



Transcriptions

Three Basic Functions of Education

Ted Ward

Annotation: *BILD Conference: Approaching the Year 2000, Ames, Iowa, February 1990.* Used with permission. Ted Ward distinguishes between education and school and makes a case for broadening our notions of the functions of education. He includes a description of socialization and nonformal education.



Words get us into a lot of trouble. Sometimes we use words that mean more than we think they mean. Sometimes we use words that mean less than we think they mean. But the worst trouble we get into I think with words is when we use a word in a fairly broad meaning but people hear it in a very narrow meaning. Let me give you an example of that: education. Now there's a fairly broad word and I suspect, as learned people schooled and having lots of experience and a lot of reading and a lot of awareness of the many kinds of things that go on in the name of education, the word education for many of you here is a fairly broad word. But let me tell you, most people hear the word education and they narrow it right down to one word and they use, from then on, all their meanings of education drawn from that one idea. What is the one idea? School. It's a very narrow word within the whole spectrum of what is involved in education.

Now this is not exactly a new discovery. People have known this for a good long while and you have to create some species of education. It's not good enough to say, education. You have to say what kind of education. And then we say, well, are you talking about elementary school or secondary school? No, I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about college, or I'm talking about

seminary. And, at some point you begin to wonder are we simply arguing that there are many kinds of schooling and that's what education is? Is there any education that is not schooling? Well, the answer is obviously, yes. In fact, a lot of the important lessons of life are learned in non-schooling, sure as the world.

When our fifth child was on the way—we have five children, nine grandchildren now and a new granddaughter on Sunday, and we enjoy this second time around thing real well. The nice thing about being a grandparent is you can send the kids home at night. But we really enjoyed our kids—and when the fifth one was on the way, my wife and I said, well, we are demographers. We know the reality of statistics in this world. And the high probability is that this fifth child will be a Chinese speaker because the data show that one child—usually every fifth child—is born in this world speaking Chinese. As a matter of fact, you know that that's really a silly thing. We didn't really do that and I'm just joking. Our fifth child arrived speaking nothing at all. No language, no clue at all as to even where this child had originally been destined other than the fact that she looked a lot like some of the rest of us in our family. But by language we couldn't identify it. The child spoke no language, made a lot of noises that sounded very human, not even very American, as a matter of fact. However, we know enough about children to know that most American children arrive looking and sounding very human because that's exactly what they are when they're born. And then we go to work on them. And what do we do when we go to work on them? We help to create in them a culture and we give them ours. And one of the ways we do this is to involve them in language experiences very early and through these language experiences they become users of our language. And, as a matter of fact, by the time a child is 4- or 5-years-old that child is doing remarkable things, even though a great deal of that learning was done literally as an infant when you wouldn't really think that people's learning skills are that great. It's remarkable how much language children learn in the first five years of life.

Then schools come along and spend twelve years trying to give them some second language help and don't get very far. You see you don't have to go to school to learn your language. When you go to school, they clean up the spelling and the grammar and a few other things like that that allow you to communicate more effectively and make teachers happy. But, as a matter of fact, you're usually using the language pretty functionally by the time you go to school. There are an awful lot of things we learn in life outside of school. Most of us here haven't been enrolled as a student in a formal education establishment for several years and I suspect that most of us would say we're still learning. I would hope you would. It's in the human condition to want to continue to learn and to develop. One of the saddest things is the person who, misunderstanding some of the research on learning curves, begins to believe at about age 28, 29 that learning prime has gone past and I've lost my opportunity. Let me tell you, that in today's world we know full well that there are plenty of very competent learners in their 60's, 70's, and a few in their 80's; people who are still learning and learning well because learning is not something that you leave behind you. It's not something that is true only of a period of time when you are going to school.

Learning is a very large idea. Education is a very large idea. Travel experiences are educational. Oh, it sounds like somebody wants to get out of school. That's the typical cultural reaction because really valid educational activity occurs in school. Now you say, well, people really don't believe that, do they? Well, no, but their language; the way their minds are programmed to use ideas tends to make them focus and fixate on those things. Now if you take a look at a continuum between socialization on one hand and formal education on the other hand, you can position a lot

of educational activity as being either over this way toward formal education or over this way toward socialization.

