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Abstract

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Regardless of the current wave of worldwide interest in the topic, *nonformal education* remains a non-descriptive arbitrary term. "Nonformal" relates more to the motives of education rather than the modes of education and uses virtually the whole range of instructional procedures found in formal education. When education is carried out by organizations recognized as "educational" (for example, the Ministry of Education or the University), we tend to think of the education as being "formal." When education is carried out by agencies that are not part of educational institutions, the efforts are described as "nonformal" education.

The distinction can be misleading since both formal and nonformal modes share similar strengths and limitations. Further, it does no justice to innovation in established institutions to label them as "formal" without recognizing their nonformal elements. Some of the most important innovations in education during this century have resulted from experimentation by formal institutions in developing truly nonformal modes of education. The significant expansion of cooperative extension services, as in rural and community-life education in the U.S., adult experiential education in many parts of the world, "radio classes" as in Australia, Colombia, India, and Italy, and other expansions of the efforts of ministries of education to broaden public education through communication media are nonformal contributions of the "formal education" sector. The tendency to polarize formal and nonformal education inevitably diverts attention from the central issue of effective learning.

Fad or Honest Search?

Little inherent difference exists between effective learning in nonformal situations and effective learning in formal situations. In contrast to both formal and nonformal learning, *informal* learning is most apt to be different, since informal learning is likely to be "unconscious" in the sense of incidental and non-intentional so far as the learner is concerned. For example, learning of one's mother tongue is mostly gained through informal learning situations.

We need to be reminded that schools do not make people learn. Certainly schools can provide opportunities for people to learn, and schools can even help people become more interested in learning. But schools in general are a way to bring people together with educational resources. Whether or not the people learn and what is the value of what they learn are issues sometimes overlooked. It is not enough to build schools and stock them with resources.

Those who are concerned about effective learning, whether the educational setting is formal or nonformal, must evaluate the relevancy of educational experiences to social values and select procedures and methods that are appropriate to the learners.

Whether or not the current wave of interest in nonformal education is a fad is a legitimate question. Education in the twentieth century has manifested the same volatility and instability as have most other institutions. The advent of the communications revolution has aggravated an already unstable situation. The pendulum swings from one extreme of philosophy and methodology to another. Thus the term “nonformal” may add little clarity to an already confused situation. If we are engaged in one more semantic exercise or one more attempt to find utopia through putting new labels on the status quo, then the excitement about nonformal education is indeed a fad. However, our experiences with those who are seriously concerned about nonformal education leads us to the conclusion that the phenomenon is neither trite nor futile.

Those who are seriously interested in nonformal education usually express their concerns as a search for alternatives to costly and/or unresponsive formal systems of education. Thus the issue is rarely the degree of formality of the educational operation, but its costs and its capacities to achieve suitable objectives. “Nonformal education” is then the non-descriptive term applied to anything people describe as an alternative to formal education. However, the technologies and pedagogies of formal education may be employed in nonformal education to the extent that they can be used to reach different objectives and reach them at lower costs.

Many of those most clearly identified with the search for nonformal alternatives in education are frustrated by the tendency of formal education to enrich and perpetuate an elitism within their societies. It is charged that such educational systems do little or nothing to solve the problems of massive ignorance, poverty, and isolation from the determination of governing authority and human destiny in general. Others seek alternatives to offset the weaknesses of the “establishment.” Notably, the kinship of reformers and revolutionaries in South America, Africa, Asia, and North America derives primarily from the fact that they are all seeking alternatives to contemporary western-style institutionalized education. This fact constitutes one of the stronger replies to the charge of faddism. “Nonformal education” may be a faddish label, but the earnest quest for effective alternatives to the present use of educational procedures and resources to enhance the human condition is significant.

In summary, alternatives are needed because of one or more of the following factors:

1. To provide education for those who are not being reached by formal schooling.
2. To provide education at lower cost.
3. To direct educational objectives toward goals that are more closely related to the needs of society and to learners’ needs within their society.

Planning for Nonformal Education

Within the scope of this paper it is necessary to emphasize the particular issues and problems of planning for nonformal education.

