

EXPLORING THE HIDDEN POWER OF WORLDVIEWS

A new learning framework to advance the transformative agenda of
Education for Sustainable Development

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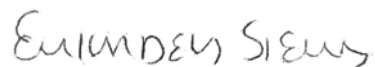
January 31st 2018

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I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "EIMUNDUR SIGURÐSSON". The letters are cursive and somewhat slanted to the right.

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List of contributions

Journal publications

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List of abbreviations

CGT	Constructivist Grounded Theory
ESD	Education for Sustainable Development
IBDM	Interpersonal Biology of the Developing Mind
TFWB	Transdisciplinary Framework on Worldviews and Behaviours
WBLF	Worldviews Based Learning Framework

Abstract

The field of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is evolving from a positivist orientation dominated by the connection between knowledge and behaviour, to a range of more integrated approaches aiming at introspection and the deep transformation of the self. A transdisciplinary literature review covering neurological, cognitive, affective, psychological and philosophical aspects of human behaviour, as well as theories of learning and educational paradigms unveiled *worldviews* as a useful term to build a new approach to learning, potentially helpful in the achievement of ESD's transformative goals.

A *worldview* is a complex constellation of meaning from which the wide range of human conduct emerges; it is the uniquely personal, subjective meaning given to reality, which explains each life experience and prescribes patterns of emotions, thoughts and actions. The concept was used to explore how people apprehend and make sense of their own reality, and form their unique structures of meaning. This investigation explored the potential of worldviews in both a theoretical and empirical manner. The Transdisciplinary Framework on Worldviews and Behaviours (TFWB) was developed as a theoretical explanation of what worldviews are and how they are mentally formed and physically expressed through the wide range of human conduct the body can display. Then, building upon the TFWB, an in-depth qualitative study of the personal worldviews was designed and implemented to gain insights into the actual experience people have of their own worldview and how it is formed and transformed.

Twenty-five randomly selected participants' worldviews were explored in three steps. Initially, the participants completed an online multiple-choice survey based on a worldviews typology and questionnaire focused on the identification of ontological, epistemological, axiological, anthropological and sociological perceptions. Then, they participated in a semi-structured interview where they discussed their responses to the questionnaire, the most significant life experiences they identified as being crucial

in the formation of their worldview, and behaviours which they identified as representative expressions of their worldview. Follow-up questions administered two months later provided an opportunity to prompt and capture insights and reflections arising from the experience of the interviews. Based on a Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) approach, data was analysed through specifically tailored interpretive frameworks; for example, to analyse coded data regarding life experiences, a specific interpretive framework integrating premises on worldviews, learning, and psychological influences in mental development, was developed.

The empirical research revealed a general struggle among the participants to recognise their own worldview, how it is formed and how it determines the way they behave. Participants showed inconsistency and variations in their capacity to self-recognise, critically reflect and eloquently express themselves. Reported significant life experiences like moving into a new country, getting married or the death of a relative suggest that, for this group at least, traditional education approaches have not played a significant role in the recognition of these fundamental issues about human identity and existential meanings. Self-recognising a personal worldview resembled the first five phases of a transformative learning experience, with the potential to encourage reformulations in meaning structures and increase coherence in personal narratives; in turn, this includes the inherent opportunity to explore new ways of being, becoming and behaving.

Based on the empirical results and the theoretical TFWB, this thesis concludes with a distillation from the findings into five learning principles integrated into a worldviews based learning framework (WBLF), which would make a difference to ESD. This study argues that transformative ESD needs new foundations that position worldviews at the centre of the learning and transformation process. Such an approach would improve people's self-recognition of how and when they sense and apprehend the world, and build its meanings; and how such meanings determine the ways people feel, think and act, contributing to the achievement of ESD's transformative goals.

Graphical abstract

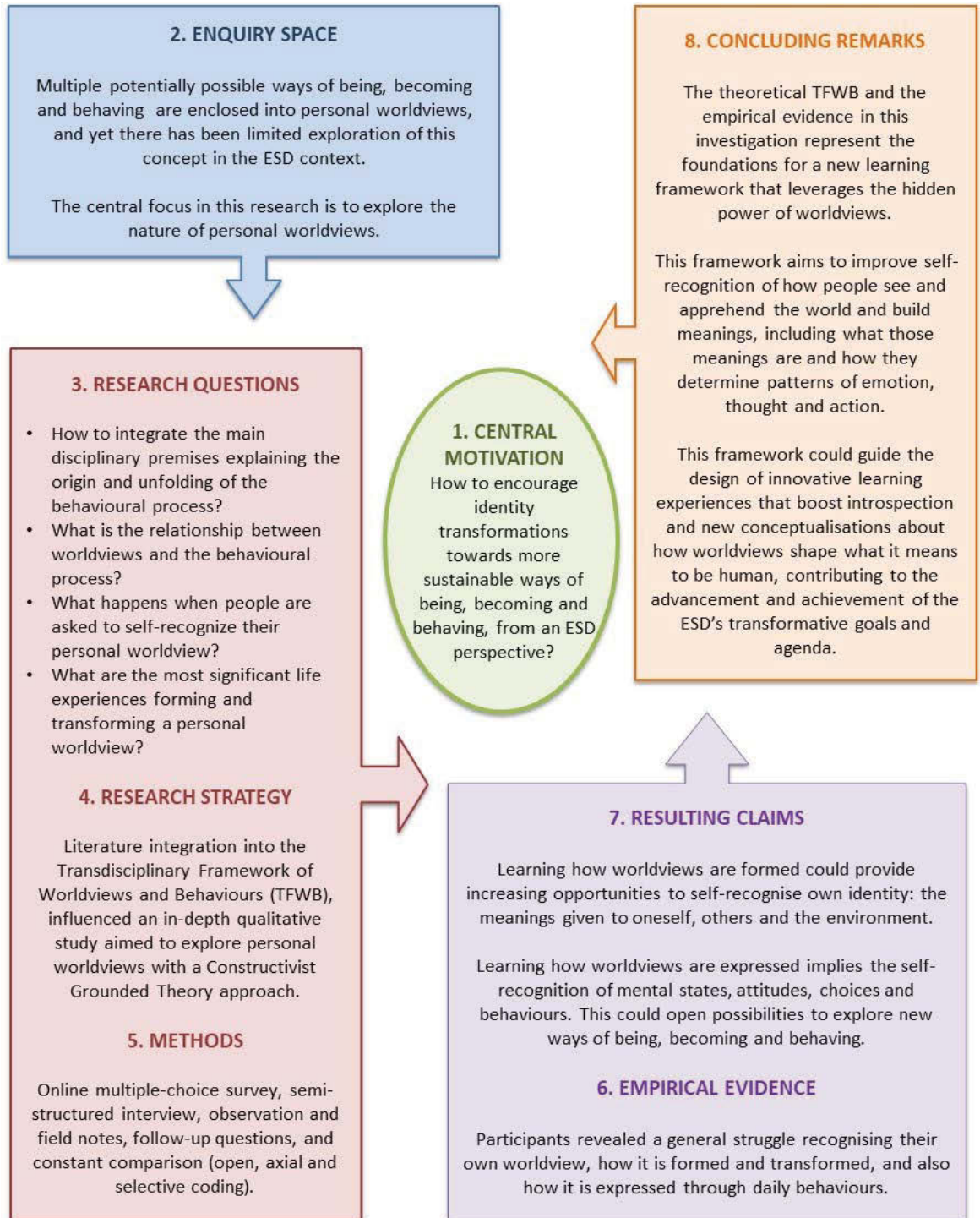


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