that it was only possible to help children by involving their opinions. Children tended to emphasize the need of including children's educational perspectives and experiences because then those who were not undergoing what these children were could gain insight as to what children liked and did not like about school. The literature on development within the educational context emphasizes that development education initiatives should be implemented in a manner which is meaningful and sustainable for locals since they are the individuals who are directly affected by education delivery in these communities (Abdi & Guo, 2008; Elabor-Idemudia, 2002; Rahnema, 1997; Spring, 2009; Wickens & Sandlin, 2007). The participants in this study reinforced the criticality of actualizing education improvements which are most beneficial for local recipients by highlighting the need to consult children and involving them in endeavours to improve education delivery in Vietnam. Although participants acknowledged that adults may possess more eloquence and sophistication in expressing their complex ideas for educational change, children still emphasized that including children's views was mandatory for pertinent insight as to what issues children were experiencing in the education sector.

A number of participants exhibited a sense of frustration when inquired about having adults respect children's views. One interviewee highlighted that children did not receive the recognition from adults that they rightfully deserved because adults sometimes underestimated children's abilities to formulate valid opinions. Therefore, this reflects some of the literature that has been produced regarding the lack of regard for children, especially within Southeast Asian communities. For example, Phelps and Graham (2010) discovered that adults had a

tendency to believe that children lacked maturity and thus were unable to articulate their views. Simply because children were younger, there was the assumption that they lacked life experience and knowledge, and consequently, their perspectives were not revered to the same extent as those of adults.' In my study, although Tina recognized that children were more capable than adults gave them credit for, it was interesting that she also acknowledged that "even though sometimes children's perspectives are more important than adults,' some children's perspectives may not be as important as adults' because some children may only be thinking about themselves without considering the well-being of others" (Tina, 16 years old). Thus, this child believed that children's opinions which held the most value and importance were the ones that provided the greatest benefit for the greatest number of individuals. In addition, her ability to recognize both the benefits and issues that may arise from consulting children as co-constructors of knowledge demonstrated that she possessed the very maturity that adults often assume children lacked. It was notable that 2 respondents, Jordan and Tina, lost their fathers at a young age which obligated them to take on adult responsibilities such as taking care of family members, farming, cooking, tending to farm animals, and vending at local markets. Being expected to carry out such responsibilities at a young age consequently coerced these children to mature at an early stage in their lives and so they adopted more adult-like views and dispositions. Therefore, this was critical to consider when assuming that children were incapable of providing useful and attainable suggestions for education improvement because although they were young, it did not necessarily mean that they lacked the life experience or maturity that was supposedly required for their perspectives to hold the same value as their adult counterparts.

In both cohorts of children, there was the assumption that because adults were older than children that they had more knowledge than children, thus meaning that their opinions possessed more value than children's opinions. What was notably different for early school leavers in comparison to children still in school was that an early school leaver specifically considered the position of children who dropped out of school in education discourse. For instance, an early school leaver spoke about how including children's perspectives and experiences in the education sector could especially provide benefits for children who had dropped out of school.

Gayle took the effort to reflect on early school leavers' circumstances whereas none of the children in the cohort of individuals still enrolled in school did. When asked about whether children's views were as important as adults,' she specifically mentioned children who had dropped out of school in her response. She believed that it was especially necessary to include early school leavers' opinions and experiences specifically, especially in the educational context because it could provide insight as to why some children had dropped out of school. Asking children about why they have dropped out and understanding their situation from an insider's perspective is definitely more beneficial and accurate to the truth than not consulting children at all as we make assumptions about what they think and have experienced.

Some respondents also challenged the feasibility of children's ideas being manifested as action, even though they did recognize that children possessed useful knowledge within the education sector. One interviewee believed that children's opinions and ideas were rarely actualized in the form of constructive action because regardless of what children said, he believed the resulting decisions which led to change rested with adults. Therefore, Vince found including children's views and experiences with regards to the education sector as useless, even though he believed that children's opinions were just as important as adults.' Vince was also able to make distinctions between how important he himself saw children's perspectives being and how their opinions were truly received by society. However, if children were involved in research as active participants and valued sources of knowledge, children could feel that they were valuable, contributing members of society (Grover, 2004), which in turn, could cause society's perception of children's capacity to form valid opinions to change. Ben, a participant who was still attending school, shared Vince's skepticism of the likelihood of children's opinions transforming into action. Ben stated that children's ideas tended to be limited by their practicality and feasibility since their ideas were often constructed on ideal or imaginary situations. Therefore, this denounced children's ideas for change as unrealistic and ineffective. Overall, the participant responses of this study reflected the existing research that states there is a lack of value and respect for children's opinions and that there is minimal support for perceiving their opinions as instrumental knowledge sources (Feeny & Boyden, 2004; Grover, 2004; Lundy, 2007; Phelps & Graham, 2010).

Some early school leavers believed that adults had more life experience which validated their opinions over children's while students still in school who thought that adults' opinions were more important than children's tended to explain their reasoning by stating that adults' opinions were presented in a more sophisticated and practical manner, thus justifying why adults' opinions were more valuable. Regardless of whether children perceived adults' opinions as being expressed with more sophistication, practicability, or experience, children still wanted to emphasize the valuable knowledge and experience that was unique to students. Therefore, children highlighted the vital roles they could play in education improvement, if given the opportunity. According to the UNDP, *development* is a democratic and participatory process where each individual has a right to fully participate in community decisions and so this carries over to development education contexts. Children thus need to be consulted and actively involved in any initiatives in relation to development education and this needs to be respected by development organizations and agencies, the government, and authoritative figures in the field of education.

Chapter Summary

According to Article 12 of the UNCRC, any child who is capable of forming his/her own views should be able to freely express these views especially if these views are interconnected with matters that affect him/her and so he/she should be allowed the space to voice these opinions. In addition, the Vietnamese government has made it part of its mandate to implement child-centred learning in 2002. However, without the involvement of children as co-constructors of knowledge within the education system, how are Article 12 of the UNCRC and the Vietnamese government's mandate supposed to be successfully implemented? The opinions expressed by the participants in this study acknowledged that including children's educational experiences and views were critical in order to deliver education in a manner which was most beneficial for the children themselves, but more needs to be done by other stakeholders working in the education sector to ensure this happens.

Without the consultation and inclusion of children's views in initiatives for educational change, it parallels the effects of when foreigners are consulted as main sources of knowledge for development initiatives in local communities. Without

experiencing the direct effects of development projects and understanding the local context where such projects are to be implemented, development becomes a distanced, foreign concept which is irrelevant to locals who are most affected by it. Similarly, with development education initiatives, if children's voices are not guiding the change, then child-centred education will only exist in theory since those most directly affected by development are excluded from the discourse.

The results of this study demonstrated that children had constructive, useful suggestions for education improvement. Their overall concerns for school improvement involved the offering of more courses, more opportunities for peer competition, schools finding employment opportunities for students and connecting students with jobs, planting trees, establishing soccer fields, keeping school grounds clean and litter-free, and having better equipped schools with quality school supplies with the increased availability and accessibility of learning resources for students. With regards to suggestions for the improvement of teachers' pedagogical practices, children stated that teachers needed to: be more understanding, provide manageable amounts of work, treat students equally and fairly without favouring, provide enough opportunities for students to apply their knowledge, and give struggling students more support. The fact that these children were able to conceive such attainable and justified suggestions for education improvement exemplified that children did in fact have the capacity to formulate accomplishable suggestions for constructive educational change.

Participants expressed that they valued being active rather than passive learners. Thus, a more relatable curriculum would not only engage children as active learners, but it would also promote the key pillars to child-centred education: *information retention* since children are constantly given opportunities to apply the knowledge they have acquired; *student engagement* because active forms of learning will involve children and allow them to use the knowledge they gain so that education becomes a more interactive and experiential process; and *child agency* since children can use what applicable knowledge they have acquired in school to develop skills that will help them outside of school. When children are given opportunities to lead educational change, awareness of existing issues within the education sector can be generated, thus laying the foundation for constructive action towards establishing child-centred learning to take place in Vietnam.

Chapter Six: Conclusions

In this final chapter, key findings and conclusions are drawn on and situated within the Vietnamese context. The chapter starts off with a contextual summary in order to re-familiarize the reader with the developmental and educational conditions in Vietnam. The contextual summary is then followed by a synopsis of the methods adopted for this research, and lastly, the chapter concludes with the significant conclusions that this research uncovered, with regards to what children had to share from their educational experiences in rural Vietnam. Also included with the final conclusions are pertinent recommendations for both implementing child-centred education in rural Vietnam and for future studies. Therefore, the overall aim of this chapter is to provide an all-encompassing summary of the context, methodology, data, analysis, and findings of the research conducted.

