I, Benjamin Brooks, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Studies.

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Educating for a Good Life: An Investigation into Quality of Life, Educational Attainment, Scholastic and Non-Scholastic Learning Experiences, and the Economics-Based Model of Schooling

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Educating for a Good Life:
An Investigation into Quality of Life, Educational Attainment, Scholastic and Non-Scholastic Learning Experiences, and the Economics-Based Model of Schooling

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Abstract

This research study uses in-depth interviewing to examine participants’ perceptions of the quality of their own lives. Specifically, the study asks which elements in their lives they perceive as contributing to their perceived quality of life (PQoL) and what contributions they perceive educational attainment, scholastic learning experiences (SLE) and non-scholastic learning experiences (NSLE) made in the development of that PQoL. While the participants were only asked to examine the above issues in relation to their understandings of their lives, their collected thoughts were also used to examine the Economic Model of Schooling.

Ultimately, seven major themes related to PQoL were developed in this study through the coding of the nine participants’ in-depth interviews: Interpersonal Relationships, Engagement, Internal Motivation/Personality, Handling Adversity, Financial Security, Occupation/Occupational Identity, and Faith. These themes were used to assess the role educational attainment, SLE, and NSLE played in the development of their PQoL. Educational attainment had a notable impact on PQoL through the theme of Occupation/Occupational Identity, and also through specific incidences related to the themes of Internal Motivation/Personality, Handling Adversity, and Financial Security. Also, several notable scholastic learning experiences involved the theme of engagement, specifically, skill development, organized sports and music, and with handling various adversities. The findings also suggest that the most notable areas of impact that took place in school, though not necessarily through SLE, were related to the Interpersonal Relationships theme through peer socialization and on all themes through positive student-teacher/authority figure contact. Overall, however, the most often discussed learning experiences that had an impact on PQoL occurred outside of the school
setting, and came through “real world” experiences and familial and community contact.

These findings were then used to examine the Economic Model of Schooling. There has been a major push by the federal government to institute educational policy and curriculum changes that are specifically geared toward improving our global standing on various measures of educational attainment with the hope that such an improvement will help maintain the United States’ dominant role in the innovation economy. The assumption underlying the increased role of economic considerations on education policy and curriculum and maintaining our powerful position in the world economy is that this will lead to improved quality of life or happiness for the citizenry.

The findings raise questions about the Economic Model of Schooling if the desired effect of that policy is to improve the quality of life of its citizenry. Based on the participants’ recollections, current education policies are preparing some students for work and financial security through educational attainment in the limited forms of credentialing and specific skill attainment. In addition, some ancillary issues related to some of the other PQoL themes, including Internal Motivation/Personality and Handling Adversity are being addressed through success or failure in terms of educational attainment. Also, not all of the occupational concerns of the participants were met through SLE, and little else that benefits PQoL and is not related to educational attainment is being done with perceived intentionality.
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CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

Statement of Problem

In recent decades educational experts and the general public have paid a great deal of
attention to issues of educational attainment in the United States. In 2005, the Organization for
Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), in a 41-country comparison on the math,
science and readings skills of 15 year-olds, found that the United States was lagging behind
many other industrialized nations. This study placed U.S. students in 29th place in math, 20th in
science, and 12th in reading. In 2008, the OECD found that the United States is no longer the
world leader in secondary education, placing it 18th among the 36 nations examined as only 75%
of U.S. students are graduating from high school on time (OECD, retrieved from www.oecd.org
on December 14, 2010). Orfield (2004) demonstrates that these graduation statistics are even
worse when examined by gender, race and ethnicity:

Nationally, only about two-thirds of all students who enter 9th grade graduate with regular
high school diplomas four years later. For minority males, these figures are far lower. In
2001, on average, 72% of female students, but only 64% of male students graduated.

African American students had a graduation rate of 50%, the lowest of racial and ethnic
groups identified; the other student groups graduated at the following rates: American
Indian, 51%; Latino, 53%; White, 75%; and Asian and Pacific Islanders, 77%. (American
Policy Youth Forum, 2006, p. viii)

The concern associated with these findings is that our poor showing on issues of educational
attainment will lead the United States to fall behind other nations in the burgeoning innovation
economy.
These discrepancies in attainment have an economic impact at the individual level as well. The most commonly recalled economic indication of the role of educational attainment in an individual’s life can be found by equating average yearly income to years of school completed. For example, adults 18 years of age and older without a high school diploma earn, on average, $19,915 a year; with a high school diploma, $29,448; with a bachelor’s degree, $54,689; and with a master’s, professional or doctoral degree, those adults earn, on average, $79,946 annually (U.S. Census, 2007). These economic disparities have been, in turn, related to sociological and psychological issues, including increases in individual’s health concerns, marital struggles (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2003), emotional and behavioral problems (McLeod & Kaiser, 2004), and increases in incarceration, with 75% of all state prison inmates and 59% of all federal inmates having not achieved a high school diploma (Harlow, 2003). These personal disadvantages also strain the larger society’s economic standing. Indeed, Secretary of Education, Margaret Spellings (2006), in testimony before the United States House of Representatives, stated that individual’s without a high school diploma or equivalent, “cost our nation more than 260 billion dollars...in lost wages, lost taxes, and lost productivity.”

In recent decades, there has been a major push by the federal government to institute educational policy and curriculum changes that are specifically geared toward improving our global standing on these various measures of educational attainment with the hope that such an improvement will help maintain the United States’ dominant role in the burgeoning innovation economy. The assumption underlying the increasing role of economic considerations on education policy and curriculum and maintaining our powerful position in the world economy is that this will lead to improved quality of life or happiness for the citizenry.
A by-product of the large-scale education policy and curriculum changes toward economic considerations has been a shift of focus away from other elements of life that might impact quality of life or happiness. Indeed, Marilyn Cochran-Smith (2006) sees this as one of the three great worries of our educational system as we move into the 21\textsuperscript{st} century. She states:

In the United States, we have seen a growing assumption that the primary purpose of public education...is to produce a workforce that will meet the changing demands of an increasingly competitive, global, and knowledge-based society. A narrow focus on producing the nation’s workforce has pushed out other traditional goals of teacher education, chief among them the goal of producing teachers who know how to prepare future citizens to participate in a democratic society. (p. 24)

Fellow educational scholar, Nel Noddings (2003), extends this point:

Often [in today’s schools] we equate happiness with financial success, and then we suppose that our chief duty as educators is to give all children the tools needed to get “good” jobs. However, many essential jobs, now very poorly paid, will have to be done even if the entire citizenry were to become well educated. (p. 22-23)

This concern over what the role of economics should be in making education policy decisions led to the central issues addressed in this study.

\textit{Research Questions}

The research questions examined in this study are:

1) How do participants from varying scholastic and occupational backgrounds articulate and perceive their quality of life?

2) What perceived impact did educational attainment have on participants’ perceived
quality of life?

3) What perceived impact did scholastic learning experiences and non-scholastic learning experiences have on participants’ perceived quality of life?

Statement of Research Purpose

This research study examines, through the use of in-depth interviewing, a demographically diverse group of participants’ perceptions of the quality of their own lives, what elements in their lives they believe contribute to their perceived quality of life (PQoL), and what contributions they perceive educational attainment, scholastic learning experiences and non-scholastic learning experiences made in the development of that PQoL. The population consists of people from varying ages, educational attainment, gender, occupation, race, religion and socioeconomic status. In addition, all participants grew up in Cincinnati and attended Cincinnati-area schools during their youth. The topics covered in these in-depth interviews included family, relationships, childhood, adulthood, occupation, faith, and schooling, amongst others, with a focus on illuminating particular experiences that had a profound impact on PQoL.

While the participants were only asked to examine the above issues in relation to their own understandings of their lives, their collected thoughts are used to examine what this study calls, The Economic Model of Schooling. This model states that while individual and national economic drivers have always been a consideration of United States education policy, over time, economic concerns have become the overriding consideration of United States education policy. This study examines the role, from a perceived quality of life perspective, the focus on economics-based considerations for the United States education system is playing in achieving a high PQoL. This examination was interpretative and sought to allow the participants’ lived
experiences and their perceptions on those lived experiences to guide the analysis of the economic model of schooling, and begin to develop possible assertions concerning the benefits to quality of life ascribed by the Economic Model of Schooling.

Approach: In-Depth Interviewing

The rationale for using in-depth interviewing that takes a personal historical perspective in this research study comes out of a desire to seek a broader, and yet deeper, understanding of quality of life and educational attainment compared to how the data is most commonly utilized. This desire is based on concerns that stem from the various, sometimes incongruent, interpretations of quality of life, possibly incorrect assumptions underlying those quality of life interpretations, and the limited interpretation of educational attainment. Whether or not these concerns prove justified, light can be shed on this inconsistency by more fully examining how individuals understand the concepts of educational attainment and quality of life in their own lives, and how that may differ from their perceptions of how society understands these concepts. This approach will be particularly useful, at least in terms of quality of life, as one of the major complaints of quality of life inventories is that they represent how people are expected to feel as opposed to how they actually feel (The Economist, 2006). In addition, it takes control, in as great a way as is possible (though not completely), of defining educational attainment and quality of life out of the hands of the researcher, while still giving the researcher the control to interpret the participants’ findings in relation to various analytical models.

The underlying rationale behind the move away from the research methods currently in use, like quantitative statistical analysis and subjective well-being measurements, to in-depth interviewing is two-fold. First, the current objectively-based quality of life indicators do not go
nearly far enough in understanding the component pieces that form the population being scored, and second, the current subjectively-based quality of life indicators do not go nearly far enough in understanding the impact that factors outside of the individual have on those being scored using this method. In-depth interviewing that examines one’s full personal history is able to supply deeper, more individualized subjective accounts than are the current subjective measures being used in quality of life research. Embracing this subjectivity, and incorporating the techniques of coding and constant comparison of data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), allowed the researcher to develop an understanding of how this set of participants perceive their quality of life and the role(s) of educational attainment, and scholastic and non-scholastic learning experiences in achieving their view of quality of life, and then use this understanding to analyze the economic model of schooling.

Definitions & Uses

This research study was designed to allow its participants to develop their own understandings of how they perceive their lives and what elements in their lives contributed to the development of that perception. To this end, it was important not to encumber the participants with defined terms or ideas that they must then fit their lived experiences into. For the purposes of using the participants’ interpretations as analytical tools in examining the economic model of schooling, however, the researcher did have to define a few key terms as they are used in this research study. These terms were rarely used during the interview process, and were never defined for the participants. In addition it should be noted that at least one of these terms, quality of life, is used to mean very different things, depending upon the researcher/scholar using it, and the definition for quality of life that follows is merely the
working definition this researcher used in interpreting the participants’ perceptions of their own lives.

Quality of Life

In the first research question listed above, the participants were charged with the task of determining what elements in life they need to have, what they perceive to be, a high quality of life. While not specifically defining ‘quality of life’, they are constructing its characteristics and how those characteristics are used in their lives. The participants are being charged with this task because the literature on ‘quality of life’ and on its related, and some times synonymous, companions, ‘happiness’, ‘life satisfaction’, and ‘subjective well-being’ (Diener, et al, 1993, 1995, and 2000; Lane, 1994; Lane, 2000), fails to come to a singular agreement on what these terms mean. Broadly, these terms serve as either a component piece or the whole understanding of what is, or makes up, a good life. This ‘good life’ has been examined as a strictly individual concept, an individual in relation to humankind (or society) concept and a humankind (or society) concept (Veenhoven, 1999). The literature review on quality of life in Chapter Two will illustrate the definitional confusion over the concept of quality of life, while describing some of the major findings in the field.

So as not to allow the definitional confusion surrounding quality of life or this researcher’s analytical lens from corrupting the directions that the participants’ perceptions concerning the quality of their own lives, a very broad definition of the term ‘quality of life’ was chosen to guide the analysis in this research study. The term ‘quality of life’ is used in this study to refer to an ‘overarching understanding of what makes a life good (Brulde, 2007; The Economist, 2006; Griffin, 2007; Veenhoven, 1999).’ This definition allows the participants to
include any and all life factors when discussing their perceived quality of life.

*Educational Attainment*

Educational attainment, regardless of disciplinary field, is generally defined using one of three criteria, or some combination of those criteria. Those criteria are 1) the number of years of schooling obtained by an individual or group, 2) the literacy rate of a population (Chatterjee, 2005), and 3) grade-level achievement on standardized measurements (AAUW, 2002)). These criteria are so often used because they are easily quantifiable and make for easy, if not always accurate, comparisons between populations. Additionally, while these criteria are used in many quality of life indicators, educational attainment is sometimes only examined indirectly (as in measuring quality of life indicators that are influenced by educational attainment) and sometimes is not examined at all. When educational attainment is examined, however, what is important to note about these criteria, and even among the more seldom used qualitative criteria, is that they are all directly related to schooling. More accurately, what these criteria are *broadly* assessing is attainment or achievement *in school*. Finally, it should be noted that while educational attainment can be defined in this manner regardless of disciplinary field, it fits very well with the economic model of schooling, but does not articulate the beliefs about schooling and attainment presented within either Lane’s or Noddings’ constructs.

The use of school attainment as a measure of educational attainment, and the use of educational attainment as a component indicator used in quality of life research does have value. Indeed, there is much to agree with in Epps’ (1995) statement that, “although varying in content and purpose across countries, the most universally recognized function of schools is to impart knowledge and skills that will enable the learner to participate successfully in the society’s
institutions (p. 596),” and Campbell’s assertion in McLeod and Kaiser (2004) that “educational attainment is a key predictor of life chances, both within the economic sphere and with respect to subjective outcomes such as happiness and perceived quality of life (p. 2).” However, what does serve as points of contention within this usage of educational attainment is that 1) attainment or achievement in schools is boiled down into only the most overly simplistic of measures, and 2) that education gained outside of the classical purview of school is not taken into account.

It is precisely because of these disagreements, that this traditional, convenient definition of educational attainment is used in this study (specifically, the number of years of schooling completed). As will become clear over the remainder of this chapter and Chapter Two, this conceptualization of educational attainment is used as a rationale for the economic model of schooling construct, thus making the participants’ perceptions on the role educational attainment played in PQoL particularly useful analytical tools.

_Scholastic and Non-scholastic Learning Experiences_

Scholastic Learning Experience is defined in this study as any learning experience or event that was perceived by the participants to have occurred under education policy or as a part of the approved curriculum designed under the prevailing education policy. Non-Scholastic Learning Experience is defined as any learning experience or event that was perceived by the participants to have occurred under all other circumstances, both inside and outside of the classroom and the school. These two terms were created by the researcher as a means of assessing the life events the participants’ perceived contributed to PQoL and to assess their beliefs about the roles educational attainment, schooling and learning played in achieving their level of PQoL. These terms also serve as a means of articulating the participants’ beliefs about
Conclusion

This research study is seeking to accomplish two difficult tasks: to understand how individuals perceive their lives and to use that understanding to critique the Economic Model of Schooling. And while mistakes are made in this study (which will be explored in the final chapter) and the findings can hardly be characterized as generalizable beyond these nine participants, the data collected here proves to be useful, at least at the anecdotal level, in examining the Economic Model of Schooling, by adding a deeper understanding of PQoL to the quality of life literature, and in beginning to develop possible assertions concerning the benefits to quality of life ascribed by the economic model of schooling.

Ultimately, seven major themes related to perceived quality of life (PQoL) were developed in this study through the coding of the nine participants’ in-depth interviews. Each participant viewed his or her own quality of life as good or great, and as such, having a positive relationship to each theme can be viewed as contributing to a high quality of life, while having a negative relationship to a theme can be viewed as hampering a high quality of life. The seven PQoL themes, listed in order of the participants’ frequency in discussing them, are Interpersonal Relationships, Engagement, Internal Motivation/Personality, Handling Adversity, Financial Security, Occupation/Occupational Identity and Faith. Not all of the themes carried equal importance to all of the participants. For example, a participant could say that her religion was the most important factor in her PQoL, while another participant could say his family is most important. The participants do, at least anecdotally, argue that some themes are more important.
than other themes. Therefore, the order of the list above should not be considered a definitive order or ranking on the importance of the components of PQoL, but instead only a convenient means for the researcher to organize the narrative of findings.

These same seven themes were examined to assess the role educational attainment and scholastic learning experiences, and non-scholastic learning experiences played in the development of their PQoL. This examination, though, is tempered for two of the themes, Internal Motivation/Personality and Faith, due to each theme’s particular relationship to issues in learning and schooling (this is one of the flaws of the study). Additionally, since all of the participants had a PQoL of good or great it was difficult to fully assess the perceived impact of educational attainment on PQoL development. Despite this, the findings suggest that to a large extent educational attainment and scholastic learning experiences had only an occasional impact on PQoL, most notably on Occupational Identity and in both positive and negative ways, while non-scholastic learning experiences, again in both positive and negative ways, contributed a great deal more to PQoL. The most notable areas of impact that took place in school, but not as a part of perceived education curriculum or policy were on Interpersonal Relationships through peer socialization and on all themes through positive student-teacher contact. Overall, however, the most significant learning experiences that had an impact on PQoL occurred outside of the formal school setting, and came through “real world” experiences and familial and community contact.

This study offers potential assertions that are counter to the United States’ adherence to an economics-based policy of education if the desired effect of that policy is to improve the quality of life of its citizenry.
The next chapter will fully explore the economic model of schooling being examined in this study. It will lay out the argument for the current existence of the economic model of schooling by demonstrating that over the course of the United States’ history, federal education policy has been moving toward meeting national and individual economic considerations and away from meeting other potentially important considerations. In addition, the next chapter will discuss the major research and writings on quality of life and educational attainment, and how they relate to the economic model of schooling.
CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter will outline the literature pertinent to this research study. The first section states that economic considerations are currently the driving force behind education policy and curriculum, and discusses the historical progression toward adopting this current model of schooling. The second section of this chapter examines research and writing on educational attainment and how educational attainment relates to the economic model of schooling and to economics-based quality of life literature. The final section of this chapter examines quality of life research and writing directly related to economic considerations and how this research fits in with the assumptions underlying the Economic Model of Schooling. In addition, this final section will confront the lack of definitional agreement in examining quality of life, which in turn underscores the need for in-depth interviews to understand participants’ perceived quality of life.

The Economic Model of Schooling

Education in the United States has always had several purposes for its citizenry with one of those purposes being the economic prosperity for both the individual and society. The question presented and examined in this section is the degree to which economic considerations have become the dominant source for federal educational policy and curricular changes in the United States. It is the belief of the researcher after a careful review of the literature that the answer to this question is that indeed economic considerations have become the dominant source for federal education policy and curricular change. What is unclear and what is the ultimate question, then, of this research study is what is the relationship between this economic model of
schooling and the participant-constructed understanding of quality of life? While that question will be analyzed in Chapter Four, this section will briefly describe the major eras of education and education reform, with an eye toward the changing role and growing level of importance of economics, often to the subjugation of other purposes of education, has played in policy decisions during these eras, first as colonies and then as a nation. Topics discussed include schooling during the Colonial Era, the Common School Movement, the Industrial Revolution, the GI Bill and the Cold War, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), A Nation at Risk, Goals 2000, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), and the current policy proposals of President Barack Obama. The conclusions drawn from this section will serve as the analytical model that will be examined using the participants’ findings.

The colonial era serves as an example of a time when economic considerations were not the major education policy concern. Colonial America presented very little opportunity for formal education, but what was available served, at least initially, the perceived religious needs of the colonists, or as McNergney and Herbert (1998) put it, the “salvation of souls.” Much of colonial educational practices came out of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. This colony sought to be an example of a good, Protestant society for the rest of the world, and it saw education as a powerful way to reach this goal. Indeed, some of the Massachusetts Bay Colony’s governing legislation proved to be the first educational legislation in the Americas and it dealt with the importance of education in relation to religious doctrine. The Massachusetts Law of 1642, according to Spring (2005), “opens with a complaint about the neglect of parents and masters in the training of children in learning and labor and calls the appointment of individuals to investigate the ability of children “to read and understand the principles of religion and the
capital laws of this country (Cubberley (1934) in Spring (2005, p. 14)).” Perhaps the most famous law on religion and schooling from this era, the “Old Deluder Satan Law,” was passed in 1647 and called for communities to establish and support schools. Spring (2005) states:

Specifically, the law required any community having at least fifty households to appoint a teacher to provide instruction in reading and writing and any community of one hundred or more households to establish a grammar school. The law opens with the famous words, “It being the chief project of old deluder, Satan, to keep men from the knowledge of the Scriptures…It is therefore ordered…” (p. 14)

Clearly religious orthodoxy was paramount in early colonial educational efforts as these types of laws were seen across the colonies and into the western territories. However, a closer examination of these laws, and this can be seen particularly in the wording of the Massachusetts Law of 1642, reveals two other key components to education, the “learning of labor” and the learning of the “capital laws of the country.”

As new colonies with vast resources, but only fledgling populations it was paramount that they develop skilled laborers through apprenticeships. That is why masters as well as parents were included in the reprimand on neglect in the Massachusetts Law of 1642. They were expected to supply a practical education that would assist these children in eventually excelling in the skilled labor positions (for example, blacksmithing, carpentry and farming) needed in the developing colonies, while maintaining the strong focus on teaching religion. The new colonies also needed to train future leaders, and it is for that reason that the “Old Deluder Satan Law” marks the distinction between appointing a teacher for reading and writing for smaller towns and establishing a grammar school in larger settlements where the wealthy tended to reside (Spring,
Reading and writing instruction was generally geared toward religion and God, whereas grammar schools taught Greek and Latin, as well as mathematics and accounting, subjects and languages of greater concern to the aristocracy and those running business and government (Spring, 2005). As only certain privileged few (white, upper class, males) could enroll in these early grammar schools, these actions can also be construed from another, at least partly economic perspective, as maintaining a system of social control, of maintaining a social structure. This social class function of the legislation can be seen as at least part of the reason for educational reform undertaken in the early decades of nationhood, in what has come to be known as the Common School Movement.

The Common School Movement’s origins can be traced to Thomas Jefferson and the early decades of nationhood. Though Jefferson was in no way alone in championing the principles of the common school, it was his Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge, drafted as a member of the Virginia Assembly’s Committee to Revise the Laws of the Commonwealth, that served as the first piece of state legislation promoting the common school (McNergney & Herbert, 1998). This bill called for schools that were tax-supported, open to boys and girls, free for up to three years, and would teach reading, writing, arithmetic and history. In addition the bill called for the construction of grammar schools, like those discussed earlier, that what teach the more advanced students (McNergey & Herbert, 1998). The bill was first submitted to the assembly in 1778 and again in 1780, but was never ratified into law, but still its ideas remained important to education reformers (Boyd, et al, 1950).

In 1818, Jefferson continued the common school fight while addressing its purpose, writing in his Report of the Commissioners for the University of Virginia, “‘objects of primary
education” such qualities as morals, understanding of duties to neighbors and country, knowledge of rights, and intelligence and faithfulness in social relations (Noddings, 2005, p. 10).” Broadly speaking, common school reformers called for taxation for public education, longer school terms, a focus on getting particular groups of nonattenders into schools, hierarchical school organizations, consolidation of small school districts into larger ones for the purpose of lowering per pupil expenditure, standardization of methods and curriculum and teacher training (Kaestle, 1983 in McNergney & Herbert, 1998).

While the above describes what common school reformers wanted for their schools, it only alludes to the potential rationale(s) behind this movement. In the years following Jefferson’s death, Horace Mann took up the cause of common schools and became their guiding force. Indeed, Mann, as Spring (2005) put it, and “[t]hose who created and spread the ideology of the common school worked with as much fervor as leaders of religious crusades. And, in fact, there are striking parallels between the two types of campaigns. Both promised some form of salvation and moral reformation. In the case of the common school, the promise was the salvation of society (p. 77).” This “salvation of society,” Spring argues, contained three distinctive features. The first was the educating of all children in the same schoolhouse. Spring (2005) states:

It was argued that if children from a variety of religious, social-class, and ethnic backgrounds were educated in common, there would be a decline in hostility and friction among social groups. In addition, if children educated in common were taught a common social and political ideology, a decrease in political conflict and social problems would result. (p. 74)

The second distinctive feature was the idea of using schools as instruments of government
policy, and the third was the creation of state agencies to control local schools (Spring, 2005). The third distinctive feature may have occurred out of necessity in seeing the first two through to fruition, but it is through the beliefs behind the first two that we can see the overriding purpose behind the common school movement. Another, secondary purpose existed behind the common school movement and that is where the influence of economics on education during this era intersected.

In the early 19th Century, the United States was a very young and fragile nation. Education was viewed as a means of spreading the belief system underlying our republic and for creating a sense of national pride. This was a goal of education during the colonial era, but was secondary in importance to religion. Religion and morality were still important in this new school movement, but not as important as strengthening and maintaining this tenuous common bond formed between an ethnically, racially, religiously and economically diverse, and geographically spreading, citizenry (McNergney & Herbert, 1998; Spring, 2005).

Creating a sense of nation was not the only rationale behind Mann and others pushing of common schools. Mann also believed that creating a common bond between the citizenry would improve relations between capital and labor, first through eliminating the friction caused by class consciousness and second by increasing the general wealth of society. Spring (2005) states:

Mann felt that common schooling, by improving the general wealth of society, would be the answer to those reformers who were calling for a redistribution of property from the rich to the poor. His argument is one of the earliest considerations of schooling as capital investment and of teaching as the development of human capital. Within his framework of reasoning, education would produce wealth by training intelligence to develop new
technology and methods of production. Investment in education is a form of capital investment because it leads to the production of new wealth and teaching is a means of developing human capital because it provides the individual with the intellectual tools for improved labor. (p. 82)

The common school era of education policy serves to demonstrate that the movement toward our current Economic Model of Schooling has not always progressed uninterrupted or in an as exclusively economic form as currently exists. The common school reformers’ major purpose was social and moral reform, not economic considerations. Still, during this era, the role of economics in education did grow from the colonial era. And while it can be argued that Mann and other common school advocates never achieved the lofty unity through collective wealth that they were seeking, and it can also be argued that common schools, in actuality had the exact opposite effect on class consciousness (see Katz, 1968), it is clear that long after the common school movement came to an end, many of its pillars, especially the economic link between intellectual development and capital growth, remained constants in the public school system. Over time, this economic component would become more and more the driving force of educational reform as educating for democracy and educating for religion were cast aside. This transition can be seen during the age of industrialization.

Toward the end of the 19th Century the United States embarked on an era of unprecedented industrialization. Factories extracting natural resources and others manufacturing and distributing a wide-range of new products popped up throughout the industrial heartland and in urban centers across the country. More workers and more nuanced skills were needed to drive this new economic engine of the United States. This led to a push to increase the focus of
education into practical, vocational applications and to find ways to get a broader demographic spectrum of workers into the factories (Anyon, 2005). On these points, Spring (2005), summarizing Katz (see Katz, M., 1968), demonstrating the shift from the common school ideal to education for industrialization, states:

> Within the context of these events, upper-class reformers were seeking to ensure that they would benefit from these changes by imposing a common school system that would train workers for the new factories, educate immigrants into acceptance of values supportive of the ruling elite, and provide order and stability among the expanding populations of the cities. (p. 94)

In addition to inculcating skill sets and belief systems through education, efforts were also made to increase the workforce in novel ways. Preschools have their American birth in the factory-system. Factory owner Robert Owen started the first one in the United States at a factory so that mothers could come to work and not have to worry about child care and to prepare children who were too young to start working (there were no child labor laws at this point, so children started working at very young ages) for their futures working in the factories (McNergney & Herbert, 1998). These preschools were not the nourishing environments that we think of today when we think of preschools. Indeed, most schools, particularly urban public schools, were uncomfortable and filthy and with teachers who were most severe in their methods of discipline (McNergney & Herbert, 1998).

These conditions would not last for too long as a wave of progressive social reform swept the nation. On the industrial front, child labor laws and sanitation laws were implemented. Women fought for and received the right to vote. And in education, efforts were made to upset
the path that current education practices led its students down. The focus of education, while still contributing to personal and societal economic solvency, broadened once again to some of the calls of the Common School Movement and to some new areas as well. Noddings (2005) notes, by way of an example, that:

[T]he National Education Association listed seven aims in its 1918 report, *Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education*: (1) health; (2) command of the fundamental processes; (3) worthy home membership; (4) vocation; (5) citizenship; (6) worthy use of leisure; and (7) ethical character. (p. 10)

These types of aims continued to be the driving force behind education for the next few decades. This is not to say that ‘factory schools’ were not still in existence and there were not still deplorable conditions in some urban schools, but that at least at the policy level the focus had shifted. We would begin to see some new wrinkles to these aims after World War II and into the Cold War era.

After the end of World War II there was a major shift in educational policymaking and in the aims attributed to public education. The shift in policymaking came in the form of increased federal involvement in funding (Carpentier, 2006) and on issues of curriculum (Spring, 2005). The reasons for these shifts were due in large part to the fear of the spread of Communism and the power struggle for global superiority between the Soviet Union and the United States during the Cold War and the space race. Spring (2005) summarizes his interpretation of these shifts laid out in his *The Sorting Machine: National Educational Policy since 1945* from 1976:

The interpretation given in *The Sorting Machine* stresses the expanded role of the corporate liberal state in the management of human resources. Within the framework of
this interpretation, selective service, the NSF [National Science Foundation], the NDEA [National Defense Education Act], and the War on Poverty are considered part of the general trend in the twentieth century to use the school as a means of cultivating human resources for the benefit of industrial and corporate leaders. This interpretation recognizes the problems and failures of the schools in achieving these goals and the evolving complexity of political relationships in the educational community. [My] major criticism of educational events is that schools were increasingly used to serve national economic and foreign policies and, as a result, failed to prepare students to protect their political, social, and economic rights. (p. 376)

As Spring points out, this is one interpretation of educational policy during this era. It is also important to note that the Civil Rights Movement and court decisions like Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas that called for an end to ‘separate, but equal’ practices would also factor into education policy decisions. Indeed, Spring, notes that the main opposing interpretation comes from formerly neoconservative scholar, Diane Ravitch (she has had a recent change of heart that places her more in line with politically liberal thinkers) (1983, in Spring, 2005) who stated, “At every level of formal education, from nursery school to graduate school, equal opportunity became the overriding goal of postwar educational reformers (p. 376)” and that the needs of industry and foreign policy were not involved in education policy decisions. Ravitch brings a negative connotation to this “overriding goal” of equal opportunity, but regardless if one accepts that element of her argument it is difficult not to say that at least a portion of what drove policy decisions for at least some policymakers was progressive social and educational equity. In addition, one can also disagree with Spring’s characterization of the
economic educational focus being increasingly used to benefit national economic needs. This may be true, and as Carpentier (2006) points out, “After 1945, growth in public expenditure on education and economic growth went hand in hand (p. 705),” but it should also at least be addressed that increased national economic wealth is perceived by some to benefit individual economic wealth, which in turn improves the quality of one’s life. Ultimately, Spring’s interpretation rings largely true for this researcher with the couple of stated caveats. The description of the modern era of education policy will demonstrate that this focus on economics continues to grow and that other once prominent components of education policy like, religion, democracy, equal opportunity and even national pride take a backseat to competition in the global marketplace.

