



Ward Center for Nonformal Education: *A Proposal*¹

Ted Ward

The term “nonformal education” tends to be confusing. Some assume that its meaning can be inferred from describing what it is not. Others assume it refers to specific methods, content or even location. The Ward Center for Nonformal Education generally uses the term as it is defined by Ted Ward in his paper, *Nonformal Education—What Is It?* In this paper he outlines the distinctives of formal, nonformal, and informal education as follows:

- Formal education is characterized as deliberate, planned, staffed, financially supported, using time-and-space fixed procedures, marked by the conscious values of interchangeable parts, equivalency, and sequenced by laddering.
- Informal education is more closely associated with socialization. It is unplanned, unstaffed, functional, unrestricted as to time and place, and responsive to need. It is what you eat, breathe, and sleep.
- Nonformal education is like formal education in that it is intentional, planned, staffed, and financially supported. However, like informal education, it is functional, unrestricted as to time and place, need-centered, and oriented toward problem-solving. Its primary characteristics are that it is learner driven, change-oriented, and highly functional.

Mission Statement

Believing that growth in Christ is a lifelong process, the Ward Center for Nonformal Education is proposed. Activities and publications through the Center will articulate, advocate, and model nonformal education as a functional philosophy and effective strategy to help meet the growing demand worldwide for competent teachers and leaders who serve the church with integrity, responsibility, and faithfulness. We will do this by,

1. Providing a forum for educators and organizations that desire to work co-operatively on the development and expanded use of nonformal education in a variety of contexts.
2. Giving identity and credibility to new and existing nonformal educators who share a common philosophy of education, and providing recognition when benchmarks are reached.
3. Partnering with formal institutions as they integrate nonformal education in affective, cognitive, and skills-related domains.
4. Cooperating in the development of educators who are able to articulate and model the values and methods that are consistent with the best applications of nonformal education.
5. Developing a shared resource base to enhance the understanding and work of nonformal educators who wish to expand their options and skills as practitioners.
6. Participating in multi-agency training efforts that explain, advocate, and model nonformal education including the commitment of staff and other resources.

A rationale for the development of the Center follows.

¹ This document is a working draft of a proposal presented in November, 1996 through Mission Training International. The Center never became a reality.

The Development of The Ward Center for Nonformal Education

Paul E. Nelson

We have reached a point in the growth of the church worldwide that the sheer number of new and growing Christians is forcing church leaders and educators to re-think current educational models and practices. Universities, schools, colleges, seminaries, and a variety of extension programs are unable to meet the needs of an exploding body of believers who are hungry to learn more about the implications of living out their faith, and what it means to worship together.

Concurrent with that reality is the almost universally held belief that education which is obtained through a university, school, college, seminary, or at least an extension program, has value. Alternatives which do not have the trappings and assumed credibility of a formal institution have little esteem and do not generally qualify one for leadership in the church or as an educator.

Most thoughtful Christian leaders recognize this paradox; but commitment to providing viable alternatives has been limited. Formal, degree-granting institutions continue to be the standard against which other educational programs are judged. The relative success of the graduates of the programs is not generally the criterion for evaluation. It is more likely to be whether or not they received a degree.

Most contemporary societies have been influenced and, to some extent, shaped by the predominately Western model of schooling. The formal, group-paced, teaching-telling, learning-listening approach to education has much to commend it both in process as well as outcome. It is the model with which most educators and Christian leaders have experience, and it is the context in which most have found success. Therefore, it is predictably the model which is replicated when new teaching-learning situations are encountered.

While not always recognized, nonformal education, as distinguished from formal schooling and informal learning from experience, is a highly effective discipline with thousands of practitioners and advocates. Most people who use this approach have never heard of the term, but they have employed its principles to acquire and pass on skills, values, and huge bodies of knowledge for generations. More importantly, it is the model which Jesus used when he wanted to communicate his love and redemption to humankind.

Jesus' approach to teaching and discipleship is readily identified and often taught by Christian educators. However, when one looks at the teaching methods currently being used for spiritual growth and leadership development, there is little evidence that Jesus' model is being replicated or even understood.

