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Metaphors we learn by: Practitioners' conceptions of the meaning of non-formal education in Estonian context

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Abstract

Non-formal education is the central standpoint and practice of lifelong learning. The aim of the article is to demonstrate the possibilities of construing the meaning of non-formal education through practitioners' conceptions in Estonia. At the same time, we show how non-formal education practice can enrich other types of education and how these principles may be more widely applied in formal education as well. The current research based on metaphor analysis draws on the materials collected in focus group interviews with practitioners (n=17). Analysis revealed that practitioners describe non-formal education as a cooperational journey of discovery which requires effort, concentrates on development and is related to emotions, play and creativity. At the same time, non-formal education is defined through metaphors of cultural symbols and open space. The diverse opportunities of non-formal education create the basis for choices and tolerance to differences, whereas the emergence of border area metaphors confirms the deep rooted idea that non-formal education's place lies in between different types of education.

Keywords: Adult education, educational metaphor, lifelong learning, metaphor analysis, non-formal education, non-formal learning



Introduction

In the centre of contemporary metaphor concept founded by Lakoff and Johnson (2003) are connections between language, thinking and perception. Their concept is based on a presumption that metaphors form the structure of every day concepts and it is reflected in language use. They posit in their work “Metaphors we live by”, first published in 1980, that metaphors determine people’s behaviour and thinking and that with the help of metaphors one can create new meanings and explain life (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, p. 4). In our article with the paraphrased title, referring to the aforementioned work of the two scientists, we demonstrate possibilities for explaining the meaning of one of the most important parts of life – learning – and one of its significant aspects – non-formal education – as it is understood in Estonian context.

The term *non-formal education* came into use in relation to adult education when such education became an inseparable part of work and personal life and European and American educational systems were looking for opportunities for complementary education (Holmberg, 1986). As a reaction to the set limitations of formal education, *non-formal learning* signified a flexible type of education that was based on the learner’s needs (Dudzinska-Przesmitzki & Grenier, 2008). A broader discussion on non-formal education started in the 1970s, though the term was first used already in the 1947 UNESCO education report (Colley et al., 2003). Non-formal education is non-certificated, happens outside the called classical school environment, is flexible, purposeful and voluntary, takes into account the learner’s autonomy and individuality and lasts a lifetime (Coombs & Ahmed, 1974; Dudzinska-Przesmitzki & Grenier, 2008; West, 2009).

As everywhere else in Europe, the history and tradition of non-formal education and learning in Estonia is quite old. Starting from the 19th century every kind of self-development has always been considered respectable for people of every age: in different folk societies, song choirs, church congregations and associations (Taru et al., 2015). The year 1906 is considered to be the start of the history of adult education in Estonia as it was the time when the Society for Education of Estonian People was founded in order to improve the general level of people’s education (Jõgi, 2020). Non-formal education for adults has been provided by different organisations, including free educational movements, e.g. cultural and folk universities – seen as educational organisations focused on learner-centredness and consideration for adult learners’ individuality to support their studies (ibid.). In the former Soviet Union non-formal education served as a means of forcing the ideological beliefs and planting political convictions among the existing working class as well as their next generations. On the other hand, there were trainings and courses for workers, managers, teachers and other members of society, the content of which was not only ideological and the approach was very similar to the nowadays understanding of non-formal education as an opportunity to support an adult’s needs and development (Juurak, 2000). Thus, the main idea of non-formal education – openness, flexibility and respect for the learner – has remained the same despite the passage of decades and change of regimes.

Social agreements and meanings are reflected in written texts as well as in oral language use. How we think, talk or write about things shows the way we understand and perceive the world. In educational policy documents and educational sphere in general more and more attention – alongside with the formal education – goes to non-formal education and their convergence (HTM, 2020; UNESCO, 2020). At the same time little is known about how practitioners from different spheres of expertise, who use non-formal education methods and principles in their everyday work, understand the meaning of such

education. According to Frackowiak (2017), many concepts in education are abstract or not clearly defined in people's experience (e.g. *emotions, ideas, time*), however, it is possible to explain them through metaphors (space orientation, objects and the like) in the same way Johnson and Lakoff (2003) describe the transfer of concepts.