As Ronald Reagan took over the presidency in 1980, the Republican Party had two vocal segments on how schooling should be approached in the United States. Reagan sought the support of the religious right by supporting a school prayer amendment, educational choice, a “restoration of moral values” in public schools, cutting federal support for bilingual education, abolishing the Department of Education and generally limiting federal involvement in educational practices. Ultimately, however, Reagan, without completely abandoning the religious right, chose to formulate his policy decisions more in line with the fiscally conservative Republicans. His rationale for doing this came from the findings of reports, most notably the National Commission on Excellence in Education’s *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* from 1983 (Apple, 1988). This report makes its message clear:

> Our nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being taken over by competitors throughout the
The educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people. What was unimaginable a generation ago has begun to occur—others are matching and surpassing our educational attainments. (NCEE, 1983, p. 5 in Apple, 1987, p. 199-200)

The language of education reform is clearly in the language of economics, and the repercussions are clear: if we do not improve education with the purpose of furnishing the needs of our economy, our nation will fail.

With such economic factors in education being endorsed by major educational reports and by President Reagan, the religious right found it useful to join forces with fiscal conservatives, as membership in one group certainly did not exclude membership in the other. As Apple (1987) points out, four key agenda items were undertaken by this new coalition:

1) Proposals for voucher plans and tax credits to make schools more like the idealized free-market economy;

2) The movement in state legislatures throughout the country to “raise standards” and mandate both teacher and student “competencies” and basic curricular goals and knowledge;

3) The increasingly effective attacks on the school curriculum for its anti-family and anti-free enterprise bias, its “secular humanism,” and its lack of patriotism; and

4) The growing pressure to make the needs of business and industry into the primary goals of the school. (p. 198)

This plan for educational reform ultimately led to a transformative change in the aims of education. “No longer is education seen as part of a social alliance that combines many minority
groups, women, teachers, administrators, government officials, and progressively inclined legislators, all of whom acted together to propose social democratic policies for schools,” as Spring (1988) states, but instead, “it aims at providing the educational conditions believed necessary both for increasing profit and capital accumulation (p. 283).” The legislation and policies that Reagan endorsed following *A Nation at Risk* were the most focused yet in terms of economics-concerned learning outcomes, while limiting other potential purposes for education. The education policies of the next few presidents would build upon Reagan’s policies, and bring the current Economic Model of Schooling into use.

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was one of the first major pieces of legislation passed by former President George W. Bush, and demonstrated his attempt to replicate the type of educational advancements¹ achieved during his time as governor of Texas (Hursh, 2007). NCLB serves to both camouflage and strengthen the Economic Model of Schooling by focusing its educational efforts on specific skill training needed for success in the current innovation economy, while couching these efforts in the language of social equity, state’s rights and religious orthodoxy. NCLB has four pillars that represent these ideological purposes:

*No Child Left Behind* is based on stronger accountability for results, more freedom for states and communities, proven education methods, and more choices for parents.

**Stronger Accountability for Results**

Under *No Child Left Behind*, states are working to close the achievement gap and make sure all students, including those who are disadvantaged, achieve academic proficiency. Annual state and school district report cards inform parents and communities about state and school progress. Schools that do not make progress must provide supplemental services, such as free tutoring or after-school assistance; take corrective actions; and, if still not making adequate yearly progress after five years, make dramatic changes to the way the school is run.

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¹ These ‘advancements’ out of Texas are, of course, greatly disputed, just as the perceived benefits of NCLB have been widely scrutinized. While a discussion of these topics is valuable, the purpose of this section is to look at ideological underpinnings of educational policies, not to get bogged down with issues of implementation.
More Freedom for States and Communities

Under *No Child Left Behind*, states and school districts have unprecedented flexibility in how they use federal education funds. For example, it is possible for most school districts to transfer up to 50 percent of the federal formula grant funds they receive under the Improving Teacher Quality State Grants, Educational Technology, Innovative Programs, and Safe and Drug-Free Schools programs to any one of these programs, or to their Title I program, without separate approval. This allows districts to use funds for their particular needs, such as hiring new teachers, increasing teacher pay, and improving teacher training and professional development.

Proven Education Methods

*No Child Left Behind* puts emphasis on determining which educational programs and practices have been proven effective through rigorous scientific research. Federal funding is targeted to support these programs and teaching methods that work to improve student learning and achievement. In reading, for example, *No Child Left Behind* supports scientifically based instruction programs in the early grades under the Reading First program and in preschool under the Early Reading First program.

More Choices for Parents

Parents of children in low-performing schools have new options under *No Child Left Behind*. In schools that do not meet state standards for at least two consecutive years, parents may transfer their children to a better-performing public school, including a public charter school, within their district. The district must provide transportation, using Title I funds if necessary. Students from low-income families in schools that fail to meet state standards for at least three years are eligible to receive supplemental educational services, including tutoring, after-school services, and summer school. Also, students who attend a persistently dangerous school or are the victim of a violent crime while in their school have the option to attend a safe school within their district. (retrieved 8/11/09 from [http://www.ed.gov/nclb/overview/intro/4pillars.html](http://www.ed.gov/nclb/overview/intro/4pillars.html))

Additionally, NCLB “requires that 95% of students in grades 3 through 8 and once in high school be assessed through standardized tests aligned with ‘challenging academic standards’ in math, reading and (beginning in 2007-2008) science (Department of Education, 2003)” and that “each year, an increasing percentage of student are to demonstrate ‘proficiency’, until 2014, at which time for all states and every school, all students (regardless of ability or proficiency, whether they have a disability or recently immigrated to the United States and are English language learners) are expected to be proficient in every subject (Hursh, 2007, p. 296).”
Before dissecting the language of the four pillars of NCLB, it is important to note that NCLB is not the sole ownership of conservatives or Republicans. Not only was it passed with broad bi-partisan support in the House and Senate (Hursh, 2007), but it is also just the most recent example of federal educational legislation attempting to confront issues of accountability, testing and measurement and educational aims. Indeed, NCLB is actually the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, which was signed into law by President Johnson, a Democrat. The ESEA was essentially anti-poverty legislation as it provided funding for improved educational programs for educationally underserved children, and as Spring (2005) puts it:

In general, the ESEA followed in the tradition of federal involvement in education that had been evolving since World War II. The basic thread was planning for the use of human resources in the national economy. In the 1950s, under pressure from the technological and scientific race with the Soviet Union, emphasis had been placed on channeling talented youth into higher education. In the early 1960s, the emphasis shifted to providing equality of opportunity as a means of utilizing the poor as human resources. (p. 393)

The Goals 2000 Educate America Act is the immediate precursor to NCLB, and while first proposed by President George H.W. Bush, a Republican, was ultimately enacted and signed by President Clinton, a Democrat. Though Clinton removed the elements of this legislation that pandered to the religious right, he kept the core elements of it which called for increased achievement testing in ‘essential’ subjects with students to be measured by “world class standards”. Additionally, Goals 2000 along with the School-to-Work Opportunities Act
continued the strengthening of the bond between education and business “by emphasizing the importance of educating workers for competition in international trade (Spring, 2005, p. 456).” Interestingly, it can be argued that Democrats have done more than Republicans to crystallize the strength of the bond between economic concerns and education because they traditionally remove any notion of blurring the lines between private and public education, issues of school prayer, vouchers and any other policies that have religious implications.

Returning to the present, the language of NCLB represents the interests of many educational stakeholders. For example, “close the achievement gap” appeals to supporters of social and educational equity for ethnically, racially, socioeconomically and gender diverse students, and “more freedom for states and communities” and “choice” appeal to conservatives who have longed for state and local control of education policy decisions and the return of religious teachings and practices to the public school setting. Ultimately, however, the policy proposals within NCLB are clearly geared toward business and economic competitiveness. President Bush said as much while giving a speech in 2006:

NCLB is an important way to make sure America remains competitive in the 21st century. We’re living in a global world. See, the education system must compete with education systems in China and India. If we fail to give our students the skills necessary to compete in the world in the 21st century, the jobs will go elsewhere. That’s just a fact of life. It’s the reality of the world we live in. And therefore, now is the time for the Untied States of America to give our children the skills so that the jobs will stay here. (Department of Education, 2006, p. 2 in Hursh, 2007, p. 297)
It should also come as no surprise that the passage of NCLB marked the biggest effort by corporate lobbyists in educational legislation history. As Hoff (2006) points out, “That year [2001], the Business Roundtable and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce formed a coalition of 50 other business groups and individual companies to support key elements of the legislation (p. 3)” and such a coalition is already being formed to ward off in any significant changes being made during NCLB’s reauthorization.

We are still early on in the presidency of Barack Obama, but it would appear that while some educational reform will certainly be undertaken while he is in office, most notably increased funding by the federal government at all levels of public education and possible attempts to broaden the core curriculum, that our education policies, most notably NCLB, will continue to feed the goals of major industry through improving our competitive balance within the global marketplace. President Obama made his goals for education known during his February 24, 2009 Address to Congress:

The…challenge we must address is the urgent need to expand the promise of education in America. In a global economy, where the most valuable skill you can sell is your knowledge, a good education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity. It is pre-requisite. Right now, three-quarters of the fastest-growing occupations require more than a high school diploma, and yet just over half of our citizens have that level of education. We have one of the highest high school dropout rates of any industrial nation, and half of the students who begin college never finish. This is a prescription for economic decline, because we know the countries that out-teach us today will out-compete us tomorrow. That is why it will be the goal of this administration to ensure that every child has access
to complete and competitive education, from the day they are born to the day they begin a career. That is a promise we have to make to the children of America. (Retrieved from www.nytimes.com on March 2, 2009)

President Obama continues his educational message by couching his goals in the language of social equity, personal development and patriotism, but the economic purpose remains:

That is why this budget creates new teachers—new incentives for teacher performance, pathways for advancement, and rewards for success. We’ll invest—we’ll invest in innovative programs that are already helping schools meet high standards and close achievement gaps. And we will expand our commitment to charter schools. It is our responsibility as lawmakers and as educators to make this system work, but it is the responsibility of every citizen to participate in it. So tonight I ask every American to commit to at least one year or more of higher education or career training. This can be a community college or a four-year school, vocational training or an apprenticeship. But whatever the training may be, every American will need to get more than a high school diploma. And dropping out of high school is no longer an option. It’s not just quitting on yourself; it’s quitting on your country. And this country needs and values the talents of every American. (Retrieved from www.nytimes.com on March 2, 2009)

Obama’s emphasis on training and getting that training for both one’s self and one’s country in this passage is unmistakable in purpose. Obama is stating that it is imperative for our nation to continue as a dominant global force that Americans get the specific job skills needed to compete in the current economy, and that the U.S. education system should be providing that training. The implicit fear in our education system not providing this training and in Americans not
making the effort to receive it, is that Americans will not be able to live in the ways they are accustomed living.

At this point it should be clear that economic factors have played a role in education policy and curriculum decisions throughout the history of education in the United States, but that over the past few decades economic factors have become the driving force behind educational policy and curricular change regardless of our leaders’ political affiliation. The assumption underlying this increasing role of economic considerations on education is that improving educational attainment will lead to greater individual and societal economic rewards (Anyon, 2005), and that greater individual and societal economic rewards will lead to improved quality of life or happiness for the citizenry. The next sections will begin to examine this assumption by looking at relevant research and writing on educational attainment and quality of life.

*The Economic Model of Schooling as it relates to Research and Writing on Educational Attainment and to Quality of Life*

The Economic Model of Schooling has been developed with the goal of improving individual and societal economic standing, which will in turn lead to improved quality of life or happiness for the individual and the society. To be able to assess the effectiveness of this model, two research areas need to be examined. The first area to be examined is educational attainment. As was described in Chapter One, educational attainment is the most commonly used measure of success or failure for educational initiatives, an example of which is the OECD study mentioned in the introduction to this study. That study examined test scores in math, science and reading, and found that despite initiatives like NCLB, the United States is still lagging behind other countries in the acquisition of skills in those areas. Here, educational attainment will be assessed in relation to economic-based indicators; the type of indicators that best measure the stated goals
of the Economic Model of Schooling. The second area to be examined is quality of life research that deals in whole or in part with economic considerations. This examination will demonstrate what the current research shows to be the relationship between economic considerations and quality of life. Again, this ties to the Economic Model of Schooling because the premise underlying the model is that improved economic standing will improve quality of life, and thus economics must be a strong factor in quality of life development.

Research and Writings on Educational Attainment

On the topic of educational attainment and quality of life a few points must be made before findings are discussed. First, as was described in Chapter One, educational attainment is usually assessed with a very simplistic definition of educational attainment, the number of years of school completed, literacy rates or test scores. Second, most of the findings that will be discussed in this section were not specifically examining the impact of educational attainment on quality of life. Instead, these studies were looking at the relationship between educational attainment and economic, psychological and sociological indicators. The intuitive leap to quality of life research is being made because the indicators assessed here are the same type of indicators that will be described in the next section as components of, or complete stand-ins for, quality of life.

A great deal of the research involving educational attainment and quality of life and its components has been intimately linked to micro-and macro-level economic issues. The most commonly recalled economic indication of the role of educational attainment in an individual’s life is found by equating average yearly income to years of school completed. For example, adults 18 years of age and older without a high school diploma earn, on average, $19,915 a year;
with a high school diploma, $29,448; with a bachelor’s degree, $54,689; and with a master’s, professional or doctoral degree, those adults earn, on average, $79,946 annually (U.S. Census, 2007). These economic disparities have been, in turn, related to sociological and psychological issues, including increases in individual’s health concerns, marital struggles (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2003), emotional and behavioral problems (McLeod & Kaiser, 2004), and increases in incarceration, with 75% of all state prison inmates and 59% of all federal inmates having not achieved a high school diploma (Harlow, 2003). These personal disadvantages also strain the larger society’s economic standing. Indeed, Secretary of Education, Margaret Spellings (2006), in testimony before the United States House of Representatives, stated that individual’s without a high school diploma or equivalent, “cost our nation more than 260 billion dollars...in lost wages, lost taxes, and lost productivity.” All of these statistics support the basic premise of the Economic Model of Schooling: that success in education, here measured by educational attainment, has a strong impact on individual and societal well-being.

The figures described above support the idea that economic considerations are very important to well-being and that the higher one’s educational attainment, the better off he or she is economically and the better off society is economically. The role that educational attainment plays in an individual’s life is not as clear or straightforward as these figures indicate, however. This is particularly true when it comes to issues of race, gender and social class (U.S. Census, 2007). For an example of disparity, a Black adult, 18 years of age and older, with no high school diploma will earn, on average, $14,356 per year, while a White adult with no high school diploma will earn, on average, $17,949; a Black adult with a high school diploma will earn $21,868, while a White adult with a high school diploma will earn $28,329; a Black adult with a
bachelor’s degree will earn $46,268, while a White adult with a bachelor’s degree will earn $54,272; a Black adult with a doctoral degree will earn $74,249, while a White adult with a doctoral degree will earn $91,653; and a Black adult with a professional degree will earn $94,077, while a White adult with the very same degree will earn $119,746. To further emphasize the educational/economic inequality between races the dropout rate can be examined. Orfield (2004), compiled the following:

Nationally, only about two-thirds of all students who enter 9th grade graduate with regular high school diplomas four years later. For minority males, these figures are far lower. In 2001, on average, 72% of female students, but only 64% of male students graduated. African American students had a graduation rate of 50%, the lowest of racial and ethnic groups identified; the other student groups graduated at the following rates: American Indian, 51%; Latino, 53%; White, 75%; and Asian and Pacific Islanders, 77%. (American Policy Youth Forum, 2006, p. viii)

The discrepancy is even more pronounced when it comes to gender, as a woman, 18 years of age and older, with no high school diploma will earn, on average, $12,550 per year, while a man with no high school diploma will earn, on average, $21,393; a woman with a high school diploma will earn $19,988, while a man with a high school diploma will earn $33,793; a woman with a bachelor’s degree will earn $38,401, while a man with a bachelor’s degree will earn $67,559; a woman with a doctoral degree will earn $66,651, while a man with a doctoral degree will earn $102,507; and a woman with a professional degree will earn $76,744, while a man with the very same degree will earn $133,540 (U.S. Census, 2007).

In terms of social class, specific numerical data could not be determined from the United
States Census, but the relationship between educational attainment and economic indicators, like income level, can be seen in the fact that “In SY 2000-2001, high school students from low-income families (the lowest 20%) dropped out of school at six times the rate of their peers from higher-income families (American Youth Policy Forum, 2006, p. vii).” The Economic Model of Schooling tells us that increases in educational attainment leads to improved individual and economic standing, but does not confront the differing impact of educational attainment when it is assessed in combination with demographic and social factors.

In one final example of educational attainment’s differential impact on an individual’s life, this time using the criteria of achievement on standardized tests as a measure of educational attainment, clear discrepancies between race, gender and social class in educational attainment can be seen. McNiece, Bidgood and Soan (2004) show, in their investigation on educational attainment and development using longitudinal data from the National Child Development Study, that:

At age 16 [children] showed significant variation between different social class groups, ethnic groups and between the sexes...Children from more advantaged social background achieved better results and made more progress during the compulsory school years in both mathematics and reading than individuals from less advantaged backgrounds. Boys achieved higher in mathematics than girls throughout compulsory education and achieved higher scores in reading at age 16. Boys also made significantly more progress than girls during secondary education (by age 16) in both subjects. The results also indicated that white students made more progress in reading than non-white students. (pp. 119-120)

The sociological indicators and psychological measures of health concerns, marital struggles,
emotional and behavioral problems, and incarceration rates discussed above, show that generally black males and females, and occasionally white females, are grossly, negatively overrepresented. The next section, which discusses quality of life research, will demonstrate that many of these sociological indicators and psychological measures impact quality of life or one of its components. In the context of educational attainment, though, these findings show that factors not addressed by the Economic Model of Schooling and factors not directly related to economics are impacting economic success and impacting well-being. Education policy (or schools in general, for that matter) cannot fix all societal ills, but these findings do lead to the possibility that by focusing so exclusively on economic considerations, education policies may be neglecting other important life elements that are needed to achieve a high quality of life.

One additional point must be made before moving on to examine the research and writing on quality of life. Very little research expressly examines the relationship between education and quality of life, but even among what does exist, the focus is almost exclusively on educational attainment’s impact on economic, psychological and social indicators of quality of life. As was described in Chapter One, educational attainment is almost universally examined in one of three ways: 1) the number of years of schooling obtained by an individual or group, 2) the literacy rate of a population (Chatterjee, 2005), and 3) grade-level achievement on standardized measurements (AAUW, 2002)). There was no research available on the role that learning plays in achieving a high quality of life, and is one of the contentions of this research study that educational attainment should be assessed in such a manner that goes beyond the three traditional approaches to include learning. This is one of the reasons that in-depth interviewing and open
coding (Glaser, & Strauss, 1967) were used in this research study. These techniques allow the
researcher to examine how learning, in addition to traditional operational definitions of
educational attainment, has contributed to economic success and quality of life, and to examine if
the current literature incorporating these topics is failing to fully critique the Economic Model of
Schooling.

This collection of findings presents an interesting counterpoint to the Economic Model of
Schooling. The first set of data supports the idea that economic considerations are very important
to well-being and that the higher one’s educational attainment, the better off he or she is
economically and the better off society is economically. The second set of findings does not
undermine the importance of economics, but does introduce the notion that more variables need
to be taken into account in examining the relationship between educational attainment and
economic success and quality of life. This leads to the possibility that the Economic Model of
Schooling’s singular focus on economic considerations may be neglecting development in other
important areas of quality of life. This is an area that will be addressed by the participants in this
research study.

Research and Writing on Quality of Life

The study of quality of life and its components has been engaging academics across
disciplines and research methodologies for centuries. Interestingly this research and writing has
focused to a large extent on the role that economic considerations, or social and psychological
indicators that are influenced by economics, has on quality of life or its components.\(^2\) In most instances some research elements from each discipline are incorporated into a single study. No inherent flaws exist with these studies, and indeed, all of the studies discussed in the next two sections represent important contributions to the quality of life field. Unfortunately, two major issues have arisen out of these studies. The first is that the findings from many of these studies are conflicting. The result of these incongruent results is a lack of agreement on many of the core issues in quality of life research. The second issue is a lack of cohesion in operationalizing the definition of quality of life. The result of this confusion is a lack of an agreed upon understanding of what factors, and to what degree those factors, influence quality of life. The next two sections will illustrate these issues across the quality of life literature, while exploring the findings from this field. The first of these sections will encompass a review of the economics-based quality of life literature from the fields of economics, psychology and sociology.

*Economics, Sociology and Psychology*

The majority of quality of life research has come out of three disciplines: economics, psychology, and sociology. Many of the earliest attempts at quality of life research dealt with looking for correlational relationships between economic indicators and subjective well-being (SWB) measures. Sirgy (2002) offers a comprehensive definition of SWB that is commonly used by psychologically-based researchers, as well as other researchers:

Subjective well being is an enduring (long-term) affective state that is made of a

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\(^2\) In the final chapter, there will be a discussion of a lesser used theoretical approach to quality of life that is based in Aristotle’s Nicomachaen Ethics, has been adapted to education by Nel Noddings through her ‘Education and Happiness’ model, and fits well with this study’s findings.
composite of three components: (a) actual experience of happiness or cumulative positive affect (joy, affection, pride, etc.) in salient life domains, (b) actual experience of depression or cumulative negative affect (sadness, anger, guilt, shame, anxiety, etc.) in salient life domains, and (c) evaluations of one’s overall life or evaluations of salient life domains. (p. 15)

It should also be noted, that SWB is also now used, often interchangeably with, but sometimes in comparison to life satisfaction, personal satisfaction, happiness and other terms that denote an inner feeling toward the self.

Early studies found a very strong correlational relationship between income and happiness. Later, more nuanced research endeavors, would show that the relationship was not so straightforward. For example, Diener, et al (1993) found in a 7,000 subject survey of Americans that there was a clear relationship between happiness and income, but that the relationship was stronger for lower incomes and leveled off at higher levels (Offer, 1996). Echoing Diener, et al, Ovaska and Takashima (2005) state that in their review of the literature, “there is some evidence...that income is positively related to happiness. However, the relationship may not be linear. After reaching a level that satisfies all one’s basic needs, some studies have found the marginal utility of income to be decreasing (p. 310).” Additionally, it has also been shown that, “not only does the absolute level of income matter, but also the relative level of income. Indeed, at times higher income may not increase one’s SWB at all, in particular, if all the others in one’s own reference group got the same raise. That is, people tend to compare themselves to others (p. 310).”
In assessing other economic factors related to SWB, Veenhoven (2000) found in a cross-nation analysis that the level of economic freedom a nation enjoys has a significant correlation with the level of SWB of its citizenry, even more so than political freedom. Also, Di Tella, et al (2001) found that a 1% increase in either the unemployment or inflation rate, led to an approximately 10% drop in individuals’ SWB levels. What is clear from this research is that there is some positive correlation between income and SWB, but that this correlation is not fixed, and is affected by other economic indicators outside of income-level.

The research findings coming out of these studies are quite important to the overall examination of quality of life and to the economic model of schooling, but there are a couple of noteworthy concerns. The first concern is that while it is important to examine economic indicators in relation to SWB (and quality of life), such a focus potentially overstates the importance of economic indicators to SWB (or quality of life) in relation to other elements of life that may affect SWB. The second is that SWB is being used and/or interpreted as a synonym for quality of life as opposed to a key component of quality of life. This approach to quality of life fails to embrace a holistic understanding of the human condition. In other words, it fails to assess objective characteristics or conditions of an individual that an individual cannot assess about oneself (Lane, 1994). For example, Aristotle finds that the ability to think rationally is what separates us from all other animals, and that to achieve perfection in living is to live the perfectly rational life (Aristotle, 2007). To this end, he found that rational thought led to virtue and an exercising of virtuous character (Noddings, 2003). This can safely be interpreted to mean standing on a strong moral and ethical ground, and treating others in a manner consistent with
this strong moral and ethical ground. But what is moral and ethical; what is just, cannot be assessed by the individual, but instead only by a disinterested competent judge (Lane, 1994). It must also be added, though, that researchers who include this objective element to quality of life assessment, do still find it imperative to assess one’s own feelings and/or beliefs about one’s subjective well-being. In other words, a researcher could never determine that a subject has a high quality of life when that subject does not believe he or she has a high quality of life (Lane, 2000).

Economic Indicators, Social indicators and Quality of Life Measures

In recent years, the vast majority of quality of life research has attempted to encompass economic indicators, social indicators and SWB measures. These research endeavors engage multiple variables in an attempt to examine more precisely their relationship with or their impact on quality of life. As in the last section, however, there are still conflicting findings and definitional concerns.

The first study represents a social psychology perspective, a perspective that examines the influence of external, usually social, factors on the individual. Diener and Fujita (1995) examined the relationship between resources, personal strivings and SWB. Resources in this study are defined as “material, social, or personal characteristics that a person possesses that he or she can use to make progress toward her or his personal goals (p. 933).” These findings state:

Certain resources that are prominently depicted in the media as being very important to happiness (e.g. money, physical attractiveness, and material possessions) were not seen by respondents as being very relevant to their personal strivings and did not correlate
strongly with SWB. In contrast, specific character traits such as self-confidence and energy were seen to be more relevant to respondents’ strivings and also were more predictive of their SWB. In addition, social resources loomed large in importance. For example, a strong romantic relationship was the strongest correlate of Pleasant Affect, and Life Satisfaction was best predicted by family support. (p. 933)

Broadly, Diener and Fujita found that there was only a very slight correlation between resources and SWB, and while Diener and Fujita do not attempt to use SWB as synonymous to quality of life, their findings do to a certain extent undermine some of the research that only looked at the relationship between economics and SWB (some of which Diener and Fujita undertook).

Flanagan (1978) undertook another study coming from a social psychology perspective, and this time the concern is not related to the findings as much as it is related to the definition of quality of life. In this study a team of researchers undertook the arduous task of creating an empirical account of quality of life by collecting more than 6,500 ‘critical incidents’ from 3,000 participants of various ages, races, and backgrounds from all regions of the United States. In addition, 2,000 more ‘critical incidents’ were obtained from another survey project called Project TALEN. These ‘critical incidents’ were compiled by asking a variety of questions. Examples include, “Think of the last time you did something very important to you or had an experience that was especially satisfying to you. What did you do or what happened that was so satisfying to you? Why did this experience seem so important or satisfying (p. 139)?”

When this massive amount of data was analyzed, Flanagan concluded that there were 15 quality of life themes that fit into five general headings:
Physical and Material Well-Being

A. Material well-being and financial security.
B. Health and personal safety.

Relations with Other People

C. Relations with spouse (girlfriend or boyfriend).
D. Having and raising children.
E. Relations with parents, siblings, or other relatives.
F. Relations with friends.

Social, Community, and Civic Activities

G. Activities related to helping or encouraging other people.
H. Activities relating to local and national governments.

Personal Development and Fulfillment

I. Intellectual development.
J. Personal understanding and planning.
K. Occupational role (job).
L. Creativity and personal expression.

Recreation

M. Socializing
N. Passive and observational recreational activities
O. Active and participatory recreation activities (pp. 139-140)

These quality of life indicators clearly span the spectrum from economics (ex. Material well-being) to sociology (ex. activities related to helping or encouraging other people) and psychology (ex. personal understanding and planning), in addition to some other realms not discussed here.

Survey questions implementing a Lickert scale were then created to determine the correlation each component had to overall quality of life. The participants were individuals, who years earlier had supplied ‘critical incidents’ that led to the formation of the quality of life list,
and they were asked to report how important each of the 15 factors was to their current quality of life and how well their needs and wants were being met. Flanagan’s findings revealed “the six areas showing the largest correlation coefficients with overall quality of life were material comforts, health, work, active recreation, learning, and creative expression (p. 143).”

These findings are significant in that they demonstrate how several facets of life, from work to play and learning to health, contribute to one’s quality of life, and represent a multidisciplinary understanding of quality of life. Again, however, there is an issue of definitional confusion. Flanagan is using the term ‘quality of life’, but is really assessing SWB. The survey was created from personal testimony and its answers come from personal testimony. However empirical this survey may be, it does not contain objective measures from economics or sociology, which would assist in assessing participant validity (Yow, 2005) or gather any other external commentary on issues that participants are unable to assess about themselves (Lane, 1994). Additionally, the quality of life components that Flanagan compiled have not all been assessed by the previous studies mentioned, most of which only examined economic-based quality of life components. This means that even if the differences between quality of life and SWB are overlooked, definitional confusion remains because the sum parts of what goes into quality of life and/or SWB in these studies are different.

The confusion does not end there, however, as researchers do not always rely on SWB in assessing quality of life. Hughes and Thomas (1986, 1998), for example, used six measures from the General Social Survey: Life Satisfaction, Happiness, Marital Happiness, Anomia, Mistrust, and Health, to create their definition of quality of life, which when analyzed showed that
regardless of socioeconomic status, African Americans have a lower quality of life than do their white counterparts. Other researchers, like Cross (1991), used personal self-esteem measures to interpret quality of life and found that African Americans and Whites do not differ in self-esteem, and thus, quality of life. Flanagan (1978), in the study described above and using the quality of life themes described above, determined that 85% of people, regardless of demographic differences reported a quality of life of good or better. These studies demonstrate not only a wider variety of ways quality of life is being operationally defined than was previously considered, but that these studies through their sometimes incongruent findings, which are quite possibly caused by the differences in operational definitions, make it even more difficult to discern which life factors truly affect quality of life.