Educating Children in Rural Vietnam

In 1989, Vietnam transformed from having a socialist to a market economy, as a part of the Doi Moi process. Therefore, schooling went from being free for grades K-12 under the socialist educational policy to having households held mainly accountable for paying fees associated with school. Since the Doi Moi process, households, especially low-income ones, have been finding themselves more financially constrained because they were now responsible for paying most of the school fees that came with educating their children. Therefore, after the implementation of the Doi Moi process, poverty has been known to take an even greater toll on children's education attainment. Although the government overwrites and reduces school fees for some households, many families still find a significant portion of their income going towards school registration, tuition, private tutoring, examination fees, uniforms, textbooks, and school supplies. To exacerbate the situation, school fees tend to increase as children move on to the next school grade. Without sufficient fiscal supports to assist low-income families, children from low socio-economic backgrounds consequently find themselves marginalized in the educational context since schooling went from being free for grades K-12 to being a draining cost for households. Government supports thus remain insufficient for providing equal education opportunities for those living in rural Vietnam.

Even though Vietnam is used as an example of a developing country that has exhibited commendable reductions in poverty with exponential increases in school

enrollment rates, rural areas of Vietnam remain marginalized from the benefits of such advancements. Quang Nam province in Central Vietnam has been identified as a specific area that still experiences high levels of poverty while also having some of the highest levels of drop out rates in the country. Taking these characteristics of Quang Nam into consideration, the province was an ideal setting for this study which would uncover the educational issues that children living in poverty encountered in rural areas of the country.

Vietnam has made impressive progress in terms of school enrollment, but the delivery of quality education remains an issue, especially within Central Vietnam. A likely reason that potentially explains the lack of quality of education that Vietnam faces may be due to the content of the national curriculum. The national curriculum in Vietnam is heavily dependent on textbook content which leads to classroom instruction and standardized tests being intrinsically dependent on textbook material. As a consequence of such reliance on textbook content, teachers centre their teaching on standardized exams instead of on their students, thus causing textbooks to become the main focus of both teaching and learning instead of students. Such dependence on textbooks further obstructs experiential, inquiry-based, and child-centred learning to occur in the classroom. Although the Vietnamese government has made efforts to adopt an education system that is more child-centred which is meant to bring out the "activeness," "consciousness," "self-motivation," and "creative thinking" of students, the most notable educational changes the government has implemented have been increasing the amount of time children spend in school, increasing the number of subjects they take in school, and altering textbooks so that they have more pictures so that they are more engaging for students (Hamano, 2008). And even though efforts have been made to organize textbooks so that children are able to apply their knowledge in daily life outside of school, based on what respondents said from both cohorts in this study, it was evident that children still found that they were lacking opportunities to apply what they have learned in school to their lives outside of school.

With the involvement of locals in educational initiatives, the implementation of more pertinent, relatable learning opportunities are made available. Although there is recognition that local experiences and views are required for development that is both sustainable and advantageous for local communities, the involvement of

some local actors in participatory development is still lacking or even absent in many educational initiatives. With regards to education in rural Vietnam, children are the most useful local actors who should be involved in education initiatives for improvement, but their voices remain overpowered by education administrators, teachers, and government officials.

Development theory indicates that students should be compelled to learn for reasons of personal development instead of strictly for future employment and meeting the needs of the labour market and I argue that children could be encouraged to adopt this mentality if education was more sensitive and responsive to their views and experiences. The poor are often marginalized from sharing their experiences, even though their views can be invaluable resources for development education initiatives, but children living in rural Vietnam are especially excluded from such development discourses since they are both poor and live in a society that is stratified based on age, where children are often left disadvantaged because of their young age and low-ranking social status in comparison to adults in Vietnamese culture.

Designing a Study that Encourages Children's Leadership in Educational Change

In order to explore the educational perspectives and experiences of children in rural Vietnam, this qualitative study drew on the experiences of 12 children. Since school fees tended to increase as children moved on to the next school grade, the participants in this study ranged within the ages of 12-16. This age spectrum made it possible to see how children's perspectives and experiences varied as they progressed through school grades within this range. These ages were also selected because the literature claimed that children within this age range were most likely to drop out of school. In addition, since the Vietnamese education system is structured so that primary school consists of grades 1-5, lower secondary school includes grades 6-9, and upper secondary school consists of grades 10-12, at the age of 12, students should be transitioning between primary and lower secondary school and at the age of 16, they should be moving from lower to upper secondary school. Therefore, as children were making these transitions within the age range that I selected for this study, I was able to see if they were dropping out because of

the increased school fees that were associated with enrollment in a higher level of learning as they moved from one level of schooling to another.

Children who were still in school and some who had dropped out were interviewed regarding their experiences and opinions about learning and education in rural Vietnam. Using constructivist and interpretivist approaches, the focus of this study was to investigate how the experiences and perspectives of children living in rural Vietnam could be incorporated in education projects and initiatives so that development education could be implemented in a way which best respects the interests of local learners. This study especially highlighted the educational experiences and views of children living in poverty because even though initiatives to improve education may have been benefiting many children in Vietnam, it was crucial to note that such improvements may only have been advantageous for those living in urban areas since educational development tends to be concentrated in urban areas of Vietnam, thus overlooking some of the educational challenges children living in rural Vietnam face. The participants in this study provided many suggestions for education improvement that would be beneficial not only for students, but for teachers, education administrators, government officials, and international organizations that would be working in development education sectors in Vietnam.

This study also used development discourse and post-development theory to further investigate and highlight critical factors that must be considered when implementing development initiatives, especially within the education sector. In development discourse, education is often perceived as a driving tool for modernization that tends to reap fiscal benefits for individuals. When education is promoted as a means to an economic end, education consequently becomes stripped of its intrinsic value. Post-development theory also warns against over-emphasizing formal education as possessing social panacea-like qualities in alleviating complex issues that may exist in any given country since it can rob education of its value when education is unable to uphold its panacea-like qualities, as it can also lead to the devaluing of non-formal and informal education. Overall, this research highlighted and questioned the constant assumption that formal education is the only form of learning that can lead a developing country to the same level of development as developed countries, as if that could be accurately measured. In

consulting these 12 research participants regarding their educational experiences and perspectives, much was disclosed about their perceptions of education, which both overlapped with existing theories in development discourse and extended beyond the issues brought up in this discourse.

Research Findings and Resulting Recommendations

Incorporating Individual Perspectives in Educational Contexts.

Although there are existing documents that encourage children to share their perspectives, such as Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), this does not necessarily mean that children are always able to voice their opinions. The process of involving children in the decision-making process concerning educational matters should be perceived as something that holds legal merit that *must* be done instead of as adults doing children a favour by listening to their opinions. Adults often make the mistake of assuming that children lack agency and that they need to depend on adults to make decisions for them. By not providing children with opportunities to express their views, children do not even receive the chance to demonstrate their agency in the process of decision-making regarding issues which directly affect them.

For those children who believed that adults' opinions were more important than children's in this study, their justifications for believing this were based on their perceptions of adults having more life experience, which enabled adults to articulate their opinions in a more sophisticated and logical manner. Although some participants found that children's opinions were in fact important, the value of their opinions was undermined by the feasibility of their ideas. Two participants thus shared that children's ideas were rarely actualized in the form of constructive action and so adults' opinions prevailed by default. Therefore, if children's ideas held merit, with the guidance of adults in the education sector, their ideas could potentially be actualized for the entire school community.

The children in this study expressed that adults had more life experience and knowledge so their opinions were more important than those of children. However, it was critical to note that children living in poverty and the kinds of circumstances that these respondents had been exposed to, such as being involved in child labour and taking on adult responsibilities at an early age, have provided these children with a plethora of experience maybe even more than what some

adults may have experienced in their given life time. The fact that some children were expected to take on adult responsibilities at such an early age meant that they were practically adults themselves so the reason as to why these children's opinions were not valued to the same degree as adults' was questionable.

Many participants highlighted the criticality of including children's perspectives, especially with regards to educational matters. They shared that in order to truly understand what children did and did not like about school, the children themselves should be consulted especially if adults wanted to gain accurate insight about children's opinions and experiences. As expressed by participants, consulting children's views was necessary because they were able to provide reliable and accurate accounts of needed education improvements. Although this study involved a small sample of participants, children felt that seeking one child's perspective could still lead to advantages for a large group of children and adults.