The necessity to analyse the meaning of non-formal education has been indicated in Estonia (Karu et al., 2019) and elsewhere (Colley et al., 2003). That is why we set the goal of the research to analyse the metaphors of non-formal education in practitioners' conceptions in order to determine: 1) what metaphors the practitioners use to construe the meaning of non-formal education and 2) what specific characteristics of non-formal education are revealed through the analysed metaphors. This enables us to demonstrate how the principles of non-formal education enrich other types of education and different spheres of expertise, including adult education. The acquired knowledge can be applicable for non-formal education practitioners as well as for those engaged in promoting adult education and in support of non-formal practitioners' professional development. The results describe significant facets of Estonian context which can be transferred to any country's sphere of adult education.

The concept of non-formal education

As everywhere else in the world, we differentiate three types of education in Estonia. Formal education, which is arranged in accordance with curricula in schools, is purposeful and conducted under the instruction of qualified teachers trained to teach a specific subject and in which the learning process and its results are assessed. Informal education is, on the contrary, non-purposeful from the learner's point of view and takes place in everyday life situations with its results remaining for the large part unnoticed immediately by the learner (HTM, 2020). The place of non-formal learning is between these two types, i.e. it has the characteristics of both formal and informal learning (Malcolm et al., 2003).

Non-formal education is a way of learning which includes hobby education, in-service complementary training, youth work, environment protection, career counselling and other opportunities for self-development. It is defined as a purposeful voluntary lifelong learning which takes place outside school (Coombs & Ahmed, 1974). The opposition to the classical obligatory school education with its set and structured curriculum, certain assessment criteria and with the acquired knowledge being attested by a certificate (the so called 'formal education') has always been the main construct of non-formal education – both in official as well as other public language use (Karu et al., 2019). However, instead of the opposition, nowadays educational strategies stress the importance of consciously purposeful and voluntary learning in different environments (HTM, 2020; UNESCO, 2020).

Non-formal learning provides formal learning with additional value and offers alternative learning approaches, diversifying the possibilities to acquire education (Colley et al., 2003). Non-formal education often brings forward the idea of the learner's autonomy as well as the instructor's supportive role (Knowles et al., 2015). In addition, the main principles of non-formal education are valuing the learner's inner motivation and determination to reach the set goal, use of various learning environments and methods as well as conscious focus on the learner's development. The latest research also indicates that Estonian education system has reached or is reaching the stage where there is one learning (the so called 'personal learning journey'), both in and outside the school, the participants of which set their individual goals in the frame of general goals to raise their

interest in knowledge and skills, but, first and foremost, in acquisition of experience. (Põlda, Reinsalu, & Karu, 2021) In our research we proceed from exactly these points of view and consider non-formal education an opportunity to learn during the whole life and voluntarily, involving the previous (life)experience into the learning process, setting learning goals and reflecting on the acquired knowledge.

Metaphors in education

Metaphor is a conceptual phenomenon through which people create abstract constructs, structure their thinking and make sense of the world, their own behaviour and activities (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003; Sfard, 2014). According to the conceptual metaphor theory, a metaphor is a natural language unit of human conceptual system in which one concept is revealed through another. As both concepts may belong to different domains, the conceptual metaphors are characterized by the conceptual relation between the two domains – the source domain and the target domain. The most wide-spread example of a conceptual metaphor is LIFE IS A JOURNEY. (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003) Thus, it is to some extent expected that LEARNING IS A JOURNEY is the most known conceptual metaphor in educational area (Cameron, 2003) which explicitly refers to the significance of process in learning, possibility of choice and change of people's points of view and broadening of their horizons (Frąckowiak, 2017). This standpoint is supported by the education strategy soon to be applied in Estonia and its vision document.

Educational metaphors have been treated from many aspects. One can differentiate metaphors describing various approaches to learning: learning as acquisition – teacher-centred approach; learning as participation – student-centred approach; learning as constructing meanings – constructivist approach to learning, and learning as maintaining vitality – an approach that values lifelong learning (Davis, 2018; Guilherme & Souza de Freitas, 2018). These metaphors reflect the changes that have taken place in education, whereas the earlier approaches to learning have not disappeared with the emergence of the new paradigms and are also reflected in the contemporary education system (Davis, 2018). Thus one can assume that education system is a multilayered mix of various approaches to learning which, in their turn, are revealed in the applied metaphors.

There are metaphors in our everyday language use that for various reasons have become universal (Säljö, 2003). Such metaphors are called grand or dominating. Grand metaphors reflect different approaches to learning: in the teacher-centred approach the teacher is considered a creator (sculptor's metaphor), whereas according to the student-centred approach, the teacher is the supporter of the student's development (gardener's metaphor) (Guilherme & Souza de Freitas, 2018). The teacher's supporting role is also described by the metaphors related to the student's choices and responsibility, e.g. 'the Teacher is like a multitude of doors and the Student chooses which doors to open' (ibid., p. 952). One might suppose that language use also demonstrates the metaphors indicating dialogue and cooperation. However, the research works (Aava, 2010; Cameron, 2003; Guilherme & Souza de Freitas, 2018) show the opposite – (formal) education is described from the perspective of the individual and their needs; and the teacher's – not the learner's – responsibility for the learning process is accentuated.

