



Putting Non-Formal Education to Work¹

What is Non-formal Education? Why is it important in relating to developing communities? Here are insights from five experts and educators in the field: Ted Ward, Bryan Truman, Christina Lee, Nora Avarientos, and Evita Perez.

We hear the term “non-formal education” used a great deal in relation to community development work. What is it, and why is it important?

We turned first to Dr. Ted Ward of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Illinois, USA, who is considered a foremost authority on the application of non-formal education. For many years, he was a Professor of Education at Michigan State University, and there he helped many World Vision development specialists who studied non-formal education, including Bryan Truman and Christina Lee.

Defining Nonformal Education

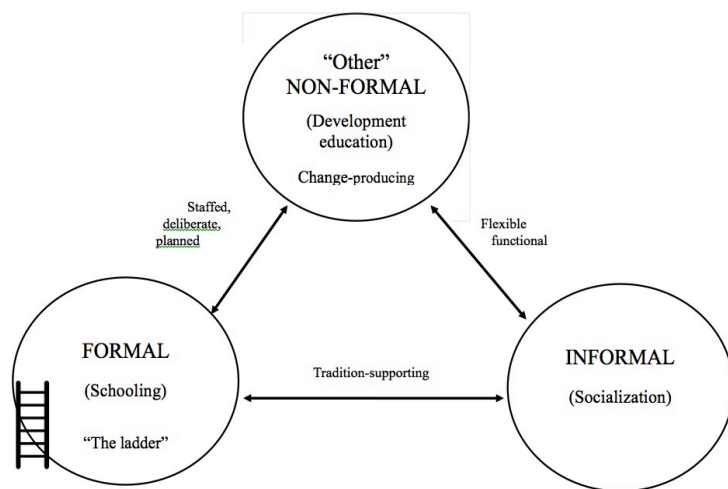
“Let’s talk about how people typically learn in society,” Dr. Ward said. “There is an *informal* educational process, which we sometimes describe as the *socialization* process. Learning a first language is an example.

Formal education is described as the schooling process; it is structured like a ladder,” says Ted Ward. “But there are some educational activities that do not fall neatly into the informal or the formal sectors. They are not a part of socialization, or of schooling. They are in a category apart, which we might label ‘other.’ Much of instruction in religion has historically been done in the ‘other’ realm. For example, Sunday schools—though we call them schools, they are not really schools.

That ‘other’ sector of education has been called *non-formal education*.

In development, we are concerned with how we get outside the tradition-supported characteristics of a culture. So we turn to the non-formal sector.” Bryan Truman of World Vision International agrees: “We’re talking about an educational approach focused on adults, involving a new mode of operation

NON-FORMAL EDUCATION TRIANGLE



¹ Editorial Staff Interviews. Putting Nonformal Education to Work. *Together*. (July-September 1987) p. 7-10. This article features a compilation of responses, including responses from Ted Ward. Used with permission of World Vision International.

called ‘facilitation’ —a non-directive process aimed at transforming values. This implies an attitude change within the facilitator.

The synonym for non-formal education that occurs to me is ‘appropriate education,’ a kind of parallel to ‘appropriate technology.’” Bryan is Field Development Service Director for the Asia/Middle East Region for WVI. He completed his doctoral studies at MSU under Ted Ward.

Changing People’s Way of Thinking

“What we’re talking about is a new approach to learning,” Bryan continued. “Non-formal education has two aspects: first, a style of operation which we might call a facilitating approach to education; and second, it is an attitude about how adults learn. A far better term I like to use is ‘development education.’ This is actually becoming a new field of endeavor.”

Christina Lee, also of WVI and a graduate of the MSU doctoral program, said, “Non-formal education is not primarily a methodology, and yet a different methodology is involved. In community development, people have often tried to use formal education methods, and that’s not the best approach.



Ted Ward

Rather than a transfer of information or expertise, which give you knowledge and stress the importance of things, development education changes people’s way of thinking.”

Ted Ward agrees with that. “Where you have a broadly based effort, with slow and systematic planning, and where the outsiders will come in and listen to the local community people and help them define their tasks and get a vision, you will get action.”

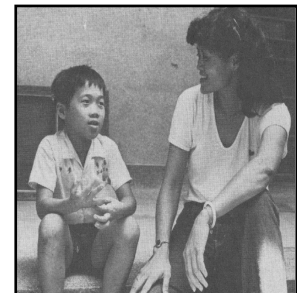
Why is a Different Approach Important?

“Non-formal education approaches are important,” Ward said, “Because the greater power for change is through the non-formal sector. It inherently has a change of dynamic to it. If you are concerned about processes of social change, and the potential of development in society, that is in the non-formal sector.

You don’t deliver development understandings by building schools. You do it by having workshops and training events, using Church assemblies, and working with congregations, and you lift by helping people lift themselves. You use non-formal education strategies. Second, you are concerned about the whole society. You are interested in what takes place in entire communities.”

A Facilitator’s Attitude

The attitudes that the development facilitator takes into the community are essential to the non-formal education approach. Christina Lee expressed it this way: “A facilitator respects another adult, and they engage in a process of mutual learning. There’s a flexible curriculum, based on the learner’s need. And it goes to the people; the setting can be anywhere—under a tree or wherever you choose.



Christina Lee with a boy in Taiwan in 1980

Involved also is the attitude about authority and control. A facilitator must actually loosen control. Respect for the learner means you are not the only information giver. Your only authority comes from your greater experience. The learner is free to challenge me, and I to challenge him or her.