Suggestions for Improvement from the Experts. The findings of this research provided evidence to support the portrayal of children as vital sources of knowledge within the education sector, for children had instrumental suggestions for both teacher and school improvement. For example, a prominent suggestion that children in both cohorts had for teachers to improve their teaching was in regards to teachers being more understanding and supportive of their students. Children voiced that teachers should treat each and every student equally and fairly since favouring could be detrimental to some students' academic progress and success, especially for those students who were disfavoured. Children also believed that teachers should explain lesson material in a manner which was easy to grasp for all students, especially for those students who were already struggling in class, and that teachers should be readily available to provide homework help. Overall, empathetic pedagogy was highly valued by participants in both cohorts as a means of improving pedagogy.

In addition to offering suggestions for improvements in teaching, children also made instrumental suggestions for school improvement. Children's recommendations tended to involve the potential betterment of the physical appearance of school grounds, higher quality and a greater abundance of learning resources, and the increased availability of such resources for the student body. One student even mentioned that schools should be more understanding of students if

they were to truly improve. Therefore, both internal and external components of schools needed improvement from the opinions of children in order to enhance their overall educational experiences in Tam Ky, Vietnam.

In general, when children were approached for their opinions regarding school and teacher improvement, many of them found it challenging to provide suggestions. Whether this was in part due to not wanting to be disrespectful towards elders or not was unclear but some respondents did directly state that they did not know what to suggest because they were not used to having adults consult them for their opinions. Therefore, it was not necessarily true that children lacked the knowledge, experience, or age to provide suggestions for educational improvement, but their lack of suggestions may have been attributed to their limited opportunities to share their opinions. If children were approached more often for their educational views and experiences as sources of vital knowledge for instrumental change within the education sector, then maybe their ideas would be more readily formulated to help enhance the delivery of quality education.

Passive and Active Forms of Learning and their Influences on Children's Conceptions of Education. It was notable that certain things that the children mentioned during the interviews did disclose that quality of education was a prevalent issue in their experiences and views. For example, it was evident that participants encountered issues with low-quality education when they mentioned the lack of teacher guidance with school work, passive learning from textbooks, and the inapplicability of what they learned in class. From what the children conveyed about their passive learning experiences from textbooks, it was also evident that the subject syllabi for the national Vietnamese curriculum were so heavily based on textbook content that lesson plans were consequently conceived from rigid outlines and so teachers' ability to incorporate different teaching methods into their pedagogy to cater to students' unique learning styles was thus limited. The respondents in this study shared that they valued learning by doing and even though respondents disclosed that such learning opportunities were available in the classroom, children could have further benefited from more hands-on learning experiences where they could have adopted active roles as learners because it would have allowed them to be engaged in their learning environment.

Participants in this study had more of an affiliation for active over passive

learning. Considering respondents' preference for engaging learning opportunities, if curriculum contained content that was relatable for students outside of school, not only would it be more useful for them, but it might enhance their school engagement and agency outside of educational contexts especially if such curriculum encouraged them to become involved with experiential learning, inquiry-based learning, and reflection. If those involved in the education sector provided children with more opportunities to apply and relate to the things they learned in school, then in would enhance information retention. Information retention was actually mentioned numerous times in the interviews as an issue since children identified the learning that took place outside of school as being easier for them because they were given more opportunities to apply knowledge attained outside of school, thus making it easier to retain this knowledge. Overall, most of the participants expressed that what they had learned in school was not relatable for them in their daily lives even though they found that it was useful for what they wanted to do in the future, career-wise. Therefore, it was evident that the education children received served the purpose of being a means to an end. Education was consequently perceived as a tool that helped children earn future careers instead of being a valuable experiential process. Participants thus tended to have narrow perceptions of what benefits formal education provided them with, and what they perceived as "education."

Overall, even though a majority of interviewees considered learning outside of school as forms of education, many children still interpreted the concept of education within traditional frameworks where only education that took place in formal institutions was considered as education. In addition, those children who did consider forms or learning that took place outside of school as education were unable to identify what they learned outside of school even though they claimed that forms of learning that occurred outside of school were important. Attaining applicable and useful knowledge in class was especially advantageous for children because when children acquired knowledge in school that they could apply in their daily lives, they could gain more agency by using this knowledge to develop skills that would help them outside of school.

Influential Factors Affecting Children's Learning Environments. Children's dispositions towards their environments within and outside of school had immense effects on their learning. For instance, how children felt in the classroom,

about going to school, and about learning both within and outside of class could be attributed to various components in their learning environments. For participants in this study, workload, relationships with teachers, and how students were treated in class were all identified as main factors in children's learning environments which affected their education.

Both early school leavers and children still in school expressed eclectic emotions towards school. Children tended to have a positive attitude towards school, especially those children who no longer attended school. Contrastingly, those children who were still enrolled in school disclosed that they were consumed with anxiety and stress when they had not completed their work or when they felt that the homework they received from their teacher was too difficult for them. Therefore, when asked for suggestions regarding how teachers could improve their pedagogical practices, a main concern that children had was in relation to workload. A number of children mentioned that teachers should give students manageable workloads that were appropriate for their students' abilities. Teachers also played an integral role in shaping children's learning environments because they could make the classroom atmosphere more welcoming for children so that they felt supported in their learning instead of stressed and anxious. Hence, even though participants named peers and parents as influential factors affecting their education experiences, it was evident from the interviews that teachers had an especially immense effect on children's disposition towards school and learning.

Based on interview responses, it was apparent that children valued teachers and their relationships with their teachers so this would help foster the burgeoning of beneficial relationships and the potential for collaborative efforts between teachers and children in order to implement meaningful change within education. Although students who were interviewed in this study identified teachers as an essential element in helping them learn, students claimed that it was the nature of teachers' lectures and instructions, examples, demonstrations, and explanations and exercises which either hindered or supported their learning in the classroom. Therefore, depending on which teaching attitudes, practices, and methods that teachers adopted, it had the potential to either contribute to their students' development or impede it. In addition to teachers' influences though, costs

associated with formal education also had the capacity to hinder children's educational outcomes.

The Price of Accessible Quality Education. Although supports are available for low-income families to send their children to school, it was apparent from participants' accounts that more needs to be done to provide equal educational opportunities for children in Vietnam. Even though primary school education (grades 1-5) is supposedly free, some children in this study still found themselves dropping out of school at the primary school level due to financial constraints on their household. This demonstrated that the waiving and reduction of school fees were insufficient in supporting low-income households. Although the provision of free primary school has resulted in an inflation of enrollment rates at the primary level, more needs to be done so that children with low socio-economic backgrounds have equal opportunities to pursue an education as their higher socio-economic counterparts. Overall, there were many hidden school fees which were not covered by the government's fiscal provisions so the financial burden of paying such hidden educational costs rested with the household. As a result, many households could not afford to send their children to school and so children were coerced to drop out even against their will which was a reality for almost all of the early school leavers in this study.

The Household Burden. The main reason children found themselves terminating their education was so they could join the workforce in order to help their families earn an income to alleviate the effects of household poverty. Therefore, it was evident in the literature and even from the interviews conducted in this study that household income had immense influence on whether children remained in school or ended up dropping out. In fact, a majority of participants attributed household income as an influential factor which affected their education. Even though school fees were supposedly waived for children in low-income households in Vietnam, it was evident through the interviews conducted for this study that individual households were in fact primarily responsible for paying school fees regardless of how eligible some of these households were for government fiscal support.

How is it possible that schooling is supposed to alleviate poverty when children were obviously disclosing that paying for school fees was one of the major

reasons why they found themselves dropping out of school to attain jobs? Although support structures were in place as attempts to equalize schooling options for children, these structures had only a limited impact because it was evident that higher-income households were able to spend more on school and thus children with higher socio-economic backgrounds had access to higher quality schooling, unlike their peers from lower-income households. Therefore, the awareness of personal experiences of children who are affected by poverty is even more crucial in order for a sense of urgency to be generated so that this issue of inequality could be addressed. Even though households experiencing financial instability could be exempted from paying school tuition fees, these households were still unable to afford the other costs associated with school and a way of conceiving a solution to this social injustice may lie with the children themselves.