In addition to the multilayeredness of education system there has been a discussion on its subordination to neoliberal ideologies and market economy (Apple, 2001; Bjursell, 2016; Guilherme & Souza de Freitas, 2018). The marketization of society has a double influence on education: on the one hand, market economy creates social inequality which is reflected in the availability of education; on the other hand, education depends on the

market and it entails excessive standardization and may transfer power to educational leaders (Fejes & Salling Olesen, 2016; Milana, Kopecký, & Finnegan, 2021). At the management level the metaphors indicate the ideologies dominating education, e.g. adult education as market, integration, democracy, which shows that contemporary theories of adult education are influenced by and intertwined with economic theories (Bjursell, 2016) but also refer to the necessity of cooperation and joint creative work in the learning process (Przybylska, 2009).

Similar tendencies have also emerged in adult education in Central and Eastern European countries: though such metaphors referring to creativity and cooperation are used like *Paradise for Creative Minds* and *Space for Interpersonal Communication*, it has also been found that adult education is *Gold Mine*, *Catalyst of Economic Growth* and *Solution to the Social Problem* (Przybylska, 2009). Similarly, Estonian educational discourse reveals the competition-centredness of education (client attendant metaphor), subordination to economic and educational policy interests (educational economics metaphor) and the issue of having access to education (resource metaphor) (Aava, 2010). The aforementioned demonstrates that metaphors by which the social reality is constructed (Redden, 2017) may refer in educational sphere both to possibilities as well as problems including oppression (see Freire, 1972).

The metaphors help to describe adult education practice and theory in order to better understand the problems of the area on the one hand, and, on the other hand, to reveal new perspectives (Edwards, 2016; Frąckowiak, 2017). This way there have emerged four categories of metaphors on the learning process level: natural, geographical, astronomical and pictorial (ibid.), illustrating dimensions and cooperation in learning environment. Adult education and lifelong learning metaphors are the moorland, desert or tundra metaphors, demonstrating changes in adult education and also courage and openness to act in the area as well as limitations for the action and the participants' opportunities (Edwards, 2016). The dual attitude to adult education is also seen in metaphors *blessing and penance*, *running and juggling* as well as *addiction for learning* (Proctor II, 1991).

Considering the aforementioned, it is intriguing to examine the language constructs of non-formal education and to find out whether the used metaphors reveal the cooperational aspect of learning process as a dominating discourse and what the metaphors characterize generally in learning, be it formal or non-formal.

Research arrangement

Metaphor analysis allows to better understand the researched phenomenon, including non-formal education (see Redden, 2017). Although the approach, which uses metaphor analysis, is not commonly accepted for investigation of concepts of education and learning, it is still a widely used method to bring out the meanings, including conception of teaching and learning (see e.g. Candy, 1986).

In addition to conventional metaphors i.e. metaphors that happen to appear in the text, the scientists have turned their attention to novel i.e. elicited metaphors, which the interviewed were explicitly asked to produce (Low, 2015). In order to collect such elicited metaphors, the interviewed may be asked to finish sentences (e.g. *The teacher is like..., because...*), write short texts, explain a drawing, fill in a questionnaire, take part in an interview or even a combination of the aforementioned tools may be applied (Seung et al., 2015). Whereas an interview is considered to be the most effective tool for collecting data, because open-ended questions allow to address the topics in-depth, reaching to personal conceptions and beliefs (ibid.). As the researched metaphors are in essence

conceptual metaphors, which manifest in the form SOURCE DOMAIN IS TARGET DOMAIN (Lakoff & Johnson, 2011), in our analysis we follow this classical metaphor theory principles.

17 focus group interviews were conducted in autumn 2019 in the framework of a wider research “*Meanings of non-formal learning from the perspectives of practice and practitioners*” that was carried out in Estonia. The interviews were conducted with non-formal education practitioners¹ to determine how they construe the meaning of non-formal education. The total number of the interviewed practitioners was 64 and they represented the following areas: adult education (AE), youth work (YW), culture (C), welfare (W), economics (E) and environmental education (EE). The choice of areas was determined by the previous research (Karu et al., 2019) which demonstrated that the policy documents of these six aforementioned areas highlight on non-formal education in Estonia and the practitioners active in those areas are guided by the named documents in their everyday work. The sample included representatives of public, private and non-governmental organisations.