1. *Specify the learning to be achieved.* Nonformal education is typically concerned with learning that has a high degree of “practical” usefulness. Thus instructional procedures are concerned with real-world applications of learning. For example, assume that the practical problem for which the nonformal education is being designed is the need for operators of tractors for community farms. The training program should specify the operational skills of tractor operation and tractor maintenance. Learning would be specified in terms of its practical use, not simply in terms of abstract or theoretical understandings. The learning objectives for a family planning program would not be specified as “knowing birth control

techniques,” but as the composite of understandings and behavior changes that represent the *actual adoption and practice* of family planning procedures.

The emphasis on applied learning is not only a concern of nonformal education. Formal education, in some countries, has undergone a similar shift in learning emphasis. But the investments in applied education are most often in the sector of nonformal education.

2. Describe the target population. The target populations for programs of nonformal education are typically specific and delimited. In spite of persistent limitations of access, it is within *formal* education that the education-for-everyone approach has been most often applied. One of the continuing dilemmas of formal education is how to provide educational experiences for a diverse population and thus broaden access. A current criticism of American education is that in its effort to provide uniform educational experiences for a widely varied target population it fails to provide appropriate experiences for those from different cultural backgrounds or for those whose academic background has been inadequate or atypical.

One of the most important requirements for effective learning is compatibility of the planned experiences and the learners. Each proposed target population must be carefully studied and understood in terms of three major factors that relate to effective learning: 1) motivations, value systems, and reward systems within which learners live and work, 2) previously acquired skills, and 3) expectations about learning and the learning environment.

Because of its importance, a detailed specification for understanding target populations is presented later in the paper.

3. Specify the instructional tasks. Jerome Bruner¹ was among the first of the psychologists of learning to warn that instructional design and learning are separable tasks. Identification and description of *learning* objectives is followed by the design of instructional experiences to facilitate the learning. The creative design of various learning experiences requires data about the target population, specific learning objectives or intentions, awareness of the full range of possible instructional alternatives, and insights into the relevancy of the instructional alternatives to the cultural context.

Specifying instructional alternatives consists of 1) identifying and/or creating instructional procedures suited to the learning objectives and 2) making choices among the alternatives in order to move ahead in the development of instruction. Finally, with further data from the target population, instructional procedures are evaluated and revised.

4. Specify the administrative support functions. Support for an instruction ordinarily involves technology and its maintenance, communication with participants and facilitators, identification of location(s), and necessary resources, and so on. Nonformal education often involves negotiation, and joint planning with other agencies is often necessary when resources are shared.

5. Specify the level of performance to be achieved. The level of performance differs from the learning itself in that it is concerned with accuracy, rate of performance, or quality of the skill. An important question is what will constitute the lowest acceptable level of performance for any learner. Since instructional materials must take account of judgments about importance, frequency, and quality, the

¹ Jerome Bruner. *Toward a Theory of Instruction*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967)

level(s) of performance should be determined before the actual design. Planners of nonformal education typically establish a set of standards that represent acceptable levels of mastery of skills or understandings and then design procedures whereby learners may attain those levels.

6. *Prepare instructional materials.* Differences in linguistic demands, conceptual level, degree of abstraction, and basic differences in learning objectives make it difficult to adapt materials used in formal education to nonformal learning experiences. Similarly, materials that originated in another culture are most often unsuitable, especially as learning preferences vary significantly across cultures. Therefore planners typically create new instructional materials and procedures for nonformal education in context.

7. *Equip human resources.* Planners create learning experiences for those who manage instructional experiences and provide support to ensure that the various human roles will be compatible and supportive. It is recommended that the personnel are analyzed in the same way as target populations, skills specified, and learning experiences designed accordingly.

8. *Design evaluative procedures.* Evaluation in formal education is more often concerned with *student* accomplishment. Students “pass” or “fail” to the degree they “apply” themselves and “work hard.” In nonformal education student feedback and performance data are elicited at several points to inform *program* improvement. Typically, in the early months of a nonformal program, the major objective is to gather evaluative data. Thus many programs begin with small-scale test sites or learning experiences. Compatibility of test sites and small-scale learning experiences with the broader contexts and target population is part of the design process.