By the way, socialization is the technical word for what you do when you are learning your first language; you are being socialized. Now those who are deeply into political science at the shallow level of anti-communism are probably pretty sure that that's what's wrong with the world is there's too much socialization already. Now let me tell you, that if there weren't any socialization, you would never speak to your children because it's only through socialization that they learn their languages. So we're talking about the natural process of learning through the experiences of life. Who organizes the socialization school? Now you might desperately grope to find a constructive answer to my silly question. You say, well, maybe parents do. I submit nobody does. Parents don't organize that. Now parents are usually quick to spot things in their children that are rewarding to them: the child's beginning to say something. My children will call me and tell me little events about the emergence of certain skills and abilities in the children, the grandchildren, and we rejoice in these things. But I don't ever ask them how long have you been working on that because they're not seeing it as something that has a curriculum and has a testing date and a date that the semester is over, pass or fail. This is life. This is real. And you learn in a functional way and that's called socialization: bringing people into the competencies of a society. And every society is different. There're some things you don't have to learn in our society you do have to learn in other societies.

By the way, the Americans and the Australians have the world's championship with reference to not socializing children to understand the reality of the spiritual world. We are the world's champions along with the Australians who are a close second. We don't cultivate in our children an awareness of the reality of a spiritual world; so evangelism, for Americans, always has the additional task of trying to convince people somehow quickly, apologetically that God is real. Most of the people of the world don't need to be argued about with reference to whether or not God is real. The question may be how many gods are there, and are you sure you've got one you can talk to. But the issue of the reality of the spirit world is, in most of the world, not really an issue. Now, for the Christian, this works against us. In our socialization process within our families, we ought to be helping children socialize in a direction where there is a real spiritual world. So qualitatively our socialization processes, as Christians, ought to be real in terms of reflecting God's reality.

But at the other end of this continuum, you have things called schools and schools are the most formal of the educational events. And in schools, you quite often register and you get your name listed and you get grades and you get other emblems of merit and you have certain kinds of responsibilities to do certain kinds of work and you have requirements in certain experiences, and if these are performed adequately then you are given symbols of the merits of accomplishment called credits, units, ultimately degrees, and it's an elaborate system. Generally speaking, highly formalized structures in society are elaborate systems. Now the socialization process is infinitely complex, but it's not an elaborate system. Do you see the difference?

For many years, this continuum that I have just described running on the one hand from socialization into the other hand to formal education was called the continuum of education. Then someone comes along and says where do you put swimming classes at the Y. Well, they clearly aren't socialization. Now some of us learn to swim in a socialization process. How many of you learned to swim in a socialization process? I was a Florida water kid. I was raised in the swamps of south Florida and swimming, for me, was just one more little thing left, you know, it was a survival skill.

And you learned it fairly early because you spent a whole lot of time in the water and you either coped with it or you didn't grow up. And growing up, to some of us, was a matter of learning to swim. Socialization process. My parents were excellent swimming teachers in the socialization process sort of way. Dad said now get to shore. And suddenly he had taught me to swim. And human beings are capable of doing remarkable things. They do the same thing at Y, but they don't use that now get to shore technique. They say, now I'm going quit holding you and I want you to do what I've been showing you and I want you to see if you can't go to the edge of the pool. How many of you learned to swim that way? Now what is that? Is that socialization or is that formal education? The answer is no, it's somewhere else in the continuum.

The fact that that has to be located somewhere else in the continuum is the producer of a lot of fuzziness about what education is. Many of you learned to operate the skills associated with a craft or an employment task in a process called on-the-job training. How many of you ever took any on-the-job training? Can I see your hands? Quite a few of us. Sometimes on-the-job training is done by an old codger who says, watch me, I'll show you how to do it. Now you do it. What did you do? I don't know. Come on, do it. No, no, hold it the other way around. And pretty soon this person does a lot like your parents did earlier in life and you find yourself almost like socialization. But is on-the-job training socialization? No. It's not done as a part of growing up naturally; you do it deliberately. But is it formal education? Nope. It's, again, somewhere on the continuum. Again, fuzziness.