Does Size Matter? It was evident from participant responses that the availability of household fiscal resources was intrinsically linked to family size since the more siblings a child had, the greater the financial strain experienced by the household. Family size had especially noticeable debilitating impacts on children's educational opportunities, but what was specifically surprising was that participants did not have to have a significant number of siblings for them to leave school. For example, the greatest number of siblings early schools leavers were noted to have was 2 siblings, yet this was enough to lead to their dropping out of school in order to seek work. Their families were experiencing such financial hardships that having early school leavers enter the workforce was the only viable option to support their households. Consequently, the findings from this research confirmed the undermining effects such financial hardships had on children's education since participants often found themselves working against their will as they sacrificed their education to support their families.

Family size was only explicitly mentioned as an undermining factor to education attainment for some respondents. For instance, household size was mentioned as an influential factor on children's education only for those children who were no longer attending school. It must also be acknowledged that family size was not the only factor affecting children's education attainment and that there was a commonality of factors mentioned in children's interviews that were identified as influencing their education. Even though there were participants in both cohorts

who had 2 siblings, only the early school leavers directly associated the effects of family size on their education.

Shedding Light on Early School Leavers. Overall, none of the early school leavers in this study wanted to cease their school attendance and when asked if they would return to school if they could, 4 out of the 5 children who were not in school said they would be eager to continue going to school. The participants who dropped out of school found that they had to because they had to help contribute to their household incomes. Therefore, from what was gathered from children's responses, scarce financial resources were an extremely significant factor leading to the termination of their schooling. Overall, there were still multiple issues associated with education attainment for children and so even though the school dropout rate has experienced an overall decrease in Vietnam, in order to further improve school enrollment rates, the causes of children dropping out must be investigated from the most accurate source: the children.

Locals Advocating for Local Needs. When development initiatives are pursued, it is often that those who are the experts of local needs are excluded from the crucial development processes which leaves opportunities for neocolonialism and imperialism to manifest. For example, the children who were directly receiving the education in rural Vietnam found themselves ignored when it came to implementing educational changes and initiatives which were supposedly meant to promote "child-centred" learning. In order to mitigate the debilitating effects of neocolonialism and imperialism, the voices of local actors who are directly affected by education delivery, such as the participants of this study, should be involved and respected as co-constructors of knowledge. When locals lead change, both development and education initiatives are implemented in contexts which are most sustainable and meaningful for the local people themselves.

If development is defined in strictly fiscal terms then it undermines other criteria individuals may use to determine development. For instance, centering development discourse solely on foundations of economic definitions strips development from any humanistic qualities such as the relationships individuals have with each other and their environment. The children in this study constantly mentioned the social relations they had with peers and teachers as factors that helped them progress in school and thus helped them develop as individuals.

Development thus needs to be extended to embrace definitions other than fiscal ones since development involves so much more than economics, as these participants demonstrated in this study. When the benefits of education are strictly centred on the idea of providing individuals with a means of developing in economic terms instead of developing the person on a holistic level, education loses its intrinsic value.

It was significant to note that the children in both cohorts of this study perceived formal education as a social panacea. When education is discussed in development discourse as a tool to enhance a country's level of development, it tends to emphasize the role of formal education as if informal and non-formal education are not capable of granting countries the same levels of development as formal education. Therefore, as witnessed from the participants' responses, both informal and non-formal education became under-valued. The children in this study generally had a positive perception of formal education's role in their lives. Some children even expressed that they truly valued formal education because it provided them with opportunities for self-improvement and adequate knowledge to impact their world. Other children voiced their value of formal education by stating that they felt grateful for being given the opportunity to attend school despite their meagre backgrounds because they were aware that not all children were able to attend school. In addition, some respondents tended to use the applicability of knowledge gained from school to their careers as a validation of whether the knowledge they acquired from school was useful or not. Overall, children associated both intrinsic and extrinsic benefits to attaining a formal education with extrinsic benefits being the acquirement of employment opportunities and intrinsic advantages being associated with opportunities for self-improvement, self-empowerment, expanding one's views, and influencing the world around them. In general, the findings gained from uncovering children's educational experiences and perspectives served integral roles for the successful implementation of child-centred education in rural Vietnam; the research findings also provide useful directions for future research regarding development education in rural Vietnam.

Recommendations for Education Improvement and Future Research. Conscious measures must be taken by development organizations and agencies to actively engage children in decision-making processes especially in regards to

development initiatives. It is crucial to acknowledge, include, and respect local perspectives with regards to development initiatives in order to respect the cultural and social contexts in which these initiatives are taking place and to thus also avoid the imposition of Western notions of development on other countries which would contribute to the perennial cycle of neocolonialism and imperialism. Therefore, with the involvement of children in critical education decision-making processes, local voices are acknowledged, included, and respected in endeavours to improve education in developing communities. Not only do these children understand the local cultural and social contexts of where the development initiative is to take place, but they are also directly exposed to some of the educational issues that need to be addressed in order to truly improve education delivery in rural communities. These children thus provide the most pertinent suggestions to guide educational change in a constructive manner. In development discourse there is always the mentioning of "needs" and post-development theory suggests that these needs should be based on local definitions since local individuals are the ones who are most aware of what they need. In this case then, children should be the individuals who are consulted first in development education initiatives because they are the individuals who are directly affected by such initiatives.

To encourage children to voice their opinions regarding educational issues, safe spaces need to be provided for children to share their educational concerns, questions, and suggestions. With the provision of such safe spaces, the establishment of dialogue between adults and children could occur, which then encourages collaborative efforts as being the major driving force for education improvement. For example, children could be involved in meetings along with teachers and education administrators so that children could gain insight as to what is discussed during crucial decision-making processes in the education sector as adults simultaneously become exposed to children's opinions and experiences regarding certain educational issues. It is necessary to consider making such dialogue spaces available external to school environments so that they are also accessible for early school leavers. The re-surfacing of adult-child power relations occurred in participants' responses and this needs to be emasculated in order to involve and respect children as co-constructors of knowledge especially within the

education sector, and encouraging dialogue between children and various education stakeholders is one way of facilitating the eradication of power imbalances.

Not only is the collaboration between various educational stakeholders vital, but such collaboration should also be promoted between children via the establishment of some kind of homework club within rural communities in Vietnam. Children are thus given opportunities to convene to spend time on school work and to support each other in their learning. Those who are no longer attending school could also get involved if they wanted to continue learning school material but could not afford to do so. Children who are not in school are an especially marginalized group in the education sector because, since they are no longer in school, their opinions and experiences are rarely sought for educational change. This makes including the views and experiences of children who are not in school even more essential when it comes to education improvement.

In order to gauge, record, and use what children are saying about their educational experiences to improve education delivery, annual student-based feedback of their learning could be implemented by having children fill out forms regarding their likes and dislikes about various aspects of their education throughout the academic year. That way, children could share their suggestions for addressing the educational issues they encountered throughout the year. The implication of such feedback forms would be especially useful for teachers, education administrators, and government officials when trying to implement child-centred learning in Vietnam, not to mention it would make the process of education improvement a lot more feasible and accomplishable for the entire school community.

Teachers make up an essential component of the school community, especially since a number of children in this study associated their academic success and preference for some subjects according to how well their teachers explained the subject matter so endeavours to improve education quality could start here. Since it was evident that teachers played such an integral role in shaping children's educational experiences and attitudes, if teachers had more opportunities to engage in professional development and partake in teacher education, then they could affect their students in even more positive and productive ways.

Teachers' attitudes, behaviours, and pedagogical practices have the ability to promote optimal learning environments or hinder them. Teachers need to create a learning environment which provides a safe and supportive space for learner-teacher dialogues to occur so that children feel comfortable in voicing their questions, concerns, and suggestions regarding their educational experiences. This can also lead to a sense of mutual understanding between the student and teacher, for teachers will be able to see where students are coming from while students will be able to learn what teachers' expectations are. There are numerous advantageous outcomes from increased understanding of students by teachers, for if educators are able to adopt an empathetic disposition to teaching, educators will enhance their abilities to implement child-centred learning in their classrooms. According to research participants, empathetic pedagogy took the forms of: providing appropriate workloads for students; equal treatment of students; and offering extra academic support for struggling students. Empathetic instruction also leads to a greater likelihood of achieving student engagement in the classroom. Therefore, not only does increased understanding on the part of teachers provide students with educational benefits, but it is also advantageous for teachers since it makes their job easier as it facilitates better comprehension and improved engagement from students.