The last research study to be discussed tries to overcome all of these conflicting conclusions and definitions. Though not completely successful, it does sufficiently represent the many economics-based attempts to cover quality of life from a multidisciplinary perspective, and as an added bonus, it is also an excellent example of quality of life as perceived in popular media. The study is The Economist Intelligence Unit’s Quality-of-Life Index (2006). This quality of life index is “based on a unique methodology that links the results of subjective life-satisfaction surveys to objective determinants of quality of life across countries (p. 1),” and “uses as its determinants of quality of life: material wellbeing, health, political stability and security, family life community life, climate and geography, job security, political freedom, and gender equality (p. 3).” The subjective life-satisfaction surveys assess “how satisfied [individuals] are with their lives in general (p. 1)” and a typical question would be like this one from the EU’s
Eurobarometer studies, “On the whole are you very satisfied, fairly, satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied with the life you lead? (p. 1)”

Here is how the scale is broken down in weighted order and what the Economist Intelligence Unit used to assess each of its nine factors:

Determinants of quality of life:

The nine quality of life factors, and the indicators used to represent these factors, are:

1. Material wellbeing
GDP per person, at ppp in $. Source: Economist Intelligence Unit

2. Health
Life expectancy at birth, years. Source: US Census Bureau

3. Political stability and security
Political stability and security ratings. Source: Economist Intelligence Unit

4. Family life
Divorce rate (per 1,000 population), converted into index of 1 (lowest divorce rates) to 5 (highest). Sources: UN; Euromonitor

5. Community life
Dummy variable taking value 1 if country has either high rate of church attendance or trade-union membership; zero otherwise. Sources: ILO; World Values Survey

6. Climate and geography
Latitude, to distinguish between warmer and colder climes. Source: CIA World Factbook

7. Job security

Unemployment rate, %. Sources: Economist Intelligence Unit;

8. Political freedom

Average of indices of political and civil liberties. Scale of 1 (completely free) to 7 (unfree). Source: Freedom House

9. Gender equality

Ratio of average male and female earnings, latest available data. Source: UNDP Human Development Report (p. 2)

What this scale is attempting to do with its mix of economic, sociological and psychological features is to supplement, but not supplant real GDP as the singular instrument used to measure quality of life. Early economic accounts of quality of life were strictly based on GDP or GNP (The Economist, 2006).

This study is to be applauded for breaking out of the traditional mold, especially given that many other organizations, including the United Nations, still use a very antiquated, GDP-based assessment of quality of life (Veenhoven, 2000). While this survey does move beyond the strict analysis of GDP in relation to quality of life, this study does still find that GDP per person explains more than 50% of the inter-country variation in life satisfaction, and that the estimated relationship is linear (The Economist, 2006). Both of these findings run counter to the findings from Diener and Fujita’s (1995) study described earlier in the section on research involving economic indicators and well-being. In addition, this study is another example, through the use of subjective life satisfaction surveys, which are akin to SWB measures, and a random selection
of objective quality of life determinants, of yet another definitional interpretation of quality of life.

All of the studies discussed in this review are beneficial to the overall discussion of quality of life, but it is clear in examining them that what makes up a quality life is still uncertain, or at least, not agreed upon. It does seem clear that economic indicators are at least somewhat correlated to SWB, but to what extent and in what ways, has yet to be agreed upon. For that matter, the way SWB, happiness, and other psychological measures are being used in a variety of ways in relation to quality of life (sometimes as a component of quality of life and sometimes as a complete representation of quality of life) is still contentious, as was shown by the differences between Flanagan’s work and the other studies described in this section. Finally, it is also evident that social indicators are linked to economic indicators and SWB, but all of the links and the role that those links play in individual and societal life is still unknown.

Conclusion

When the literature reviewed in the last two sections on educational attainment and quality of life are combined, the need to assess these topics in relation to the Economic Model of Schooling is clear. The Economic Model of Schooling states that economic factors are the driving force behind educational policy and curricular change in the United States. The assumption underlying this role of economic considerations on education is that improving educational attainment will lead to greater individual and societal economic rewards (Anyon, 2005), and that greater individual and societal economic rewards will lead to improved quality of life or happiness for the citizenry. The educational attainment research demonstrates that the higher one’s educational attainment, the better off one is economically and the better off society
is economically, but does also introduce the notion that non-economic factors, and factors unrelated to educational attainment, are contributing to economic inequalities. This leads to the possibility that the Economic Model of Schooling’s singular focus on economic considerations may be neglecting development in other important areas of quality of life. This possibility is further supported by the quality of life research. This research, with often conflicting results, and ripe with definitional confusion (which are reasonable reasons for this study in their own right), broadly embraces the notion that economic considerations are important to quality of life, but again, other social and psychological factors are also acting upon individual lives, and that these factors may carry as much if not more weight in determining an individual’s quality of life.

This research study attempts to, if not answer, at least add clarity, to this confusion, while also addressing some of the definitional and methodological issues in the literature. This was accomplished through in-depth interviewing, primary document analysis, open coding and a constant comparison of incidences, which will be described in the next chapter.
Chapter Three: Research Methods

Introduction

The first chapter of this dissertation research study explained the need to examine the role of the United States education system’s focus on economics-based considerations in achieving a high perceived quality of life (PQoL). The second chapter outlined the pertinent literature to this research study, including an examination of the Economic Model of Schooling, and a review of the major work on quality of life and educational attainment. The first section of this chapter will discuss in-depth interviewing as a research method and the in-depth interview research process, while broaching important ancillary topics, including interviewer interference, interviewee fear and the reliability and validity of memory. The next section will briefly discuss the analytical tools of coding and constant comparison used in this research study. The final sections will discuss the specific nature of this research study, including a re-statement of the research questions and the purpose of this study, a description of the research design, and a collection of biographical sketches of this study’s participants.

In-depth Interviewing as a Research Method

In-depth interviewing is a well-regarded research method in academia that can potentially be used across all academic disciplines. Boyce and Neale (2006) provide a simple, yet comprehensive definition:

In-depth interviewing is a qualitative research technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program, or situation. (p. 3)

When using the in-depth interviewing research method, the interviewer is seeking to deepen his
or her knowledge of a topic, is open to all relevant ideas and responses, and is exploring domains related to the topic of the research study and about which little is known (Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte, 1999). In addition, in-depth interviewing is often used to provide context to other data (Boyce and Neale, 2006).

All of these elements are incorporated into this study as the rationale for using in-depth interviewing in this research study comes out of a desire to seek a broader, and yet deeper, understanding of quality of life and educational attainment compared to how these topics are most commonly being studied today. This desire is based on concerns that stem from the various, sometimes incongruent, interpretations of quality of life, possibly incorrect assumptions underlying those quality of life interpretations, and the limited interpretation of educational attainment. Whether or not these concerns prove justified, light can be shed on this inconsistency by more fully examining how individuals understand the concepts of educational attainment and quality of life in their own lives, and how that may differ from their perceptions of how society understands these concepts.

The In-depth Interview Research Process

In-depth interviewing is a research methodology that is used across multiple disciplines, and while each discipline may incorporate additional components to the research process, all in-depth interviewing research projects, include at least these seven steps:

1. Formulate a central question or issue.
2. Plan the project.
3. Conduct background research.
4. Interview.
5. Process interviews.

6. Evaluate research and interviews and cycle back to step 1 or go on to step 7.

7. Organize and present results.

(Moyer, 1999; see also Boyce and Neale, 2006; Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte, 1999)

These seven steps represent the research steps taken to complete this research study. Over the next several pages each step, and corresponding issues related to this type of research method, is explained.

Formulate a central question or issue. Developing a research question or issue differs little between methodologies, and this is because methodologies should not determine research questions. Instead, theoretical and conceptual frameworks should provide the foundation upon which one bases a research question (Miles and Huberman, 1994), and then the researcher should determine if a methodology is the correct one to use for the research question (Moyer, 1999). Questions to ask when determining whether or not in-depth interviewing is the correct research method to choose for a given research question, include: Will the study benefit from in-depth, personal testimonies? And, if pertinent, is the nature of the research question such that the information provided by the testimonies able to be checked for validity against primary documentation?

Plan the project. Once in-depth interviewing is determined to be a useful research methodology, the researcher must then plan the research project. Every research design must include information about end products, budgets, evaluation, personnel, equipment and time frames, regardless of methodology. Answers to these questions will differ between
methodologies (for example, audio recording devices will be of benefit to an in-depth interview researcher, while Scantron sheets will be of benefit to a researcher administering a subjective well-being inventory), but there are no mandated rules for each research methodology.

Conduct background research. Using in-depth interviewing as a research method entails more than just interviewing. The researcher must examine literature from various sources. First, the researcher must examine the prior research done surrounding the research topic. This type of in-depth literature review is not unique to in-depth interviewing. Second, the researcher must examine primary source documents to become familiar with material that is likely to come up during interviews and material that forms the social, political, economic and cultural background of the interviewees (Mintz, 1979; Moyer, 1999; and Yow, 2005). Mintz (1979), speaking specifically about life histories, but in a manner applicable to all in-depth interviewing, discusses the benefit this background research will serve when it comes time to interview participants:

I would certainly not argue that verbal communication between informant and biographer can or should be the sole source of relevant information. Elsewhere, I have suggested the opposite, contending that many life histories lose some of their value because the fieldworker lacks sufficient knowledge of the community and culture within which the informant lives, and which he or she expresses, in one way or another, in nearly everything he or she says or does. Thus, for the life history, while intensive work with one informant (or several) is of course absolutely essential, it must not preclude broader interviewing, or the study of the community within which the principal informant lives and works. (p. 299)

Okahiro (1981) further underscores the importance this background research can have during the
The relationship between the interviewee and the wider community involves the ideological or theoretical context within which words or phrases are placed, the presence of absence of concepts, and the individual’s vision of history...But by being able to direct questions at the interviewee’s conceptions of history and historical change, the [interviewer] is able to arrive at a deeper understanding of the people and their history.

(p. 209)

Both Mintz and Okahiro are looking at in-depth interviewing from an historical perspective, but understanding the background of interviewees is important regardless of disciplinary home as it helps the interviewer to focus questions around the research topic and to test for validity. The concept of validity will not be discussed until Step Five as it constitutes the type of background research that can only fully be accomplished after the interviews are completed, but in this study testing for validity involved looking at photographs, personal writings and other personal artifacts of the participants and discussing these with the participants, looking at Census data to examine particular demographic-related points brought up by the participants, and by reading secondary sources concerning important historical events that the participants referenced.

Interview. This stage seems self-explanatory, as obviously it is during this stage that the researcher actually sits down with the research subject for the recording of the oral testimony, but interviewing is a skill that takes a long time to master, and in-depth interviews require certain elements that do not exist in all interview situations. Moyer (1999) makes an extensive list of interview practices:

• Compile a list of topics or questions.
• Make sure the interviewee understands the purpose of the interview and how the interviewer intends to use it.

• Start each recording with a statement of who, what, when, and where you are interviewing.

• Listen actively and intently.

• Allow silence. Give the interviewee time to think.

• Follow up your current question thoroughly before moving to the next.

• Usually ask questions open enough to get ‘essay’ answers, unless you are looking for specific short-answer ‘facts.’

• Start with less probing questions.

• Be aware of and sensitive to the psychological forces at work during the interview.

• Only ask very personal or emotionally demanding questions after a rapport has developed.

• End the interview as you began, with lighter questions.

• Limit interviews to about one to two hours in length. (p. 4-5)

Ideally, as Yow (2005) points out, “The in-depth interview enables the researcher to give the subject leeway to answer as he or she chooses, to attribute meanings to the experiences under discussion, and to interject topics. In this way new hypotheses may be generated (p. 5).” Using Moyer’s techniques, it is possible to meet Yow’s goals.

All of these prescriptions were attempted by the researcher in this study. In the early interviews for this study the interviewer was not as skilled at these interview techniques as he
was by the later interviews for this study. The interviewer missed several opportunities to elicit thoughtful, anecdotal evidence on broad proclamations made by participants by not asking follow up questions or not asking the right follow up questions. This type of error is common with novice interviewers and the researcher believes that this issue has been overcome and that ultimately this did not impact the results of this study.

Process interviews. The premise of this stage is simple. Processing the interviews means making copies of the audio, video or digital recordings of the interview, writing field notes about the interview experience, and transcribing the interview (Moyer, 1999). While this premise is simple, it is very tedious and time consuming, and if this step is done incorrectly, or not thoroughly enough, it can completely compromise the integrity of the entire research project.

Evaluate research and interviews and cycle back to step 1 or go on to step 7. At this point in a research study, a great deal of background research has been conducted, interviews have been performed, and the written data from those interview experiences have been created. A researcher has to be open at this point to shortcomings in all the work that has just been done. If after a cursory examination of the data, the researcher finds that the data does not represent the initial question or issue being researched, it would be wise for the researcher to begin again anew, hopefully, with an understanding of went wrong the first time. If, however, the data passes this initial examination, it must be extensively and exhaustively analyzed for three potential in-depth interviewing trouble areas: interviewer interference, interviewee fear, and the reliability and validity of memory. These three concerns are thoroughly explored here.

Interviewer interference is an issue with any research method that incorporates the interview.
interviewee sit down to talk. The participants who are selected for interviewing may be predetermined by the interviewer to fill some idea or theory that the interviewer is trying to prove. This predetermined belief can continue into the actual interview, wherein the interviewer, as Moyer (1999) puts it, “has expectations about what she or he wants to hear and is closed to other avenues of inquiry (p. 12).” In a related issue, the interviewer must be cognizant of the participants who accept the invitation to be included in an in-depth interviewing project. It is often only the articulate who agree to be a part of such a project, and this may leave valuable voices unheard (Perks and Thomson, 2006). It is often impossible for the in-depth interviewer to ascertain, by any demographic criteria, a fully representative group of participants, but the interviewer must be able to demonstrate that an attempt was made to include a cross-section of participants, including non-traditional voices, if any conclusions drawn from a study are to be taken seriously.

Even if the in-depth interviewing researcher has properly dealt with these issues, interviewer interference can still occur during the actual interview. This type of interference can occur through the use of leading questions; questions designed to elicit particular responses, through physical gestures by the interviewer that can be construed by the interviewee to represent approval or disapproval with particular responses, and by using language unfamiliar to the interviewee, which can lead the interviewee to blindly follow the assumptions of the interviewer (Moyer, 1999). Not performing this type of interference can be very difficult for an interviewer because it can happen very quickly and subconsciously. The interviewer must at all times remain actively engaged with the interviewee, be fully aware of all that is occurring in an interview (not just the oral testimony), and be constantly checking his or her behavior and
language against the subjective assumptions that he or she is bringing into this research study. If the interviewer is not functioning with all of these concepts in mind, and if this level of interference occurs, the data compiled is likely unusable. Yow in Perks and Thomson (2006) states this point well when she argues for oral history researchers to have “an objective relation to our own subjectivity (p. 5)”, and to use this reflexive alertness to enhance the interview process and the interpretation of interviews.

Interviewee fear is the second major concern surrounding in-depth interviewing based research, and if the interviewer does not confront it properly it can hamper the data the interviewee supplies. Interviewee fear can be a reaction to many different elements of the interview, including discomfort with the recording equipment (most people are unfamiliar with being video- or audio-taped), a belief that what he or she has to say is not important, discomfort telling stories publicly, discomfort talking to the interviewer about certain topics, and concern with relinquishing feelings or thoughts that differ from the interviewee’s ‘public mask’ or that differ from the public norm (Moyer, 1999). To combat these issues, the interviewer must take special care to develop a warm, nurturing, judgment-free interview atmosphere.

This is difficult to do, however, in situations when interviewee fear is particularly strong. This is because the interviewer must successfully balance two, sometimes incongruent, ideas. The first is that the interviewee is participating in this research study voluntarily, and so it is imperative for the interviewer to accommodate to the needs, desires, fears and concerns of the interviewee; the interviewee is doing the interviewer a favor. The second is that the interviewer needs to get certain information to meet the expressed purpose of his or her study. In-depth interviews are not just polite conversations; some greater meaning is attempting to be discovered.
Situations will arise where, despite the best efforts of the interviewer, the interviewee’s fears cannot be alleviated, and the interviewer must be prepared to, respectfully, walk away from a participant and the possibly compromised data he or she contributed.

Establishing the reliability and validity of participant’s memory is the third concern facing in-depth interviewing research. To begin to confront this issue, the accuracy of memory in general must first be examined.

In ancient times, before the advent of mass production and before the invention of reliable, long-lasting writing tools, memory held supreme standing among the powers of the intellect. It was used for everything from passing down the stories of a people to conducting sound business on a day-to-day basis. Indeed, those with the greatest skill in memory, like the orators Cicero and Quintilian and the Greek lyric poet, Simonides of Ceos, the believed creator of the mnemonic arts, were heralded for their abilities and garned positions of power because of it (Boorstin, 1985). In recent centuries, however, memory has been considered less important for the development of the intellect and is even viewed with suspicion as to its veracity. Perhaps this is due to the myriad of recording methods that have been developed since the time of Gutenberg’s moveable-type printing press that seem more reliable as storage units than does the human mind. And there is a great deal of research to support this view, as well. The unreliability of eye-witness testimony in legal trials (Ceci and Bruck, 2003) and the ability to create false memories as demonstrated by Loftus (Loftus and Ketcham, 1994; Schacter, 1995) and many others, are just two of many examples of how memory is faulty, and that the repercussions of that faulty memory can have very serious consequences. The concern arising from these examples is how much memory can be trusted.
To get to the answer of this concern, it is best to start with the biological understanding of memory, including the types of memory and the ways in which these memory types are retrieved from our brains. Schacter in *Memory distortion: How Minds, Brains, and Societies Reconstruct the Past* (1995) lays out the basics:

Explicit memory involves conscious recollection of past experiences, whereas implicit memory involves nonconscious effects of past experiences, on subsequent behavior and performance...Explicit memory appears to depend heavily on memory systems involving the medial temporal lobes, diencephalic structures, and frontal lobes, which function to bind together representations at various cortical sites into a coherent memory. By contrast, various kinds of implicit memory reflect changes in different brain regions; priming, for instance, appears to depend on changes in individual cortical systems, whereas skill learning relies heavily on subcortical structures such as the basal ganglia.

(p. 19)

Schacter goes on to explain the implications of this for memory distortion, that is, the likelihood that memories will be recalled inaccurately, a special point of interest for oral history researchers:

The implications of research on multiple forms of memory for distortion-related issues are severalfold. First, the availability of implicit memory tests provides new ways to assess memory distortion. Second, because implicit memories do not involve recollection of source information, they may give rise to vague sensations or feelings for which people attempt to generate a plausible, but possibly inaccurate, source or cause. Third, the idea that storage and retrieval of explicit memories involves binding together different
kinds of information from diverse cortical sites provides a biological basis for the notion that retrieval of a memory is a complex construction involving many different sources of information; not a simple playback of a stored image. Fourth, the existence of multiple forms of memory reminds us that memory is not a unitary entity and that it is necessary to qualify general statements about “memory distortion” with respect to particular kinds of memory. (p. 19)

In general, then, explicit memories will be recalled with greater accuracy than will implicit memories because they can be recalled from an actual source, but both types of memory recall are complex neurological activities that can contain inaccuracies.

Within this biological understanding, some specific memory research can be explored. First, research indicates that individuals forget more about an event in the first hour after it occurred than during any other time period. In addition, individuals continue to forget for about nine hours after an event. What this means is that more is forgotten in the first nine hours than in the days, weeks, months and years to follow (Yow, 2005). Second, research indicates that culture plays a role in what is actively remembered (explicit memory). Schacter in Yow (2005) finds that, “what we encode depends on who we are; our past experiences, knowledge, and needs all have a powerful influence on what we retain (pp. 37-38).” Extending the reach of memory and culture to the creation of a life story and Erickson’s psychosocial interpretation of identity, McAdams in Fivush and Haden (2003) states:

Identity takes the form of a story, complete with setting, scenes, characters, plot, and themes. In late adolescence and young adulthood, people living in modern societies begin to reconstruct the personal past, perceive the present, and anticipate the future in terms of
an internalized and evolving self-story, an integrative narrative of self that provides modern life with some modicum of psychosocial unity and purpose. Life stories are based on autobiographical facts, but they go considerably beyond the facts as people selectively appropriate aspects of stories that make sense to them and to their audiences, that vivify and integrate life and make it more or less meaningful. A person’s evolving and dynamic life story is a key component of what constitutes the individuality of that particular person, situated in a particular family and among particular friends and acquaintances, and living in a particular society at a particular historical moment. (p. 187)

In general, then, what can be taken away from this memory research in relation to in-depth interviewing testimony is that people do have and can produce (retrieve) accurate memories, but that all memories cannot be blindly accepted as completely accurate or objective because we know that humans do forget regardless of the explicit or implicit nature of the memory storage, that memory storage is a complex and fallible neurological process and that previous experiences and cultural background play a role in not only what is remembered, but what is attended to during a given event and how that event is mentally processed. This does not mean that oral testimony is a poor component to a research method. It does, however, show that in oral documents, as Okahiro (1981) states, “there exists more possibilities for distortions to arise, and they are more complex and hazardous to use [than written documents] (p. 209).”

In-depth interview researchers deal with these possibilities for distortion in two ways, by examining the participant testimony for reliability and validity. Reliability in in-depth interviewing refers to consistency within the testimony. If an interviewee is recalling a story, but the characters, places, dates, events, etc. keep changing, the testimony is lacking reliability
(Yow, 2005). It is the job of the interviewer to confront these inconsistencies during the interview or during future interviews by asking content clarifying questions or by asking open-ended questions that lead an interviewee into retelling an event or story (Moyer, 1999). If even after intervention on the part of the interviewer, the testimony is not cohesive and unreliable, the interviewer cannot use it.

Validity in in-depth interviewing refers to accuracy in relating factual information, or in other words, the degree to which the oral testimony conforms to other accounts (Yow, 2005). To show the greatest level of validity, the testimony should be judged against primary documentation first and foremost, and then anecdotally with secondary resources. Testing validity sounds simple, but it is a time-consuming task, potentially involving spending a great deal of time in museum and library archives, on the internet and searching out other specific proofs (photos, personal journals, etc.) that relate to the testimony offered by the interviewee (Yow, 2005).

Organize and present results. This step is not unique to in-depth interview based research projects by any means. This is the culminating event of any research project, and includes presenting at conferences, submitting to journals, doing speaking engagements, showing a documentary and any other means the researcher has chosen to disseminate his or her work.

The research process described above was used in this research study. Additionally, the potential areas for concern with this research method were confronted in this research study, and, while mistakes were made (these mistakes will be detailed in Chapter Five), ultimately the areas for concern were dealt with successfully. The next section will discuss coding and constant comparison, the analytical tools used to examine the data collected through in-depth
interviewing.

Coding and Constant Comparison as Analytical Tools

The research method used in this study is in-depth interviewing. As stated earlier, when using the in-depth interviewing research method, the interviewer is seeking to deepen his or her knowledge of a topic, is open to all relevant ideas and responses, and is exploring domains related to the topic of the research study and about which little is known (Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte, 1999). In addition, in-depth interviewing is often used to provide context to other data (Boyce and Neale, 2006). Coding and constant comparison are excellent analytical tools to use to assess the data collected during the in-depth interviewing process as these tools allow the researcher to confront and make sense of the wide array of data collected in in-depth interviews.

Coding and constant comparison are two analytical tools most commonly associated with grounded theory, and its theoretical offshoot, constructivist grounded theory. Grounded theory is a research method that seeks to inductively construct theory about important issues (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The constructivist approach, or Constructivism, is a philosophical understanding about the nature of truth and reality. This approach states the belief that all people’s understanding of truth and reality is influenced by our shared and personal history, and the cultural context in which we live (Mills, et al, 2006). In other words, there are no single, objective truths. Given the many different ways that quality of life is defined and assessed by researchers and theoreticians, taking an analytical approach that embraces the disbelief in a singular “objective” understanding of quality of life and how to achieve a high quality of life makes sense.

In addition, constructivism emphasizes the subjective nature of the researcher/participant...
relationship and the co-construction of meaning (Mills, et al, 2006). This co-construction is achieved through constant analytical comparison of data with data, all of which is developed by the participants, and then progressing to comparisons between participant interpretations translated into codes and categories and more data, including outside literature, until themes are developed in relation to the larger context being examined by the research study (Mills, et al, 2006). This process and a few key terms involved in this process must be briefly discussed to fully understand this co-construction of themes.

Constant comparison is the process of examining each piece of data against every code already identified and every new piece of data, and it occurs throughout every stage of coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Coding, in its simplest definition, is an analytical method used to look for relationships between categories (Omar, et al, 2010). Open-coding is the initial phase of coding, and involves the identifying, selecting and naming of phenomena found through line-by-line analysis of the data followed by an analysis of any potential areas of overlap between all of the initial phenomena. Open-coding ends when all of the phenomena uncovered are combined into core categories (Glaser, 1992). The second phase of coding is axial coding. Axial coding allows the researcher to seek to understand the conditions, actions, interactions and consequences that led to the development of categories or that occurred as a result of the formation of categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998 in Mills, et al, 2006). This stage allows the researcher to begin to see links between or potential causes of the core categories developed through open-coding. The final stage of coding is done through creating a conditional/consequential matrix, which allows the researcher to trace linkages between categories, the conditions that caused categories, and the consequences of categories, so as to develop thematic understandings of the
broad context(s) being examined in a research study (Corbin & Strauss, 1996 in Mills et al, 2006). Throughout all of these phases constant analytical comparison of data is occurring.

In this study, while the researcher was careful not to lead participants to certain answers or to code data using preconceived beliefs, it was understood by both participants and researcher that the participants’ words would be used to analyze topics beyond the scope of the interview. Embracing this subjectivity allowed the researcher in this study to develop, if not a theory of quality of life, at least an understanding of how this set of participants view quality of life, and the role(s) educational attainment plays in achieving their view of quality of life, and then use this understanding to analyze the economic model of schooling.

Re-statement of Research Questions

The research questions examined in this study are:

1) How do participants from varying scholastic and occupational backgrounds articulate and perceive their quality of life?

2) What perceived impact did educational attainment have on participants’ perceived quality of life?

3) What perceived impact did scholastic learning experiences and non-scholastic learning experiences have on participants’ perceived quality of life?

Re-statement of Research Purpose

This research study examines, through the use of in-depth interviewing, a demographically diverse group of participants’ perceptions of the quality of their own lives, what elements in their lives they believe contribute to their perceived quality of life (PQoL), and what contributions they perceive educational attainment, scholastic learning experiences and non-
scholastic learning experiences made in the development of that PQoL. The population consists of people from varying ages, educational attainment, gender, occupation, race, religion and socioeconomic status. In addition, all participants grew up in Cincinnati and attended Cincinnati-area schools during their youth. The topics covered in these in-depth interviews included family, relationships, childhood, adulthood, occupation, faith, and schooling, amongst others, with a focus on illuminating particular experiences that had a profound impact on PQoL.

While the participants were only asked to examine the above issues in relation to their own understandings of their lives, their collected thoughts are used to examine what this study calls, The Economic Model of Schooling. This model states that while individual and national economic drivers have always been a consideration of United States education policy, over time, economic concerns have become the overriding consideration of United States education policy. This study examines the role, from a perceived quality of life perspective, this focus on economics-based considerations for the United States education system is playing in achieving a high PQoL. This examination was interpretative and sought to allow the participants’ lived experiences and their perceptions on those lived experiences guide the analysis of the economic model of schooling, and begin to develop possible assertions concerning the benefits to quality of life ascribed by the Economic Model of Schooling.

Description of the Study, Participants and Data Analysis

The overall design of this research project engages in-depth interviewing as a research method and coding and constant comparison as analytical tools. In-depth interviewing is used in this study as it is the best means by which to facilitate the level of in-depth information needed to confront the questions posed above, and coding and constant comparison were used as the
analytical tools for this study as these tools represent the best means for interpreting the large amount of data collected through in-depth interviewing and developing a thematic understanding related to the research questions posed in this study.

This research study was carried out by extensively interviewing nine participants who vary demographically in terms of age, educational attainment, gender, occupation, race, religion and socioeconomic status to determine how these participants perceived their quality of life, and to assess what perceived impact educational attainment, scholastic learning experiences and non-scholastic learning experiences had on their perceived quality of life. While demographic diversity was an important element in determining participants for this study, the only fixed variables in this study, aside from having grown up and gone to school in Cincinnati, were having a participant’s educational attainment relatively commensurate to his or her occupational attainment as this would assist in confronting the presuppositions of the economic model of schooling and much of the quality of life research outlined in Chapter Two. To achieve this, a combination of quota selection sampling and snowball sampling to find potential participants was used.

Quota selection sampling is a type of convenience sample that makes the effort to obtain a certain distribution of demographic variables (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). In this study, the specific distribution being obtained concerned the demographic variables of educational attainment and occupational achievement for the purposes described in the previous paragraph. Once the researcher determined the appropriate distribution, snowball sampling was used to locate participants who fit the quota being sought in this study. Snowball sampling is a participant selection technique that identifies people with particular knowledge, skills or
characteristics who are potentially useful in answering a research question through either the recommendations of current participants or contacts with knowledge of potential participants related to the area of research study (Patton, 1990).

In this research study, the researcher made contact with individuals from varying parts of Cincinnati with whom the researcher was already acquainted, and inquire if they or anyone they knew fit the research criteria of this study and would be interested in participating. As the areas of research in this study involved only having attended some schooling, the ability to speak about their own personal histories, and having to meet the quota sampling requirements, the applicant pool was large. The researcher inquired with persons from varying geographic, employment and demographic differences. Through these contacts, the researcher set up meetings with potential participants. Upon meeting potential participants who fit into the quota sampling needs of this research study, the researcher explained the study to them and inquired as to their interest in being involved in the study. The ultimate group of participants who took part in this study do represent many different elements of Cincinnati, but, despite the care the researcher took in obtaining participants, this group of participants should not be considered fully representative of the demographic makeup of Cincinnati, and should be considered a limitation of the study. This limitation, along with a few others, will be discussed in Chapter Five.

