



Nonformal Education: *An Area of Research and Service at Michigan State University (1976)*

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The increasing interest in nonformal education seems to reflect two major factors: 1) a growing awareness that the established (formal) educational institutions are not the only means (and often not the best means) of carrying out educational missions within a society, and 2) an increased concern for utilizing a broader range of means to fulfill the educational goals of community and national development. The major practical problem is how to use a nonformal agency without the consequence of turning it into just one more formal institution. Without an adequate theory of the nonformal distinctives, any attempt to deliberately use a nonformal educational operation in some new way will run the hazardous risk of damaging the infrastructure of a society. Thus the proposed development of a university's inquiry into the matter of nonformal education is appropriate. Developmental models and appropriate assessment procedures are needed; but social, anthropological, and educational theory must also be developed.

The faculty of a college of education comprises scholars whose interests and expertise lies in matters of teaching, learning, and the organizational management of educational enterprises. During the frantic years of expansion of schools and schooling to accommodate the population increases, faculties of education have given primary attention to schools. A transition is underway: educational researchers, evaluators and designers are relating to education as a societal element that is carried out through many agencies, organizations and informal elements within the social composite.

Within the College of Education at Michigan State University are many people whose practical experience and research inquiries are closely related to problems within the domain of nonformal education. To be concerned with the whole community and the various roles and forms of educative forces is not new to these scholars. The current stimulus to relate to the nonformal as the *primary* focus is different, since characteristically in the past the tendency has been to look first at the formal or institutional and then to look outward from there toward the other educative forces of the community. The new vantage point will likely prove to be stimulating.

The term "nonformal education" reflects, an honest yet unfulfilled attempt to clearly distinguish among the major educative forces in a society. Some sort of distinction must be made in order to highlight the alternatives to formal, institutionalized educational enterprises. "Nonformal education" is a negative description, and thus it is less descriptive than "formal education." Even the deficiencies of "formal" as a descriptor are readily recognized. "Formal" implies having form or discernable structure, and much education within the community, the home and other less structured elements of society has form. Thus the word "schooling" has been recently revived to denote the sort of education provided by the educational establishments. What seems to be indicated by "nonformal education" is more a matter of "non-school" than of "nonformal," since the main interest is in identifying the societal agencies and instruments other than the school enterprises that carry out educative functions. The distinction is not a matter of "nonformal" as "form-less", but rather it is nonformal as *apart from the agencies and institutions that are primarily given to education as their primary purpose*.

It is thus indicated that the military services, youth corps operations, agricultural extension and the like are concerned with nonformal education. Indeed they are concerned with educating, but they are not lacking in form or structure. It stretches the language quite far to call them nonformal. To call them “non-school” might be more precise; but again there is difficulty: most of these agency-organizations also use the word “school” to describe some of their internal services; thus even the descriptor “non-school” breaks down.

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Although there is no single statement of policy with regard to nonformal education, the various departments and faculty of the University who are most extensively involved in nonformal education at home and abroad are generally agreed on several basic propositions. First, there is general agreement that the major importance of nonformal education is to extend the availability of educational resources to persons who are not within the influence spheres of particular schools or programs of schooling. At one end of the continuum of opportunities are the advanced specialists in a practical field whose needs for continuing education during their career preclude their taking substantial breaks for extensive periods of additional formal schooling. At the other end of the continuum is the adult or child for whom education in the formal schooling structure has never been a live option.

Our second area of agreement is that nonformal education is not a unique problem for third-world countries or developing nations. In fact, we observe that it is in the highly developed nations of the western world that we see the most explicit examples of highly developed nonformal education—operating as supplements and integrators with the formal schooling establishment. The current interest in nonformal education within the developing nations is largely a response to the growing awareness that the difficulties and costs associated with establishing a very large program of formal educational opportunity may be beyond the reach of many nations within the reasonable future.