Teachers could also encourage student comprehension and engagement by allowing them to apply the knowledge they gained in school in their out-of-school experiences by incorporating opportunities to apply their knowledge in assignments, projects, and homework. Students valued opportunities in applying and relating to what they learned so providing children with such opportunities to do so also enhances children's perceptions of the usefulness of formal schooling and information retention. Although students recognized that what they learned in school was helpful for their future, methods focusing on information retention should be a priority for schools especially since it was a reoccurring concern for research participants. All in all, if we want to restore the value of education in terms of its benefits manifesting through valuable experiential processes, educators need to provide more opportunities for children to both apply and relate to the things they learn in school.

Lastly, when unequal opportunities for development surfaced between

students based on their existing fiscal and social capital, this increased the marginalization of certain groups of children. Separating populations of students and allocating their opportunities for development based on their access to fiscal and social capital restricted the value of development to fiscal frameworks since those who had more capital were more able to partake in opportunities to develop within the education sector. Therefore, chances for engagement in development were more readily available for a selection of the population while others remained left behind. Therefore, this favouritism in classrooms based on social and fiscal capital parallels the approach towards local involvement in development projects that are implemented by Western countries in developing communities. Marginalization manifests in the classroom when children's opportunities for equal development are dependent on the resources children have to offer since the resources that children possess consequently determine their ability to earn opportunities to develop. Therefore, to mitigate this stratification between marginalized and non-marginalized children, children of all demographics, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, need to be consulted to guide education improvement in rural Vietnam.

Overall, the results from this study could benefit school administrators, local communities, and local government officials. If research were to increasingly incorporate children's experiences and opinions, then pertinent suggestions for both local communities and non-government organizations (both international and local) could be made so when making efforts to improve the education system for marginalized children, it would be approached from the most resourceful and pertinent perspective: the children's. Overall, without the inclusion of local individuals who are directly affected by development initiatives, the concept of development has a greater likelihood of being far removed from pertinent social, political, and cultural contexts and more likely to reinforce neocolonialism and imperialism. Therefore, specifically within the development education sector, children function as the locals who are most directly affected by development initiatives which emphasizes their critical role in decision-making processes in development education projects. Without the inclusion of children's views, it is equivalent to how foreign sources of knowledge are consulted over locals as "experts" of development even though foreign knowledge about the social, political,

and cultural context of the developing community may be limited. Development organizations possess fiscal and human resources; authoritative figures in the Vietnamese education sector have experience, power and status within society, professional knowledge, resources to transform ideas into action (according to research participants), and logical and practical knowledge to implement change (also according to participants). Therefore, partnerships between development organizations, authoritative figures in the Vietnamese education sector, and children are critical because each stakeholder has something valuable to contribute to education improvement in rural Vietnam.

In regards to recommendations for future research, multiple factors need to be taken into account when selecting participants. For instance, this study lacked a varied representation of children with different ages since 6 participants were 12 years old and 5 participants were 16 years old. This lack of variety in participant ages may have altered the results since children of different ages are at various levels in the education system and so they may be exposed to a spectrum of different educational experiences and issues. Thus, future studies should try to incorporate a wider representation of children of various ages. Also, it would be beneficial for future studies to involve children up to the age of 18 because it would provide more insight into the experiences that children encounter at the upper secondary school level. For this research, I specifically decided to interview children between the ages of 12 and 16 because it was emphasized in the literature that this cohort of children was most likely to drop out of school, but in this group of respondents, some children dropped out of school earlier on in their education. Hence, future studies could also select participants based on the grade they dropped out of school instead of on their current age. Overall, it would be insightful for future research to expand the range of participants' ages so that a more eclectic understanding of children's educational experiences and views could be constructed.

Children who terminate their formal schooling have limited opportunities to be involved in education discourse so the inclusion of early school leavers as co-constructors of knowledge within the education sector is especially vital for the success of child-centred education. Since this study only included 5 children who were not in school, it would be useful for future studies to include more early school leavers. This way, there would be more insight as to what children who have

dropped out of school have to share about their educational and out-of-school experiences and how these experiences are different and/or similar to children who are still attending school. Children who have dropped out of school are often marginalized from educational discourse so this makes including their perspectives with regards to learning and schooling even more crucial. When finding children who have dropped out of school though, it is important to keep in mind that some parents will not provide permission for their children to participate in the research because they may not be willing to disclose their children's termination of school, especially when Vietnamese culture highly regards the value of formal education. For this study, 3 children who were sought consequently declined their participation since their parents did not feel comfortable in having their children's dropping out of school being discussed. Although it was more challenging to encourage participation from early school leavers in this study, they remain especially excluded from education discourse and thus additional efforts to uncover early school leavers' experiences and views must be employed.

Females are another demographic of children who are identified in the literature as often being marginalized in educational contexts. However, the results of this study were not able to provide evidence to support this statement since none of the children mentioned gender as a factor which affected their education. Therefore, future studies should incorporate explicit questions in the interview protocol which touch base on gender in order to elicit potential discussion from children regarding gender's effects on their education. The literature also claims that girls have a tendency to drop out at a younger age than boys, but it is significant to note that the only girl who dropped out of formal schooling in this study did so at a much later grade than her male counterparts for she ceased her school attendance in grade 10 while the boys dropped out in grades 4, 6, or 7. Because there was only one girl who attended formal schooling in the cohort of early school leavers though, it would be interesting to see if other females also dropped out at later grades than boys if more girls were included in this cohort.

Overall, it is important to keep in mind that although there is a plethora of factors affecting the education attainment of the children whom I interviewed, I only had the resources to investigate a number of factors at an in-depth level. Therefore, future studies could further investigate the influences of gender, parents,

geographical location, and private tutoring on children's education in this region of Vietnam. It would also be meaningful to interview teachers to compare their perspectives on relevant educational issues to what children are saying. Lastly, this study only included one respondent who had never attended formal schooling so it would be useful for future studies to include children who have only participated in informal and non-formal schooling to see how their experiences and perspectives are (dis)similar to their peers who have attended or who are still continuing formal schooling.

Final Conclusions

This study involved children, both of whom were still attending school and those who had dropped out, as active participants in order for children to exercise their agency and capacities as co-constructors of knowledge within the education sector. By unearthing children's educational experiences and perceptions of education's role in their lives, teachers, educational administrators, government officials, non-government organizations, and other individuals who are involved in the education sector are able to make progress towards implementing truly child-centred learning through the eyes of the child. There is growing recognition of children's agency, and since they have the potential to become contributing actors in their own education, their perspectives need to be heard and respected. Allowing children to take on active roles is also essential in educational policy development because if policies are meant to benefit children, then it is useful to hear *their* opinions of how such policies can actually accomplish the task of better meeting their needs. Local involvement needs to be actively pursued not only for the prevention of neocolonialism and imperialism, but also for development projects and initiatives to be more sustainable and relevant for local communities. In addition, without including children's perspectives in educational matters, especially the perspectives of those children who are living in poverty, instead of becoming a tool which enhances one's life opportunities, education consequently becomes an instrument that increases the gap between social classes because those living in poverty fail to be heard and remain marginalized.

Children prove to be critical and valuable sources of knowledge in the education sector and thus should be involved in decision-making processes in educational contexts. It is nearly impossible to have truly child-centred learning if

children are not involved in the processes of developing such learning. If education was to be truly child-centred, but decisions were made solely by adults, how would we know if children were truly the focus of learning and teaching? True child-centred education, as described by participants in this study, promotes information retention, student engagement, and child agency; however, these critical aspects of child-centred education will be impossible to implement without children's voices guiding the change.

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APPENDIX A: Information Letter and Consent Form for Parents

Study Title: Learning to Listen: Children's Voices Guiding Change in Rural Vietnam

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Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am doing research on children's experiences and opinions about learning and education in rural Vietnam. Through the help of local informants, I have come into contact with you and your child and I would like to invite you to allow your child to participate in this study. The results of this study will be used in support of my thesis and they may also be included in other work that is related to learning about how education can be improved for children in the future.

Learning how school can be made better for children through their perspectives and experiences can help add to the little research that exists in this area. Children's voices need to be heard if education is to be changed to meet their needs. This research will help show the importance of including children's opinions about learning and school in order to make meaningful change in education and society.

If granted your permission, and your child's willingness to participate in the study, the following will happen:

- We will have a casual one-on-one interview, which may be audio-recorded with the participant's permission, that will last approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour where the child will be asked to answer questions about learning, schooling, and work (if applicable).
- Approximately 2 weeks after the interview, arrangements will be made so that findings from the interview will then be summarized and shared, in person, with both you and your child by the researcher.