9. *Evaluate participant learning.* The primary purpose of program evaluation is program improvement. Evaluation of learning is also necessary to help participants achieve desired levels of competency and understanding. Testing, therefore, is consistent with goals and desired levels of performance. Written examinations are rare. Most evaluative feedback is based on observations of performance.

Basic Questions for Planning

Effective nonformal education is a complex universe of experiences in which the learners themselves are a contributing part. Further, learning results from the interaction of *deliberately designed* educative experiences, multiple environmental influences, and the learner as a unique personality. Since identifying all significant variables is impossible, planners select the more important factors for intentional inclusion in the program.

One of the more important responsibilities of planners is adequate and appropriate analysis of target populations. Design for nonformal education involves consideration of motivations, expectations, and abilities of learners and the rewards and reward systems in which the learners and the learning experiences operate. Why do learners get involved in nonformal education? What do they expect from the experience? What is the extent of their capabilities? What are the potential constraints on their learning? Particular questions and issues related to this responsibility follow:

Questions related to *motivations* of learners:

- What motivations are evident?
- What motivations are consistent with educational goals? Which are inconsistent?
- How can consistent motivations be enhanced?
- Which inconsistent motivations should be suppressed or discouraged?

- What other categories of motivation are compatible with the educational goals?
- Which of these motivations are worth building on?

Questions concerning *rewards*:

- What rewards exist in the personal-social-occupational environment of the learners?
- What rewards are in harmony with the educational goals?
- How can these rewards be used appropriately to enrich learning?
- What other rewards are consistent with the educational goals?
- Which of these rewards should be recognized?
- What rewards are inconsistent with the educational goals?
- Which of these rewards should not be recognized?

Parallel questions about *expectations*:

- What expectations can be determined?
- Which expectations are compatible with the educational goals?
- How can these expectations be fulfilled?
- What other expectations are consistent with the educational goals?
- Which of these expectations are worth building on?
- Which expectations are inconsistent with the educational goals?
- Which of these expectations should be suppressed or discouraged?

With reference to the matter of cognitive styles, mental and physical *capacities* of the target population, the following questions should be investigated:

- What is the level of ability to comprehend abstractions, verbal and symbolic?
- At what level is the reading comprehension?
- What mechanical and manipulative skills are evident?
- What are the factors of health, attention span, alertness, concentration and application of effort that will affect the learners?
- What learning preferences (in terms of cognitive styles and habits of response to pedagogy) can be accommodated by the instructional design?

The questions specified above are concerned primarily with describing and understanding the target population. Though it is important to consider the findings from these questions and to make appropriate accommodations, the complexities inherent in planning for nonformal education remain significant. The tasks however, can be more clearly defined in relation to key areas of understanding:

Understanding historical and cultural sources. Within every society there are traditions and value systems that have shaped education. Before attempting to augment or significantly alter the educational resources of a community, examination of institutionalized efforts, familial and tribal influences, rituals and indoctrinations is necessary. Such understanding is necessary if new nonformal resources are to be designed in such a way as to integrate with existing formal and informal systems of teaching and learning.

Understanding the target populations. In order to plan effective nonformal experiences, attention must be given to the motivations and rewards that drive learners, the expectations resulting from their previous learning experiences, and the learning characteristics that have been fostered by previous formal and informal learning experiences. Education without an outlet for the learning is useless. Incentives for learning should be perceptible to the learners and should be specifically rewarded within a relatively short period of time.

Understanding the administrative demands of education. For effective learning, nonformal education should correlate human and physical resources and communicate with all contributing agencies. Nonformal education should also operate within an evaluative structure that provides data for continuous improvement of instructional procedures.

Summary

Designing nonformal education that will lead to effective learning is a complex undertaking. The relationship of the learning experiences to the learners' characteristics and life experiences and the need to develop an administrative and evaluative framework to assure the continuous refinement of the system constitute the most demanding tasks.