The traditions of formal education prevail, even in the most personal domains of faith and relationships. There is probably a philosophical consensus on the appropriateness and effectiveness of the Scriptural paradigm of nonformal education, but there is also an overriding commitment to maintaining the status quo. The reality of today's overwhelming need for prepared leadership in the church, combined with limited opportunities to study in formal institutions, creates an openness to embracing alternatives and, perhaps, an impetus for change.

Essential Questions

The following questions provide the impetus for discussion of this proposal:

1. How can we organize to share the vision for a different and more appropriate approach to meeting the need for educated leaders in the church?

2. How can we teach thousands of people and do it on a human scale?
3. How can we increase the competence and esteem of educators and students who are committed to a nonformal approach to education?

Proposal

Mission Training International, in partnership with recognized specialists, will establish a center to serve as the focus for a variety of models, programs, and resources that are commonly identified with nonformal education. The name of this partnership will be the Ward Center for Nonformal Education.

Purpose

To articulate, advocate, and model a nonformal approach to education and to present it as an effective, legitimate, and viable strategy for meeting the overwhelming need for educated leadership in the church worldwide.

Goals

The following are anticipated outcomes for the Center:

1. To provide a forum for educators and organizations who desire to work cooperatively on the development and expansion of nonformal education as a tool for preparing Christian leaders.
2. To give identity and credibility to new and existing nonformal educators who share a common philosophy of education, and to provide recognition when benchmarks are reached.
3. To facilitate the articulation and development of a mutually agreed upon definition of nonformal education including its values and distinctives.
4. To cooperate in the development of educators who are able to articulate and model nonformal education.
5. To develop a shared resource base to enhance the work of nonformal educators.
6. To participate in multi-agency training efforts including the commitment of staff and other resources.

Programs

The Center will create, sponsor, host, and publish events and resources that will facilitate the understanding and application of the philosophy and methodology of nonformal education in a variety of contexts. Programs such as these can lead to a coordinated exploration and dissemination of ways the principles can be reinforced and are being implemented in different contexts.

Rationale

The following factors are to be considered in the development of this proposal:

1. No single model or entity is able to address all the perceived educational needs and achieve the expected outcomes. A coordinated effort between existing agencies and cooperation in new efforts is required.
2. A center whose organizing principle is methodology rather than content will provide a forum through which diverse entities can work together to improve the effectiveness of their teaching.
3. Vested interests of formal institutions can be addressed through cooperative efforts rather than competition.

4. A credible, recognized center can be large enough to exert influence on the entire Christian community to effect change where change is appropriate.
5. Experienced, qualified educators can be brought together to develop and implement programs designed to meet common objectives.
6. Cooperative efforts in program design and implementation will be more easily funded because they represent a larger potential audience and constituency.
7. Shared expertise will result in better quality education at all levels.
8. Events can be planned with the presumption of previous knowledge and experience and appropriate follow-up.
9. There can be continuity of observation, evaluation, development, and reinforcement throughout an educator's career.
10. Cooperative efforts can be more cost effective since there will be a greater number of participants in each program.
11. Mission Training International (formerly Missionary Internship) has based its programs and contributions to the missions community on its commitment to modeling and using a nonformal approach to preparing missionaries for cross-cultural life and ministry.
12. A center for nonformal education will become credible as its philosophy and purpose are clearly articulated and understood. One way to achieve that is to have a credible nonformal educator and widely recognized mentor and advocate identified with the center.
13. Ted Ward's worldwide influence on the missions community through his writing and personal involvement as an educator and mentor would identify the center with some of the most successful models of nonformal education in a variety of contexts.
14. Dr. Ward's long and fruitful association with Missionary Internship makes it appropriate for MTI to take initiatives to bring into existence a center which bears his name.
15. Ted's former students, many of whom are in strategic leadership positions, might find renewed vision and expanded opportunities to articulate and extend their advocacy for nonformal education as Associates or Fellows of the center.

Scenario for Implementation

Mission Training International will convene a meeting of nonformal educators and other resource people to explore the need for and implications of forming a center specifically focused on this methodology. The initial meeting will identify such things as the center's mission, its values, a structure which will facilitate the fulfillment of its mission, a strategy to identify the status quo, and an action plan for future activity. Mission Training International will ensure continuity of effort and serve as the co-ordinating entity for information flow and program implementation.