Ultimately nine participants took part in this research study. The researcher interviewed each participant two times with each interview lasting approximately between one to two hours. In general, the questions of the first interview consisted of demographic information, early life memories and discussions of schooling, family experiences, and other elements of childhood. The second interview dealt predominantly with adult experiences in relationships, jobs and other
elements of the participant’s life and then some ‘philosophical’ questions concerning how they perceive their quality of life, what the most important contributing factors are to that quality of life, and what role learning has played in relation to that quality of life (A complete list of the interview questions, as well as the rest of the materials submitted for IRB approval, can be found in Appendix B). In addition, it was not uncommon during the interviews for primary source documents to be introduced by the participants. These documents ranged from photographs and original creative works to a eulogy by a son for his father, and allowed the participants to make specific points related to a particular question and allowed the researcher to gain a deeper insight into the beliefs of the participants on a wide variety of topics.

It is important to point out that given the level of in-depth personal testimony that was given by the participants in this study, no attempt was made to protect anyone’s identity during the interview process or after, including when the information collected in the interviews is used in this dissertation or in future presentations and publications. The participants were made aware of this before agreeing to participate in this research study, and no objections were raised. The researcher did, however, make it clear that, if requested, some or all of a participant’s information could be made confidential. Such a request has yet to be made.

Additionally, any participant was able to leave this research study at any time for any reason with no repercussions. Any participant can also decide at any time, even after the interviews have been completed, that he or she does not wish to have his or herself or the information from his or her interview included in the study, and this request will be honored. Again, such a request has yet to be made.

During the interview process the interviews began to be transcribed, assessed for
reliability and validity, and examined for core categories and potential themes through the methods described in the research methods and analytical tools sections of this chapter. When there were issues or topics that needed clarification or when more information was needed on a topic from the first round of interviews, these were addressed in the second round of interviews. After the second round of interviews, all material was transcribed and the content of the interviews was further checked for reliability and validity using the methods outlined earlier in this chapter. All of the interviews proved sufficiently reliable and valid to be included in this study.

When the interviewing process was complete, the researcher then, by using line by line open-coding, coded all of the interviews by hand and using NVivo software. Through this process Research Question One yielded 37 potential themes (nodes), Research Question Two yielded 31 potential themes and Research Question Three yielded 29 potential themes. These potential themes were then further examined through continued open-coding and axial coding for frequency of occurrence and relationship to other potential themes, after which each potential theme was deleted from consideration, combined with other themes to create a more all-encompassing theme or left as is. Out of this procedure it became clear that the themes being generated in response to Research Questions Two and Three were the same themes of the question being explored in Research Question One. Through further axial coding and the development of a conditional/consequential matrix, these themes were then examined to assess the relationship of these themes to educational attainment, scholastic and non-scholastic learning experiences, and ultimately, the Economic Model of Schooling.

However, before providing a narrative describing the co-constructed themes and an
analysis examining how these themes relate to the broader context of this research study, the final section of this chapter will serve as a demographic and biographical introduction to the participants who helped develop those themes.

_**Biographical Sketches**_

The table below gives a basic overview of the demographic makeup of the participants in this research study. Again, while demographic diversity was an important element in determining participants for this study, the only fixed variables in this study, aside from having grown up and gone to school in Cincinnati, were having a participant’s educational attainment relatively commensurate to his or her occupational attainment, and this is reflected in the table. Following the table are brief biographical sketches of the participants. These sketches will allow the reader to add a personal context to the stories, beliefs and assertions presented in the next chapter.

**Table 1. Participants Demographics Table**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Name</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Educational Attainment</th>
<th>Occupation(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April Morgenthal</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
<td>Teacher of deaf education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian Hellman</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Associate’s Degree</td>
<td>Industrial Automation Distributor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheryl McDonald</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>Associate’s Degree + Some Bachelor’s</td>
<td>Secretary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Levy</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Juris Doctorate</td>
<td>Lawyer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francine Nelms</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Some High School</td>
<td>Janitorial, factory, dry cleaning, Meals on Wheels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gayle Jones</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>GED</td>
<td>Unemployed; on disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hadley Bowling</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>Engineer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonas Thom</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
<td>Consultant and Trainer in Mental Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louise Spiegel</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>Social Activist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_April Morgenthal_

April is an introspective and relatively soft-spoken 27 year-old, white woman who was born and raised in Cincinnati and Anderson Township. She attended public schools from
elementary school through high school, then attended Ohio State University for her undergraduate studies, and Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts for her Master’s degree in deaf education. Throughout her schooling, April was engaged in a number of extracurricular activities, including track, swimming, drama club, choir (which she did through her undergraduate studies), and volunteering through organizations like Key Club. She currently works as a teacher of the deaf and interventionist specialist at a school that focuses on teaching hearing impaired children oral language. In working as a teacher, not only is April fulfilling her self-perceived need to help others, but she is continuing a family tradition as both of her parents and her grandparents were teachers.

April is a part of a uniquely, blended family. She has a mother, father and three brothers, two older and one younger, and is engaged to be married. The man she calls her father is not her biological father, but has raised her from infancy. April shares a biological father with her two older brothers, but it was agreed upon by her biological father and the father who raised her that her father who raised her would adopt her and have full custody over her. April’s biological father committed suicide when April was in the sixth grade, and though she did not have a relationship with him, this event has proven to be a formative one for both her perspective on family and relationships, but also on life in general.

*Brian Hellman*

Brian is an outgoing 45 year-old, white male who was born and raised and still lives on the west side of Cincinnati. He attended both public and private schools growing up, but spent most of his schooling in private, Catholic schools, including Elder High School. Over several years after high school, Brian earned an Associate’s Degree from Xavier University. Throughout
his schooling, Brian struggled with the academic side of school (he likely had an undiagnosed learning disability, but fully embraced the social elements. He still carries regret that he did not do better in school and did not continue his schooling past his Associate’s Degree. Outside of school, Brian played sports, was involved in a few plays and was a longtime member of the Boy Scouts.

Brian’s family is very important to him. He has a mother and father (recently deceased), is the youngest of five brothers, is married and has a daughter. His daughter is from his first marriage. Catholicism is also very important to the point that he had his first marriage annulled through the Catholic Church. This was a difficult, emotional undertaking, but one that Brian needed so that he would be “right with God” and feel his soul cleansed.

Brian has worked for 12 years as an industrial automation distributor, distributing software and hardware that helps automate production lines. Before this, he worked for several years in the warehouse at Federated Department Stores. He appreciates the financial security his job offers, but finds it otherwise somewhat unfulfilling. His real enjoyment comes from his side business as a DJ, which he has been doing for the past twenty years. Overall, Brian has regrets that he has not taken more chances and accomplished more in life, but is happy and knows that he has it better than most.

Cheryl McDonald

Cheryl is an easy-going African American woman in her 40s who was born and raised in the Mount Healthy neighborhood in Cincinnati. She went to public schools growing up, most of which were relatively equally racially mixed, though she did have one year where she was bussed to a predominantly white school where she experienced the most overt, scary racism she
has had to confront in her life. Cheryl graduated high school, earned an Associate’s Degree through Raymond Walters College and is in the process of completing the last few courses she needs to earn her Bachelor’s Degree from the University of Cincinnati. Cheryl has always loved school and learning—she even “played” Spelling Bee as a child—and her parents expected her to do well in school, though they did not expect her to go to college.

Cheryl’s family is also very important to her. She has a mother and father and is the youngest of five children (three brothers and one sister). She is also close with her extended family. Cheryl’s father worked as a supervisor for city sanitation and her mother took care of the home, and the whole family went to Baptist Church every Sunday. Cheryl, herself, is divorced and has a son who has just left for college and a daughter in high school.

It has been a long road for Cheryl to her current position as an Administrative Assistant to the President of the University of Cincinnati. Out of high school, she worked in human resources for a telemarketing company, then left to attend Raymond Walters. After a year there, she married and had her first child. After her second child was born, she needed to return to work. She worked at Proctor & Gamble for seven years, before taking a buyout that allowed her the time and money to return to school. During this time she worked part-time for the county. In 2001, she finished her Associate’s Degree and in 2004, she separated from her husband. In 2005, Cheryl came to work at UC, which, in addition to leading her to current position, has allowed her to continue her pursuit of a bachelor’s degree. Ultimately, Cheryl is happy with how her life has turned out, but does feel it could be better if it were not for the stress she feels in worrying over two teenagers and the gaps in equality she perceives between men and women and African Americans and whites.
David Levy

David is an affable 27 year-old white, male from an affluent section of Mt. Lookout. He went to Seven Hills schools from kindergarten through high school, then attended the University of Vermont and the University of Cincinnati law school. The schools David attended growing up were private, non-religious schools (David is from a non-practicing Jewish family) that emphasized individual instruction. David was diagnosed with a mild form of dyslexia, and though he is very bright and loves reading now, he did not put a lot of effort into school, usually doing enough to get good grades, but not great grades. David is, however, very social and active, and throughout his childhood had many friends and played a variety of sports, finding the greatest success in golf.

David is incredibly close with his family. He has a mother and father and an older brother and younger sister. His father is an oncologist who started his own oncology practice and his mother was a nurse before staying at home to take care of the family. His father and brother are his best friends, and it is out-of-the-ordinary that a day will go by that he will not see or talk to them. David also does have a large group of friends outside of his family and a long-term girlfriend. All of these relationships are very important to him.

David currently works as a lawyer at a law firm, but has mixed emotions about both his job and the profession. He likes the intellectual challenge his job occasionally offers and he likes the lifestyle it affords him, but he is not yet passionate about either the job or the profession, and feels on some internal level that something that he spends so much time doing should be more satisfying.

Francine Nelms
Francine is an engaging 48 year-old African American woman who was born and raised in the West End of Cincinnati. She went to a number of public schools growing up, including Sans Montessori, Bloom, Swab, Hughes and the McMillan Center before she got pregnant at the age of sixteen and dropped out. She still regrets not having finished high school.

Francine grew up with her mother and father and was the ninth of ten children (two of the children are step-siblings from her father’s first marriage). She has six brothers and three sisters, though one of those sisters is deceased, having died under what Francine considers uncertain circumstances. Francine’s father was the main earner for the family, but also was “out in the streets”, drinking and carousing with women, and could be prone to violence. Because of this, one of Francine’s older brothers took on a fatherly role for Francine in the house by helping her with her homework and making sure all of the children had what they needed for school.

Francine, too, had to do work around the family home, like doing laundry, the dishes and ironing. She also recalled that a neighborhood man attempted to sexually assault her when she was nine. She was able to escape, but never told anyone what had happened. Despite all of this, Francine recalled many happy memories from her childhood involving playing, singing and dancing with family and friends. Francine also has three children and four grandchildren. Two of her children and one of her grandchildren still live in Cincinnati.

Francine has worked countless jobs since she dropped out of high school, including in a factory that made frozen pizzas and delivering food for Meals on Wheels. She currently does janitorial work at the University of Cincinnati. For Francine, jobs are a means to security, but they must also be at least somewhat pleasant. When Francine is not working, she spends a lot of time with her mother and enjoys designing and making clothes, and using her own home to
demonstrate her creative interior design ideas.

Gayle Jones

Gayle is a 50 year-old, African American woman who has lived through some very difficult experiences, but has dealt with them and now feels good about where her life is now. Gayle has a mother, a step-father who is now deceased and two half-sisters, one younger and one older, and also spent time in the foster system. She also has a son, two daughters and two grandchildren of her own. Gayle had a very difficult childhood. Her mother was a part of what Gayle describes as a “cult”, and her step-father physically and sexually abused her. These actions led Gayle to engage in a lot of dangerous activities, like robbery, and led her to develop a lot of serious psychologically-based disorders, including anorexia and post-traumatic stress disorder. She eventually got help for these issues when she was in a school for juvenile offenders.

Despite receiving this help, Gayle did not straighten out right away. She became a drug abuser and spent time in jail in California for her role in a robbery. It was in jail that Gayle found Jesus, and finally stopped all of her destructive behavior. In jail, Gayle got her GED and after being released, she went to a trade school to learn skills in refrigeration, nursing and legal services. Gayle worked for a number of years in a factory that made items for the military before going on disability for a number of physical ailments, though she is doing much better now.

Gayle now spends her time engaging her creative pursuits, speaking the word of Jesus and showering love upon her grandchildren. Her creative pursuits include making soaps, candles, greeting cards and writing fiction and non-fiction that seeks to help others who may have suffered through the same things that she suffered through as a child.

Hadley Bowling
Hadley is a very positive, motivated 29 year-old woman who grew up mostly in Anderson Township and attended both a private Montessori school and public school before getting her Bachelor’s degree in engineering from Purdue University. Hadley has always enjoyed schooling and learning, and experiences stemming from these activities have been fundamental to her career development.

Hadley has a mother and father who divorced when she was young. Both have remarried, and all told, Hadley has one biological brother and two step-sisters. When Hadley’s parents divorced and later when each remarried, they made a point of doing their best to not have their events negatively impact their children, and as a result, Hadley has a large blended family that is very close. Hadley is married with a son and a daughter, and this need for closeness has spread to her own family as well. Indeed, close personal relationships with both friends and family are the most important factors to Hadley’s well-being.

Hadley also gets great satisfaction out of her occupation. She works as a marketing manager for airplane engines at General Electric, and has quickly moved up within her division of the corporation. Through General Electric and through her own initiative, Hadley has also been able to engage in a number of volunteer experiences. Hadley believes strongly in civic engagement and though her children are only two and four, she and her husband have already begun involving them in their volunteer activities.

Jonas Thom

Jonas is an intelligent, opinionated 38 year-old white male who was born on the Westside of Cincinnati. Most of his childhood was spent on the Westside—his family home sat on the edge of Mount St. Joseph’s College—but his first schooling experience was actually in Germany.
where his father taught for a few years. After returning to Cincinnati, Jonas attended public schools for most of his scholastic career, including going to high school at the prestigious Cincinnati Country Day, but did spend some brief time at Catholic schools in both Delhi and Covington. Jonas is Catholic and while he loves the history and ritual of the religion, as well as the good works that can and have been done in the name of Catholicism, he has a great deal of difficulty rectifying that with the sordid recent history involving abuse in both Cincinnati and throughout the domain of the church.

Returning to his schooling, from his time at Country Day, Jonas remembers receiving an excellent education, but laments the lack of focus on issues of social justice. After graduating high school, Jonas attended Erlham College in Indiana before dropping out to travel around the country. After a couple of years of traveling, Jonas returned to Mount St. Joe’s to finish his Bachelor’s Degree and then went onto to get his Master’s Degree in community education at the University of Cincinnati.

Jonas has a mother and father and a twin sister. Both of us parents worked as educators, and his sister is now a teacher. Growing up, Jonas’s parents always stressed the importance of equity and social justice to him. He believed strongly in these tenets, but it was not until his “lost” years traveling when he realized how these tenets would impact his life. While on the road, Jonas saw the impact that mental illness and drug abuse could have on individuals, especially among the homeless. This has led to a career in social work that he is incredibly passionate about. He currently works as a trainer and consultant in the mental health field.

The only thing that Jonas is more passionate about than his work, is his family. He is married and has a daughter, and his daughter’s safety, happiness, and intellectual and creative
growth are the most important things in Jonas’s life.

Louise Spiegel

Louise is a self-effacing, yet straight-forward 84 year-old woman who was born an orphan in Washington DC, before being adopted a few months into her life by an affluent, Jewish family in Cincinnati. Louise also had one adopted brother who is now deceased, and is married with four sons of her own.

Louise had a difficult relationship with her parents. Her father was loving, but distant, and her mother was severely manic-depressive. She was often ill and Louise, even as a young child, was in many ways her main caregiver. Her main caregiver was her governess, as she was the person in her life who helped her with homework, took her places, ran the household, and anything else that Louise might need. Louise believes that having this unique upbringing, especially having to care for her mother, gave her insight into the frailty of adults.

While her parents were not always available, they did instill the belief in Louise that both formal and cultural education were important to her development. Louise’s formal education took place at Hillsdale, which is part of the Seven Hills Schools, attended Bennington College in Vermont, and she took some graduate courses at the University of Cincinnati. To have Louise tell it, she was an average student, but her stories make it clear that she excelled in school. She was even president of her class for five years in a row. Louise’s cultural education took place inside and outside of the home. Louise’s parents often had artists, writers and musicians over to the house for parties, and though she was not usually invited to these parties, the sounds that wafted up to her room, left a lasting impression upon her. This was particularly true when it
came to music. Louise hears the rhythm in everything around in what could be described in a spiritual way, and still plays the piano herself. Her parents also sent her to camps that focused on a number of cultured activities, including dance, horseback riding and tennis.

Moving to her working life, Louise does not feel like she had a “professional career”, though she worked for much of her life in helping professions and in philanthropy. Civic engagement is very important to Louise and her work, particularly her work with the Urban Appalachian Council, is well regarded in the community.

These biographical sketches represent just an overview of this diverse group of participants. The next chapter will serve to more fully examine these individuals in relation to this study’s research interests. The participants’ responses will shed light onto these individuals perceive the quality of their own lives, what elements in their lives they perceive as contributing to their perceived quality of life, and what contributions they perceive educational attainment, scholastic learning experiences and non-scholastic learning experiences made in the development of that PQoL. The chapter will conclude by using the participants’ beliefs on these elements of their lives to analyze the Economic Model of Schooling.
Chapter Four: Narrative and Analysis of Findings

Introduction

The responses of nine participants in this study paint a picture of their perceptions of the quality of their own lives, what elements in their lives they perceive as contributing to their perceived quality of life (PQoL), and what contributions they perceive educational attainment, scholastic learning experiences and non-scholastic learning experiences made in the development of that PQoL. This picture shows a diverse group of individuals, specifically in terms of educational attainment and economic attainment, but also in terms of gender, race and religion, who nonetheless shared some common beliefs in answering all three research questions. This chapter will begin by allowing the participants to describe their beliefs and recollections on the three research questions posed in this study, beginning with the research question on perceived quality of life. As this is an in-depth interviewing based research study, special emphasis will be placed on allowing the participants’ voices to be heard. The chapter will conclude with the analysis of the participants’ beliefs about and recollections on these three research questions in relation to the Economic Model of Schooling.

Narrative of Findings

Perceived Quality of Life

Seven major themes related to perceived quality of life (PQoL) were developed in this study through the coding of the nine participants’ in-depth interviews. Those seven themes are: Interpersonal Relationships, Engagement, Internal Motivation/Personality, Handling Adversity, Financial Security, Occupation/Occupational Identity and Faith. Before beginning the narrative discussion of each theme, a few characteristics of these themes will be presented. First, the reader should regard having a positive relationship to a theme as that theme contributing to a
high quality of life, while a negative relationship to a theme should be regarded as detracting from a participant’s high quality of life. Second, it is true that some themes were discussed by the participants more often or with greater passion, than other themes, but no consensus was reached among the participants as to a ranked order of PQoL themes, and even if a consensus had been reached, the small number of participants in this research study make it impossible to draw any generalizable, rankings-based conclusions. Finally, while each theme is unique, they did not occur in a vacuum. Many of the participants’ recollections combined multiple themes and were coded to reflect this. With these overarching thematic characteristics understood, the narrative of findings will now begin by exploring the seven PQoL themes developed by the participants, starting with the theme of Interpersonal Relationships.

**Interpersonal Relationships**

Participants mentioned several different types of relationships, recounting both positive and negative experiences that were categorized under the heading of ‘interpersonal relationships’. These relationships included relationships with family, friends, adults, teachers, authority figures, their community and cultural groups. Regardless of the specific individuals involved in the interpersonal relationships, it was clear for all of the participants that without positive interpersonal relationships in their lives they would not be as satisfied as they are with their lives, and that during lulls in positive interpersonal relationships or while experiencing negative interpersonal relationships, the participants did suffer in their satisfaction with life.

Among the various types of interpersonal relationships described by the participants, relationships with family proved to be the most commonly recalled. Brian, who has always lived very close to his parents on the Westside of Cincinnati and cannot hide his deep affection for what they mean to him, gives a good example of a positive familial relationship in describing his
relationship with his father growing up:

I had a really good relationship with my dad growing up, a real good one. He was funny. He had a great sense of humor. My brothers and I would get Mad Magazine and Dad would read them and he would crack up and you know, we thought it was so great that our dad reads Mad Magazine and that he laughs and thinks its great. And he would, we would play baseball games and stuff, and he was always there. He was a really good dad in that he was there for you for all the really important things.

Brian is one of many participants who recalled the importance of parents in their PQoL development. He is also, now that he is married and has a daughter, one of many participants who as an adult find purpose and a sense of pride in being on the parental side of that relationship dynamic:

Boy, you know, that is a good question, what am I most proud of? I’m proud of the normal things like I’m proud that I have a loving wife, and a great daughter, I have a good family and I’m close knit with my family and my wife’s family.

Jonas, who also grew up on the Westside in Delhi, and has a close relationship with his parents and his twin sister and is married with a daughter, shared similar sentiments:

I: What are you most proud of in your life?

Jonas: My daughter.

I: And what do you like most about your life?

Jonas: It’s actually family first and foremost and probably my daughter, she’s well-adjusted, you know happy and self-motivated. My marriage, which is not easy, 17 years we’ve been together, 16, whatever that is. Up and down but we’re still together and clearly going to be. So my family I would have to say.
Interpersonal relationships appear to serve a fundamental need for these participants to feel connected to others and to have others to rely on and also to be relied on or to feel needed. Hadley, a child of divorce that nonetheless grew up in a warm, close knit blended family and is now married with children of her own, makes the case for this role of interpersonal relationships in discussing her family and friends:

I have always been the type of person who loves to be surrounded by friends and family. I think that provides some level of security for me. There is very rarely a time when I want to be alone. There are times when I am like, I want to be alone. But not very often. I could just hang out with people all the time…So I think now I am older with a family, I just think that being close and being sure that not only my family, but my friends know that I care about them and that I would always be there for them and that a really close relationship is important for me.

When asked the question what is quality of life to him, David, who rarely lets a day go by without talking to or seeing most of the members of his family, expressed the same themes as Hadley:

Quality of life is more whether I am happy with who I am, who my friends are, whether I see my parents a lot. I feel like I have a great quality of life…I have an incredible relationship with my parents, and my brother is like my best friend…Yeah. But yeah, that is probably what my parents are most proud of is the relationship that they have with us. I think my dad’s favorite thing in the world is to hang out with me and my brother. I am lucky.

To this point, all of the examples of the interpersonal relationship theme relate to parents, siblings and friends, but the participants supplied plenty of recollections that recall important,
positive relationships outside the traditional ‘nuclear family’ relationships. Francine, who is from a large, blended family, describes a woman from her childhood who was her mother’s only friend after moving to Cincinnati from Texas. Francine’s parents were very poor and this friend would help make sure the kids were fed and would give the kids a little spending money. This woman became like family for Francine:

There was this lady, named, we still wonder where she is, named Bessy Moe. She was one of my mother’s, she was my mother’s only friend when she came to Cincinnati. Bessy Moe was like an aunt to us. She helped my mother with us a lot. When we didn’t have nothing to eat, Bessy Moe would feed us. Bessy Moe, and we used to call her Aunt Bessy. And I was two years old and that is when I knew I liked to dance, because Bessy Moe used to play records all the time and I would be like Aunt Bessy play Peppermint Tree. And she would be like Francine, if you dance to Peppermint Tree I will give you a nickel. [Francine sings Peppermint Tree] I used to dance for that little nickel. I used to dance on Peppermint Tree and get me that nickel.

Louise also described an interesting positive interpersonal relationship with a caregiver other than her parents. Louise, who is now 86, had adoptive parents who could be quite distant and demanding for reasons of work, mental illness and what she described as ‘the nature of families in that social realm during that time period’, but she forged a powerful caregiver relationship with her governess. Louise, a quiet, introspective soul, became especially so during this recollection, looking away from me, off into the distance and speaking softly with a warm tremor in her voice:

Well, she [her governess] helped me with my studies; with homework. Making sure I started things and finished things. She helped me at the piano. She helped me. She was
always there. She drove the car, took me places. Saw that I was fine. She was a very dear person.

More examples of interpersonal relationships will be presented later in this chapter when discussing learning experiences and interpersonal relationships, but it is important to reiterate that the participants recalled many different types of interpersonal relationships. Regardless of the particular individuals involved in the interpersonal relationships, the participants viewed positive interpersonal relationships to be very important in relation to PQoL, and that without these relationships each participant would have viewed his or her life in a much more negative light. The next theme, Engagement, shares this thematic characteristic.

**Engagement**

The PQoL theme of Engagement encompasses a number of activities, including engagement through community, volunteerism, creativity and physical activity being most often discussed. A great deal of overlap exists between engagement and interpersonal relationships, as they both can involve interaction between individuals or groups, but engagement appears to deal less with psychological considerations and more with intellectual, moral, physical, social, and creative needs. It is less interpersonally intimate than the relationships in the Interpersonal Relationship theme, but is not perceived as less of a contribution to quality of life.

The discussion of the Engagement theme will begin by looking at sports and music as several participants, including April, Brian, David, Francine, Hadley, Jonas and Louise described the positive creative, intellectual and social impact sports and music had on them as children and in adulthood. The first example comes from Francine, and in offering up this story, Francine demonstrates the significant role sports played in her family history, while ascribing the fundamental role sports played in her childhood; a role that was echoed by many of the
Francine: I came from a baseball family. My father played in the black negro league. Two of my brothers played for the Reds. Major leagues.

I: In the majors?

F: yeah, no not the majors, I meant the minor leagues. So we came from a baseball family.

I: Did you ever play?

F: yeah, a little bit. I was good at sports. I played them all a little bit. For my money I was gymnastic and track, oh yeah, I was good at that. So I came from an athletic family.

I: did you ever play in school?

F: Yeah.

I: What sports did you play?

F: I played baseball, volleyball, kickball, track team, I was on all them teams. That is what I am saying, when I was young, I had fun!

Louise, who was exposed to music by her parents from an early age and still takes piano lessons at the age of 86, offers a good example of the sentiment expressed by the participants on the musical form of engagement in discussing how the rhythm in music has profoundly affected the way she views the world around her:

To tell you the truth, it is strange, but I’ve come to realize that rhythm is really what I am very good at. And whether that has to do with the fact that I have always been physically active and have a good ear; I think the combination has made me very sensitive to rhythms. Which I hear in nature and all kind of things. It is very personal.

Engagement can also help create a sense of pride. Francine works as a janitor and does
not have a lot of money, but it is important to her that she presents herself well in person and in her home. To do this with her budget she makes some of her own clothes and finds inexpensive ways to do design changes to her home. She describes the latter:

I like decorating. I can take a room and make it look like I spent money. I am one of them people too. My mom is always like you going to decorate because I can make something look expensive, and I ain’t spend no money. So I like decorating. I like doing that. Colors and stuff like that. I change my colors every six months.

To this point, these examples of engagement had largely internal benefits gleaned from personal, solitary experiences. There is, however, another component to the engagement theme that stresses positive PQoL through personal interaction with outside elements. With the participants in this study those interactions included interactions with nature, newly discovered stimuli, and, most commonly, interactions with others in need. Hadley succinctly describes her need to help others, “it is important to me to feel like I am contributing, or at least helping the world to be a better place; kind of giving myself to others where I can.” Hadley is unable to fill this role through her job as an engineer, which explains why she recently took a trip to Columbia to bring supplies for, and work and play with, the children at an orphanage there. Still, for some participants, like April, working in a “helping” profession is necessary, but not sufficient to meet the internal desire she has for engagement through helping those less fortunate, and she gets mad at herself for not doing more:

No, I feel like I am doing my part, I am helping deaf kids learn to talk, so I feel like that is nice and it is a nice duty to fill for society, but at the same time I feel like there is other stuff that I can do, there is time for me to go to a hospital and volunteer. I do feel guilty
about it, so thanks for bringing it up. I don’t know, there is probably a relationship
between the two, but I still feel bad.

Regardless of the way it manifested itself in each participant, the theme of engagement
was extremely important to most of the participants. It fulfilled a need beyond interpersonal
relationships in that it helped the participants interact in a positive manner with the world at
large. Later in this chapter a number of specific learning experiences will be explored that will
shed more light on how, and in what situations, the participants learned the value of engagement
on PQoL. In the next section, we will continue the discussion of PQoL themes, by discussing the
participants’ beliefs on the importance of Internal Motivation and Personality in achieving a high
quality of life.

**Internal Motivation/Personality**

The third major PQoL theme uncovered in this research study falls under the title of
Internal Motivation/Personality. In this theme the participants would attribute positive
accomplishments, beliefs and actions, or failures to achieve to internal drives or inherent
personality traits. It must be stated at the beginning of this section that it is extremely difficult to
know the true origin of what a participant perceives to be an internal or inherent aspect of one’s
self. It is very difficult to parcel out what beliefs are truly innate (i.e., actual internal
motivations/personality traits) and what beliefs are perceived as innate, but have their origin in
life events that we have little or no memory of, or that we do not understand the impact such
events have had on our beliefs (i.e., external motivations). Since this research study is looking at
perceptions about quality of life and learning experiences, it is expected that each theme will
contain moments when participants’ perceptions do not match their lived reality, but with
internal motivations it is particularly difficult for participant and researcher alike to uncover
these discrepancies because they concern reflective beliefs about one’s unwavering nature of being. With this disclaimer in mind, a few examples will be given that illustrate how the participants incorporated the Internal Motivations/Personality into their PQoL.

Brian is very satisfied with his life, but there are some things that he has not accomplished that he wishes he had. He puts the majority of the blame for these ‘failures’ on internal mechanisms related to his lack of drive and inability to take on tasks he perceives as difficult. To demonstrate this, here is how Brian responded to a question on what he is least proud of in his life:

Well, I know the answer to this. Unfortunately, I’m least proud of, I’ve had a lot of shortcomings in my life, I’ve had a lot of opportunities that have knocked that I haven’t taken advantage of, I think that’s what I’m least proud of. I had an opportunity to get a better education, certainly at the college level and I didn’t. I had opportunities to get bigger and better jobs, I’ve had chances where I should have pushed myself further, but I have been one of those people who get stuck in a comfort zone, like hey I’m comfortable, I’m feeling good, I don’t want to try something that I am unsure. And I really do regret that. I have had chances that I have blown because I’ve ignored them. So that is the thing I am least proud of in my life. If I would have really put my mind to it I could certainly be doing something other than I’m doing, not that my job is a bad job. I make good money for what I do, and it is something that I have never really been trained to do. I could have been doing something else probably, but again I chose the easy road instead of the more difficult road.