- Your child may make any changes necessary to the summary to ensure that the findings are accurate.
- Please note that this study will run from mid-August to the end of November.

From participating in this study, your child will be able to share any opinions or experiences which can help improve education for other children. He/she will have the opportunity to speak about any concerns, advice, or comments that he/she has. I hope that the information I get from doing this study will help me better understand how children's views can be used to improve education. Since there is very little research on children's education in rural Vietnam, this study will help create awareness about children's experiences and perspectives in Vietnam which can be shared with other parts of the world.

Interview questions will be worded in a casual way so that children do not feel intimidated. Children may feel tired during the interview but they can take breaks when they feel necessary and if they wish to end the interview, they are free to do so and will be reconnected with you. The interview will be audio-recorded but if your child does not wish to be recorded, he/she may inform the researcher and his/her wishes will be respected. Children will be given enough time to answer questions so they do not feel stressed and they do not have to answer all of the questions if they do not want to. Being with a stranger might also be stressful for the child, but the opportunity to play games and activities will help the child get to know the researcher and thus feel more comfortable with the researcher.

Your child is under no obligation to participate in this study. The participation is completely voluntary. Your child may also choose to end his/her participation in this study at any time without penalty and he/she can ask to have any collected data left out of this study. Even if he/she agrees to be in the study, your child can change his/her mind and withdraw at any time up until data analysis has started.

This research will be used for the completion of a thesis, presentations, and potential research articles where no personal information will be released about your child. Data will be kept confidential and only the researcher and the researcher's supervisor will see the data. The identity of your child will remain anonymous since personal information will not be collected, except for his/her name, but a pseudonym will later be used. Data will be kept on a password-protected laptop and stored in a locked cabinet for at least 5 years after the research project is finished and will later be destroyed by deleting the research files. If you or your child would like to receive a copy of a final report of the research findings, you may contact the local informant who got you in contact with the researcher and he/she will let the researcher know. An emailed copy will then be sent to the informant and passed on to you. You may also contact the researcher directly with the given contact information provided if you would like a copy of the final report.

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please do not hesitate to contact:

Freda Thanh Maideen – 1-780-901-1652 OR

Dr. Lynette Shultz – 1- 780-492-7625

Regards,

Freda Thanh Maideen, The University of Alberta

I, _____ have read and understood the above and provide consent for my child, _____ to participate in this study.

_____ _____

Signature Date

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at 1-780- 492-2615.

APPENDIX B: Translated Information Letter and Consent Form for Parents

Study Title: Learning to Listen: Children's Voices Guiding Change in Rural Vietnam

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Thân gửi người tham gia nghiên cứu,

Tôi đang thực hiện đề tài nghiên cứu trãi nghiệm và ý kiến của trẻ em về việc học và giáo dục ở vùng nông thôn Việt Nam. Thông qua sự giúp đỡ của người dân địa phương, tôi đến đây gặp bạn và mong muốn mời bạn tham gia vào đề tài nghiên cứu này. Kết quả nghiên cứu sẽ được sử dụng để hỗ trợ cho đề tài luận văn của tôi, và nó sẽ phần nào giúp tôi học hỏi được phương pháp nâng cao giáo dục cho trẻ em trong tương lai

Học hỏi cách nâng cao giáo dục cho trẻ em thông qua quan điểm và kinh nghiệm của trẻ có thể giúp bổ sung vào các đề tài nghiên cứu đang có ở khu vực này. Tiếng nói của trẻ em cần được lắng nghe nếu nền giáo dục được thay đổi để đáp ứng nhu cầu của chúng. Nghiên cứu này sẽ giúp chúng ta thấy được tầm quan trọng của ý kiến trẻ em về việc dạy và học để tạo nên sự thay đổi có ý nghĩa trong lĩnh vực giáo dục và xã hội

Nếu bạn sẵn lòng tham gia vào đề tài nghiên cứu này, thì bạn cùng tôi sẽ phải làm như sau:

- Chúng ta sẽ có một bài phỏng vấn đối đáp thông thường trong vòng khoảng 30 phút đến 1 giờ, bạn sẽ trả lời các câu hỏi về việc dạy và học và về công việc hiện tại (nếu có) của trẻ, cuộc phỏng vấn này sẽ được ghi âm lại.
- Khoảng 2 tuần sau lần phỏng vấn, tôi sẽ sắp xếp các bài phỏng vấn , tổng hợp và chia sẻ cho bạn và gia đình hoặc người đỡ đầu của bạn biết.

- Con của bạn cũng có thể thay đổi hoặc thêm bớt các thông tin cần thiết để đảm bảo tính chính xác.
- Vui lòng lưu ý rằng bài nghiên cứu sẽ được tiến hành chỉ trong giai đoạn từ giữa tháng 8 đến cuối tháng 11.

Từ việc tham gia vào bài nghiên cứu, con của bạn có thể chia sẻ bất kỳ ý kiến hoặc kinh nghiệm nào mà có thể giúp cải thiện chất lượng giáo dục cho các trẻ em khác. Con của bạn sẽ có cơ hội nói về các mối quan tâm, những lời khuyên hay ý kiến của chính bạn. Tôi hi vọng rằng những thông tin mà tôi nhận được trong quá trình thực hiện bài nghiên cứu này sẽ giúp tôi hiểu rõ hơn về cách nâng cao chất lượng giáo dục khi đứng dưới góc độ nhìn nhận của trẻ em. Bởi vì có rất ít nghiên cứu về giáo dục ở vùng nông thôn Việt Nam, nên bài nghiên cứu này sẽ giúp nâng cao nhận thức về kinh nghiệm và quan điểm của trẻ ở Việt Nam và có thể được áp dụng ở những nơi khác trên thế giới.

Các câu hỏi phỏng vấn sẽ được thiết kế theo cách thông thường để các bạn khỏi bị bỡ ngỡ. Có thể trẻ sẽ cảm thấy mệt một chút trong suốt thời gian được phỏng vấn, nhưng mà trẻ có thể giải lao một chút khi cần, và nếu trẻ muốn kết thúc buổi phỏng vấn, tôi rất sẵn lòng và sẽ liên lạc lại với bạn. Trẻ sẽ có đủ thời gian để trả lời các câu hỏi vì vậy đừng cảm thấy lo lắng; hơn nữa trẻ cũng không phải trả lời tất cả các câu hỏi nếu chúng thực sự không muốn. Có thể khi gặp người lạ chúng sẽ cảm thấy căng thẳng, nhưng rồi các trò chơi và một số hoạt động khác sẽ giúp chúng biết rõ hơn và cảm thấy thoải mái hơn khi làm việc với tôi

Không bắt buộc con của bạn nhất thiết phải tham gia bài nghiên cứu này. Việc tham gia là hoàn toàn toàn tự nguyện. Trẻ cũng có thể lựa chọn kết thúc sự tham gia của mình vào bài nghiên cứu bất cứ lúc nào mà không cần bồi thường; khi đó con của bạn vẫn có thể yêu cầu để có được dữ liệu còn lại của đề tài nghiên cứu. Thậm chí nếu con bạn đồng ý tham gia lại thì chúng cũng có thể thay đổi quyết định và rút bất cứ lúc nào cho tới khi việc phân tích dữ liệu được bắt đầu tiến hành

Đề tài nghiên cứu này sẽ được sử dụng để hoành thành luận văn, trình bày và phục vụ cho các mục đích nghiên cứu tiềm năng khác, nơi mà các thông tin cá nhân về con bạn sẽ không bị tiết lộ. Các dữ liệu thông tin được giữ bí mật và chỉ có người nghiên cứu và người hướng dẫn thấy được thông tin đó. Thông tin về trẻ sẽ được ẩn danh vì tôi sẽ thu thập thông tin cá nhân của trẻ, trừ tên ra, sau đó tôi sẽ dùng biệt danh để thay thế. Dữ liệu được lưu giữ trong máy tính cá nhân của tôi với mật mã và khóa lưu trong tập hồ sơ riêng ít nhất năm năm sau khi dự án nghiên cứu được hoàn thành; sau đó tất cả các thông tin sẽ bị hủy bằng cách xóa hết các tập tin dữ liệu. Nếu bạn hoặc trẻ muốn nhận một bản copy bản báo cáo cuối cùng của kết quả nghiên cứu thì bạn có thể liên lạc với người cung cấp thông tin tại địa phương, họ có liên lạc với người nghiên cứu, sau đó họ sẽ báo cho người nghiên cứu biết. Người nghiên cứu sẽ gửi thư điện tử cho họ và họ sẽ gởi đến cho bạn. Bạn cũng có thể liên hệ trực tiếp với

người nghiên cứu theo địa chỉ đã cho ở trên nếu bạn cần bản sao của bản báo cáo chính thức.