The interviews consisted of four parts, whereas the current article concentrates on the first two, which contain elicited metaphors. In the first part the participants were asked to describe non-formal education with the help of a photo they brought with them. In the second part the participants explained what, in their opinion, is and is not non-formal education. They were also asked to name a metaphor that is associated with non-formal education. In those cases when the interviewed came once again back to some elicited metaphor, we also used other parts of the interview where practical opportunities of non-formal education were dealt with.

To analyse the collected data, we divided the transcripts between the researchers. Each of them entered into the common table the elicited metaphors appearing in their analysed texts, the texts’ excerpts with the explanation of these metaphors and the characteristics of non-formal education found in the excerpts. It was followed by a consensual discussion of all the language units presented as metaphors, which would be in accordance with classical metaphor theory as well as non-formal education principles (see above). The resulting final sample contains 86 metaphors, including two repeated ones. After that we divided the metaphors into subcategories, taking into consideration the context when performing detailed differentiation of meanings (on metaphors and context-bound units see Ricoeur 1991), and this later formed the basis for main categories. Some metaphors, the so called hybrid metaphors (see also Poom-Valickis & Oder, 2013), belong to several categories.

The non-formal education metaphors were divided into five main categories (see the table in Annex). We describe below the main categories according to subcategories’ capacity, point out the metaphors that make up the subcategories as well as the characteristics of non-formal education as manifested in the practitioners’ conceptions. To illustrate the results, we present excerpts from the interviews accompanied by the sign signifying the practitioner’s area of expertise and the ordinal number of the interview.

Results: non-formal education metaphors in practitioners’ language use

Metaphors related to the process

The metaphors from the journey subcategory are mostly connected with a physical place, with physical change of the location. One part of them expresses a longer purposeful process, e.g. *flying, painting, journey* (example 1). Whereas the other part is related to a

sudden change which takes place during the journey or at the end of it, e.g. *coming out of the tunnel, descending the hill, soaring up*.

1. My image is of such a hiking journey when there, far away, one sees a mountain. The aim is to get to the top. /---/ And at some point maybe the journey becomes even more important than the final goal itself. (YW2)

The journey subcategory is associated with the subcategory of development, because if a journey is a purposeful process, it is accompanied by development. In the interviews non-formal education was explicitly compared to *development* and *self-development*, at the same time the opportunities for development were also indicated indirectly, e.g. through the *flower* metaphor (example 2).

2. For me it's like a flower, and this expresses growth and development. /---/ Continuous development and then bursting into bloom in the end. (EE1)

The development subcategory indicates both spontaneous processes as well as ideas of work and effort. The effort subcategory metaphors reveal that non-formal education is active contribution, born in cooperation, rich in experiences; at the same time, the importance of work and working was also stressed. The idea of making an effort is clearly demonstrated by the metaphor of the bow (example 3), where pulling of the bow's string is equalled to tuning oneself in before an activity.

3. Like a bow: first there's a pull, and then it goes. /---/ this effort at the beginning, when you have to pull the string, to tune yourself in somehow. (AE1)

The discovery subcategory metaphors are the most prominent among the ones related to process. The interviewed compared non-formal education to the diverse nature of *rain forest/jungle* and an *adventure park*, offering a chance to overcome oneself, a generally thrilling *adventure* (example 4). The metaphors of *a tunnel* and *a door slightly ajar* also indicate a wish to discover, as well as *groping (feeling one's way)*, which helps one to get to know (new) people and environment.

4. My first thought is adventure. If I am interested in developing myself in non-formal context, then I want some thrill and I will choose such a thing which I certainly don't know yet. (EE1)

For the participants non-formal education is also associated with spending free time. For instance, *theatre, puppet theatre, museum* belong to the subcategory of spending time. Also *the Song and Dance Festival*, an important part of Estonian national culture, where one can enjoy together someone else's creative work (see the creativity subcategory), but also simple *playing* and *intellectual game*. All these activities may be summarised by the joint name, using the metaphor *intelligent dispelling of boredom* as in example 5.

5. Like dispelling boredom, intelligent dispelling of boredom. (W2)

The subcategory of spending time is directly related to the subcategory of creating a whole with such toy metaphors as *Lego blocks, kaleidoscope, Rubik's Cube* and *puzzle* and also a creativity metaphor of *stained glass*. They indicate that non-formal education consists of small parts which have to be put together to make up a whole (example 6).