The third area of agreement is that whatever is to be done within the nonformal education sector, there are many different ways that formal education can contribute. We see a polarization of formal versus nonformal education to be counterproductive. Comprehensive educational opportunity demands both. At this moment of increased emphasis on nonformal education, there is a special role to be played by institutions that have made extensive research and service contributions within nonformal education. Specifically, at Michigan State University there is a large and established involvement of the institution as a whole, and of several hundred of the faculty in particular, in various aspects of nonformal education growing out of services to a broad range of the Michigan population. These services have been provided for many decades through various extension, continuing education, and community service programs.

Our approach has been to draw from existing experience and to develop new research and competencies, as needed. We have not attempted to develop a separate department or specialized faculty in nonformal education. Instead, we draw upon the many more specialists who become available to us because of our flexibility in tapping into the many departments and division of the University (and agencies allied with the University) whose commitments are to the extension of the educational opportunities involved in their disciplines regardless of type of educational structure.

A major contribution of the collective participation of interested faculty in the College of Education will be to develop the conceptual and descriptive tools needed to grasp the educational issues and potentialities inherent in what is now called “nonformal education.” Especially the sociologists and

anthropologists of education are needed to study the implied and real distinctions in order to provide a systematic and holistic view of education within a society.

The distinction between “formal” and “nonformal” education at present seems to be sometimes a matter of administrative structure and style and sometimes a matter of the label. In administrative structure and style a family planning program differs from a primary school. (Yet *both* are, in the more basic sense, formed and institutionalized.) The army teaches basic arithmetic and literary skills; so does the primary school. The first is “informal,” the second is “formal”—not because of differences of administrative structure and style but because one is labeled “school” while the other isn’t. These distinctions may be too arbitrary to be supportable as part of any cogent theory. The formal/nonformal distinction is, at best, a subdivision of some larger construct.

For example, the subject-matter content of a school is a matter of policy—some formal authority in the society (whether the local schoolmaster or the national ministry of education) determines the goals and objectives; in contrast, the family and the neighborhood educates the child or the newcomer, but toward norms that are informal and are vested in extra-legal authority. The family rarely uses overt means to teach speaking of the mother tongue; the school necessarily uses overt means to teach a second language, but may use only covert modes to enrich the fluency of mother-tongue speech.

In various realms and on various occasions, the school, the family, the religious order, the government, or the community exercises the authority of norms or the authority of policy and instructs in covert or overt ways. For example, *when* does the family employ overt modes? On what matters does the church establish policy? In what matters is the school engaged in covert modes?

The formal/nonformal distinction now gains perspective: as presently used it is an arbitrary subdivision of the authority: policy sectors. The distinction is made in terms of the administrative structure, style, and labeling of the agency.

Elementary and secondary schools, as well as colleges and universities, are primarily engaged in overt *formal* operations. But note: the school also operates in covert ways to carry out both policy-and norm-authorized learning. Schools are rarely engaged in informal operations, for the important reason that schools, as formal institutions have their authority in policy; when a school overtly educates, the authority is that of policy. For example, a local school may impose an informal community standard of conduct or dress—and in doing so, it makes the imposing a matter of policy (e.g., “dress codes” and “conduct policies”).

Some of the most basic questions in the nonformal education matter concern the interface between formal and nonformal educative operations. What changes are induced by using a nonformal agency to carry out a policy-authorized mission? What changes are induced by changing the modes of instruction from covert to overt? What influences of the formal cause the goals of the nonformal to be more readily achieved? What nonformal functions depend on the infrastructure of the formal (and vice versa)? Lest the efforts to bring nonformal education into ascendancy result instead in a distortion of fragile societal structures, development and experimentation must be linked to sound theory. Understanding and respect are basic.

The Potential Participation Of Michigan State University with and for the Activities of UNICEF

We are meeting on November 22, 1976, with policy personnel in UNICEF at the request of Mr. Newton Bowles in order to explore the potential for mutually beneficial cooperation between Michigan State University and UNICEF. We are in no position to make a proposal for any particular activities at this time. Indeed, we are hoping to gain a clearer perception of the needs of UNICEF and to relate them to our own concerns and commitments. Subsequent to such understandings, it may be possible for one of several sorts of activities to follow.

