Learning and Instructional Effectiveness[1]

John Dettoni and Ted Ward

The challenge facing education worldwide is effectiveness in learning. At issue is the ability of all educational enterprises and institutions to provide meaningful, efficient and effective learning for its students. The problem is not *formal* education versus *nonformal* nor is it institutionalized education versus non-institutionalized. (All education that is planned or sponsored is, to some degree, formalized. Any organization that provides education is to some degree an institution of the particular society.) The problem and challenge is stimulating learning experiences by which the learner does indeed learn effectively.

Effective learning is composed of several important elements:

1) *Developmentally*, effective learning happens within a person. But it is difficult to talk meaningfully of what is going on inside a person; thus an outward manifestation of the inner experience is sought as a representation for purposes of assessment and discussion. Within the newly emerging technology of instruction objectives are stated in terms of observable behavior changes that are assumed to be indicators of learning; further, learning itself has been redefined to accommodate this inferential viewpoint: learning is observable behavior change. It is not possible to directly measure learning. Thus, in keeping with the technological view, the designer of experiences for effective learning works with the variables of instructional communication and evaluates effectiveness in terms of measures of behavior change from which effective learning is inferred. Therefore these papers speak of instructional effectiveness, but the basic concern is for effective learning.

2) Instructional effectiveness is also concerned with *economics*. It seeks to reach the most people at the least cost per unit of achievement (learning gain). In the final analysis, education has worth as it contributes significantly to individual, community, and national development. Ultimately humankind should be benefitted. Thus, within an effectiveness concept, there is little justification for learning for learning's sake. Such education may, in fact, debilitate the society. Nor is education worthy if it has value only as a consumable commodity for the individual. Humankind must benefit. Indeed, these economic and social concerns are arbitrary, but some such dimensions of worth must be basic, otherwise a scientism of learning defines and defends the mission of education in purely technological terms.

[1] Unpublished discussion paper, 1970s

3) From a *sociological* viewpoint, instructional effectiveness is concerned with thoroughly reaching all or a critical mass—in terms of the critical mass of people within the target group and in terms of the critical minimum of new skills and knowledge needed to sustain a life-changing behavior.

4) *Psychologically*, instructional effectiveness involves meeting the felt and real needs (if the latter differ from the former) of each individual. It seeks to approach people on their level of expectation and on their level of motivation. From this perspective, the effectiveness of learning is, to some extent, interwoven with the value that the target learners see in it.

In sum, effective instruction is attuned with the realities of the world of the intended learner. It is sensitive and responsive to the needs of the individual and society. It is based on a view of humanity that sees men and women as educable and valuable in their own right and for their own ends as well as society's.

Without such a view of instructional and learning effectiveness, educators flail away at learning achievement using whatever criteria for measurement strikes their fancy. With the four basic elements outlined above (developmental, economic, sociological and psychological) planners of nonformal education can take steps to design and assess instructional experiences that are effective.