Now, Sunday school. Where do you put that? Is it socialization? It doesn't look much like the socialization described in Deuteronomy 6, does it? That's socialization: Deuteronomy 6. And it doesn't look like formal education, even though we do a lot of things that make it somewhat resemble formal education. Let me tell you, you can go to Sunday school for years and years and get Sunday school pins that run clear down to the place where they are a health hazard. You could trip over them and break a leg. And they will not cash those in for a degree of college anywhere in the nation. It's not transferrable into the formal education enterprise; it's somewhere else on our continuum. So here we have Sunday school, swimming classes at the Y, on-the-job training, and you could think of another dozen things that you do in the way of deliberately learning something—not socialization, not formal education. And that whole intermediate zone there has never had a name until 1970 when a man by the name of Philip Coombs said we've got to name that sector and instead of thinking of a continuum of educational function, we'll think of a triangle or a three-lobed model of educational function. The continuum lies across the bottom from socialization to formal education; schooling, to be more precise. And somewhere else on that space another thing called . . . and he created the word nonformal education. Many of us instantly jumped to a high degree of concern about that saying that nonformal education is not going to be a good term because it is a negative descriptor. Now a negative descriptor is trying to name something by virtue of its being not something else. A duck is a non-zeppelin. That is easy to argue: that a duck is a non-zeppelin. As a matter of fact, a zeppelin is a non-bathtub. But it doesn't help you visualize either a duck or a zeppelin by using those descriptors and I think it's unfortunate that the term nonformal education was the best that he could come up with. But, I know the man and I know his scholarship and I know why he did it and I, along with about a dozen others, have tried to come up with a better term and we haven't been able to agree on one because it is a funny sector that doesn't quite lend itself to a good label. We need a generic term like socialization, I suppose, to do this other thing.

Nonformal education has several things in common with formal and in common with socialization. And the diagram that I have given to you shows some of these relationships. First of

all, if you compare nonformal education with socialization, both are alike in that they tend to be highly functional. They are concerned with functional learning. Take on-the-job education as we mentioned it a little bit ago. On-the-job education is not a matter of learning to pass tests in lathe operation. On-the-job training is concerned with only one thing and that is running the lathe well. See the difference? Functional. As a matter of fact, sometimes you can take that kind of skill in a high school and what'll they do? They'll give you a grade at the end of the course. And the grade at the end of the course on running the machinery will deal with things like some fraction of the score given to skills but a great deal more of the score given to things that can be more easily tested reliably; things like knowing the names of the parts of the machine, and you get a point for each part. Have you ever taken tests like that? But on-the-job training doesn't give two hoots whether or not you call it the right thing or not, as long as you can go to the Parts window at the shop and get the replacement part that'll fit what you need and get going again with your machine. In other words, there's a functional objective in nonformal education of the on-the-job training sort. There is a functional concern in the Y in the swimming class. The issue isn't can you pass a test on naming all the strokes? This one is called the Australian crawl. This one is known as the Austrian walk. I don't know what they all are but, you know, there must be an Austrian one in there somewhere because there's an Australian one. No. It's not concerned with naming them. What is it concerned with? When you learn to swim at the Y, what are they really trying to have happen? They want to see you swim and they want to see you swim well. It's a functionality test.

That is characteristic of the sector nonformal education with the possible exception of some of the things we do in religious education which we don't take very seriously such as how do we really assess the functionality of Sunday school. How do we assess the anything of Sunday school? Therein is one of our problems: we are in the habit of using unevaluated education. It is no wonder that the churches don't know what to do with reference to evaluating the readiness for ministry of someone that they're prepared to call. They'll ask a lot of people, what do you think about this person? But if this person is just out of seminary, what have they got to go on? Primarily an academic record out of the formal establishment which may have very little to do with the functional skills demanded in the reality of the church.

Now does nonformal education have anything at all in common with formal education? You can look at this chart and you can easily see the answer is, yes, it has something very important in common with the schooling or formal education sector. Nonformal education and schooling—both are deliberate. They are planned. They are staffed. Usually they are financed. In other words, they are structured in order to get something to happen. The difference is that the schooling is less concerned with the functional. In fact, one of the purposes of these lines across the middle of your diagram is to show you that this model is a very powerful one in that each of the extremes of our triangle—such as schooling on the lower left—is, in fact, in the sharpest contrast with that which lies opposite as a base line.

Look at functionality. If you want to see education at its least functional, where do you go? So help me, you go to schools. If you want to see education that is most functional, where do you go? You go to socialization. The school of hard knocks, the school of mother's knee, the school of the home, the school of the street. The street is a very effective teacher. Or, you go up in a nonformal and you look at the kinds of things that are done in on-the-job training in Scouts, in boys and girls clubs, and there you get a much closer fix on functionality than you will ever get in school.

Now, please understand, this does not suggest that there is nothing useful done in schools. Schools are great devices for teaching the underpinning relationships of ideas. They they're really very good at that. It happens that that sort of stuff is valuable if it is also, then, worked into a functional form that people can apply and build on. And, of course, the basic argument about liberal arts education is that the liberal arts education gives you that broad base of totally integrated structures of knowledge and then you can build almost anything on it. The problem is that's awfully hard to sell to today's parents and today's children because today's children are saying why should I learn all that stuff? I can't see how I can ever make a nickel doing *that*.