For Louise, civic engagement is an element of her life that she views as positive and that she perceives as having come from internal drives. This back and forth occurred:
I: Your civic engagement seems to be a—

Louise: A big part of my life.

I: Did that come from your mother? Or was it just always part of you?

L: It seems to be apart of me. It is kind of, I have some sort of a sensor. It keeps me very aware of people in my environment, even people who are total strangers to me, you usually can tell pretty much, passing them on the street, make an assumption what is worrying them, what is going through their heads. Occasionally I will mention something as I pass someone on the street. And then I’ll say something like I know it’s going to get better.

It is interesting to note that Louise so firmly believed in the internal nature of her civic engagement despite potential evidence of an, at least partly, external source. The interviewer even asked the question “Did that come from your mother?” because earlier in the interview she had told the interviewer about the work her parents, who are Jewish, had done during WWII to assist displaced Jews, but Louise was adamant about its internal source. Brian, too, as will be shown a little later in this chapter, took on and succeeded in some very difficult tasks, but still viewed his inability to take on certain tasks or opportunities as an internal failure.

The participants’ beliefs make it clear that, just as with the other PQoL themes, achieving success due to internal attributes does produce a sense of pride, and thereby contributes positively to PQoL, while suffering failure that is perceived to be caused by internal attributes can detract from PQoL. However, it would be inappropriate to jump to any conclusion that would say only people with certain innate traits could lead happy lives. The next section will deal with Handling Adversity, a PQoL theme that was far easier to confront through in-depth interviewing, but was no less important to achieving a high PQoL.
Handling Adversity

Adversity, and more specifically, Handling Adversity, proved to be a very important theme for a number of the participants in achieving a high PQoL. It also appears that during times when participants were not yet able to overcome their adversity, they perceived their quality of life as low. What caused adversity was different for each participant and could be as generally recognizable as anything from setbacks at school or work to childhood sexual abuse. While some of these adversity-causing events may seem more serious than others, they were all serious for the individual participants and successfully overcoming them was necessary for regaining or first developing a high PQoL.

How the adversity was handled was also different for each participant. The ‘handling’ element of this theme concerned how, and to what degree, the participants were able to intellectually confront, manage, learn from and grow from the situation causing the adversity. When participants were able to intellectually confront, manage, learn from and grow from an adversity, their PQoL improved. When they were unable to accomplish this intellectual understanding, their PQoL suffered. This does not necessarily mean that their PQoL was low or bad, but that the unresolved situation has stopped their PQoL from being as high as it could be. While this understanding ultimately occurred within the individual, for the majority of the participants, the ability to handle adversity came through specific learning experiences (the lesson may have been learned with one exposure or, as was more often the case, prolonged exposure to the learning experience) that engaged a wide variety of external supports. The nature of these experiences will be explored later in this chapter, but a few recollections will be shared here to show how fundamental the Handling Adversity theme was for these participants to achieve high PQoL.
The first example comes from Gayle. Gayle grew up in a household filled with sexual abuse, crime and general neglect. She found herself in and out of foster care and trouble with the law, and with an eating disorder. At the age of 12, Gayle went to a school/detention center for at-risk girls called Riverview. There she was helped to confront what happened to her as this discussion illustrates:

Gayle: I’m going to guess, 12. Riverview was the longest place. And I was in shock when I reached there, I didn’t know who to trust. Who to talk to. I was anorexic. I weighed 78 pounds. I wouldn’t eat at home. I didn’t trust my mother. And I just didn’t know. And then I started seeing a man. Well, he looked like you, but he was thinner and his beard was bigger and his hair was more and he had glasses and he was the nicest man I have ever met in my life.

I: How old are you at this point?

G: 13, maybe 13. And he started seeing me three times a week and he got me to talking, but first he said I want you to yell. And he said I am going to tell the guards to just let you scream, so I started screaming. And from yelling and stuff, he said I want you to write, and he said one day, you are not going to believe this, but you are going to be a writer, and then I started writing. And he said I want you to just write a letter to your mother and tell her all the abuse that happened and then ask her to come up here to visit you. She won’t hit you or abuse you, and he showed me all of the guards downstairs and whatever. And it took awhile, but I did it. I got the most help, I think out of all of my childhood, there.

I: So the guy was a counselor or a teacher?

G: He was a psychiatrist, yeah, no medicine, no shock, no nothing, just scream.
It was books. And it was life skills with the counselors. They would just sit you down and rap to you, they just gave you some commonsense and some wisdom. It was everything hashed out at you, that was good, and you’d take it because you are locked up year round in here and you get it right, you know, you learn, and that is what we did.

While Gayle suffered through many more difficult times in her life before achieving the high quality of life she believes she has now, the help she received at Riverview served as the foundation for her getting her life on track. At Riverview she learned to process events from her life; she learned that a lot of what happened in her life was not her fault, but that she did have control over how she confronts these issues. Gayle learned the positive impact on her well-being of talking about and writing about what happened to her. This has, in turn, led to Gayle writing books about her traumatic childhood that she hopes to some day get published, so that she can help people who have suffered in similar ways to her handle their adversities.

As was the case for Gayle, it was common for the participants to express the help others gave to each of them in overcoming adversity. It is also with such situations that we can see the overlap that exists between themes. In the second example of the Handling Adversity theme, April describes her challenges in confronting a series of deaths of people close to her, including the suicide of her estranged birth father, and how the strengthening of her interpersonal relationships with her family contributed to her ultimate success in handling adversity:

› There was a ten-year span of time when just everyone I knew, somebody in some shape or form of our family, died. It wasn’t, obviously, good, but I think my whole family banded together and got through it. And it made us all stronger and we talked about it a lot, talked through it a lot. I think it just kind of helped me put things in perspective and still to this day helps me put things in perspective, so I am really grateful for everything
that I have, and so many people have things way less than I did, and way worse circumstances than I did. I just feel like I was given a really good life, and I think I have done a good job with myself. I am trying to be a good person, and there are obviously things that I could have done better and that I would change if given the opportunity. But I kind of think that everything happens for a reason. I don’t kind of think, I think that everything happens for a reason. I am okay with it. Life is good.

This example from April, in addition to showing how PQoL themes can overlap, also demonstrates how negative experiences can adversely affect perceived well-being. April handled her adversity by having supportive people around her who helped her process and make sense of these events. Ultimately, April has developed a philosophy of life—everything happens for a reason—that has enabled her to move forward in a positive manner even when sad or disturbing events interrupt her life. April definitely feels that she would not be in the good place that she currently is in all elements of her life, including family, friendship, engagement and job satisfaction, if it were not for her ability to handle adversity in a positive manner. For April, her ability to handle these difficult issues has permeated all elements of her life, and it is fair to assume that had she been unable to successfully confront these adversities, she would be less successful in many areas of her life and would not view herself as having a high PQoL. In the next section, the PQoL theme of financial security is discussed, and the participants begin to show the breadth of life factors needed to achieve a high quality of life.

**Financial Security**

The next theme the participants related to their PQoL was Financial Security. The participants largely discussed this theme in monetary terms. For the majority of the participants, money was desired to make sure all perceived necessities, like utilities, rent or mortgage, and
food and clothing, were taken care of for themselves and their families and friends. It was also common for the participants to desire money for perceived luxuries, like items associated with hobbies, leisure time and vacations. It should at least be considered that these perceived luxuries, many of which have elements that would fall under the Interpersonal Relationships and Engagement themes, may actually be necessities, if not for survival, then for a high quality of life.

In addition to actual money, the Financial Security theme was also used by the participants to reference some perceived necessities that have monetary value and are of a protective nature. The most common example of these perceived necessities was insurance, and in particular, health insurance. Interestingly, seven of the eight participants who mentioned financial security made it clear that being rich was not an end objective or a necessity, and the eighth, Gayle, only wanted to be rich so that she could give more money to her grandchildren and help people around the world, not for herself. And while every participant may, and probably does, have a differing interpretation of how much money or financial security is ‘enough’, it is a telling admission that security is the primary goal. Hadley, an engineer, wife and mother of two, who, admittedly, makes more in salary and benefits than the majority of the other participants, describes this view:

Certainly, financially, I think everybody likes things, but I just want security, I don’t want to ever live where I didn’t feel like I could pay the bills. So that is a function of happiness for me; that I live within my means and I feel comfortable and secure.

In discussing their feelings on the Financial Security theme, David and Cheryl demonstrate an interesting element of all PQoL themes, which is that these themes, while important, are not equal in importance. Both of these participants desire financial security, but
they do not perceive it as having as strong a pull on their quality of life as some other themes.

David, a lawyer from an upper-middle class background, states:

I don’t really think about money to tell you the truth. And it’s probably because I have
enough, and I don’t have a lot of needs. I am not very material. But I have a nice car and
my apartment is perfectly nice and I play at a private golf club, so I have a lot of nice
things. But, so I guess it is tied to money to some extent, but I think it is more ‘am I
happy with who I am, and who my friends are, if I have good relationships with my
family’.

Cheryl, an executive assistant from a working class background, reiterates David’s notion on
family and relationships, while also factoring in issues of health in putting financial security in
its place for her perceived well-being in relation to the other PQoL themes:

You could be very financially well off; not have a care in the world, in terms of finances,
totally where you want to be. On track for retirement or goals or whatever, and be in a
very unhappy or dysfunctional or unsatisfying relationship. Whether that’s with a spouse
or partner, it could even be with your children, or a parent or a sibling. To me they go
together, like the material and fiscal aspects of life as well as your mental and physical
well-being. You know, if you’re well off, but you have cancer, I guess being well off
makes it more comfortable, but ideally you would like to not have cancer because you
can enjoy life better.

Francine, who grew up in a relatively poor household, has spent a brief time on welfare
and currently works in a job that keeps her just above the poverty line (though she would be
quick to point out that she does receive full benefits through this job), takes this theme even
further by arguing against extreme wealth and making the point that the relationship between
happiness and wealth can be incongruent and that, at the very least, there is no cause and effect relationship between the two:

I: But do you think more money is important in general?

Francine: No. Because a lot of people who have money are very unhappy. I wouldn’t want to be rich, just comfortable. Just the necessary things were I don’t have to worry about the little common things that we worry about. That is about it. Other than that, I wouldn’t change the way my life turned out.

These last few examples make the point that most of the participants found Financial Security to be an important PQoL theme, but the participants, almost uniformly, felt the need to clarify its role in their lives in relation to other perceived important factors. This should not, however, be construed as participants saying that Financial Security is less important than other PQoL themes. One possible reason for this is that no participants in this study live below the poverty line, a point at which some research shows that at least subjective well-being can be negatively impacted (see Diener, 2000). A second, potential reason is the social stigma in our culture attached to desiring wealth beyond other pursuits (Lane, 2000). Whatever the reason for the qualifying nature of the participants’ sentiments, the phenomenon is an interesting one to be examined by future research.

Occupation/Occupational Identity is the next PQoL theme to be discussed, which is appropriate because for many of the participants it is closely tied to the Financial Security theme.

**Occupation/Occupational Identity**

The next PQoL theme, Occupation/Occupational Identity, took on many different roles in helping seven of the nine participants achieve a high PQoL. The roles Occupation/Occupational Identity played in the participants’ lives often interacted with, and having positive or negative
impact on many of the other PQoL themes. For many participants the Occupation/Occupational Identity theme served as their major source of the previous theme, Financial Security; for others, Occupation/Occupational Identity helped actualize Internal Motivations usually based around desires to achieve; and for some of the participants, Occupation/Occupational Identity helped them achieve needs and goals related to the themes of Engagement and Interpersonal Relationships. These different variations on Occupation/Occupational Identity and how this theme interacted with the other themes will be discussed next.

Brian, who works as an industrial automation distributor, distributing software and hardware that helps automate production lines, cited a familiar refrain for many of the participants in establishing that his job serves to provide financial security and is tolerable, but that he views the most important elements of his life to be those that occur outside of work:

Well, it [my job] is important to me because it is, obviously, my major source of income, but I never felt like I was one of those people who is married to their job. I like to leave work at work and I feel like my whole life is much more than just my job and who I am at my job.

Brian was not alone in having the perspective that occupation is important for financial considerations, while maintaining the importance of not having one’s whole life wrapped up in one’s employment. There were, however, other considerations outside of financial security. Cheryl explains one of those reasons, her own mental well-being, in describing why she left her job at Proctor & Gamble and no longer takes her work at the University of Cincinnati as an executive assistant home with her:

Work doesn’t stress me anymore. I stopped stressing out about work when I left P&G because it consumed my life. I was physically sick from the stress and I just said I won’t
do it. I mean I work hard, but if it is out of my hands, out of my control, I don’t take it home. I don’t think about work at home until the alarm clock goes off. I just leave it.

For other participants, their occupation gives them a sense of purpose and usually helps fill a need they have related to the Engagement and Interpersonal Relationships themes. April is a good example of this phenomenon. She is a teacher of students with auditory disabilities at a small, private school, and she has foregone higher paying opportunities, even within the teaching profession because she truly cares about her students and is invested in her school:

It doesn’t really, I mean I knew going into the field that I would make less money than a regular teacher makes, I knew that it wasn’t going to be lucrative. But I really like what I do, I think it is interesting, I think there is a purpose to it, so that makes me happy. So money plays a part because I obviously have to pay bills and all that, but I mean, I wasn’t not going to take the job because of the money because anywhere else that I would go, I might make more money somewhere else, but I wouldn’t be as happy doing what I was doing. Because I could go work for a public school or a hospital or whatever it may be and make a lot more money. I know that, but I like the kids, I like the people, most of the people, that I work with, so money doesn’t play that big of a part.

For some participants, however, occupation and occupational success play a larger role in PQoL for a different reason; they receive a great deal of satisfaction out of a job well-done and actively enjoy what they are doing in their occupations. Interestingly, like with Financial Security, these participants place their feelings about their occupational success in relation to other themes, like interpersonal relationships. Hadley describes the importance of her occupation to her PQoL, while describing how she balances her occupation with her family:

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3 It should be noted that the two best examples of this component of the Occupation/Occupational Identity theme, Hadley and Jonas, happen to have relatively high salaries and benefit packages. It could not be determined in this study if they would feel the same satisfaction out of their jobs if they were not so well compensated.
I really like GE [General Electric]. I think it is a great company. I love what I am doing. I think ultimately I want to have more of a leadership role where I have a team of people working for me, and I can drive strategy. I mean my job right now is very strategic so that is fun. But we’ll see. That is always a balance. With more responsibility it means more time, so I always try to keep things in check with what I have at home with my family and at work.

Jonas, too, who provides extensive mental health services to people in need, talks with a deep passion about his work and how he needs the challenge his work provides to be satisfied with his life, but still establishes its secondary role in comparison to his family:

   Well, it [my job] largely is my life…I think about it [my job] all the time and again what fascinates me is my growth in [the mental health] field…not just the work with clients, but now sort of working at the system level and the state level …I do policy work, I do current development work… I think about it all the time, and I think about systemic issues, I think about the nature of mental illness, I think about the nature of people and how we organize ourselves, I think about healthcare delivery systems, I think about the economics of it, it is so multifaceted, it is so challenging in terms of all the stuff…It is my life, in a healthy way…I have the greatest job in the world for me that I can do…I love my job. It is a huge part of my life. I mean my family is the biggest part of my life, and there is a lot of separation there, but it is my life.

   Occupation/Occupational Identity is important to the majority of the participants in this research study, but in a number of different ways ranging from a means to achieving financial security to helping others to serving internal drives to succeed. The final PQoL theme, Faith, also impacts the participants’ PQoL in a number of individualized ways.
Faith

Faith is the final PQoL theme developed from the participant interviews. Six of the nine participants discussed the importance of faith to their PQoL, with faith taking several forms, including organized religious faith, faith based on a spiritual connection to Jesus Christ, a humanistic, morals-based spiritual faith and the intellectual and emotional search to understand faith.

Every participant in this study attended church or synagogue at some point in his or her life. For some, this activity ended during adolescence and organized religion is no longer a part of their lives. For others, early involvement with organized religion has lead to a life-long, existential debate over the nature of being, the purpose of life and the role God and church play in life. For one participant, Brian, organized religion, in his case, Catholicism, is, and always has been, a foundational element of his life and is something that he needs to be engaged in and dedicated to in order for him to maintain his high quality of life. He explains the basic function the Catholic Church plays in his life and in his role as a father:

I’m proud that I do a decent church life and I try to walk the talk especially when it comes to my daughter because she’s 12 years old and you know I try to keep it real with her, but I try to go the extra mile and show her that you know, it’s not about ourselves, it’s about serving a greater good whether it be to mankind or to god almighty or to whoever, but you know, trying to show her that you know you’ve got to think beyond your own self.

Brian was not alone in incorporating his faith into improving his perceived quality of life, but not everyone incorporated organized religion. For the majority of the participants who found faith to be an important component of a high PQoL it was not organized religion, but rather an
amalgam of highly individualized life experiences that led to what is probably best described as a moralistic spirituality. For some participants this included the belief in a God, if not the God of any specific religion. For some this included the quasi-religious notion that “everything happens for a reason”. For all of these participants, and this is also true for the participants citing organized religion and Jesus Christ, there was always a faith-based belief that helping others or doing good is important to achieving a high quality of life, a perceived quality of life trait seen repeatedly in the engagement theme.

Cheryl, Hadley and April each describe their personal faith and how it fits into their lives:

Cheryl: I think having some type of spiritual grounding or core keeps you centered and it helps you kind of channel what comes at you in life. You’ve got to have a go to something. person. man, lady, God, Buddha, something. I believe that.

Hadley: I am not super religious. You know that about me. I say more spiritual. It is not that I don’t believe in God. It is just that I don’t know. I am just so practical.

I: What is spirituality to you?

H: I do believe there is more out there than us. I do. I guess there is a higher power, I don’t know, I just feel like there is something out there that is bigger and maybe we are not supposed to understand.

I: Big picture aside, how does spirituality manifest itself in your life?

H: Other than my thoughts on everything happens for a reason, do good for yourself, do good for others, that would be kind of the outward manifestation.
April: So I have always had a lot of faith, but I have never been a very religious person, and I always felt like everything always happened for a reason, and that it was kind of out of my hands. I am not sure that I think there is an old man up there with a beard looking down on me every moment of my life, but I don’t really think there are accidents so much, so I don’t know if you call that a religion so much, but it is what it is, and happened for a reason, and you just have to roll with it.

I: I didn’t mean organized religion necessarily, faith or--

A: yeah, I am a very faithful person I would say, I always have been.

The mental and emotional struggle to understand and to come to terms with God, Jesus, religion and spirituality appears to be an important component of faith’s role in PQoL. One can see hallmarks of earlier discussed themes like Interpersonal Relationships, Engagement and Handling Adversity in this struggle to understand. Jonas, in the lengthy passage to follow, explores the confusion that so many face in understanding faith:

Jonas: I love the church, I love growing up in the church. But what I loved about it is that sense of community. I love saints, I love the mysticism aspect of it, I love the fact that the history of the church and the history of the Western world are essentially the same thing. I love the interface the church and sort of the history of the near East, which I know is politically incorrect these days, but Turkey and Greece and all that. But I love the history of the church and the saints and the mysticism and the whole, like, you know the redemptive nature of the narrative that is Catholicism. I dig that, I think it’s fucking cool.

I: But does that also extend into belief?

J: No, I struggle. Let me actually say I struggle with that greatly. I really want to be an atheist, but I can’t. I can’t, and I struggle with that a lot and like, I’ve read-- although I
forget it all…You know, I dig it. I dig the thought…We’re raising our daughter Catholic, or at least I’m trying to. And when I say Catholic, I mean she’s going to school to learn about the Saints, you know? She goes to CCD every Sunday, but we don’t got to Church. I think it’s important that you have a framework for understanding morality, and understand organizing principles of culture. And it’s not THE framework, but it’s A framework to have and I think it’s important to have that sort of intellectually and spiritually so that you can reject it later on. And I think that it is developmental and that is why I am pushing my daughter to do it. I struggle with it a great deal. Just like I want to believe in UFOs really really bad. And I want to believe in Catholicism specifically because I love the Trinity, I love the saints, I love it. It is such a cool elegant framework for understanding so much stuff. But the anthropologist or sociologist in me, won’t let me embrace it as a singular thing. And I fucking hate [new age] spirituality and I hate Unitarianism, I viscerally hate it.

I: Do you think it is a cop out?

J: Yeah, I think it is moral relativism. I think it is more than a cop-out, I think it is an excuse to be sort of self-indulgent and explain away a lot of crap and it makes people feel good without actually doing any good work. I am more of a faith in action kind of guy. You know who I love, and this is going to sound crazy, all the whacko Baptists out there that are trying to do shit to the holy land, like that what they are trying to politically is wrong, but I fucking dig it. I dig people who are willing to live their faith. Now the problem with that crap is that they are also grinding another agenda. Like Mormons, I fucking love the Mormons. And the Jehovah’s! Dude, they are my favorite people, I always invite them in and talk to them for like three hours…
I: You make an interesting divide, but then you can stop it short of, this being real.

J: Yeah, it might be real. No, you are right, because I can because I get it, I understand why we constructed all that stuff from a sociological view. We did that to explain stuff and give us a sense of comfort and we need to heal these psychological wounds about death and these existential issues.

This passage from Jonas is sprawling, intriguing and confusing in this written form, but it is important to note the verve with which he spoke these words. It is difficult to say what Jonas ultimately believes. It is doubtful that he could say. But it is clear that part of what makes him view his quality of life so highly is the intellectual and emotional expenditure he undertakes in attempting to understand. This demonstrates that the theme of Faith is not only a means of support, reassurance and guidance as it was in the earlier examples in this section, but can also serve as a means for intellectual growth.

These seven themes constitute the seven most important elements regarding perceived quality of life identified in the coding of the nine participants’ in-depth interviews. The next section will discuss the impact of educational attainment, scholastic learning experiences and non-scholastic learning experiences on the development of these participants perceived quality of life.

*The Impact of Educational Attainment and Scholastic and Non-Scholastic Learning Experiences on Perceived Quality of Life*

This section will focus on the recollections and beliefs of the participants in relation to the second and third research questions posed in this study:

- What perceived impact did educational attainment have on participants’ perceived quality of life; and
What perceived impact did scholastic learning experiences and non-scholastic learning experiences have on participants’ perceived quality of life?

In this study, educational attainment is defined and assessed using the number of years of schooling obtained by an individual, scholastic learning experience is defined as any learning experience or event that was perceived by the participants to have occurred under education policy or as a part of the approved curriculum designed under the prevailing education policy, and non-scholastic learning experience is defined as any learning experience or event that was perceived by the participants to have occurred under all other circumstances, both inside and outside of the classroom and the school.

The participants had a good deal to say on these topics, and as this section of the narrative will show, those beliefs and recollections will prove interesting in their own right, but they are also important as they will serve as the foundation for the final section of this chapter and the final goal of this research study, the analysis of the Economic Model of Schooling.

Before beginning this section, however, two points on the nature of the research and how it should be interpreted must be discussed. First, specific questions on the impact of scholastic and non-scholastic learning experiences on PQoL were asked of the participants, but the answers to these questions do not constitute the total examination of the two research questions concerning these topics. In fact, most participants had already provided numerous examples of scholastic and non-scholastic learning experiences by the time the specific questions were asked, which allowed their answers to be more summative of earlier statements then new revelations.

Finally, just as there was no theme that could be considered the most important to achieving a high PQoL, no thematic experience or lesson should be inferred by the reader to be the most important experience or lesson to receive from educational attainment or out of
scholastic and non-scholastic settings. While some experiences or lessons were discussed by the participants more often or with greater passion than other experiences or lessons, the small number of participants in this research study makes it impossible to draw any generalizable conclusions.

With these points made, this section of the narrative of findings will begin by exploring the impact of scholastic learning experiences and non-scholastic learning experiences on the theme of Interpersonal Relationships.

**Interpersonal Relationships**

The thematic discussion in this section will cover the theme of Interpersonal Relationships. Interpersonal Relationships were commonly referenced in discussions of non-scholastic learning experiences, but is one of the themes that were never broached in relation to educational attainment. In addition, the theme of Interpersonal Relationships was rarely mentioned in relation to scholastic learning experiences, though a large number of incidences of non-scholastic learning experiences that occurred in schools were mentioned. While this may seem counterintuitive, these experiences tended to occur outside of the classroom before, in between, and after class time and involved peer-to-peer interactions or occurred through mentor/role model relationships with teachers or other adults who were perceived to be going above and beyond what was dictated by policy. It is possible that some of these experiences related to the mentor/role model relationship should actually fall under the category of scholastic learning experiences, but this is not how the participants perceived them. This section will begin with a discussion of the Interpersonal Relationships theme with regard to non-scholastic learning experiences that occurred in schools and will conclude with learning experiences that occurred outside of schools.
The first learning experiences to be discussed in relation to the Interpersonal Relationships theme concern socialization. For the majority of the participants, the majority of the time, socialization was viewed as positive, and mainly consisted of learning, broadly, how to acceptably interact with others, develop friendships and relationships, and discover shared activities of interest. Brian, who was a self-proclaimed “bad student”, nevertheless recalls fondly the social elements of school:

I struggled. Every year, struggled. In fact by the time I got to seventh and eighth grade where you really need to be kind of getting better grades, I struggled even worse, and what made it worse, was, and it is not so much that I hated school because I hated school work, but socially I really liked school. In seventh and eighth grade I had to go to summer school to make up for failing English and failing Math. Six weeks of summer after seventh and eighth grade I had to makeup just to go on to the next grade, so I really struggled. But I like to tell people too that I flunked a couple of classes in eighth grade, but I didn’t miss a day! I was there everyday! Socially, I had a lot of fun.

“good” and “bad” students, alike, echoed this sentiment. Most of the participants found school to be boring most of the time, outside of the subjects they were interested in or were made interested in through excellent teaching, but relished the social interactions with peers throughout the school day.

Not all learning experiences associated with socialization were so fondly remembered, however. Cheryl, an African American woman from a predominantly African American neighborhood who did most of her schooling in that neighborhood, was bussed to a predominantly white neighborhood for a brief part of her schooling. Cheryl learned an ugly element of socialization that unfortunately has a long history in Cincinnati:
Cheryl: Greener [the school she was being bussed to] was about 15 minutes away in a very kind of seedy neighborhood. And seedy which, my family is from the inner-city so the ghetto whole thing didn’t bother me. I was comfortable there. But this was seedy with white people, which was something I wasn’t really familiar with, and it sort of scared me, like they might kill us today when they chase the bus.

I: They chase the bus?

C: Yeah, and threw things at the bus and used the N-word. Yeah.

I: And how old were you?

C: I was twelve.

I: Had you ever experienced stuff like that before?

C: Yeah. On a one-on-one basis, but not like, I’m talking to my friends on the bus, like Are we going to make it home today?...In school it was kind of the same. Recess was always a challenge. Like, is there going to be a race fight today? So it just made us, the kids that came from the other school, a lot closer, and we kind of really stuck together.

Despite this difficult lesson in socialization, Cheryl still found a way to make this learning experience into a positive as she felt she learned about an important element of society at-large and she found companionship, support and security in the other students who came with her from her community. The importance of a mentor or role model was a common component of the Interpersonal Relationship PQoL theme, and many of these mentor/role model relationships were developed through scholastic learning experiences. Most commonly these experiences centered around teachers who either helped a participant discover a topic he or she was interested in, made a perceived boring topic engaging, or helped a participant overcome some difficulty. Some examples of this will be seen later under the Handling Adversity theme,
but a few will be recalled here to establish the mentor/role model concept and to demonstrate the importance of teachers in PQoL development. It is also important to note that rarely did the invaluable interaction by the teacher come from a perceived systemic directive. The majority of the instances recalled by the participants seemed to be individual acts by gifted teachers.

The first two examples come from April. April has a great love of music, and sang in school all the way through college. She recalls where the discovery of this love comes from, while also recalling how valuable it was to her to have a teacher support her when she found a task difficult:

April: Mrs., I can see her face, red hair, short, she was really nice, she was really cuddly and I remember I wasn’t good at cutting circles out and I remember her sitting behind me helping me figure out how to do that.

I: Was that kindergarten?

A: That was kindergarten. Was that preschool? No, that was kindergarten. I remember singing a lot, singing a lot of songs. I remember playing a lot of instruments. I remember my music teacher a lot. Mrs. Bradenbury. She was awesome. She was crazy, but she was a lot of fun, and she may be the reason why I have loved music from a very young age.

The second example from April, who is now a teacher, shows how a teacher made her engaged in learning, regardless of her inherent interest level in the topic. Many of the techniques her teacher used, like experiential learning, she now uses in her own classroom:

April: remember Mr. Eads. He was my fourth grade teacher, he taught all subjects. That was the last time I was taught all some subjects my one teacher. And he had this thing called the Eads Express. It was so cool. If you did something good. And you get these tickets or like any time you did well on a test you would get these tickets and if you got
enough tickets, you could take a ride on the Eads Express. All it was, was a chair that had
wheels and he would whip you around the room and it sounds really stupid, but everyone
liked the Express! And it was like fantastic and he was phenomenal teacher. He was a
very hands-on teacher, everything he did, he was like a drama person, everything was
huge and elaborate, and we were always up and moving around and experiencing stuff
rather than just talking.

I: Is he still teaching?

A: He retired and now he is traveling around the world or something. But he was a really
good teacher, and I just remember him taking a lot of extra time in math. A couple of us
would stay after school sometimes because we weren’t good at math and we would like
draw these huge problems on the board and I remember him having us draw them as big
as we could. And just making it more fun and more functional. Like we didn’t care about
math, but if you make it fun and make it more functional, too. So I liked him a lot.

