

Part II

The Great Debate

We do not even have enough agreement to be able to arrive at a common mind about what it is we should be quarrelling about. (MacIntyre 1987)

As with development, we can examine the debate around the concept and practice of non-formal education in terms of discourses. These discourses not only create the categories by which to identify those educational activities which are to be called non-formal, the programmes which are to be included and those which are to be excluded. They also determine the kinds of educational programmes provided and the way those programmes are constructed and supported.

There are several family members in the discourse of non-formal education; the discourse was a site of contestation. Those who saw in NFE the answer to education's main problems were not united in either their definition of NFE or their approach to the programmes which followed. In this section, I divide up the debate about NFE into four major components:

- a) the *Advocates* who saw NFE as all education outside the formal system (extra-formal)
- b) the *Ideologues* who saw NFE as inherently opposed to formal education (anti-formal)
- c) the *Empiricists* who looked at NFE in the field and claimed it was much the same as formal education (para-formal)
- d) the *Pragmatists* who saw the possibility of non-formal elements within a formal educational situation (intra-formal).

The section then looks at the decline of the debate, and ends with a discussion of some of the key issues raised by the debate.