6. Some different puzzle pieces which in the end become that whole picture, meaning that you can experience, learn different things and just be and in the end it will all become a whole. (M2)

The metaphors belonging to the cooperation subcategory refer to a body of beings, which may be for instance a *company* or *fish school* (example 7). In addition to forming a body, cooperation is reflected in joining of participants as expressed in such metaphors like *creating societies* or *making bridges* and *finding good notes between the pauses*.

7. The sea is big and you can choose your own school of fish and move from one school into another. But there may be one word which is a keyword in non-formal education for me – it is respect: that there is a lot of respect between the fish and for the environment too. And also for oneself that if you can't make it, then you take a break and do not disturb the others. (EE1)

Metaphors related to the subject

One part of the creativity subcategory metaphors is connected with fine arts. Non-formal education is presented as *theatre* (including *puppet theatre*), *stained glass* and *painting/picture*, as well as *glass bead game* – in other words, everything that presupposes *creativity* (example 8). As playing is also a creative activity, so the other part of this subcategory contains metaphors related to toys, e.g. *puzzle*, *kaleidoscope* (see toy subcategory).

8. When I started thinking what this non-formal education actually is, then my first thought was creativity, some fun, some pleasure. (W1)

The emotion category shows that non-formal education is connected with *fun* and *pleasure* (examples 8, 9), and, in addition, the metaphor *beauty of the game* demonstrates that non-formal education is a voluntary activity which supplies good emotions.

9. It's a little pleasure, voluntarily taken up for oneself. (W2)

Metaphors related to the object

The majority of metaphors from the symbol subcategory carries cultural values. *The map of Estonia* and *the Tall Hermann Tower with the Estonian flag on top* are connected with national symbols (example 10). The latter is a tower near the Estonian Parliament's building with the Estonian national flag flying over its top. However, the Hermann Tower metaphor's focus is not the tower itself but it is the reflection on the surface of water in the moat, which surrounds the ancient Toompea castle, revealing the interpretational and also self-reflectional aspect of non-formal education.

10. The Hermann Tower with the Estonian flag on its top /---/ and then how its reflection down here, on the moat's water, the top of the same tower and this flag, this actually is the whole point of it all /---/ I wouldn't associate this [non-formal education] so much with any person or place but with one's own responsibility to keep your eyes open and to see some connections or some points of view. (W2)

The model subcategory is quite close to the symbol subcategory and the metaphors belonging to it form a heterogenic group. Non-formal education is compared to *the map*

of *Estonia* (example 11) and the *model of the country*, while the metaphor *miniature life* reveals the vital side of non-formal education.

11. So, I have such an image of the map of Estonia. (YW2)

Metaphors like *kaleidoscope*, *Rubik's Cube*, *puzzle*, *Dixit cards* and *Lego blocks* belong to the toy subcategory as well as more sports-like toys like *bow and arrows* and *balls*. A part of them is also related to spending time subcategory (see above). So the metaphor in example 12 stresses the inner determination and an opportunity to learn through play. While the usage of the objects is usually determined by practical necessity, the toys reflect more the childhood nostalgia and sense of safety, a play being a combination of practicality and conditionality.

12. I remember this cartoon "Laughing ball" /---/, but we bring more such balls here. Let's say exactly this zeal and motivation, this fun of play and joy. (E1)

A subcategory of a storage place came forth, referring to the idea of practicality, the prototype representatives of which are *storage box* and *treasure box*. Using the metaphor of a storage box, the participant in example 13 describes non-formal education as a diverse purposeful activity, the final result of which will become clear only in the end.

13. The storage box here is quite a good comparison. Firstly, here are very many different things, secondly, there's this something, which I'm going to look for with a purpose in mind. /---/ The other point is that I don't see the bottom, /-- / that it's a surprise, actually. (E5)

Metaphors related to the opportunity

In the core of the diversity subcategory there are things and activities related to playing which have a certain purpose and which, according to the interviewed, are creative, special, non-standard and diverse (see toy subcategory). The metaphors indicate the various opportunities of non-formal education, described by such nouns and adjectives as *multicolouredness/multitude* and *colourful*. Thus, non-formal education enriches formal education, adding colours and shades to the black-and-white definite images and frames, at the same time blurring the borders (example 14). Similarly to the cooperation subcategory, one part of the diversity subcategory is connected with people as non-formal education takes place in cooperation with others (*company*, *fish school*).