Brian also speaks of an innovative instructional technique that helped him enjoy a class
he had not enjoyed throughout most of his schooling, English (this is probably due, in part, to an
undiagnosed reading-based learning disability). Brian’s teacher chose an interdisciplinary
approach, incorporating music into literature and writing. Brian has always had an appreciation
for music as he has had a side job as a DJ for over twenty years, and this teacher helped him
explore the relationship between music and writing and literature to the point that this learning
experience has stayed with Brian to this day:

When I was a senior I had a guy named Joe Accedo and he was probably my favorite
teacher I ever had in my life. He was just great. He did literature, I know he did some
Shakespeare. He just made it interesting. He was just the ultimate great guy. He was just
a really good teacher. I still see him from time to time and I am always glad to see him. Because he was just a really great dude. I remember we were getting out for, we were taking our exam, before Christmas break, and we listened to the song America by Simon and Garfunkel and we basically had to write what we thought the song meant. Do you know the song? It is a great song. And I remember what was cool about it, he played it, and then he was like alright I’ll play it again [recites lyrics] I remember writing about that song and then I remember he said Simon and Garfunkel, Paul Simon is the greatest song writer ever. Do you guys care? I’ll just play the whole album. And it was Simon and Garfunkel greatest hits LP. I remember thinking, I am a senior in high school, I am lucky to be going to this school. Where else are people listening to whole Simon and Garfunkel albums while writing our exam. This is our exam.

This example from Brian and the ones before from April serve as good examples of experiences that were perceived as non-scholastic learning experiences that may have actually been scholastic learning experiences. The participants are not curriculum or policy experts, so it is possible that their characterizations of these experiences were incorrect. The point, however, is that these types of experiences happened so rarely for the participants that they made the assumption that these teachers were doing things beyond what was required of them under education policy.

These recollections on Interpersonal Relationships, represent only a sampling of the participants’ feelings on the matter and how it was manifested in schools, but is representative of their overall assertions on this theme. This will be discussed in much greater detail in the analysis section, but it should be reiterated here that very few of these recollections occurred, or were perceived to have occurred, as part of the perceived education policy. Instead, these
positive learning experiences were perceived and reported to have occurred because of highly skilled teachers or outside of the classroom.

Moving to non-scholastic learning experiences outside of schools, the participants stated, and this is true in relation to all PQoL themes, that it was not common for learning experiences to be planned learning experiences, or, at least, for those lessons to be understood as planned learning experiences. Additionally, it was not uncommon for these experiences to only be viewed as learning experiences upon later reflection. Finally, it was not uncommon for these learning experiences to take place over long periods of time, as opposed to singular events. Francine offers a perfect example of all three of these thematic characteristics in describing how she learned, mostly from her mother’s words and example during Francine’s childhood, to be the type of person she wanted to be in all parts of her life:

Francine: My parents. My mom. Because my mom, she was there. She had to work, but she was there. She wanted me, you know, she showed me how to be a parent and how to take care of yourself. Because once you know how to take care of yourself, it is an easy thing.

I: What do you mean by take care of yourself?

F: Taking care of yourself in terms of life, being a woman, being a lady, going to work, being responsible, taking care of yourself. Don’t put that off on anybody else thinking the world owes you something, the world doesn’t owed you anything. You gotta go out there and get it yourself. My parents always worked. My mom aint never been one of those women, cause you have some of these families where the mom has always been in the system on public assistance, it goes into the kids, it is a generation thing. And I know a lot of families like that. It is a generation thing. My mom worked since I was two years
old. My dad always worked. I grew up around people who always took care of
themselves. And I never heard them complaining about things, little things, always
fussing.

Francine was not alone in learning lessons on how one should live one’s life through
family members, though the lessons were often learned in different ways. Gayle, who had a
difficult childhood filled with abuse, foster care and the criminal justice system, learned from her
mother who she did not want to be, and that she should not and could not live her life like her
mother. Louise, who served as a caregiver to her mother who probably suffered from bipolar
disorder before such a diagnosis existed, learned a different, but valuable lesson, on human
needs. Referencing this care-giving, Louise stated, “it gave me, I think, an awareness of the
fragility of a person’s life as well as how to comfort.” Louise has gone on to live a life filled with
activity and exploration, and helping others less fortunate than herself and she learned that this
was important and valuable to her at her mother’s sick bed.

The non-scholastic learning experiences related to the Interpersonal Relationships PQoL
theme did not all come from parents. Jonas, who dropped out of college to wander around the
country for several years, found the security and stability that he knew he needed in the woman
who would become his wife:

I: Did she play a role in helping you buckle down?

Jonas: Buckle down? Yeah. Absolutely no question. I mean I loved her and we had a
place together and immediately I got a job in the mental health system, which was weird
right, through the Mount, through co-op, and I am still in the mental health system. I had
just wanted a normal life. I had done my thing, I had done it very intensely, I had done it
very fast, but I was like, I needed structure.
It was also true that not all of the non-scholastic Interpersonal Relationship learning experiences contributed such overarching life lessons. Most were small instances that, if nothing else, showed the participants how important relationships are to their well-being. April offers one such small example of her mother:

We had a ritual. My mom, my mom is awesome, she is awesome. We were not allowed to go to school without eating breakfast. We weren’t allowed to leave the house without eating breakfast and taking our vitamins. And she would be like running after us out the door yelling you didn’t take your vitamins. It was embarrassing. I remember one time she showed up at school with my vitamins because I forgot to take them. She was the same way with dinner. She would work a full day and then she would come home and cook a huge dinner, not just putting stuff in the microwave, and we would all sit around the dinner table and everybody had to go around and talk about their day at school.

Surely what April describes here is a small event, but has had a lasting impact on her because even though her mother may have embarrassed her at times, she knew she loved her, and April needed this. Indeed, all of the participants recalled a similar need, not necessarily from a parent, but from someone. With these types of relationships, the participants’ PQoL was enhanced. The next section will explore the participants’ recollections on scholastic and non-scholastic learning experiences associated with the PQoL theme of Engagement.

**Engagement**

The thematic discussion in this section will cover the theme of Engagement. Engagement was, like Interpersonal Relationships, commonly referenced in discussions of both scholastic and non-scholastic learning experiences, but is one of the themes that were never broached in relation to educational attainment. This section will first discuss the impact of scholastic learning
experiences on PQoL development, and then move to non-scholastic learning experiences.

Participants from all economic backgrounds found Engagement to be important to PQoL development, but in examining scholastic learning experiences associated with Engagement, there are some clear similarities and differences between the participants from more affluent backgrounds and those from less affluent backgrounds. Physical activity or sports proved to be one area where there was general agreement. Being engaged in sports, particularly school-sponsored sports, proved to be valuable for these participants across social backgrounds because of its social and community-building components. Hadley, though she is discussing general engagement in sports as a youth (youth leagues as well as school teams), sums up the general feeling presented by the participants on physical activity:

I had fun. I think it broadens you and helps socially, you know, you meet kids. I think socially, especially when you are little. When you play soccer a lot of it is learning to share, learning to work with others, learning to interact with other kids, I mean come on you are not going to be Olympians at five, right? So you are just out there learning how to interact. And then also developmentally, playing sports, playing music, anything artistic, you know it draws on different parts of the brain I think, makes you think differently, taps into your creative side.

Toward the end of that quote, Hadley crosses into another element of engagement, which is the development of creative or artistic abilities. It is with this area that one can begin to see a difference in scholastic experiences with students from varying economic backgrounds. The participants who attended schools in more affluent neighborhoods appeared to have far more opportunities to develop and express their creativity. We read earlier from April’s recollections on the importance of music and singing to her life and how a teacher helped her in finding this
passion. The availability of arts, music, sports and other extracurricular activities was expressed by all of the participants from more affluent, middle-class and higher, backgrounds or who attended schools in more affluent environments. Those participants that did not fall into this economic/scholastic realm did generally mention the importance of creative engagement, but did not recall any scholastic learning experiences associated with it.

The same general principle existed for the engagement components of volunteerism and community involvement. April offers a few recollections of the types of activities available to her and are common in more affluent schools:

In high school I did Key Club, which was a volunteer thing, so you would go to nursing homes or soup kitchens or really anywhere that needed volunteers. I remember I would go to the nursing homes and I would read. I really liked it actually… I did [also] help a little girl, not a little girl, she was in my grade, who, I can’t think of what she had, but she was wheelchair bound, and she had a computer that she communicated with, and I helped her, I took her to all of her classes and I sat with her. They gave her the same class schedule as me, kind of, so I would just kind of explain things to her and talk to her. So they gave us opportunities like that, but not classes per say, that I remember. But we had like opportunities within class, like Everybody Counts Week, or something, so you could go to a school for kids with disabilities.

Still, some of the participants lamented that not more was done with the resources available to them. A perfect example of this is Jonas. He attended Indian Hills High School, a very wealthy school in a very exclusive Cincinnati suburb. He was only able to attend this school because his father was a teacher there during Jonas’s high school years. While he felt the education he received was excellent in that it taught him how to think critically about and
analyze a topic, and it exposed him to ideas and opportunities not commonly available in schools, he lamented, from a social justice perspective, the lack of societal and community engagement:

But my social justice point, what shocked me about it, and I think my father would say, to drive a principle, I get angry about social justice issues and um, you know, I didn’t see a lot of good work being done by those families and that was weird to me because I grew up in this, again, this sort of Sisters of Charity, Jesuit tradition, like everybody did social justice work. And these guys weren’t and they had all the authority and it was bizarro to me.

While the mostly positive experiences described above were important lessons, ultimately, the participants related far more experiences involving engagement that took place in non-scholastic settings. Not surprisingly, many of these learning experiences occurred in the home, and were fostered by parents, caregivers or siblings. Louise, who had a tumultuous relationship with her parents, due to her father’s emotional distance and her mother’s mental illness, nevertheless learned of the value of music, through her childhood experiences in her own home:

I tell you, as other people who have known my life, my experiences, my mother was very musical. And the house lent itself to entertaining because it had a huge downstairs and huge hallways, so she was often asked to entertain for the symphony and the opera and the artist series and all the wonderful things that we still have. So as a child I met all of the world’s great artists and musicians.

Gayle, too, has embraced creative engagement through non-scholastic learning experiences, and has found an interesting additional element to creative engagement, which is
that engagement through artistic creativity can also serve as a community engagement tool. She has come up with countless, what she calls “inventions”, that are all geared toward helping others cope with and overcome life difficulties. These include not only writing creative, but instructional books based off of her life experiences and a number of projects like the one recalled in this exchange:

I: So you think doing all this creative stuff has helped you?

Gayle: Yeah, cause I couldn’t express, but with my talents and my skills and come up with all kinds of crap if I want to. Greeting cards, I was prophesized that I would have a greeting card business, but nobody knows that I carry around boxes of greeting cards with me when I see someone sad I will get the card and write stuff in it and give it to them.

Brian offers another example of engagement that was viewed as important to PQoL to many of the participants, and that is using engagement as a means to create a sense of community. The example Brian gives is from his childhood and his time in the Boy Scouts. This experience has stayed with him and is something he laments not having done more with. Part of the reason for this lament is because his father was a Boy Scout and Brian, as described earlier, cared deeply for his father, but the other reason he misses the Boy Scouts was the camaraderie, volunteerism, involvement with nature and the sense of accomplishment that he felt through this community. He describes some of those factors in this recollection:

I was a Boy Scout. I was in Cub Scouts for about three years when I was a little kid, and then I got into Boy Scouts when I was in the sixth grade and I stayed in the Boy Scouts into my senior year in high school, and that is about when I dropped out. which is a pretty long time. I never really advanced very far in Boy Scouts. I made it to first class. That is
one of those other things, if its like, if I could go back and do my life over again, I don’t
know if I would go back and get a bachelor’s degree, but I damn sure would have been an
Eagle Scout. I am always proud of kids who get Eagle Scout because you have to work
hard to get it.

One last example of a non-scholastic learning experience impacting a participant’s
perspective on the engagement theme comes from Jonas. Jonas dropped out of college around
the age of 20 and traveled around the United States, following bands, hitchhiking, visiting hip
cities, living on communes and any number of other activities typically associated with that
youthful notion of finding one’s self. In Jonas’ case he did, at least in part, find himself, and he
did so through his interactions with others, most notably through the homeless, drug-addled and
mentally ill people that he met in his years on the road. Through these experiences he realized
that more could be done to help these people and that helping these people is something he
should be doing. He went back to school and has been working in the mental health field ever
since. Almost twenty years later he still speaks with great passion about his belief in helping
others and his desire to see more be done to help those less fortunate:

It is a struggle because again there are so many systemic and cultural barriers to doing the
type of work that I want to have done and it is always a resource struggle, not just
personally, but in terms of the system and the folks that we work with, and again I think
this is born out of, and this sounds righteous, and I am really not that righteous because I
really have a strong appreciation of the nature of being, but social justice, man. These are
folks who are struggling with these horrendous illnesses that I would argue are among the
most difficult life experiences that exist. And they are incredibly marginalized in terms of
not just who they are personally but as a group. They are stigmatized because of their
illnesses and lay on top of that the crushing poverty that comes with mental illness. Add on top of that this notion that our culture is sort of anti-poverty. It is not something that we embrace.

Both of the first two themes, Interpersonal Relationships and Engagement, dealt with the importance of participants’ interactions with others and the learning experiences that helped them understand that importance. With the next theme, Internal Motivation/Personality, the participants move away from interactions with others to focus on internal traits.

**Internal Motivation/Personality**

The PQoL theme of Internal Motivation/Personality, encompasses internal motivators and personality traits that the participants believed were not learned, but were innate elements of their being. The Internal Motivation/Personality theme is different from the other PQoL themes, in that the learning experiences described here are not examples of the participants discovering what they need external to themselves to achieve a high PQoL, as is the case with the other themes, but rather discovering who they are and how they have to act or behave across all experiences to achieve a high PQoL. This section will describe some of the scholastic and non-scholastic learning experiences that led to the participants’ realizations about their internal motivations and personality characteristics.

The first example of an Internal Motivation/Personality learning experience comes from Cheryl’s childhood and encompasses both scholastic and non-scholastic elements. Cheryl has always had a love of learning and a love of school for the sake of knowledge acquisition. Cheryl describes this and how it has impacted her desire to finish her college degree:

It was just the learning. That’s just how I was. Like as a child, my cousins always wanted to play like house or operation or something and I was always like “let’s do Spelling
Bee.” Let’s do grammar and sentence structure and what’s the difference between synonyms and antonyms and they’d be like “Shut up!” And honestly in my entire family, and there’s probably forty cousins who are my mother’s siblings and their children. There are only two people in our entire family who have a college degree, there’s probably five people who have even gone to college. And sad is probably too strong a word, but I just don’t think that’s good. So I don’t know I just love school.

Cheryl clearly demonstrates that her love of learning and her need to continue to learn was internally driven. For example, when she states, “That’s just how I was.” she is stating that she always loved learning, and it was not something she developed. From her first introduction into schooling, Cheryl realized this and relished the scholastic learning activities that many around her found boring to the point that she would “play” these activities at home, and in so doing, engaged in both scholastic and non-scholastic learning experiences that reinforced the importance of this internal drive to her PQoL development.

While Cheryl’s recollection above demonstrates internal motivation, this example from Francine looks at a personality trait. Through too many non-scholastic learning experiences with people she found to be negative Francine discovered her own understanding of self:

I can’t be miserable or unhappy. I don’t know, I am a happy person…

Inner peace. With me. I know who I am. I am for sure who I am. And I like me. And I guess, that is kind of true, if you really like yourself that will show as you present yourself to other people. You know what I mean. Because if you are nasty and grumpy that will show. If every time somebody says something to you, you are snappin’ or you don’t ever smile, that says something about you. You ain’t at peace with yourself. You don’t like yourself too much.
What Francine discovered about herself, mostly through a lot of negative experiences with co-workers, was that she is and always has been, a positive, happy person who does not like stress, anger and hatred, and that she naturally moves away from these emotions that she does not like and can center herself in a way that makes her feel better and helps her outwardly express this personality trait.

These examples from Cheryl and Francine, taught them things about themselves. The next PQoL theme to be discussed, Handling Adversity, will return to the more externally-focused discussions involving learning experiences related to PQoL of the earlier themes.

Handling Adversity

The PQoL theme of Handling Adversity is an element of quality of life that surrounded experiences that were unique, individual challenges that may not have been areas of difficulty for others but that nevertheless needed to be overcome by individual participants to achieve a high PQoL. Participants experienced adversity in both scholastic and non-scholastic situations and in a variety of ways. Some examples of overcoming or handling adversity were brought to the forefront by internalized pressures to succeed or achieve, while other examples consisted of events or actions put upon the participants that they had no choice but to confront. The discussion of the Handling Adversity theme will begin with recollections related to educational attainment and scholastic learning experiences.

Cheryl gives an example of the Handling Adversity theme related to educational attainment. This example could have also served as an example of the Internal Motivation/Personality theme, again demonstrating the overlap between themes. Cheryl has wanted a college degree ever since she was a child, and has the skills needed to achieve this goal, but has been unable to accomplish this goal because of familial responsibilities and financial circumstances that have prevented her from pursuing her educational goals.

The examples from Cheryl and Francine, taught them things about themselves. The next PQoL theme to be discussed, Handling Adversity, will return to the more externally-focused discussions involving learning experiences related to PQoL of the earlier themes.
considerations. Still, she has carried on and is currently only a few courses away from completion. Here, she discusses a major life change that she made to make it possible to achieve her goal:

    I felt incomplete without a degree. And I wanted to go on for advanced degrees, not just my bachelor’s, but all the way. I just had to go back. I thought about it long and hard, prayed about it, I kind of pondered this thing for like three months and I finally got up enough courage to say I want to take a package. So I took a package. Left P&G in August. And they paid for school, plus I had a severance deal. And I started at UC back at Raymond Walters to finish up the two quarters I needed for my Associate’s. I started that September.

Cheryl clearly believes that the success of completing her degree will serve as a source of pride and will improve her PQoL, and this belief seems to be internally driven.

    Brian offers another example of the Handling Adversity theme related to educational attainment. This one, however, seems to be derived from an external source. Brian’s experience occurred in high school and centered on his inability to learn well and receive good grades. The constant failures he was experiencing hurt his PQoL and were it not for some academic and life-skill support he received from a couple of his teachers, Brian may have had difficulty finishing high school, and more than likely would not have gone on to receive his Associate’s Degree. He describes his situation, the help he received and the resulting success:

    But by high school, I struggled my first couple of quarters as a freshman, and I remember, that is when it hit me, man, I’m flunking classes, I can’t let this happen. Well, at Elder you are on academic probation if you are failing more than one class, which I was, so then they put you with a teacher which was sort of a counselor type, and that was
basically someone who would help you with your struggles. And I man named Mr. Dirger when I was a freshman at Elder and he helped me, I went and saw him every morning, it was only fifteen minutes every morning for the entire quarter I guess, and basically he helped me learn how to study to put it bluntly. And it helped. I turned my grades around and the rest of my high school years, I didn’t take a lot of the higher ended classes in high school, I was never in those classes, but in the classes I took I did real well, I made second honors a couple of times, and I didn’t fail anything.

Brian’s overcoming adversity also indicates an important element of this theme, which is that it is often necessary to have the help of others to achieve the desired results. Gayle offers another example of the help others can bring to the Handling Adversity theme in a scholastic setting. It should be pointed out though, that Gayle did not receive any help battling major issues of childhood sexual abuse, neglect and anorexia in a traditional school. It took going to a residential program for juvenile offenders before she started to receive the counseling and academic help she needed to overcome her personal adversities. In this recollection, Gayle describes her experience at Riverview:

Gayle: I’m going to guess, 12. Riverview was the longest place. And I was in shock when I reached there, I didn’t know who to trust. who to talk to. I was anorexic. I weighed 78 pounds. I wouldn’t eat at home. I didn’t trust my mother. And I just didn’t know. And then I started seeing a man. Well, he looked like you, but he was thinner and his beard was bigger and his hair was more and he had glasses and he was the nicest man I have ever met in my life.

I: How old are you at this point?

G: 13, maybe 13. And he started seeing me three times a week and he got me to talking,
but first he said I want you to yell. And he said I am going to tell the guards to just let you scream, so I started screaming. And from yelling and stuff, he said I want you to write, and he said one day, you are not going to believe this, but you are going to be a writer, and then I started writing. And he said I want you to just write a letter to your mother and tell her all the abuse that happened and then ask her to come up here to visit you. She won’t hit you or abuse you, and he showed me all of the guards downstairs and whatever. And it took awhile, but I did it. I got the most help, I think out of all of my childhood, there.

I: So the guy was a counselor or a teacher?

G: He was a psychiatrist, yeah, no medicine no shock no nothing, just scream.

It was books. And it was life skills with the counselors. They would just sit you down and rap to you, they just gave you some commonsense and some wisdom. It was everything hashed out at you, that was good, and you’d take it because you are locked up year round in here and you get it right, you know, you learn, and that is what we did.

Earlier in this chapter, it was stated that this experience at Riverview alone was not enough to overcome her adversities, and that it was not until some non-scholastic learning experiences she had in prison before she completely turned her life around. Pointing this out is important because for the participants, rarely did the overcoming of adversity entail a singular, epiphanal moment. Instead, it took a great deal of time, stops and starts, internal questioning and external support, and more often occurred outside of a scholastic setting. The last two examples on the theme of Handling Adversity contained all of these elements and occurred through non-scholastic learning experiences.
The first example comes from April. During her childhood her biological father (who she did not have a relationship with) committed suicide, and on an almost annual basis, a friend or family member died. She describes how she dealt with these situations, in particular, the support she received and offered to her family, and how it has impacted her own outlook on life and her PQoL:

April: I feel like with the cards that I was dealt, I played them pretty well. Other than the suicide, there were a lot of things growing up that happened in my family that were not typical happy things that would happen in a childhood. We had a lot of people die. Just from various weird random reasons.

I: Friends or family members?
A: Yeah, friends and family, a lot of cancers and suicides.

I: Like uncle, grandparent?

A: Yeah, on both sides, all sides of my family. There was a ten-year span of time when just everyone I knew, somebody in some shape or form of our family, died. It wasn’t, obviously, good, but I think my whole family banded together and got through it. And it made us all stronger and we talked about it a lot, talked through it a lot. I think it just kind of helped me put things in perspective and still to this day helps me put things in perspective, so I am really grateful for everything that I have, and so many people have things way less than I did, and way worse circumstances than I did. I just feel like I was given a really good life, and I think I have done a good job with myself. I am trying to be a good person, and there are obviously things that I could have done better and that I would change if given the opportunity. But I kind of think that everything happens for a
reason. I don’t kind of think, I think that everything happens for a reason. I am okay with it. Life is good.

There is a calmness and a perspective to the way April looks at life that is a strength in achieving her high PQoL, and she would argue that this strength stems from her ability to confront and come to terms with these adversities. The last recollection of a non-scholastic learning experience related to adversity comes from Louise, and her ability to confront her adversities has led to a similar strengthening of her PQoL as was described by April.

Louise, starting at a very young age, had to care for her sick mother. Over time Louise learned to do this very well, and it brought her mother a sense of peace to have her around. Interestingly, in overcoming the challenge of caring for her mother, she learned what she believed to be some fundamental truths about people, and this experience with her mother has greatly affected the way she interacts with all people. Louise describes how this process unfolded for her:

As I got older I had to maintain that kind of oversight of my mother, not because that was something that was, that was not something that people said this is what you do Louise. It was my sense that she was happier, and quieter and calmer when I was with her. And in time, as I got older and her needs seemed to change from time to time, I began to realize in many ways that she depended on me entirely to be the person that would keep her safe. And you know that is a big thing to have come into your life. And I did it well. And what it did was, you know, it brought me a sense of the vulnerability of adults, which is not what every kid is looking for.

This phenomenon Louise describes seemed to be a regular occurrence among the participants who overcame adversity, showing that handling adversity in one circumstance can have a
positive impact on other parts of life, making its impact on PQoL even greater.

The ability to handle adversity is clearly important to these participants achieving a high PQoL, and these recollections demonstrate that the circumstances and experiences that cause adversity can come from anywhere, including inside and outside of scholastic situations. These recollections also demonstrate that outside support is often needed to overcome adversity, that the impact of overcoming adversity in one situation can have an impact on confronting future adversities, and that other parts of life not directly involved in an adversity can be impacted by the adversity.

For the theme of Handling Adversity, the participants had a great deal to say, expressing themselves in long recollections. In the next section, however, the theme of Financial Security is discussed and a shift can be seen in the participants’ discussion style. Financial Security is certainly important to them, but they had difficulty expressing themselves beyond the point of saying that not having enough Financial Security would negatively impact PQoL.

Financial Security

The PQoL theme of Financial Security was one of the more difficult themes for the participants to elaborate on in relation to scholastic and non-scholastic learning experiences. As was shown earlier in this chapter, eight of the nine participants said that Financial Security was important to their well-being, and that financial security did not necessarily mean “being rich”, but the participants had a great deal of difficulty elaborating on why they felt this way and what events brought them to this understanding. Some participants, like Cheryl and Francine, felt that financial security did not equate to some sense of happiness; that miserable people can exist in every tax bracket, but they did not offer examples of experiences that made them feel this way. With other participants, their troubles elaborating on this theme may have come from never truly
being in a dire financial situation as David described earlier.

Still, two experiences, one related to educational attainment and one related to non-scholastic learning, were recalled that at least shed some light on how participants ended up with this “comfortable middle” feeling about the Financial Security theme. The first experience is a non-scholastic learning experience that comes from Francine. She describes why Meals on Wheels was one of her favorite jobs, and why she ultimately had to leave Meals on Wheels for another job:

Because I met a lot of old people and I drove around and I didn’t have a boss, I had a boss on the radio, but I didn’t have a boss over my back. And I went everywhere delivering meals on wheels. And that was one of my favorite jobs, I just didn’t make no money. But I enjoyed the job.

In this recollection, Francine is stating that the Meals on Wheels job did not strike the balance she was seeking between different PQoL elements. This job contributed positively to the theme of Occupation/Occupational Identity for Francine, but negatively impacted Financial Security to the point that it outweighed the positive impact the job was having on her PQoL. Francine had to leave her position in search of a job that would meet her Financial Security needs, meet her Occupation/Occupational Identity needs, and presumably meet other PQoL needs as well.

David offers a recollection on Financial Security in relation to educational attainment, both his and his father’s, which shows the importance of generational success. David’s father’s is a doctor who owns his own oncology practice. The financial security that came with his father’s success allowed David to not have to worry about the struggles associated with poverty, thus allowing him to be able to go to school to find a profession he could be passionate about. Here he describes his decision-making and how it relates to his parents’ educational attainment:
I didn’t go to college to get a well-paying job. I went to college to find something that I
wanted to do. Which, I think a lot of people don’t get to do that. But then again, I don’t
have kids and I’m not married. I’m actually an inexpensive person myself, although I’d
be perfectly happy if I spent half of the money I spend now. I guess I didn’t tie education
to earning power; even though I guess it does, I mean I have a law degree, which is funny
to think of (laugh). But as I said, my dad he went to school until he was, he graduated
medical school and then had another whatever, 8 years of schooling to become a doctor,
to make a lot of money, so in that sense, yes my life would probably be a lot different if
my dad and mom didn’t go to college.

David’s comments also demonstrate how educational attainment can impact the next theme,
Occupation/Occupational Identity, by showing that a high-level of educational attainment was
often viewed as necessary to achieve the Occupation or Occupational Identity that some of the
participants sought in order to achieve a desired PQoL, and that, for some, led to their feeling of
financial security.

**Occupation/Occupational Identity**

The theme of Occupation/Occupational Identity was shown earlier in this chapter to be of
varying levels of importance amongst the participants. For those participants who felt that
Occupation/Occupational Identity was very important to PQoL, educational attainment and
scholastic learning experiences often played a vital role in achieving their occupational goals.
This role was often realized in one of two ways (or a combination of both), through a scholastic
learning experience that enlightened them to a potential occupation or through educational
attainment and the credentialing needed for admittance into a profession. David is a good
example of the combination of enlightenment and credentialing. David is a lawyer and needed to
go to law school to be admitted into the profession, but he did not always know that he wanted to be a lawyer until he was an undergraduate at the University of Vermont. He recalls how he came to the decision to enter the legal profession and to go to law school:

I thought it was kind of an extension of what I did in college. I thought it would be, I thought it sort of fit what I was good at. I thought I’d like it. I like arguing. It was fun. And analysis. And I was a history and philosophy major in college, and you know the law is really history and philosophy. I thought it might be something that I would be good at.

With Hadley it is not as clear where or how she decided she wanted to be an engineer, but it is clear that she used scholastic learning experiences and educational attainment to make her desire a reality. Throughout high school she took the most difficult mathematics and science courses; she went to a university renowned for its engineering departments, Purdue University; and she immediately took an engineering job at General Electric upon completing her degree and has quickly moved up within her department. Hadley’s educational attainment and scholastic learning experiences clearly, positively impacted her occupational choice and her identity within that occupation. Despite this, Hadley, like many of the participants, expresses occupational identity’s importance in relation to her family. She describes the relationship here:

Well, I like to think that my job doesn’t define me, but I do enjoy doing a good job at work, so I like doing well and I like when opportunities arise. I like to think, particularly now that I am married, I have two children, I like to think that people see me as more than that and I actually think that, while work is a huge part of me and I am there a lot and I spend a lot of time trying to do well and learn more in that area, I also spend a lot of time at home and with my kids. I like to think that I am pretty good about it at work, you know say hey, set boundaries, I have to go, I need to be with my family. I think it is a
pretty good mix, I mean from my perspective.

For April the lines are even a little more blurred than they were for Hadley. April, a teacher of students with special needs, gets great satisfaction out of her job and it definitely has a positive impact on her PQoL. Also, to be a deaf educator she needed the credentialing that only comes with a high level of educational attainment. It would appear, however, that April’s decision to enter this profession marks an interesting confluence of scholastic and non-scholastic learning as it appears to stem both from her own experiences in school and she learned by watching her parents and the impact they had on her as teachers. She explains:

I knew from a really young age, but not knowing to what degree, that I wanted to work with special needs kids, I just didn’t know in what capacity, though it is funny because my mom, all growing up I can hear her in my brain saying don’t go into special ed, don’t go into special ed, and now I am in special ed, I don’t know why, but I don’t know I just always thought that what she did was so neat. She always had these parents calling her thanking her for how much she improved her child’s life, their family’s life and that just seems awesome. And my dad was a coach as well as a teacher, and all the kids always loved him, and even now I will run into people who had my parents as a teacher or as a coach and everybody is always talking about how they changed their life and how happy they were to have teachers like that, and I just always thought that, that would be a neat profession, rewarding I guess.