In our society there is such a tremendous emphasis on mercantile gain—making money—that people pick their college experiences, even after they go to a liberal arts college, in terms of things that they can use to create employment for themselves and, ultimately, to make money. And parents aren't much different. They often ask, especially at the liberal arts school where this is almost anathema: pardon me, sir. What will my kid be able to do when he gets out of here? We're putting an awful lot of money into this thing. Can you give me an idea of what he can do when he gets out? And, of course, the standard answer is, don't worry about that; that will take care of itself. Which is very much more difficult to sell to parents than it used to be; which is one reason the liberal arts colleges are having so much trouble.

Where do I stand on liberal arts education? I think it's a very important notion that we have underpinnings of well-connected bodies of knowledge, but I also believe that higher education has to go for a great deal more accountability and a great deal more concern for the outfitting of people to competently function in the work-a-day world that they will encounter, especially when formal education in some sectors does not really address itself to the question of what will be demanded when they get out there. And I have just named . . . did you guess it? Theological education. There is a strange unwillingness in theological education to come to terms with such matters and the evidence that many people do not make it in Christian ministry after seminary simply because they cannot function well in relationships with other people. Oh, but you say, that's not the purpose of the seminary. And that, by the way, *is* the standard answer. And I keep saying, whose responsibility is it? You say, well, it's not ours. And then I say if that is the view of the schooling model, maybe we ought to move deliberately to another model that will take that functional concern more into account. So you see why, in my motives and in my heart for the development of leadership in the church, I am concerned that our educational establishments of formal education become more real and, hence, do a better job; but, at the same time, that we not put all our money on that bet. We need to hedge our bet—to use language that, of course, as Christians we never heard before—by putting some of our money on the nonformal sector as an alternative.

As a matter of fact, this is not a totally new idea. There is one democracy in this world, one of the oldest of the common democracies that has within its constitution a provision that there always should be more than one way to join into any career pursuit. That legislation was created into the structured constitution of the *Confoederatio Helvetica*. And for those of you who know what it means to have a license that says CH on your car, you know that we're talking about Switzerland. The Helvetica Confederation in their document that became their constitution has a little piece in there that says there must be more than one way to enter any craft and guild. And the point was that in that era in the Middle Ages when that emerged, the guilds had such a strong death grip on all the professional areas and on all the occupational fields that unless you were born in the right family you couldn't get in. And the people who were born in the right families controlled it. And in the interest

of a popular democracy, the *Confoederatio Helvetica* put into its constitution this provision that there always ought to be another way, and some of us believe that there ought to be another way.

My motive is not to burn theological seminaries. My motive is to simply put our effort on creating another way that is similarly concerned with an effective education and, in fact, is even more concerned with the functionality issues. But, at the same time, I'm working like crazy over within the establishment to try to deal with it internally in terms of its reform, so I'm not a renegade. I believe that our God can use all kinds of resources. I believe that the church of Jesus Christ has historically used all three sectors of this map and always will. In the first place, Deuteronomy 6 is clearly socialization. This is the way to live as God's people. That's a motive. That's an instruction to parents: how to bring up your children. That's a socialization concern; that's the way to live.

What is this business of tie it on your forehead, bind it on your wrists? It doesn't sound like much of a curriculum, does it? No, it's a way to live. It's a way to live that exemplifies constantly your consciousness of therefore God is. Put it on the doorposts. Let the world know we believe our God is. Yes, there it is. That's Deuteronomy 6.

Now where is Christian education within and for the church as it relates to the development of God's people in community? Even though we may call it—or some parts of it school, where is it? That's your nonformal education, and we ought to do it extremely well.

Now, we have also employed for hundreds of years education of a formal education schooling sort in the name of Jesus Christ. I'm not here to argue whether or not Christian schools at the elementary, secondary, day school level are a good idea. They are. They're there. They function. They do things. And many of you here would rise up and say, wait a minute, if I said anything negative about them because you've seen some good they've done for you, for your children, for others. Fine. No problem. Many of us have been to Christian colleges. We say that's an important kind of higher education. Never mind, by the way, that only about 15 to 18% of Christian public—and we're not sure what the percentages are—can even get near a Christian college at college age because there are just, in the first place, aren't enough, though there are enough to take care of the demand. The fact is that well over 4 out of 5 Christian young people do go other directions for their higher education. Nevertheless, the ones that are there, many of them do a good job. I'm not in favor of ignoring them, burning them down, or even insulting them. I just happen to think that they aren't the whole answer.

Theological education establishments. I am a faculty member, a very happy faculty member of a very good one. I just happen to think it's not the whole answer. And it distresses me that in terms of certain kinds of functionality issues, it isn't much of an answer. But I do believe that God's people ought to be educated. Do you see? That's back to the earlier lecture. We have a mandate to be concerned with education, but we ought to define that educational mandate in very broad terms. So we need a model like this.