14. It enriches this very certain black-and-white picture that has these very clear and definite lines /---/ But non-formal education adds different colours and shades and images. (YW2)

Some metaphors forming the difference subcategory refer to being something or someone, e.g. *a clever cow*. Example 15, through the red fly agaric metaphor, demonstrates drawing attention caused by differing from the norm and argues that learning takes place in the case when one thinks beyond the difference and starts making connections. The other part of the metaphors from this subcategory shows non-formal education as being *outside of the classical learning form*. The learning happens on the basis of free will and a purpose and involves the learner's experience, body and activity.

15. Red fly agaric. /---/ How you can't just go past it, you just notice it, and at the same time how far you can go and think and connect from that point further

on, exactly this making connections is one of the key words for me about non-formal education. (EE1)

Metaphors related to the environment

The movement metaphors, belonging to the open space subcategory, describe non-formal education as a movement outward from a limited territory: *from a classroom, a classical way of learning, a box or a frame*. The reference to cognitive processes, learning methods, guidance and environment support appear as features of the movement metaphors in the descriptions of the participants (examples 16, 17).

16. A child learning somewhere outside of the classroom, far away from school. /---/ They are like in contact with all this nature, as if sitting on this very ground. (EE1)

In addition to movement metaphors, the metaphors of static nature also carry the meaning of open space, when they describe some element of the environment (*landscape, empty paper*) or an event (*World Cleanup Day*). They demonstrate learning as an event in the globalised society looking for balance with nature. The metaphor *sky is the limit* also belongs here (example 17), illustrating a wide range of opportunities in non-formal education. At the same time the metaphor denotes the border area as it sets a frame for the learning, a seemingly supernatural and yet certain.

17. Thinking out of the box /.../ Then there comes creativity, some creative education, doesn't it, one gets out of formal education, really out of the box. Sky is the limit. (E3)

The border area subcategory emerges mainly as border drawing elements (*door, tunnel, zebra stripes*) and activities (*opening/closing the door, driving into formal education*). A metaphor with a special meaning is *a door slightly ajar*, which expresses doubt. Whereas the Russian expression *не мясо не рыба* ('not meat and not fish either') refers to the diversity of non-formal education and to the multitude of possibilities for construing the meaning of the concept (example 18). Thus the position of non-formal education is in the border area between different and diverse possibilities.

18. The first that came to mind was the Russian не мясо не рыба, that as how many of us are sitting here, that many possibilities of interpretation there are, I think one could make a debate or a discussion about it. (W2)

The subcategory of cultural space shows widening of the learning room outward from the classical learning environment as the metaphors of the open space also indicate. In addition, it refers to a broader connection of education and learning with culture in general – learning is an inseparable part of culture, essentially interwoven with it via common elements (e.g. constructing identity, consolidation of principles and attitudes, formation of habits and traditions). The metaphors of culture space (*the Song and Dance Festival, museum, theatre*) indicate larger narratives, e.g. Estonians are a culture nation, and reproduce the widely adopted as natural conception that education and culture are *a priori* interconnected.

Discussion and conclusion

The general meaning of non-formal education has been construed via opposition to formal education both in historical (Coombs & Ahmed, 1974) as well as in contemporary conceptions (Jarvis, 2002; Knowles et al., 2015; Merriam et al., 2007). The metaphor analysis revealed the following characteristics in the conception of non-formal education understood by practitioners.

- The metaphors related to the process: valuing the learning process; purposefulness; offering options; focusing on the learner's development and broadening their horizons and conceptions; the learner's activity and their active contribution; cooperation between the participants of the learning process and learning from each other; division of the whole into parts and the skill to put the parts together into a whole.
- The metaphors related to the subject: creativity in learning; valuing personal experience; the learner's activity; looking for an alternative learning approach and, through that, also valuing the traditional learning.
- The metaphors related to the object: connection between socio-cultural context and real life; a learning approach which complements and supports formal learning; the values and interpretation possibilities that emerge in the learning process; importance of reflection and a sense of safety in learning; simulation as a possibility to support learning.
- The metaphors related to opportunity: diverse forms and ways; alternative choices; the learner's independence and decisiveness, responsibility for one's learning; self-directed learning; different and personalized modes of action.
- The metaphors related to the environment: openness and a multitude of opportunities; creativity; gaining balance with the nature; supported learning; learning as sharing the culture and its connection to formal education.