First, we might foresee a consultancy relationship in which specialists in various aspects of non-formal education at Michigan State University might be on call for short-term assignment to activities and projects in which UNICEF has a direct responsibility. In this role, the professional resource pool at Michigan State University would provide a flexible response capability to meet the particular needs of UNICEF as they emerge in the field or in central planning matters.

The second possibility might be a particular thrust toward one of the areas of remaining great need in the development of nonformal education resources and programs. For example, we note that very little has been done to stimulate and sponsor educational operations that would have primary value for out-of-school children. We are aware of the need to bring together the skills of literacy and numeracy education and the understanding of small children in the various cultures. The University has the resources that are appropriate to these emerging needs.

The third possibility might be to engage with UNICEF in the development of one or another exemplary program of comprehensive focus on children's needs. Perhaps in one or two countries it might be possible to develop a composite service approach to children's learning needs that would range from the basic literacy and numeracy skills through rudimentary family development, nutrition, and vocational competency. Some one or more UNICEF countries might undertake a research project on some distinct focus with the help of Michigan State University specialists.

Summary Of Experiences And Kinds Of Work In Non-Formal Education At Michigan State University

During the period of time when UNICEF and other international agencies were highlighting the needs of children and adults beyond the reach of formal schooling, Michigan State University responded by mobilizing a large project for the development of literature appropriate to nonformal education. Since the University has a century of experience in the development of nonformal education programs and has well over thirty years of experience in the development of institutional structures and forms within other nations, we attempted to put these resources together in a different way to respond to this newly emphasized need.

From our deep commitment to the Land Grant college tradition and our long involvement in the practices of extension and continuing education, we drew both incentive and experienced, professional personnel. From our overseas experiences, we are able to draw upon people with a wide range of insights and skills ranging from the establishment of agricultural extension programs, home economics, human ecology, vocational education, vocational rehabilitation of the handicapped, Peace Corps training and on-site supervision, religious mission co-ordination, and similar programs. We bring together people who have served in various roles, including the counterparts of national planning officers and counterparts of field trainers for programs

ranging from family planning to rice production. Further, we attempt to develop a more extensive participation of people with background in educational subjects such as the teaching of reading, numeracy, and civic competencies. This sort of mobilization is greatly facilitated by a long-standing pattern of organization within the University through which it is possible to bring together multi-disciplinary teams from any appropriate department and college. The University's Dean for International Programs has facilitated these mobilizations, and the resources of the University at large have been made available. The restrictions upon use of public funds of the State of Michigan for programs outside the state have been no hindrance because our efforts have been funded by the United States Agency for International Development, the Organization of American States, the Southeastern Asian Ministers of Education Organization, the World Bank, and other organizations of bi-national and multi-national aid.

The work that we have undertaken overseas and within the United States to support our overseas work has been of a wide variety. We have participated in multi-institutional leadership for national surveys of nonformal education resources, the most extensive of which was in Brazil. We have sent people to serve as counterparts in offices of national planning for the development of nonformal education resources. We have provided many short-term consultants in matters ranging from evaluation to staff training. We developed three conferences of international significance which brought together major leadership and policy-making persons from around the world; two of these conferences have been held in the Kellogg Center for Continuing Education at Michigan State University, and one was a seminar for Asian nations conducted in Bangkok and Seoul. We have contributed substantially to the professional literature through two sets of monographs produced under contract to the United States Agency for International Development. Currently, we are developing a series of training materials and less complex literature for the purpose of direct communication with technician-level personnel in the field within many countries.

In addition to these service activities, the University has provided seminars and special course programs, both credit and non-credit, for the continued encouragement and training of personnel from the United States and from overseas interested in the matter of nonformal education for developing nations. A continuing education seminar concerned with our project in Indonesia meets monthly on campus with voluntary graduate student and faculty participation. Many graduate students, both master's level and doctoral, are working on individually designed programs for preparation of their increased effectiveness in nonformal education planning, program management, evaluation and training. Such students have been or are enrolled here from Brazil, Chile, Hong Kong, India, Iran, Jamaica, Kenya, Korea, Liberia, New Guinea, Nigeria, Peru, Taiwan, Thailand, Turkey, and Zaire.