Nếu cần thêm bất cứ thông tin nào liên quan đến bài nghiên cứu này, xin đừng ngần ngại liên hệ đến

Freda Thanh Maideen – 1-780-901-1652 OR

Dr. Lynette Shultz – 1- 780-492-7625

Trân trọng,

Freda Thanh Maideen, Đại học Alberta

Tôi, _____, đã đọc và hiểu những điều trên và đồng ý thỏa thuận tham gia vào quá trình nghiên cứu.

_____ _____

Chữ ký Ngày_tháng_năm

Kế hoạch của đề tài nghiên cứu đã được xét duyệt tuân thủ theo các nguyên tắc đạo đức bởi Ban nghiên cứu Đạo đức học tại Đại học Alberta. Để biết thêm thông tin liên quan đến quyền lợi và nghĩa vụ đạo đức của người tham gia nghiên cứu, vui lòng liên hệ Văn phòng nghiên cứu Đạo đức tại 1-780- 492-2615.

APPENDIX C: Information Letter and Consent Form for Children

Study Title: Learning to Listen: Children's Voices Guiding Change in Rural Vietnam

Research Investigator:

Freda Maideen

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maideen@ualberta.ca

1-780-901-1652

Supervisor:

Dr. Lynette Shultz

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lshultz@ualberta.ca

1-780-492-7625

Dear Participant,

I am doing research on children's experiences and opinions about learning and education in rural Vietnam. Through the help of local informants, I have come into contact with you and I would like to invite you to participate in this study. The results of this study will be used in support of my thesis and they may also be included in other work that is related to learning about how education can be improved for children in the future.

Learning how school can be made better for children through their perspectives and experiences can help add to the little research that exists in this area. Children's voices need to be heard if education is to be changed to meet their needs. This research will help show the importance of including children's opinions about learning and school in order to make meaningful change in education and society.

If you are willing to participate in the study, the following will happen:

- We will have a casual one-on-one interview, which may be audio-recorded with your permission, that will last approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour where you will be asked to answer questions about learning, schooling, and work (if applicable).
- Approximately 2 weeks after the interview, arrangements will be made so that findings from the interview will be summarized and shared, in person, with both you and your parent/guardian by the researcher.

- You may make any changes necessary to the summary to ensure that the findings are accurate.
- Please note that this study will run from mid-August to the end of November.

From participating in this study, you will be able to share any opinions or experiences which can help improve education for other children. You will have the opportunity to speak about any concerns, advice, or comments that you have. I hope that the information I get from doing this study will help me better understand how children's views can be used to improve education. Since there is very little research on children's education in rural Vietnam, this study will help create awareness about children's experiences and perspectives in Vietnam which can be shared with other parts of the world.

Interview questions will be worded in a casual way so that you do not feel intimidated. You may feel tired during the interview but you can take breaks when you feel necessary and if you wish to end the interview, you are free to do so and will be reconnected with your parent/guardian. The interview will be audio-recorded, but if you do not wish to be recorded, you may inform the researcher and your request will be respected. You will be given enough time to answer questions so you do not feel stressed and you do not have to answer all of the questions if you do not want to. Being with a stranger might also be stressful for you, but the opportunity to play games and activities will help you get to know the researcher and thus feel more comfortable with the researcher.

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. The participation is completely voluntary. You may also choose to end your participation in this study at any time without penalty and you can ask to have any collected data left out of this study. Even if you agree to be in the study, you can change your mind and withdraw at any time up until data analysis has started.

This research will be used for the completion of a thesis, presentations, and potential research articles where no personal information will be released about you. Data will be kept confidential and only the researcher and the researcher's supervisor will see the data. Your identity will remain anonymous since personal information will not be collected, except for your name, but a pseudonym will later be used. Data will be kept on a password-protected laptop and stored in a locked cabinet for at least 5 years after the research project is finished and will later be destroyed by deleting the research files. If you or your parent/guardian would like to receive a copy of a final report of the research findings, you may contact the local informant who got you in contact with the researcher and he/she will let the researcher know. An emailed copy will then be sent to the informant and passed on to you. You may also contact the researcher directly with the given contact information provided if you would like a copy of the final report.

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please do not hesitate to contact:

Freda Thanh Maideen – 1-780-901-1652 OR

Dr. Lynette Shultz – 1- 780-492-7625

Regards,

Freda Thanh Maideen, The University of Alberta

I, _____ have read and understood the above and provide my consent to participate in this study.

_____ _____

Signature Date

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at 1-780- 492-2615.

APPENDIX D: Translated Information Letter and Consent Form for Children

Study Title: Learning to Listen: Children's Voices Guiding Change in Rural Vietnam

Research Investigator:

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1-780-492-7625

Thân gửi người tham gia nghiên cứu,

Tôi đang thực hiện đề tài nghiên cứu trãi nghiệm và ý kiến của trẻ em về việc học và giáo dục ở vùng nông thôn Việt Nam. Thông qua sự giúp đỡ của người dân địa phương, tôi đến đây gặp bạn và mong muốn mời bạn tham gia vào đề tài nghiên cứu này. Kết quả nghiên cứu sẽ được sử dụng để hỗ trợ cho đề tài luận văn của tôi, và nó sẽ phần nào giúp tôi học hỏi được phương pháp nâng cao giáo dục cho trẻ em trong tương lai

Học hỏi cách nâng cao giáo dục cho trẻ em thông qua quan điểm và kinh nghiệm của trẻ có thể giúp bổ sung vào các đề tài nghiên cứu đang có ở khu vực này. Tiếng nói của trẻ em cần được lắng nghe nếu nền giáo dục được thay đổi để đáp ứng nhu cầu của chúng. Nghiên cứu này sẽ giúp chúng ta thấy được tầm quan trọng của ý kiến trẻ em về việc dạy và học để tạo nên sự thay đổi có ý nghĩa trong lĩnh vực giáo dục và xã hội

Nếu bạn sẵn lòng tham gia vào đề tài nghiên cứu này, thì bạn cùng tôi sẽ phải làm như sau:

- Chúng ta sẽ có một bài phỏng vấn đối đáp thông thường trong vòng khoảng 30 phút đến 1 giờ, bạn sẽ trả lời các câu hỏi về việc dạy và học và về công việc hiện tại (nếu có thể), cuộc phỏng vấn này sẽ được ghi âm lại.
- Khoảng 2 tuần sau lần phỏng vấn, tôi sẽ sắp xếp các bài phỏng vấn , tổng hợp và chia sẻ cho bạn và gia đình hoặc người đỡ đầu của bạn biết.

- Bạn cũng có thể thay đổi hoặc thêm bớt các thông tin cần thiết để đảm bảo tính chính xác.
- Vui lòng lưu ý rằng bài nghiên cứu sẽ được tiến hành chỉ trong giai đoạn từ giữa tháng 8 đến cuối tháng 11.

Từ việc tham gia vào bài nghiên cứu, bạn có thể chia sẻ bất kỳ thông tin hoặc kinh nghiệm nào mà có thể giúp cải thiện chất lượng giáo dục cho các trẻ em khác. Bạn sẽ có cơ hội nói về các mối quan tâm, những lời khuyên hay ý kiến của chính bạn. Tôi hi vọng rằng những thông tin mà tôi nhận được trong quá trình thực hiện bài nghiên cứu này sẽ giúp tôi hiểu rõ hơn về cách nâng cao chất lượng giáo dục khi đứng dưới góc độ nhìn nhận của trẻ em. Bởi vì có rất ít nghiên cứu về giáo dục ở vùng nông thôn Việt Nam, nên bài nghiên cứu này sẽ giúp nâng cao nhận thức về kinh nghiệm và quan điểm của trẻ ở Việt Nam và có thể được áp dụng ở những nơi khác trên thế giới.