The metaphor analysis revealed that non-formal education is perceived as purposeful, voluntary, supports the learner's development and self-reflection and offers diverse learning approaches and environments. It supports and values the learner's activity, cooperation between the participants and learning from each other, the discovery-like and playful character of learning, and also voices the seriousness of non-formal education in the context of general education. The current research showed that, in addition to the opposition, non-formal education is seen as an opportunity to diversify the acquisition of education via alternative learning approaches (compare Colley et al., 2003). Moreover, this concept of education is based on cultural values and beliefs. Therefore, the metaphors we learn by reflect different facets of both educational sphere as well as our cultural space.

The new national educational strategy of Estonia focuses on the learning process and describes the learner's coping in this process (learner-centred, the so called 'changed concept of learning'). This is carried out with the help of journey metaphors – learning ways and paths. The importance of the conceptual change is also confirmed by the present research as the metaphors referring to the process outweighed others in the language use of non-formal education practitioners' (see table). The most well-known was the metaphor NON-FORMAL LEARNING IS A JOURNEY, which is considered to be the most widespread educational metaphor, being derived from the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY, detected by Lakoff ja Johnson (2003). The journey was associated with stable ongoing movement (e.g. *riding a bike*, *hiking*, *working*) but also with such activities that bring extreme and sudden changes (e.g. *sudden descent*, *adventure*, *coming out of the*

tunnel). Other works indicate the journey as creation of opportunities, a chance to broaden one's horizons and to see new points of view (Frąckowiak, 2017). The current research adds one more significant aspect – the journey that describes the process also helps one out of the comfort zone, supports development and cooperation and is, in addition, an opportunity to 'intelligently dispel boredom'.

We would like to point out the subcategory of spending time as no such issue is mentioned in scientific literature. This category also contains the connection between non-formal education and play (see also toy subcategory). Estonian theatre scientist Liina Unt states that toys acquire meaning in a play situation (2005); therefore, the toys related to learning process are connected to and acquire their meaning in the learning process. Contrary to the widely accepted conception that play is an important part of culture reproduction – the process of transmitting cultural values, practices and shared understandings –, Unt (2005) brings to the light another aspect: an activity with no research-like, experimental and transcendental element – in other words playfulness – cannot be considered playing. Thus, play is important and seriously considered not only in non-formal education but in education in general. Play focuses on effort and is an important opportunity to learn. Thus, the research demonstrates the positive meaning of play and of spending free time in interpretation of learning at any level of education.

Though some metaphors were related to only one subcategory (e.g. *storage box*), most were, however, hybrid i.e. they were presented in several subcategories. The metaphors demonstrated the multi-facet character of non-formal education. Metaphors referring to play and toys were presented in six subcategories in total and thus indicated that play and playfulness are among the most significant characteristics of non-formal education. Connection with play revealed the discovery-like and creative facet of non-formal education, its characteristic feature to create and value emotions and its dimension of supporting cooperation and a skill to create a whole. Such metaphors as the puzzle and Rubik's Cube highlighted an important characteristic of non-formal education to value small parts in learning – 'learning bites' – as describing learning journey in our new educational strategy (see HTM 2020). The research demonstrated that usage of play elements in non-formal education creates for a person a freedom of choice to reach their goals in a multitude of ways.

Similarly to play metaphors, movement metaphors appeared in several subcategories, which, in its turn, confirmed the importance of process in learning and also indicated the direction. In non-formal education the movement is directed 'outward' – be it from formal education, classical learning environment or a thinking pattern (*out of the box/frame*). The coming out of the tunnel and the door metaphor indicated such characteristics of non-formal education as valuing choices and possibilities, support of the learner's talents and strengths and its close connection to culture space.

The third larger group of hybrid metaphors emerged as culture symbols and culture space metaphors, which were also present in the subcategory of creativity, cooperation, difference and diversity. The conceptual metaphor NON-FORMAL LEARNING IS A SONG FESTIVAL sums up all the features of the aforementioned subcategories and shows non-formal education as a significant cultural event happening in public space, involving cooperation and acknowledgment of differences. The metaphors referring to culture space, which appear in the research materials, were quite unique: the cultural symbols indicated that non-formal education is natural as the symbols are wide-spread in the people's language use.