But we also need to understand something else and that is that if our concern is for the change in society that will produce counter-culture, we're not going to get it out of either of the two elements—formal and socialization—because their role is traditional. They have an investment in the status quo. Educational institutions and the language of the mother's knee and the street all are alike in that they are traditional. They tend to perpetuate what has been.

Now what is the clear opposite of traditional common value? Nonformal. And this has been one of the great powers of the discovery of this sector and the naming of this sector, is the discovery of its potential as an engine for change in society. Until you begin training people functionally in ways that are different and are in contrast with the status quo, nothing much changes. You can get riots with slogans, but you can't get social change with slogans. You have to get social change through education. You've got to train people differently.

Now many of you are aware of the plan in the Communist countries in China, for example, during the time of the repression of Christians when millions of Christians were slaughtered in the late '40s, early '50s—there was a re-education campaign. And the whole idea was to create something that would really change the structure of that society. And re-education was, in fact, in the Chinese structure deliberate nonformal education. Dastardly, but effective. They created a new Red society. Now we have, praise God, seen the turns of events; not only in China, but who could have believed it in '89 and '90 what majestic things were happening in this world bringing into a whole new perspective God's power, God's capability in Eastern Europe and in many other parts of the world. Where we see the change needs today is for the rapid mobilization of nonformal education that can be change-oriented in those societies that now are once again liberated to the point where a godly change can be put in place. In other words, if we are concerned about maintaining, if we are concerned about perpetuating, if we're concerned about continuing, if we're concerned about having things be as they have been and doing this deliberately then, indeed, invest in formal education.

If, on the other hand, we're concerned about change; if we're concerned about a new orientation, a new voice then we had probably best think in terms of nonformal education. You say, well, this is rather radical. Well, I want to tell you that it is radical, but it's of the same radicalness that was in the pre-Marxist arguments in the United States in the Congress during the last years of the life of Abraham Lincoln.

Those of you who know the history of the Land Grant University Movement, which was then called the Land Grant College Movement, are aware that one of the things that was put in place right from the word go within the Land Grant University scheme—which, by the way, was one of the last pieces of legislation signed by Lincoln before his death. Historians don't pay it a lot of attention partly because historians have all their eyes in that period fixated on the major issue of that time which was the Civil War. But Congress was still working with some other issues and one of the issues they were working with was the inappropriateness of higher education in the United States in reference to what this society was becoming and the need for another kind of education. And you know what they did? They put an emphasis on a people's college—it was actually called that before Marx discovered the word people's—a people's college or a people's university that would put its primary attention on the practical functional problems of the little people in society. That's the origin of the Land Grant philosophy. And that Land Grant philosophy still lives in your Land Grant Universities and they still maintain it. And if you don't believe that, check with any president's office in any of the Land Grant Universities. They can tell you of the meetings they go to once, sometimes twice a year just to swear allegiance again on a national basis to the Land Grant philosophy. It's believed in. And one of its hallmarks is that it believes in the agency system through which the findings of science are made available to simple people at the functional level. We are the only nation in the world where it is possible within any telephone district to use a local telephone book and call someone to ask why your pet rose is blighted and what to do about it. We are the only

nation in the world where the common people can get at information directly through a system called the County Extension Agent. Are you aware that in the County Extension Agent system in the United States we have one of the clearest examples of a long-standing nonformal education enterprise? And who runs it? The Department of Agriculture provides the money and the management is provided through the Land Grant University; an example of the Land Grant University formal education also being the sponsor of the major nonformal education activities in certain sectors, particularly in agriculture, and now in urban affairs and urban development, families in the city.

Are we to a point when our formal education institutions could become more nurturant of the nonformal sector? I hope so. I have my doubts partly because I'm a little paranoid. Because one of the things we discover is that the formal education enterprise is not only traditional but it tends to be very powerful. And institutions of formal education, like any other human institutions, seem to have one motive that works more extensively, more strongly than any other motive and that is the motive of self-preservation. And anything that comes along that looks like a threat to them, they buddy-up to it, put their arm around it, and then swallow it. And it is for that reason that I am very anxious about where we may go if we prematurely push our best nonformal education enterprises in theological education under the embrace of the ever too willing theological seminary that would like to treat it simply as one more extension operation. Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educational philosopher, has actually come to the point where he argues that nonformal education should be cautious of extension education because extension education, in Paulo Freire's words, tends to be the long arm of formal education with minimal concern for the realities in the functional environment.