The last reflection on learning experiences related to Occupation/Occupational Identity comes from Cheryl, and regards non-scholastic learning experiences and “Life 101”. Cheryl states:

Yeah, I think having education opened doors to me; helped open doors to me that may
not have been open if I did not have the education, and I think sometimes it may have been the deciding factor for jobs or anything. I mean it helps. A black woman definitely could use higher education versus not having any. It’s not like take or leave it. You got to have it. I think it does play a part in quality of life because the more education you have, the more opportunities you have the, the better chance you have at having a high quality of life, however, if your internal controls and planning and design don’t really perpetuate that, you are going to be screwed up. We have a saying, “You can take the Negro out of the ghetto, but you can’t take the ghetto out of the Negro.” If you have a master’s degree, but you still take your whole paycheck and spend it on non-value added things that don’t grow or generate income, you might as well be down in OTR standing in front of the liquor store. I mean “what are you doing?” You have to change your mentality. I know people who have master’s degrees and they are temps. I don’t get that. Was the degree too specialized? Or what is the deal? And then in talking to them, I know why. I mean you have gone to school and you’re educated, but have you taken Life 101 application skills. I mean it just doesn’t mesh. I think I have been fortunate to have common sense, life maneuvering skills and education.

This quote demonstrates Cheryl’s belief that credentialing and achieving a high level of educational attainment can definitely allow individuals to find employment in more selective fields, which is why she continues to work toward her college degree, but that if these individuals do not gain real world, life skills—skills she did not feel were taught in any scholastic situation—that ultimately they would not do as well in their chosen occupations or in life in general. Cheryl is describing the balance that she feels must exist between educational attainment and real world experience to achieve a high PQoL, and she is very thankful that she
attained, through non-scholastic learning experiences, the skills that she believes are necessary for her to achieve in work and life outside of work.

**Faith**

The PQoL theme of Faith is the final PQoL theme to be discussed in relation to educational attainment, scholastic learning experiences and non-scholastic learning experiences. This theme proved difficult to discuss in relation to educational attainment and scholastic learning experiences because of this research study’s focus on public schooling and research design flaws. The issues and limitations in relation to the Faith theme are discussed in Chapter Five.

Despite these flaws, it is still worthwhile to discuss the Faith theme in relation to non-scholastic learning experiences. Earlier in this chapter, Brian described the general importance of Catholicism to his PQoL. In this example of a non-scholastic learning experience, Brian demonstrates that in difficult times in his life, he turns to the Catholic Church for guidance and support. Brian went through a divorce several years ago and during this process he sought an annulment from the church because by church doctrine only through an annulment can a divorce be “legal”, for lack of a better term, in the eyes of God. He describes this process:

> An annulment is much more difficult from a personal and an emotional standpoint than an actual divorce. Or it’s a lot more complicated than getting married. It’s a lot harder to get unmarried if you’re a Catholic than to get married. It’s, it’s basically, um, it’s a series of questions and it’s not yes and no questions, you really go through a battery of answering, and it’s more than just why you don’t want to be married to this soon-to-be ex-spouse. A lot of it is your childhood, upbringing, relationships, you know. And it’s a big deal in the Catholic Church...It’s good though in a sense because it’s a total cleansing
of your soul. And so for me, it was a good thing. But, it’s a tough process to go through, I’m not going to lie to you- it was very emotional at several points of that. But in the end I felt good, it was like, okay, you know, the monkey’s off my back. This was a load lifted and I felt a lot better.

Brian needed the guidance and support of the Catholic Church to create an inner sense of well-being not that dissimilar to the approval described in the interpersonal relationship and engagement themes.

Gayle, too, turned to Faith during a particularly difficult experience in her life. Gayle did not turn to an organized religion as Brian did, but instead turned to Jesus Christ, and fully believes without “His” assistance and guidance she would have died long ago. Gayle has been through many heartbreaking situations in her life, but below she describes the specific event that led her to find Jesus:

Well, it was by the grace of god that they [the police] caught me. Because I think I would have been dead if I would have kept going my way. He [her boyfriend and criminal partner] was a doper and he took some gold coins that were from the 1700s… And he took them and got like about 5000 dollars say for one and he got greedy and he went back [and got caught] and when he went back they found a hotel key in his pocket and they came back to the hotel and I was there. So I got caught, but I am glad that I got caught. [In jail] I just stayed to myself pretty much and I discovered Jesus Christ over the radio and I never knew anything about Jesus Christ and that was the greatest thing that ever happened to me.

I: What was on the radio?

Reverend Schambach. A lady had left the radio for me to listen to. She had shared Christ
with me and then I had the radio on and he came on and he started talking about Jesus
dying that we may have life, and have life more abundantly and at that point I had never
had any life. And I thought, and I just fell on my knees and said if there is a God, help me
and from that point on I just went forward.

After this revelatory experience, Gayle got her GED, stopped doing drugs, stopped
stealing and got a job. When asked if she now viewed herself as having a high quality of life,
Gayle immediately invoked her faith in Jesus, showing just how fundamental her faith is in her
perceived well-being:

I like my life because I don’t have the guilt and the pain and I have Jesus healing me
from that and that if nobody don’t love me, he love me. He has been my mother, my
father and my protector and my provider. He provides all my needs that make me happy.

These two non-scholastic learning experiences involving Faith, demonstrate not only the
degree of importance it can have in an individual’s life, but also the breadth of circumstances and
experiences that can be impacted by this PQoL theme.

Over the course of this chapter, the participants have shared their views on what they
perceive as a high quality of life and the contributions that educational attainment and scholastic
learning experiences and non-scholastic learning experiences have made to these perceptions.
Ultimately, seven major themes related to PQoL were developed in this study through the coding
of the nine participants’ in-depth interviews. Each participant viewed his or her own quality of
life as good or great, and as such, having a positive relationship to each theme can be viewed as
contributing to a high quality of life, while having a negative relationship to a theme can be
viewed as hampering a high quality of life. The seven PQoL themes are Interpersonal
Relationships, Engagement, Internal Motivation/Personality, Handling Adversity, Financial

These same seven themes were then examined to assess the role educational attainment, scholastic learning experiences, and non-scholastic learning experiences played in the development of their PQoL. The findings suggest that educational attainment had a notable impact on PQoL through the theme of Occupation/Occupational Identity, and also through specific incidences related to the themes of Internal Motivation/Personality, Handling Adversity, and Financial Security, and notable scholastic learning experiences involved engagement with specific skill development, organized sports and music, and with handling various types of adversity.

The findings also suggest that the most notable areas of impact that took place in school were on Interpersonal Relationships through peer socialization and on all themes through positive student-teacher/authority figure contact. Overall, however, the most often discussed learning experiences that had an impact on PQoL occurred outside of the formal school setting, and came through “real world” experiences and familial and community contact. The next section will engage the last purpose of this research study by analyzing the participants’ recollections in relation to the Economic Model of Schooling.

Analysis of The Economic Model of Schooling Construct

Education in the United States has always had several purposes for its citizenry with one of those purposes being the development of economic prosperity for both the individual and society. The Economic Model of Schooling demonstrates that over the past few decades, economic factors have become the driving force behind educational policy and curricular change. This change appears to have occurred as a reaction to the United States falling behind a number of other countries on key measures of educational attainment, inducing the concern that
our poor showing on these issues of educational attainment will lead the United States to fall behind other nations in the burgeoning innovation economy. The proof that the United States is indeed using this model is laid out in Chapter Two.

The assumption, then, underlying this increasing role of economic considerations on education policy and curriculum is that improving scholastic attainment will help the United States maintain its powerful position in the world economy, which in turn will lead to greater individual and societal economic rewards (Anyon, 2005), and that greater individual and societal economic rewards will lead to an improved quality of life for the citizenry. What is still unclear and what is the ultimate question, then, of this analysis is what is the relationship between this Economic Model of Schooling and the participant-constructed understanding of quality of life? When the participants’ recollections and beliefs about their PQoLs, educational attainment, scholastic learning experiences and non-scholastic learning experiences are used to analyze this relationship, a number of findings are uncovered, many of which lead to additional questions that should be explored by future research (these are explored in Chapter Five). The analysis of these findings will begin with an examination of the relationship between the Economic Model of Schooling and the PQoL themes developed from the participants’ recollections and beliefs.

The Economic Model of Schooling states that economic considerations are important to quality of life. When the participants were allowed to determine the elements in their lives that contributed to their overall well-being, they included two themes that directly show that economic considerations are important to their PQoL, Financial Security and Occupation/Occupational Identity. In terms of the Financial Security theme, many of the participants made it explicitly clear that they felt it was imperative to their well-being that they have enough money to pay all of their bills, have insurance coverage, have enough money to
purchase some “wants”, and to help others in a variety of ways. For the Occupation/Occupational Identity theme, many of the participants expressed the importance of having an occupation because that meant achieving financial security, and some of the participants expressed value in the intrinsic nature of their occupation, finding that enjoyment of their occupation was a key component to their identity and their overall well-being. With these two themes proving to be so fundamental to PQoL, it does suggest that a focus on economic considerations in school is a valid aim for education policy and curriculum.

While there is clearly a relationship between the PQoL themes involving economic considerations, the Economic Model of Schooling cannot only be examined exclusively in terms of issues related to these concepts. Earlier in this chapter Jonas described his complaint over his high school’s lack of social justice initiatives. In the passages to follow, Louise extends this complaint beyond social justice issues in one school to what she perceives as negative trends running throughout the entire public school system and in so doing describes much of what the participants feel is missing from the Economic Model of Schooling in relation to PQoL:

Well, they take away the librarians, they take away the clubs, they take away the sports. All the things that are the socializing mechanisms that schools need are things we will take away from you if you don’t pass the levy. And then because experts, expert in sports and expert in this and expert in that became very important, but most of the people got pushed off to the side and are not participants. We have kind of professionalized children’s lives and opportunities, which is not a good thing. So exploration, your own definition of what learning is about are not things that I see happening. Now it is meet the test. Meet the grade. Get through. And I think there is a lot of mischief going on.
of Schooling from perspectives beyond economic considerations, many concerns about the model are raised. A large concern is that there are five additional PQoL themes that are rarely directly (or for the most part, indirectly) confronted by the Economic Model of Schooling through scholastic learning experiences. The themes of Interpersonal Relationships, Engagement and Handling Adversity, Internal Motivation/Personality, and Faith are all themes that could potentially be woven into the fabric of policy and curriculum, but the Economic Model of Schooling, for the most part, chooses not to confront these topics through scholastic learning experiences.

Occasionally, the participants did supply examples of scholastic learning experiences involving various elements of the Engagement theme, including physical activity, music and volunteerism, but these were generally limited to participants who attended more affluent schools, and even these participants often lamented that there were not more scholastic learning experiences associated with the theme of Engagement, let alone the Interpersonal Relationships and Handling Adversity themes.

Overwhelmingly, the learning experiences associated with these PQoL themes were non-scholastic learning experiences that took place outside of the school setting and involved learning from family, friends, community and discovery. When one of these themes was confronted in schools it was usually through a non-scholastic learning experience, like socialization occurring through peer-to-peer interaction outside of the classroom, or through the perceived individual efforts of exceptional teachers on issues like engagement or overcoming adversity.

This study does not attempt to say which PQoL theme is always the ‘most important’ to an individual, but the generalization can be made that these five themes are at least as important
to overall well-being as are Financial Security and Occupation/Occupational Identity, and that these are potentially areas on which education policy should be concerned. The relationship between PQoL and the Economic Model of Schooling cannot be limited by only looking at scholastic and non-scholastic learning experiences. In the next section of the analysis another core component of the Economic Model of Schooling, educational attainment, will be examined for its role in relation to perceived quality of life.

Educational attainment has an interesting and complex relationship to the participants’ understanding of their own quality of life. The participants find several points of contention and areas of agreement with the role of educational attainment in the Economic Model of Schooling, beginning with the actual impact of educational attainment on the two economics-related themes. In this study, educational attainment was defined as the number of years of schooling completed, and participants were selected to represent varying levels of educational attainment, including from high school dropout to terminal degree recipient. The participants were also chosen so that their occupational attainment would match their educational attainment. According to the Economic Model of Schooling, the participants with higher educational attainment and higher occupational attainment should have a higher quality of life. For these participants, this turned out not to be the case as all nine of the participants viewed his or her quality of life as good or great, and all of them (with the exception of Gayle for reasons explored earlier) felt financially secure despite differing levels of wealth.

This finding would seem to undermine one of the basic tenets of the Economic Model of Schooling, which is that persons with higher levels of educational attainment should have a higher quality of life, and it cannot be ignored that several of the participants made little or no connection between their PQoL and their educational attainment. The researcher, however, is
reticent to completely dismiss the Economic Model of Schooling’s focus on educational attainment in terms of PQoL. There are a few reasons for this. First, this research study was not designed to be generalizable; Second, none of the participants in this study are below the poverty line, a point at which, much of the quality of life research states that financial concerns can drastically, negatively impact quality of life; And third, for certain participants in this study, educational attainment, particularly when it is examined in combination with specific scholastic learning experiences, was important to their achieving a perceived high quality of life.

To begin to examine the whole story, educational attainment will be analyzed more closely in relation to the themes of Engagement and Occupation/Occupational Identity. Two of the participants in this study, April and Jonas, learned, mostly through non-scholastic learning experiences, that they wanted to go into helping professions. For April this was special education and for Jonas this was social work. The only way to achieve this was through a certain level of educational attainment, with both achieving graduate degrees in their respective fields. For these two, however, it is not a simple matter of credentialing. They both recalled many scholastic learning experiences that would make them successful in their professions (both did also claim that scholastic learning could only take them so far and that on-the-job learning was needed for continued success and growth within their fields). These learning experiences were tied directly to the coursework of the undergraduate and graduate programs they were in and were often based around experiential learning.

Hadley also experienced a positive benefit of educational attainment that involved Occupation/Occupational Identity, but for her, it was combined with the theme of Internal Motivation/Personality. Hadley, as was shown earlier in this chapter, has always had a desire to achieve, and she equated this desire with internal processes. The external vehicle for her to
accomplish at least one of these goals, to become an engineer, was through formal education. As was the case with April and Jonas, credentialing plays a role in the overall value of Hadley’s educational attainment as she would never have been offered her first engineering job without an engineering degree, but she too, can point to specific skills she gained related to engineering at college and broader skills related to math and science that she gained at college and in primary and secondary school that have assisted her in achieving her occupational goals.

While credentialing does sometimes carry negative connotations, it can at times be beneficial in its own right. For David, this appears to be the case. David is a lawyer who is somewhat indifferent towards his chosen profession. He likes parts of it and does not like other parts. Being a lawyer, however, does, in conjunction with other factors, afford him through intellectual challenge, income, schedule and location, the ability to accomplish his other PQoL goals, in particular those related to Engagement and Interpersonal Relationships. And while it is true that other participants, including Brian, Cheryl, Francine and Gayle, were able to accomplish this same balance without credentialing, it seems evident that at least at this point in his life David needed his high level of educational attainment to achieve it. Regardless, this comparison of the majority of the participants underscores that there are many paths to a high PQoL.

Moving away from issues related to Occupation/Occupational Identity, it would appear that educational attainment might have PQoL ramifications in a more direct manner than previously discussed. One aspect of this role for educational attainment concerns the themes of Internal Motivations/Personality and Handling Adversity. For those participants who believe they have a high internal drive to succeed, educational attainment is one more venue through which a goal can be reached and a sense of pride can be attained, and formal schooling was not
usually an area where adversities needed to be overcome. Interestingly, the same is possibly true for those participants who did not have extensive success in formal education, except formal education was a potential source of adversity. Brian, Cheryl, Francine and Gayle all expressed regret over not accomplishing more in school. Cheryl actually has a high level of internal motivation to succeed, and there is no doubt that she will soon receive her undergraduate degree, which, according to her, will greatly improve her PQoL, but the other three participants appear to wish they had the internal motivation needed to succeed in this arena, and this is likely one of the adversities in their lives that is hindering them from having even higher PQoLs. This is made even more likely true in recalling the positive PQoL benefits of handling adversity for both Brian and Gayle in receiving a high school diploma and a GED, respectively.

Based on the participants’ findings in this study, it appears that current education policies are preparing some students for work and financial security through educational attainment in the limited forms of credentialing and specific skill attainment. In addition, it appears that some ancillary issues related to some of the other PQoL themes, including Internal Motivation/Personality and Handling Adversity are being addressed through success or failure in terms of educational attainment. Also based on these findings, it is clear that not all of the occupational concerns of the participants were met through scholastic learning experiences, and that little else that benefits PQoL and is not related to educational attainment is being done with perceived intentionality. Ultimately, the participants’ findings support the proof of the Economic Model of Schooling’s existence in current education policy and curriculum, but find that it is not meeting many of their needs, if the purpose of formal schooling is to improve the quality of life of its citizenry.
Chapter Five: Summary, Discussion, Issues and Limitations, and Assertions

Introduction

This chapter provides a brief summary of this research study and a discussion of its findings in relation to the three research questions posed within it and the Economic Model of Schooling. There will also be a brief discussion of an alternative philosophical approach to formal education, Nel Noddings’ Educating the Whole Child. Noddings’ approach falls more in line with the participants’ PQoL and the type of learning experiences that can lead to a high PQoL. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the issues and limitations of this study and a list of assertions and proposals for future research.

Summary of the Study

This research study uses in-depth interviewing of a demographically small, but diverse group of participants to examine their perceptions of the quality of their own lives. More specifically, the study asks which elements in their lives they perceive as contributing to their perceived quality of life (PQoL) and what contributions they perceive educational attainment, scholastic learning experiences and non-scholastic learning experiences made in the development of that PQoL. While the participants were only asked to examine the above issues in relation to their understandings of their lives, their collected thoughts were also used to examine an external construct, The Economic Model of Schooling.

In-depth interviewing was chosen for this study as it was an acceptable way to facilitate the attainment of the amount of information needed to answer the questions posed above and examine the Economic Model of Schooling. In addition, in-depth interviewing allows for an assessment of reliability and validity concerning the participants’ perceptions. The researcher utilized extensive interviewing of nine participants who vary demographically based on age,
educational attainment, gender, race, religion and socioeconomic status, and while demographic diversity was an important element in determining participants for this study, the only fixed variables in the study, aside from having grown up and gone to school in Cincinnati, were having a participant’s educational attainment commensurate to his or her occupational attainment.

The first variable allowed this study to have a representative cross-section of educational achievement. Participants collectively filled the spectrum of attainment from high school dropout to terminal graduate-level degree recipient. The second variable, occupational achievement, served as a representation of quality of life. Occupational achievement is an appropriate variable for the purposes of this study given the assumption underlying the Economic Model of Schooling and with much of the economics-based quality of life literature concerning the relationship between educational attainment and quality of life that there is a strong relationship between financial success and quality of life. In relation to occupation, participants collectively represented the occupational spectrum from unemployed to professional, high-achiever.

Individual participants could be represented by these two variables in a number of different ways. Participants with low educational attainment also had low occupational attainment and participants with high educational attainment had high occupational attainment. The assumption of the Economic Model of Schooling is that those participants with higher educational attainment and higher occupational attainment would have a higher PQoL.

Ultimately, seven major themes related to PQoL were developed in this study through the coding of the nine participants’ in-depth interviews. Each participant viewed his or her own quality of life as good or great. A positive relationship to each theme was viewed as contributing to a high quality of life, while having a negative relationship to a theme was viewed as hampering a high quality of life. The seven PQoL themes are Interpersonal Relationships,
Engagement, Internal Motivation/Personality, Handling Adversity, Financial Security, Occupation/Occupational Identity, and Faith. Not all of the themes carried equal importance to all of the participants. For example, a participant could say that her religion was the most important factor in her PQoL, while another participant could say his family is most important. The participants do, at least anecdotally, argue that some themes are more important than others, but this study did not seek to draw any generalizable conclusions to support the participants’ anecdotes.

These seven themes were examined to assess the role educational attainment, scholastic learning experiences, and non-scholastic learning experiences played in the development of their PQoL. The findings suggest that educational attainment had a notable impact on PQoL through the theme of Occupation/Occupational Identity, and also through specific incidences related to the themes of Internal Motivation/Personality, Handling Adversity, and Financial Security. Also, several notable scholastic learning experiences involved the theme of engagement, specifically, skill development, organized sports and music, and with handling various types of adversity.

The findings also suggest that the most notable areas of impact that took place in school were related to the Interpersonal Relationships theme through peer socialization and on all themes through positive student-teacher/authority figure contact. Overall, however, the most often discussed learning experiences that had an impact on PQoL occurred outside of the formal school setting, and came through “real world” experiences and familial and community contact.

These findings were then used to examine the Economic Model of Schooling. Throughout the history of the United States, federal education policy has taken national and individual economic concerns into consideration when determining the purpose and nature of
public schooling. In recent decades, there has been a major push by the federal government to
develop an economic model of schooling, which has instituted educational policy and curriculum
changes that are specifically geared toward improving our global standing on these various
measures of educational attainment with the hope that such an improvement will help maintain
the United States’ dominant role in the burgeoning innovation economy. The assumption
underlying the increasing role of economic considerations on education policy and curriculum
and maintaining our powerful position in the world economy is that this will lead to improved
quality of life or happiness for the citizenry.

The participants’ findings raise questions and concerns over the United States’ adherence
to the Economic Model of Schooling if the desired effect of that policy is to improve the quality
of life of its citizenry. Based on the participants’ findings in this study, it appears that current
education policies are preparing some students for work and financial security through
educational attainment in the limited forms of credentialing and specific skill attainment. In
addition, it appears that some ancillary issues related to some of the other PQoL themes,
including Internal Motivation/Personality and Handling Adversity are being addressed through
success or failure in terms of educational attainment. Also based on these findings, it is clear that
not all of the occupational concerns of the participants were met through scholastic learning
experiences, and that little else that benefits PQoL and is not related to educational attainment is
being done with perceived intentionality. Ultimately, the participants’ findings support the proof
of the Economic Model of Schooling’s existence in current education policy and curriculum, but
find that it is not meeting many of their needs, if the purpose of formal schooling is to improve
the quality of life of its citizenry. The next section will discuss an alternative education
philosophy to the Economic Model of Schooling that may fall more in line with the participants’
understanding of PQoL.

*Discussion: Nel Noddings’ *Educating the Whole Child and Educating for Happiness*

The argument is made in Chapter Two that the Economic Model of Schooling is the current system governing federal education policy. Ultimately, those who have instituted the Economic Model of Schooling have done so because of a philosophical belief about the purpose of public schooling, which is that the business of schools is to develop individuals who can help the United States thrive in the innovation economy and that in turn will lead to a good quality of life for those individuals. Taken from this perspective, the findings in this study suggest that, while perhaps the Economic Model of Schooling is not working as efficiently as it could, it is focused on precisely what it is supposed to be focused on in terms of outcomes. The participants in this research study seem to suggest, however, that there are additional elements that go into producing a high quality of life, and some participants brought up the point that schools should be focusing on these additional elements. Jonas’ quote on social justice and Louise’s critique of the whole education system represent elements of this belief, as does this hopeful quote from April:

> I think some school systems are starting to get the idea that kids need more social and emotional help in school, like figuring out what to do when a kid is not nice to you. It is not okay to just beat up a kid. What can you talk about, what can you say to the kid, what can you say to your parents, how do you work through those things, without using violence or without using bad words…Yeah, I think there a lot of things that are not built into curriculum that should be. That being the social emotional piece being important. Like coping skills. What to do when you are sad. What do to when somebody dies. Like all of those emotional things that are brought up that for some reason people don’t talk
about, and teachers are scared to go there with kids I think know, because there are so many rules, and the dynamics of a teacher/child relationship have changed so much. It is sad, but I think those kind of pieces should be part of curriculum.

Beliefs and recollections like those from Jonas, Louise, and April, led the researcher to explore other philosophical models and constructs of education to see if there were any that appeared to more closely relate to the ideas presented by the participants in this research study. This search led to Nel Noddings’ constructs: Educating the Whole Child and Educating for Happiness. In describing these constructs, Noddings uses different terminology and life examples from the participants in this study. Nevertheless, these two philosophical constructs encompass all of the PQoL themes expressed by the participants and explore how schools can create learning experiences that will help students develop an understanding of those elements and foster positive growth toward achieving a high quality of life. The description of these philosophical constructs to follow offers an alternative to the Economic Model of Schooling with regard to the purpose of schooling in the United States.

Nel Noddings has long been a proponent of educating the ‘Whole Child.’ An education with this as its focus would address not only the academic needs of a child, but also the “physical, moral, social, emotional, spiritual, and aesthetic aims (Noddings, 2005, p. 10)” that a child may have, and that we should not compartmentalize these curricular goals into different subjects, but instead have them incorporated into every lesson and every class (Noddings 2005, 2005b, 2006). Noddings argues that there is currently a major push for an academics-only focus to the educational process, but that that falls out of line with the traditional goals of education in this and other countries, and that it is a mistake to continue to push the agenda to the disadvantage of the Whole Child (Noddings, 2005). Noddings (2006) states, “Students need to
know how schooling is related to real life, how today’s learning objective fits into their own interests and plans, and even whether there is any meaning to life itself (p. 154).”

Flowing from this pursuit of educating the Whole Child, Noddings theorized that happiness should be a main aim of the educational process. Noddings breaks up educating for happiness into two fundamental parts, education for personal life and education for public life. Education for personal life includes training in making a home, developing a sense of place and a relationship with nature, parenting skills, character and spirituality, and interpersonal growth or relationships. Education for public life includes training in work preparation and training in understanding and taking part in our community, democracy, and service. Each of these concepts will briefly be discussed, beginning with the components of educating for a personal life.

The first component of educating for a personal life, the making of a home, is a topic not often discussed in school. Certain elements of homemaking were represented in the past by home economics classes, like cooking and cleaning, but these classes were largely only provided for girls as they were expected to stay at home while their husbands worked. Today these classes have largely gone away under the curricular demands of other subjects, but the ability to maintain a home is still a valuable skill (and not just for women) (Noddings, 2004). It would not be sufficient, however, to just reinstate these home economics classes and have all gender-types take them. Instead, the teaching of making a home would also include the idea of a home as a basic need for survival, and as Noddings (2004) puts it, “The discussion of home as an extension of our bodies and selves is filled with possibilities for the examination of class differences, individual taste and authenticity, self-knowledge and comfort (p. 117).” In other words, the making of a home is an individual conceptualization that extends beyond the physical building (if one’s home even is a building) and into how the home represents the person.
Developing a sense of place, or love of place, as Noddings puts it, is an extension of making a home. When people think of home it is not just a dwelling that is thought of, but also the streets, neighborhood, town or city, the community we live in (Noddings, 2004). In an academic environment that is increasingly geared toward globalization and a global economy, it is this sense of place that can get lost. Noddings argues that it is not necessary, as our system is currently doing, to eliminate a sense of place to make room for globalization; that they are not mutually exclusive. As for love of nature, Noddings (2004) states that many feel a connection to the natural world, and that this should be explored in curriculum, not just for personal benefit, but so that students may embrace our collective role as steward of nature, the responsibility, of which, may in turn lead back to increasing individual happiness.

Parenting is the third of Noddings (2004) components of happiness that should be addressed in schools. This might seem an obvious one, but schools spend very little time discussing parenting. This would be beneficial for students, not only so that they have a better understanding of the processes behind pregnancy, giving birth and caring for an infant, but also so that students will have a better understanding of the perspective their parents are bringing to their rearing practices, which will potentially open lines of communication that are often closed between child and parent.

For her fourth component, Noddings addresses an issue that could have been brought up in any one of the previous or future components of happiness and that is character development and spirituality. Noddings (2004) readily admits that there is no singular definition of good character or for that matter what it means to be a spiritual or moral person, and that too often virtues are taught through strict discipline or “indoctrination (p. 157).” The purpose of character and spiritual education should not be to tell students that traits or actions like courage, honesty,
and perseverance, for example, are always virtues (they may not be) and that other actions like stealing and killing are always evil (they may not be), but instead to allow students the platform for understanding the complexities of any action and how that relates to their understanding of sound character or spirituality.

The final component educating for a personal life is interpersonal growth. Again, there is overlap with the other components, but interpersonal relationships are so fundamental to again, at the very least, a high-level of subjective well-being, that Noddings felt it deserved its own place on this list. Teachings on this subject would include discussion of what it is to be a friend, why friendship is important, why romantic love is important, what personality traits are admirable. Noddings (2004) gives a brief list that includes physical attractiveness, good manners, a capacity for (decent) pleasure, wit, modesty, a certain grace of manner, self-esteem (balanced by modesty), and extraversion, as well as the greatly admired character traits of kindness, generosity, honesty, and fidelity) and how they can be cultivated. This type of education might seem decidedly unacademic, but at the same time Noddings would argue that having successful interpersonal relationships is such a fundamental component of happiness that any educator with an ethic of care would be remiss not to address it.

The first component of education for public life is preparation for work. The importance of finding a job or occupation one is satisfied with cannot be understated according to Noddings. She (2004) quotes John Dewey, “An occupation is the only thing which balances the distinctive capacity of an individual with his social service. To find out what one is fitted to do and to secure an opportunity to do it is the key to happiness (p. 197).” Noddings acknowledges that schools today are addressing work through curriculum, but perhaps not in the ways that are best for all students. She (2004) states, “In their zeal to give every student an academic education, schools
today neglect those students whose chosen work may not require a college education. However, they also neglect genuine intellectual interest—an interest that, if cultivated, may enrich both occupational and personal life (p. 197).” Additionally, Noddings feel that our schools, when dealing with work preparation put such an emphasis on an occupation’s income that it can mislead students into going professions for their financial benefits, and that the answer to all of this, is a blending of academic and vocational education instead of the tracking-based system we have now (Noddings, 2004). This would allow all students to pursue an intellectual, and possibly philosophical understanding of their working life, while gaining practical insight through experiential learning.

The final component to educating for public life is gaining a sense of community, democracy and service. One fundamental reason this is important is that we are a social species, so we may have a biological need for community and for relationships with those around us, but this component runs deeper and is more complicated than that. Communities, Noddings (2004) states:

…socialize their members; from that process there is no escape. However, a good educational system will help students to reflect upon and understand the processes of socialization. What standards should I accept as beneficial for the growth of individuals and the order of society? Which might I reject in the interests of my own growth without hurting others? Which should I reject entirely on moral grounds? (p. 238)

These questions are vital to ask so that students can become functioning members of society, but also become critical thinkers who consider when our society may be leading us in a moral direction that they are not comfortable with. Learning how our democracy truly works will allow students to direct their answers to these socializing questions in positive, constructive ways that
will take the form of service to our community and our democracy.