Các câu hỏi phỏng vấn sẽ được thiết kế theo cách thông thường để các bạn khỏi bị bỡ ngỡ. Có thể bạn cảm thấy mệt trong suốt thời gian được phỏng vấn, nhưng bạn có thể nghĩ một lúc khi cần, và nếu bạn muốn kết thúc buổi phỏng vấn, tôi rất sẵn lòng và sẽ liên lạc lại với ba mẹ hoặc người đỡ đầu của bạn sau. Bạn sẽ có đủ thời gian để trả lời các câu hỏi vì vậy đừng cảm thấy lo lắng; hơn nữa bạn không phải trả lời tất cả các câu hỏi nếu bạn thực sự không muốn. Có thể khi gặp người lạ bạn sẽ cảm thấy căng thẳng, nhưng rồi các trò chơi và một số hoạt động khác sẽ giúp bạn biết rõ hơn về người nghiên cứu và cảm thấy thoải mái hơn khi làm việc cùng

Bạn không bắt buộc phải tham gia bài nghiên cứu này. Việc tham gia là hoàn toàn toàn tự nguyện. Bạn cũng có thể lựa chọn kết thúc sự tham gia của mình vào bài nghiên cứu bất cứ lúc nào mà không cần bồi thường; khi đó bạn vẫn có thể yêu cầu để có được dữ liệu còn lại của đề tài nghiên cứu. Thậm chí nếu bạn đồng ý tham gia lại thì bạn cũng có thể thay đổi quyết định và rút bất cứ lúc nào cho tới khi việc phân tích dữ liệu được bắt đầu tiến hành

Đề tài nghiên cứu này sẽ được sử dụng để hoàn thành luận văn, trình bày và phục vụ cho các mục đích nghiên cứu tiềm năng khác, nơi mà các thông tin cá nhân về bạn sẽ không bị tiết lộ. Các dữ liệu thông tin được giữ bí mật và chỉ có người nghiên cứu và người hướng dẫn thấy được thông tin đó. Thông tin về bạn sẽ được ẩn danh vì tôi sẽ thu thập thông tin cá nhân của bạn, trừ tên bạn ra, nhưng sau đó tôi sẽ dùng biệt danh để thay thế. Dữ liệu được lưu giữ trong máy tính cá nhân của tôi với mật mã và khóa lưu trong tập hồ sơ riêng ít nhất năm năm sau khi dự án nghiên cứu được hoàn thành; sau đó tất cả các thông tin sẽ bị hủy bằng cách xóa hết các tập tin dữ liệu. Nếu bạn hoặc cha mẹ bạn hay người đỡ đầu muốn nhận một bản copy bản báo cáo cuối cùng của kết quả nghiên cứu thì bạn có thể liên lạc với người cung cấp thông tin tại địa phương, họ có liên lạc với người nghiên cứu, sau đó họ sẽ báo cho người nghiên cứu biết. Người nghiên cứu sẽ gửi thư điện tử cho họ và họ sẽ gởi đến cho bạn. Bạn

cũng có thể liên hệ trực tiếp với người nghiên cứu theo địa chỉ đã cho ở trên nếu bạn cần bản sao của bản báo cáo chính thức.

Nếu cần thêm bất cứ thông tin nào liên quan đến bài nghiên cứu này, xin đừng ngần ngại liên hệ đến

Freda Thanh Maideen – 1-780-901-1652 OR

Dr. Lynette Shultz – 1- 780-492-7625

Trân trọng,

Freda Thanh Maideen, Đại học Alberta

Tôi, _____, đã đọc và hiểu những điều trên và đồng ý thỏa thuận tham gia vào quá trình nghiên cứu.

_____ _____

Chữ ký Ngày_tháng_năm

Kế hoạch của đề tài nghiên cứu đã được xét duyệt tuân thủ theo các nguyên tắc đạo đức bởi Ban nghiên cứu Đạo đức học tại Đại học Alberta. Để biết thêm thông tin liên quan đến quyền lợi và nghĩa vụ đạo đức của người tham gia nghiên cứu, vui lòng liên hệ Văn phòng nghiên cứu Đạo đức tại 1-780- 492-2615.

APPENDIX E: Interview Protocol for Participants who are still Attending School

a)Children's Educational Experiences

1) What do you like most/least about school? Why?

2) What subjects do you find easiest/hardest? Why?

3) How much homework do you usually get?

4) Do you have help with homework? If yes, from whom? If no, then why not?

5) How do you learn best (e.g. by seeing, by doing, by hearing, etc.)? In class, what helps you learn this way?

6) How do you feel at school?

7) How do teachers treat you in class?

8) If you could help teachers become better teachers, what would you suggest/do/say?

9) If you could improve school, what would you change about it?

b)Children's Opinions about Attaining an Education/ Children's Views of Education's Role in their Future

1) Do you consider learning outside of school as forms of education?

2) Do you see the things you have learned in school as being useful for what you want to do in the future? If no, why not and if yes, how?

3) Do you apply the knowledge you learn in school to your life outside of school?

c)Thoughts about Including Children's Perspectives and Experiences

1) How do you feel about having children being asked about their perspectives and experiences?

2) Do you think it's a beneficial thing to include children's educational perspectives and experiences? If yes, why? If no, then why not?

APPENDIX F: Interview Protocol for Participants who are not in School

a)Children's Educational and Out-of-School Experiences

1) When you were still in school, how did you feel at school?

2) How did teachers treat you in class?

3) Why did you stop attending school?

4) Did you want to drop out of school? Why or why not?

5) Instead of going to school, what are you doing now?

6) Would you want to return to school? Why or why not?

7) If you could help teachers become better teachers, what would you suggest/do/say?

8) If you could improve school, what would you change about it?

b)Children's Opinions about Attaining an Education/ Children's Views of Education's Role in their Future

1) Do you consider learning outside of school as forms of education?

2) Do you see the things you have learned in school as being useful for what you want to do in the future? If no, why not and if yes, how?

3) Do you apply the knowledge you learn in school to your life outside of school?

c)Thoughts about Including Children's Perspectives and Experiences

1) How do you feel about having children being asked about their perspectives and experiences?

2) Do you think it's a beneficial thing to include children's educational perspectives and experiences? If yes, why? If no, then why not?

APPENDIX G: Consent Agreement with Participant Informant
THỎA THUẬN ĐỒNG Ý VỚI NGƯỜI THAM GIA LẤY THÔNG TIN

I, _____, the Informant who is responsible for connecting the researcher to the research participants, agree to maintain the confidentiality and privacy of participants by not disclosing their identities and personal information to anyone. I will also keep all the information revealed to me during this study confidential by not discussing or sharing this research information with anyone.

Tôi,_____ - là người cung cấp thông tin và có trách nhiệm liên kết nghiên cứu sinh và người tham gia nghiên cứu - đồng ý đảm bảo tính bảo mật thông tin của những người tham gia bằng cách không tiết lộ danh tính và thông tin cá nhân của họ cho bất cứ ai. Tôi sẽ chỉ dùng tất cả các thông tin mà tôi được cung cấp để phục vụ cho quá trình nghiên cứu cá nhân và không thảo luận cũng như chia sẻ thông tin nghiên cứu cho bất cứ ai

Informant (Người lấy thông tin)

_____	_____	_____
Name (Họ tên)	Signature (Chữ ký)	Date (Ngày tháng năm)

Researcher (Người nghiên cứu)

_____	_____	_____
Name (Họ tên)	Signature (Chữ ký)	Date (Ngày tháng năm)

APPENDIX H: Consent Agreement with Translator
ĐỒNG Ý THỎA THUẬN VỚI NGƯỜI BIÊN DỊCH

I, _____, the Translator, agree to:

- Keep all the information revealed to me during this study confidential by not discussing or sharing the research data with anyone.
- Return all research material and documents to the researcher when I have completed translating the transcription summaries.
- Delete any research information that may be stored on any devices I use during the process of translating the transcription summaries.

Tôi, _____, người biên dịch, đồng ý rằng:

- Không tiết lộ hay chia sẻ thông tin nghiên cứu mà tôi được biết trong suốt quá trình nghiên cứu cho bất kỳ ai.
- Trao lại tất cả tài liệu cho người nghiên cứu khi tôi hoàn tất bản dịch.
- Xóa hết các thông tin nghiên cứu lưu trữ trong các thiết bị tôi sử dụng trong quá trình biên dịch.

Translator (Người biên dịch)

_____	_____	_____
Name (Họ tên)	Signature (Chữ ký)	Date (Ngày tháng năm)

Researcher (Người nghiên cứu)

_____	_____	_____
Name (Họ tên)	Signature (Chữ ký)	Date (Ngày tháng năm)