It is critical to change our attitude toward others, to respect the people, and to allow the community to participate at every stage in the development process. That relates to project design and to every subsequent step of the process. We are not there as the experts. The community people have lots of wisdom. We learn from them. Some workers have the idea that they must have control. Really, it is the project committee which must do the controlling. Facilitation lets people discover the right course of action themselves.”



Evita Perez (right) and Nora Avarientos (2nd from right) enjoy a conversation with community women and their children in a Philippines project.

Nora Avarientos of World Vision Philippines spoke from her experience in training new staff members: “As I’ve become more involved in training, I am inclined to allow people to express their feelings, rather than coming from a top-down view, always following my own agenda. Sometimes you want to put across the information, yet that is not the need of the people. It’s better to allow the people to express their needs, so their experience can be more meaningful.” Nora is Manager of the development training unit of World Vision Philippines.

Her colleague, Evita Perez, said, “The first thing that’s important in working with the people is to recognize their capabilities. They have potential as leaders in the community. When you recognize their worth, their dignity, you are uplifting them as persons. They are able to do the activities—the planning and implementation. Sometimes we have the idea that we are the experts going, but if we have that attitude, we are wrong. There are potential leaders. What is necessary is listening to them.”

Evita, who is the Branch Manager of World Vision Philippines in Palawan, continued, “The leadership of the facilitator counts a lot. If

the people have trust in the facilitator, they will open up. Time is needed, and encouragement and a sense of openness. The process is good when there is an atmosphere of openness and trust.”

What actually happens in Communities?

Ted Ward commented, “In Africa, I’ve seen some good examples in World Vision’s work lately, of the kind of participatory development that makes a broad impact on whole communities. One principle that should be applied in development assistance is to involve broad communities, not just small groups of hand-picked people. Religious, missionary-related activity tends to be narrowly focused. I think World Vision has discovered how to work through the Christian communities, and yet not isolate the Christian communities from the rest of the community.

I was involved in a series of workshops last summer where we brought together people from Kenya, Ethiopia, Uganda, and Tanzania. That was one of the most convincing groups that I’ve ever worked with. Those were people who were really discovering ways to make the Church active in relationship with the whole community.”

Bryan Truman said, “I think of a very positive example that impressed me in the Philippines, related to the DAC [Development Assisting Center] in Capiz. I visited the project, and in a community

meeting, as usually happens, I, as the visiting outsider, was asked to say something. I told a story that I've used many times, comparing the process of development to the process of the hen hatching an egg. There's no way to speed up the process. It takes the egg 21 days to hatch.

When I finished, the people applauded warmly, and the two young facilitators jumped to their feet. One of them wrote on a flip chart, 'What did we learn?' and the other began leading a discussion among the community people. I didn't ask for that; they did it spontaneously.

For the next 30 minutes, they led a vigorous discussion and engaged in a process of discovery together. The people related the story to their own experience. At one point, the facilitator who had been writing said, 'Why doesn't one of you from the community come and write?' A woman did. And another community member replaced the other DAC worker in leading the discussion. To me, it was an outstanding example of a facilitating mode of learning in action."

Ability to Relinquish Power

Nora Avarientos, from her work in the Philippines, said, "I have met a few people who were good examples of facilitators. Some are community leaders. When I was a community development worker in direct contact with community people, one man who was a barrio captain assumed leadership. What struck me about this man was his ability to relinquish the power that he had in a specific group, although he had the respect of the whole community. He let them do the job. He felt he was growing old, and that the work that must be done in the community must go on. He became in inspiration to me.

At first, I was concerned about information. I was the development worker, and I thought I was doing development work, but when I saw him, he taught me how to become a development worker."

As she reflected further, Nora recalled others who exemplified a facilitator's attitude in their service to communities. "Among our Philippines staff, Joy Pedrano is a very intelligent woman, and yet her humility enables people to relate to her on equal terms. She can identify with the people, and based on the reports we get from the people about her, they are not afraid to be with her, because she is one of them.

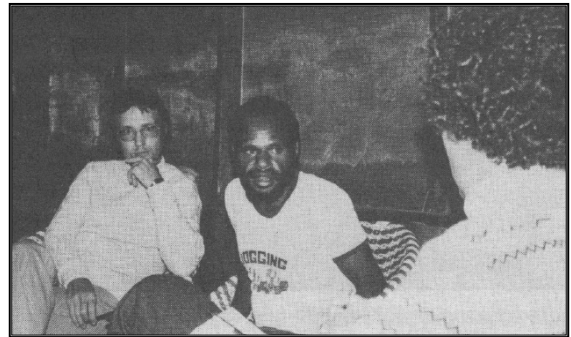
Danny Isagani is someone I appreciate because of his willingness to learn from the people. He had to change quite a bit to become like that. Seraphin Molina is that way. What I've appreciated is his willingness to be honest and open, and an ability to be vulnerable also. If you're not vulnerable, you're not learning from the people you work with."

Evita Perez, from her work with communities in Palawan, recalled, "In previous years, the people in one project were oppressed by one outsider living in the community. When the workers of the project began working in the community, they were able to inform the people of their rights in the community. In the fifth year, the staff saw good things begin to happen. The people became united. The oppressor in the community saw he was being excluded from community gatherings.

The people are grouped in small groups of ten families. Couples attend—not just men—and they make an assessment of their own family's economic and spiritual situation. There is open communication among the ten families—a kind of cell grouping."

Ted Ward summarizes his comments about the development facilitators in Africa he has observed recently, “It is typical that these people have a keen understanding of a Christian value system underneath their working communities. I think they will become the leaders of their generation.

They are strong Christian laypersons, and they remain such. The inspiration that comes from their service ministry causes them to relate more closely to their Church. I think we’re delivering back into the churches an energized leadership.”



Bryan Truman (far left) in Indonesia, 1981