Again, this inclusion of the education philosophies of Nel Noddings is only meant to foster a philosophical discussion over the purpose of education in the United States. The next section will return the discussion to this research study by examining its issues and limitations.

Issues, Limitations and Recognition

Based on the analysis of the in-depth interviews of the nine participants in this research study there are two issues, two limitations, and one area of recognition that must be discussed in relation to this study. The first issue involves the researcher as interviewer. In the early interviews for this study the interviewer was not as skilled at interview techniques as he was by the later interviews for this study. The interviewer missed several opportunities to elicit thoughtful, anecdotal evidence on broad proclamations made by participants by not asking follow up questions or not asking the right follow up questions. This type of error is common with novice interviewers and the researcher believes that this issue has been overcome and will not be an issue in future research studies.

The second issue to discuss concerning this research study has to do with research design and the inclusion of participants who went to private or parochial schools. Part of the rationale for including these participants was a simple practicality of the geographic base the participant field was pulled from. Cincinnati has a remarkably high percentage of students attending private or parochial schools, and it would have made it difficult to find the desired representative, demographic blend of participants had only public school attendees been interviewed. Additionally, the researcher hypothesized that not including the possibility for diversity in religious, faith and non-faith-based beliefs could affect the perceived quality of life themes described by the participants in relation to research question one. The other side of this
argument, however, is that the vast majority of what is being discussed in this research study concerns issues of public education, making the findings for research questions two and three that relate to learning experiences and the “faith” theme somewhat unusable for the larger focus of this research study because of the generally accepted First Amendment principle of the separation of church and state. Ultimately, the researcher is satisfied that the inclusion of public and private school attendees does not negatively impact the findings of this study, but does assert that future studies geared to education policy will include only public school attendees.

The first limitation is that there were no participants who perceived their quality of life to be poor. The Economic Model of Schooling makes the case that the greater the level of the educational attainment achieved, the greater the level of occupational earning the person will have, which will in turn lead to a higher quality of life. Participants in this study were chosen so that their level of educational attainment would match their level of occupational earning with the assumption being, according to the Economic Model of Schooling, those participants with lower educational attainment working in lower occupational earning positions would have a lower quality of life. As it turned out, all of the participants regardless of these variables perceived their quality of life as good or great. It was impossible to assess prior to participant selection whether or not a person perceived their quality of life to be good or bad because part of the point of this study (Research Question One) was to assess what life components contribute to perceived quality of life. This challenge does not preclude the researcher from noting the patterns the participants recalled on PQoL or on attainment, scholastic learning experiences, and non-scholastic learning experiences, but it does demonstrate the need in future studies to make sure that participants represent the full continuum of PQoL beliefs, so that more complete findings can be drawn in this research area.
The second limitation to the findings in this study concerns the breadth of the subject pool. The researcher attempted to have a diverse demographic group of participants, even though demographic diversity in the form of race, gender, religion, sexual orientation and other demographic measures, were not specified variables being examined by this study. The researcher was successful in achieving some diversity, but fell short of achieving anything that might be considered “representative” diversity for the greater Cincinnati community. A few glaring examples of this lack of representation, include having no African American men as participants, having no non-heterosexual participants, and having no African Americans who would be considered above middle class. While having a truly “representative” demographic mix of participants is an unlikely accomplishment for a single student researcher using in-depth interviewing as a research technique on as broad of a topic as was examined in this study, the researcher should have at least increased his number of participants to include some of the glaring omissions in this study. Future studies will rectify this limitation.

The one area of recognition concerning this research study is that its findings are not generalizable. While the researcher took due care to not allow any researcher biases to seep into the findings, ultimately this research study is only based on nine participants’ in-depth interviews and the tools of testing for reliability and validity associated with this research method. In-depth interviewing allowed the researcher to elucidate the relationship among the variables and construct being studied as perceived by the participants. This depth of understanding about the processes (or at least the perceived processes) that was accomplished in this study is something quantitative approaches cannot do. The final section of this chapter will discuss assertions made based off of the findings from this research study and represent ideas for future research questions and studies.
Assertions and Future Research

The analysis of nine participants’ in-depth interviews have resulted in a myriad of findings that confront the questions posed by this study’s three research questions on what constitutes perceived quality of life and what roles educational attainment and scholastic and non-scholastic learning experiences play in developing and achieving perceived quality of life, and in analyzing the Economic Model of Schooling. These findings lead the researcher to question where the research can go from here. Ultimately, the researcher developed nine possibilities for future research questions and studies.

1. The findings from this study are limited somewhat because there was a lack of diversity in the participants perceptions on their own quality of life (i.e. they all had PQoLs as good or great) and in demographic representiveness. This caused two of the limitations described earlier in this chapter, and it is probable that one of the first follow-up research studies this researcher would want to undertake would still use in-depth interviewing as a research method, but would develop a larger, more demographically diverse participant pool that included a wider variety of PQoL, so that the assumptions of the Economic Model of Schooling, and the role educational attainment, scholastic learning experiences and non-scholastic learning experiences play in PQoL development can be assessed from a wider array of perspectives.

2. The findings from this study suggest that income and overall financial security, while important to perceived well-being, are not the only important perceived components of a quality life. This echoes the beliefs of some quality of life researchers (see Lane, 2000), but runs counter to many other researchers and of the majority of devices used to measure quality of life (see The Economist Quality of Life Index, 2005). A full-
scale, mixed methods research study should be carried out to assess the
generalizability of this study’s findings, assess possible perceived differences in
quality of life based on demographic differences, and potentially, based on the new
findings, develop new means of assessing quality of life for individuals, groups,
countries and societies.

3. The findings from this study are based on the accounts of participants who view
themselves as having a high quality of life. One of the interesting findings of this
study concerns the impact of internal motivations on perceived quality of life. A
large-scale mixed methods study needs to be carried out among individuals along the
spectrum of perceived quality of life that assesses and correlates these individuals’
personality traits, intelligence, self-esteem and self-efficacy with PQoL. This type of
study could lead to very interesting findings on not only the role lived experiences
play in perceived quality of life, but also on how internal processes affect the
perception of well-being.

4. The findings from this study suggest major holes in the scholastic learning
experiences being provided by formal education in relation to all of the components
of perceived quality of life. Additionally, many of the instances where positive
learning experiences did occur in schools, seemed to have happened by chance or at
least not as missive curriculum guidelines or education policy. A large-scale mixed
methods analysis is needed to assess the perceived quality of life benefits of formal
education, complete with an examination of the roles curriculum guidelines, teacher
training and education policy have had on perceived quality of life. Special attention
will need to be paid to how positive, chance learning experiences can be incorporated
into curriculum design to insure that all students have access to these experiences.

5. The findings from this study demonstrate many positive learning experiences that occurred outside of a scholastic setting. Learning will always occur outside of school and schools should not be burdened with the task of developing lessons in any or all areas in which a child might want to learn, but it is possible that some of these learning experiences can be incorporated into a scholastic setting. A large-scale mixed methods study that analyzes the perceived quality of life benefits of non-scholastic learning experiences is needed to assess which specific beneficial learning experiences can be incorporated into a scholastic setting. This study would need to be accompanied by a number of studies from the curriculum and instruction field that would involve designing curriculum based on these traditionally non-scholastic learning experiences.

6. The findings of this study suggest the acute importance of teachers in perceived quality of life development. Currently many studies are being done on teacher quality and perhaps this issue will be addressed by them, but if not, it is important that a study be carried out that assesses exactly what teachers can do to positively impact perceived quality of life.

7. It was not only teachers who impacted perceived quality of life. Authority figures, be they teachers, parents, siblings, or religious personages or figures, were important contributors of learning experiences that impacted perceived quality of life. A study should be carried out assessing what learning experiences generated by authority figures were of the greatest importance to perceived quality of life, and what are the best methods and venues to disseminate these lessons.
8. This study was carried out under one premise: the U.S. education system should educate our students toward a high quality of life. The Economic Model of Schooling purports to do this. The researcher did not know what would constitute a high quality of life, but knew that this was a key component of his philosophy of education and questioned whether the Economic Model of Schooling policies were actually addressing quality of life as well as they could. A qualitative study examining the relationship between the goals of current education policy and the educational philosophies of today’s educational policy leaders would be invaluable in adding to the debate of whether we are truly attempting to educate toward a high quality of life or, as this study suggests, we are educating toward the economic component of a high quality of life and neglecting the other, often more important, components of a high quality of life.
References


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Appendix A

IRB Proposal

The Relationship Between Educational Attainment and Quality of Life as Perceived by a Demographically Diverse Population

1. Purpose and Design of the Research Project:

a. Purpose of the research

This research study is intended to be a series of oral histories that examine the relationship between educational attainment and quality of life as articulated by a demographically diverse population. The population will consist of people from varying ages, educational attainment, gender, and race. In addition, all participants will have grown up in Cincinnati and attended Cincinnati-area schools during their youth.

The questions I hope to answer with this study are:

1) How do participants from varying demographic backgrounds articulate their meanings of quality of life?
2) What effect, if any, did childhood quality of life have on educational attainment?
3) What effect, if any, does level of educational attainment have in formulating an individual’s perceived quality of life? If there is an effect, is it negative? Is it positive? Is it not so easily measured in terms like negative and positive? Is the effect different between demographically diverse individuals?
4) Are the perceived effects different between/among demographically diverse individuals?

In addition to these questions, I hope to be able to use the data collected through these oral histories in combination with primary source documents to describe the educational history of Cincinnati from the Depression era forward.

b. Prior research related to the study

For the past several decades, quality of life and educational attainment have been extensively researched, though not necessarily in relation to each other. Despite this, there is still a great deal of contention among researchers concerning the roles both play in individual’s lives and society at large. In the paragraphs to follow, the major research findings and debates on each of these topics are briefly discussed, followed by a description of the potential benefits oral history can provide in examining quality of life and educational attainment.

Quality of life is a concept that can be described using varying terms depending upon the disciplinary perspective a researcher is coming from. Fields as diverse as economics, psychology and sociology have offered definitions of the term (Campbell, 1976) before using this definition to prove similarities and differences across divergent populations. For example, Hughes and Thomas (1986, 1998), used six measures from the General Social Survey, Life Satisfaction,
Happiness, Marital Happiness, Anomia, Mistrust, and Health, to create their definition of quality of life, which when analyzed showed that regardless of socioeconomic status, African Americans have a lower quality of life than do their white counterparts. Other researchers, like Cross (1991), used personal self-esteem measures to interpret quality of life and found that African Americans and whites do not differ in self-esteem, and thus, quality of life. In another study, 6500 critical incidents were collected from approximately 3,000 people of various ages, genders, races, and backgrounds to determine what is meant by quality of life (Flanagan, 1978). This study yielded 15 factors that made up an individual’s quality of life, ranging from work satisfaction to participation in active recreation, and determined that 85% of people, regardless of demographic differences reported a quality of life of good or better. Clearly there is a great deal about quality of life that is still contentious, and that debate must be continued in order to offer solutions that positively impact people’s lives.

Educational attainment, while somewhat less controversial than quality of life in its definition, is no less debated in terms of what life factors impact educational attainment, and conversely, what life factors educational attainment impacts. Educational attainment is defined as and measured by the number of years of schooling obtained by an individual or group (This definition is the conventional one used in discussing educational attainment, but is by no means the only one. It is likely that during the course of this study, other, non-traditional forms of education will be presented and examined, as well.). This perspective of educational attainment shows that childhood emotional and behavioral problems adversely affect educational attainment (McLeod & Kaiser, 2004), as does parenting differences amongst varying social classes (Lareau, 2002). In the aftermath, educational attainment has proven to be intimately related to economic and health issues in later life. For instance, persons with a bachelor’s degree earned, on average, approximately $41,500 more per year than did high school dropouts (Center on Education Policy and American Youth Policy Forum, 2003). Additionally, the U.S. death rate for high school dropouts is 2.5 times higher than for those with 13 or more years of education (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2003). It is clear that factors that could be used to measure quality of life impact and are impacted by educational attainment, but questions still remain concerning the inner workings of this relationship.

It is the purpose of this study to use oral histories to shed some light on the inner workings of this relationship. Oral history is the recording of personal testimony delivered in oral form (Yow, 2005). This oral testimony is then triangulated against primary and secondary historical sources and artifacts to create a richly contextualized account of a person’s world. This account can then be analyzed to a specific end, which, in this study is centered on quality of life and educational attainment.

c. Overall design

The overall design of this research project is an oral history. I will utilize extensive interviews that will then be used to compare participants based on age, educational attainment, gender, and race in relationship to perceived quality of life. I plan to interview approximately twenty-four participants with each participant being interviewed two to three times for one to two hours over the course of one year. The range represented here is because there are a number of questions that need to be answered, and I cannot say with exact certainty how long it will take
each participant to answer all of these questions, and the questions that will arise from their statements. I have chosen oral history for this study as I feel it will best facilitate the level of in-depth information that will be needed to answer the questions posed above, or at the very least, to learn how to more succinctly formulate a means by which these questions can be asked and answered, en masse.

Participants will not be kept anonymous or confidential, except under extremely sensitive circumstances. This will be explained more completely in the consent process section.

d. Facilities and research team

I will not need any facilities, funding, or a research team to conduct this research. I expect data collection will take one year to complete, with the analysis and writing to follow data collection lasting an additional six to eight months.

e. Funding

N/A

f. Training in research-related activities

Field Methods sequence in Educational Foundations (EDFN 802, 812, 822) and Oral History class in Educational Foundations (EDFN 856). EDFN 812, 822, and 856 have also been taken.

2. Participants

a. Recruitment

1. Number of Participants
I plan on having twenty-four participants in this study. This number allows me to have a thoroughly diverse demographic makeup of Cincinnati citizenry. While this is a relatively high number of participants for an oral history, I believe this will not be an issue given my timeline and the recent advances in dictation software. In addition, I have sufficient connections around Cincinnati to make finding twenty-four participants who fit the research criteria, a relatively easy task.

2. Eligibility criteria (inclusion and exclusion)
All of the participants must have attended school in the Greater Cincinnati area during their youth. The participants must be either African American or Caucasian, male or female, and over 21 years of age. In addition, I hope to have some participants with very little formal schooling, some with a moderate amount of formal schooling, and some with extensive formal schooling.

3. Explanation of vulnerable populations
There will not be any vulnerable populations included in this study.

4. Reducing potential for coercion
There will be no issues of coercion in this study. If a person does not wish to be included in this study, they may simply decline my invitation. In addition, any participant may leave the study at any time, for whatever reason, no questions asked.

5. Permission to use a study site
N/A

6. Recruitment methods
I will be using quota selection sampling to find potential participants. The large group I will first identify is Cincinnati residents. I will then break this group down into subgroups based on age, educational attainment, gender, and race. Also all subgroups have the underlying detail that its members must have attended Cincinnati area schools during some part of their youth. I will make contact with individuals from varying parts of Cincinnati with whom I am already acquainted, and inquire if they know of anyone who fits the research criteria of this study who they believe would be interested in participating. Examples of the varying parts of Cincinnati that I am referring to include employees of GE, employees of the state and federal judicial systems, an employee of the Drop-In Center, a principal and teachers in CPS schools, and persons who live in divergent Cincinnati neighborhoods. Through my contacts, I will set up meetings with potential participants. Upon meeting potential participants who fit into one of the subgroups, I will explain the study to them and enquire as to their interest in being involved in the study. Attached is the verbal script that I will be using with potential participants.

7. Recruitment incentives
N/A

8. Compensation payment
N/A

b. Consent Process

1. Step by step process
Once a possible participant who meets the research criteria has been identified, I will sit down with him or her, one-on-one, and explain the make-up of the study and what his or her participation will entail. In addition, each participant will have to sign a consent form documenting his or her understanding of this participation.

2. Privacy protection
As this is an oral history project, it is my preference to not protect anyone’s identity during the interview process or after, including when the information collected in the interviews is used in presentations and publications.

However, if requested, I can make some or all of a participant’s information confidential. During the oral history interview process it is possible that a participant may reveal some element of his or her life that he or she may deem sensitive or embarrassing. If this occurs the participant may request to have his or her identity protected, and this request will be honored. If this is chosen, I will change the participant’s name and any other identifiable features that may have been relayed
to me during the interview process. These changes will be reflected in all elements of the research study, from the raw data I keep to any presentations and publications that may result from this research study.

Additionally, a participant can leave this research study at any time for any reason with no repercussions. A participant can also decide at any time, even after the interviews have been completed, that he or she does not wish to have his or herself or the information from his or her interview included in the study, and this request will be honored.

3. **Confidentiality of data**

Given that every participant will have waved their right to conceal identity, the names of participants will not be either anonymous or confidential. All consent forms, interview tapes, and transcripts, however, will be stored in a locked filing cabinet for five years following the end of the participant’s involvement with this study. After this time, they may be given to a historical foundation, museum or university’s archival unit. This will be done because part of the purpose of oral history is to add to the historical record. If, however, the participant has exercised his or her right to leave the research study and has decided that he or she does not wish to have his or her information included in the research study, his or her consent forms, interview tapes, and transcripts will be kept in a locked filing cabinet by me in perpetuity.

4. **Identifiable data**

As stated earlier, every participant will have waved their right to conceal their identity, unless specified as described above. In addition, the data, audiotapes, and videotapes collected through this oral history will be kept in perpetuity.

5. **Identification of possible risks or discomforts**

I do not believe there are significant risks associated with this study. Having said that, however, there are two issues that should be raised. First, it can be difficult to talk about one’s personal history for any number of sensitive and/or embarrassing personal reasons. If this is the case with a potential participant, I will recommend that he or she not take part in this research study. Second, the information that a potential participant will supply is meant for public dissemination. Having one’s personal information be a part of the public record could prove embarrassing for the participant. If the participant has a problem with this, I will recommend that he or she not take part in this research study.

Additionally, if a participant becomes concerned with either of these two issues during his or her participation in the research study the participant can leave this research study at any time for any reason with no repercussions. The participant can also decide at any time, even after the interviews have been completed, that he or she does not wish to have his or herself or the information from his or her interviews included in the study, and this request will be honored.

6. **Statement of any direct benefits, if any**

There are no direct benefits of this study to the participants.

7. **Statement of indirect benefits, if any**
The possible indirect benefits come in the form of better understanding the community in which the participants live, including the way education interacts with the community’s well-being.

c. Consent Documents
Please see attached Informed Consent Form for Adults.

3. Research-Related Activity

a. When using existing datasets
N/A

b. When using records collected for non-research purposes
N/A

c. Setting
I will be interviewing the participants in whatever setting they prefer. I want them to be as comfortable in the interview process as is possible. The only element of the setting I will push for, but not demand, is that the interviews occur in person.

d. Activities or procedures

1. What
I plan to interview approximately twenty-four participants with each participant being interviewed two to three times for one to two hours over the course of one year. The range represented here is because there are a number of questions that need to be answered, and I cannot say with exact certainty how long it will take each participant to answer all of these questions, and the questions that will arise from their statements.

2. Who
I, Benjamin Chaffin Brooks, will be conducting all of the interviews. I will have no direct assistance from anyone else.

3. How long
The entire data collection phase (i.e. the interviewing of all twenty-four participants) will take approximately one year. Transcribing and coding of interview data will be occurring all throughout the data collection phase and in the months that follow the completion of data collection. Within six to eight months of the final interviews I will have completed the data analysis and will have compiled my findings in a narrative form.

4. Phases/stages
There will be no stages in this study. In terms of phases there will be the general phases of data collection, data analysis, and narrative of findings. Within the interviewing/data collection phase there will be a firm, but not rigid, separation of questions where each interview is centered on a specific theme. For example, the first interview will discuss experiences during or about childhood, the second interview will discuss work and personal life experiences, and the third interview will discuss issues around the concept of quality of life. The concept of education will
be coursing through all of the interviews. This type of phasing is not set-in-stone, however, as I have to let these interviews follow their own paths.

5. Comparison group
The only activity participants will be involved in is interviews, and all participants will be taking part in these interviews. There will be no different activities between comparison groups.

6. Address usual activities vs. research-related activities
N/A

7. Types of data collected
All of the data being collected will be from interviews. I expect the interview data to consist of personal opinions, personal reflections, historical reflections, and reflections on any artifacts (photographs, family heirlooms, etc.) that participants may contribute to the interviews.

8. Alternative activities available to participants
N/A

4. Data Analysis
This is a qualitative study with extensive interviewing. The interviews will be transcribed. The transcriptions will be coded. The codes will then be clustered into analytical categories and triangulated for comparison. The findings will then be written up in a lengthy narrative, hopefully for publication.

5. Data Collection Tools
Please see attached a copy of the interview question guide that I will be using. Also, please note that this guide cannot be considered a comprehensive list of all the questions I will be asking as the oral history interviewing will be very long and will go off in directions that I cannot predict at this time.

6. Recruitment Materials
Please see attached a copy of the script I will be using to verbally explain the study, and a participant’s role within the study, to potential participants.

7. Additional Documentation
N/A

8. Consent Documents
Please see attached copies of the Informed Consent Form.
Consent to Participate in a Research Study
University of Cincinnati
College of Education, Criminal Justice, and Human Services
Division of Education Studies

The Relationship Between Educational Attainment and Quality of Life as Perceived by a Demographically Diverse Population

Investigator
Benjamin Chaffin Brooks, Doctoral Student, Principal Investigator
University of Cincinnati
(513)751-3391
brooksbn@uc.edu

What is the reason for this research study?

The purpose of this research study is to examine the relationship between educational attainment and an individual’s perceived quality of life. Approximately twenty-four people from diverse ages, educational attainment, genders, and races will be invited to participate. Mr. Benjamin Chaffin Brooks will direct this study.

In addition to this examination, I hope to also be able to use the data collected through our interviews in combination with other materials to describe the educational history of Cincinnati over the past four generations of its citizens.

What will happen?

Mr. Chaffin Brooks will interview you two to three times in a setting of your choice, and at times convenient for you. The questions and your answers will be tape recorded (audio or video) and later transcribed onto paper.

The topics that will be discussed include educational attainment (for example, aspects from your formal schooling experience will be discussed), childhood, family, past and present, and your conceptualization of quality of life. Examples of questions related to these topics are ‘Explain the relationship between education and your family upbringing,’ and ‘what impact has your education had on your personal life?’
How long will this take?

There will be a series of two to three interviews over the course of several months with each interview lasting one to two hours. The range represented here is because there are a number of questions that need to be answered, and I cannot say with exact certainty how long it will take you to answer all of these questions, and the questions that will arise from your statements.

Will anything bad happen to you?

It is unlikely that anything bad will happen to you. Having said that, however, there are two issues that should be raised. First, it can be difficult to talk about one’s personal history for any number of sensitive and/or embarrassing personal reasons. If you believe this is the case with you, you should not take part in this research study. Second, the information that you will supply is meant for public dissemination. You should be aware that having your personal information be a part of the public record could prove embarrassing for you. If you believe this could be the case with you, you should not take part in this research study.

Additionally, if you become concerned with either of these two issues during your participation in the research study, it is important for you to know that you can leave this research study at any time for any reason with no repercussions to you. You can also decide at any time, even after the interviews have been completed, that you do not wish to have yourself or the information from your interview included in the study, and this request will be honored. You may share any concerns that you have with Mr. Benjamin Chaffin Brooks at (513) 751-3391 or brooksbn@uc.edu or his faculty advisor, Dr. Roger Collins, at (513) 556-3613 or roger.collins@uc.edu.

What will you gain?

You will not benefit directly from this study. But your participation will help in understanding the relationship of educational attainment and quality of life for a demographically diverse population.

Is this study confidential?

This research study is not confidential. As this is an oral history project, it is my preference to not protect anyone’s identity during the interview process or after, including when the information collected in the interviews is used in presentations and publications.

However, if requested, I can make some or all of your information confidential. During the oral history interview process it is possible that you may reveal some element of your life that you may deem sensitive or embarrassing. If this occurs you may request to have your identity protected, and this request will be honored. If you choose this, I will change your name and any other identifiable features that you may have relayed to me.
during the interview process. These changes will be reflected in all elements of the research study, from the raw data I keep to any presentations and publications that may result from this research study.

Additionally, as stated above, you can leave this research study at any time for any reason with no repercussions to you. You can also decide at any time, even after the interviews have been completed, that you do not wish to have yourself or the information from your interview included in the study, and this request will be honored.

Finally, all consent forms, interview tapes, and transcripts will be stored in a locked filing cabinet for five years following the end of your involvement with this study. After this time, they may be given to a historical foundation, museum or university’s archival unit. This will be done because part of the purpose of oral history is to add to the historical record. If, however, you have exercised your right to leave the research study and have decided you do not wish to have your information included in the research study, your consent forms, interview tapes, and transcripts will be kept in a locked filing cabinet by me in perpetuity.

Will you receive anything?

You will not receive any compensation for participating in this study.

Can you quit at anytime?

Being a part of this research study is entirely your choice. If you take part, you may choose to stop at any time. There are no penalties for quitting. You can also decide at any time, even after the interviews have been completed, that you do not wish to have yourself or the information from your interview included in the study, and this request will be honored.

Who do you call if you have questions?

Please call Mr. Benjamin Chaffin Brooks at (513) 751-3391 or brooksbn@uc.edu or his faculty advisor, Dr. Roger Collins, at (513) 556-3613 or roger.collins@uc.edu if you have any questions about this study.

The University of Cincinnati Institutional Review Board – Social and Behavioral Sciences reviews all non-medical research projects that involve human participants to be sure the rights and welfare of participants are protected. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact the Chairperson of the University of Cincinnati Institutional Review Board – Social and Behavioral Sciences at (513) 558-5784. If you have a concern about the study you may also call the UC Research Compliance Hotline at (800) 889-1547.

Signature

I have read this permission form, which explains the reason and details of this
research study. I have had time to review the information. I have been encouraged to ask questions and have received answers to my questions. If I do not participate or if I quit, I will not be treated any differently and I will not lose any rights. Being a part of this study is entirely up to me. I give my permission to be a part of this study. I have received (or I will receive) a signed and dated copy of this form for my records.

_______________________________________  ________________________
Signature of Participant     Date

_______________________________________  ________________________
Signature and Title of Person Obtaining Consent   Date
Appendix C

Verbal Script Explaining the Study to Potential Participants

Before agreeing to participate in this study, I would like you to know a bit about this study. I will give you a brief, verbal explanation of this study, and discuss with you any questions you may have. You will need to sign a consent form giving me permission to include you in the study.

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between educational attainment and an individual’s perceived quality of life. Approximately **Twenty-four** people from diverse ages, educational attainment, genders, and races will be invited to participate. Mr. Benjamin Chaffin Brooks, me, will direct this study.

In addition to these questions, I hope to be able to describe the educational history of Cincinnati over the past four generations of its citizens.

The oral history you will provide through extensive interviewing will serve as one piece among many that will answer these large-scale questions and other questions that may arise as we go through the data collection process.

To participate in this study you must have grown up in Cincinnati, attended some schooling in the Greater Cincinnati area, be older than 21 years of age, and be either Caucasian or African American.

Your participation in the study will go as follows. There will be a series of two to three interviews over the course of several months with each interview lasting between one to two hours. The range represented here is because there are a number of questions that need to be answered, and I cannot say with exact certainty how long it will take you to answer all of these questions. The interviews will occur at times and in places convenient for you. The questions and your answers will be tape recorded (audio or video) and later transcribed onto paper.

It is important for you to know that your identity will not be concealed at any point during the research study, including when the data collected in your interview is being disseminated publicly in the form of presentations and publications, except under extreme circumstances. However, you can leave this research study at any time for any reason with no repercussions to you. You can also decide at any time, even after the interviews have been completed, that you do not wish to have yourself or the information from your interview included in the study, and I will honor that request.
Appendix D

Interview Question Guide

Background Questions

1. What is your name?
2. How old are you?
3. What is your gender?
4. What is your race?
5. Please list all the schools you have attended and the grades during which you attended those schools.
6. What is your occupation?
7. Who are the members of your family?
8. What was the level of importance placed on education by your family (parent, guardian, etc.)?
9. What neighborhood did you grow up in?
10. Where do you live now?

Long Answer Questions*

1. Tell me about your childhood. What is your earliest personal memory?
2. Tell me about your family life growing up. What role did your parent/guardian(s) play in helping you with your school work? What roles did they play in informal learning? What did they communicate to you about the role of school and wider learning in life? What did your friends and siblings say was the purpose of schooling and outside learning?
3. Tell me about where you grew up. Describe your neighborhood(s) for me.
4. Tell me about your personal life as an adult, including your family and friends, organizations you may be a part of or anything that is of value to you.
5. Tell me about your K-12 schooling experiences. What were your fondest memories of elementary/high school? Who were some of your favorite teachers, and why? What were your grades like? What are some valuable lessons you took away from your K-12 schooling experiences?
   [This question will be broken up into parts: preschool/kindergarten, elementary, middle and high school.]
6. Can you think of learning experiences from your youth that occurred outside of school? Tell me about those experiences? In what environments did these experiences occur?
7. If applicable, tell me about your schooling experiences from your adulthood. What were your grades like? What are some valuable lessons you took away from these schooling experiences?
8. Can you think of learning experiences from your adulthood that occurred outside of school? Tell me about those experiences? In what environments did these occur?
9. Tell me about your work experiences. What is your work history? How does it explain who you are and are becoming? What do you like about your job? What do you hate about your job? What role does your job play in your life? How would you sum up your satisfaction with your job? Explain.
10. What are you most proud of in your life?
11. What are you least proud of in your life?
12. What is the most memorable moment of your life?
13. Do you feel good about your life? What do you like about your life? Name two things you
would change about your life. How would you sum up your satisfaction with your life? Explain.
14. What elements of your life have contributed to this feeling about your life?
15. Has your schooling had an impact on your perception of your life? Please, explain.
16. Have your other experiences had an impact on your perception of your life? Please, explain.

* I have not separated these questions into interview sessions, though it is likely that they will
occur over more than one interview session as it is a general rule to not have an interview last
more than an hour. Further, I understand that each participant will respond differently to these
questions and because of this it is likely that this order of questioning will not be followed
exactly. In addition, it is also quite likely that participant responses will lead to questions that I
had not previously thought to ask and, as such, are not included in this interview guide.