The current research findings provide a significant addition to the theoretically assumed characteristics of non-formal education: purposefulness, voluntary participation in learning, focus on the learner's development, possibility of choice, use of diverse

learning environments, the learner's responsibility (Colley et al., 2009; Coombs & Ahmed, 1974). Among the characteristics that appeared in our research, learner-centredness is worth to be mentioned separately: while in previous research the educational metaphors focused on the teacher (e.g. Cameron, 2003; Guilherme & Souza de Freitas, 2018), according to our research the learner and their support is in the centre of attention (see for comparison Knowles et al., 2015). In non-formal education the learner's responsibility is highlighted both in the effort and in the discovery subcategory, the learner is an autonomous and active contributor.

It is noteworthy that metaphors referring to oppression did not emerge in the practitioner's language use, although they are present in education discourse (Aava, 2010; Przybylska, 2009). Also no reference to economic discourse emerged in our research (though practitioners from economics sphere were present in the sample) with its central issue of commercialization of education and the teacher's role as a client attendant (Aava, 2010; Bjursell, 2016; Guilherme & Souza de Freitas, 2018). Such a result may reflect a revolutionary change both in educational sphere and in the society in general and is worth further research. The appearance of border area metaphors confirms the deep rooted conception of the opposition between non-formal and formal education on the one hand, and yet, on the other hand, demonstrates possibilities to combine and integrate these types of education. The door for such an action is *slightly ajar* (compare the innovation in education UNESCO, 2020), but only *sky is the limit* for movement in that direction.

Notes

¹ In this research a non-formal education practitioner is the person who conducts the learning process, is responsible for it and acts as a facilitator and creator of the favourable environment for learning and of the learning experience. This is the person who supports learning and self-development of adults in a purposefully created learning situation. (Adult Education Act, 2015; Põlta et al., 2021).

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Annex

Table. Categories of metaphors describing non-formal education and the number of metaphors

<i>Main category</i>	<i>Subcategory</i>	<i>Metaphors</i>
Process (64)	Journey (13)	riding a bike; hiking journey; adventure; painting/picture; bird/flight; descending the hill; coming out of the tunnel; journey; soaring up; work/working; creating societies; making bridges; thinking out of the box
	Creating a whole (12)	puzzle (2 x); black spots (on a big cat); Lego blocks; kaleidoscope; Rubik's Cube; little pieces; creating societies; making bridges; stained glass; finding good notes between pauses; triangle
	Discovery (12)	aha moments; adventure; groping (feeling one's way); open mind; rain forest/jungle; curiosity; tunnel; a door slightly ajar; adventure park; out of the frame; thinking out of the box; gives wings
	Spending time (9)	playing; intellectual play; adventure park; theatre; puppet theatre; museum; Dance Festival; Song Festival; dispelling boredom
	Cooperation (8)	school of fish; World Cleanup Day; company; creating societies; making bridges; finding good notes between the pauses; dialogue (2 x); Dance Festival; Song Festival
	Development (5) Effort (5)	flower; bird/flight; self-development; soul bird; educating oneself bow; bow and arrow; doesn't become a deposit in the course of life by itself; work/working; contribution
Subject (20)	Creativity (14)	creativity; painting/picture; Dance Festival; Song Festival; theatre; puppet theatre; finding good notes between pauses; glass bead game; stained glass; Rubik's Cube; Lego blocks; puzzle (2 x); kaleidoscope
	Emotion (6)	fun/pleasure; condensed milk; beauty of the game; an opportunity to dream; dispelling boredom; open mind
Object (20)	Toy (8)	kaleidoscope; Rubik's Cube; balls; bow and arrows; puzzle (2 x); Dixit cards; Lego blocks
	Symbol (7)	Hermann Tower with Estonian flag; Dance Festival; Song Festival; soul bird; map of Estonia; theatre; museum
	Model (3)	model of the country; map of Estonia; miniature life
	Storage place (2)	storage box; treasure box
Opportunity (22)	Diversity (16)	Big layered cake; Dixit cards; colourful; school of fish; multicolouredness/multitude; a set of methods; rain forest, jungle; Lego blocks; Dance Festival; Song Festival; museum; company; stained glass; glass bead game; kaleidoscope
	Difference (6)	black spots (on a big cat); red fly agaric; clever cow; out of the classic learning form; tops; Hermann Tower with Estonian flag
Environment (24)	Open space (11)	out of the classroom; landscape; empty paper; World Cleanup Day; a broader view of life; image outside of a school lesson; out of the classical learning form; out of the frame; thinking out of the box; sky is the limit; rain forest/jungle
	Border area (8)	не мясо не рыба; opening/closing the door; tunnel; a door slightly ajar; door; sky is the limit; zebra; driving into (formal education)
	Cultural space (5)	museum; theatre; puppet theatre; Dance Festival; Song Festival