



Nonformal Education: *Strategy for Instructional Planning*¹

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Thank you, Madame Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to meet with my colleagues from so many countries and to share with you some ideas that might have some value and hope for each of us. Nonformal education is one of those rare topics in history that is, at the same time, affecting the whole world east and west, the so-called *developed* and the so-called *less-developed* nations. Each, for its own reasons, is confronting something of a challenge to the established system that requires a much more careful and perceptive view of the alternatives. Therefore, we are here to share our experiences with one another, not nearly so much in giving from one sector or from one piece of geography to another piece of geography; but to honestly engage in a search that will enlighten each of us because of the experiences of the other. It is toward that hope, then, that I would like to suggest to you a strategy for educational planning, particularly focused on the matter of instructional planning. The intent is to provide a framework within which, as we learn, country by country, situation by situation we will be in a much better position to *share* from one place to another. In the history of informal development, or the general cultural milieu of circumstances, it sometimes becomes difficult to talk about the past and about the way we come to where we are today. I propose for you then a tactic, which if acceptable and useful to you, might put each of us in a better position to communicate with each other in another ten years were we to re-gather.

I think we have to think about this in terms of what we would do were we to re-gather in five years or ten years. What stories would we have to tell then, and how able would we be to communicate these stories to one another. Clearly, one of our problems today is that we are using language that is newly arrived at: terms such as nonformal education and educational alternatives are newly coined terminology to express what we think are old ideas. Yet we have noticed in our conversations that these old ideas actually take on different viewpoints and different terminology from place-to-place. The question is, *Will we be better able to communicate in five years; in ten years? What kinds of success will we have to report to one another? What will be the ways in which we can identify within our own situations those parts of the success story and those parts of the failures that would inform, truly inform, people from another country and from another sector of humanity?*

This paper is an attempt to be helpful and hopeful. I am more sure about being hopeful than about being helpful; therefore, I assure you that what I have to present to you is, in fact, a hopeful view of this particular phenomenon within the whole range of educational planning and development. Perhaps in five years some of us can say *Yes, it was helpful*.

This presentation is comprehensive with reference to that particular sector of instructional planning that is laid out in the first section, but it is detailed only with reference only to one small part. In order

¹ Ted Ward. *Nonformal Education: Strategy for Instructional Planning*, Malaysia, 1971. Transcription of an *Nonformal Education*, organized by SEAMEO/SEADAG, 1971” was the subject of a subsequent research study “Beyond School Walls: A Study of Non-Formal Education in the SEAMEO Region”. It can be accessed at <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED137501.pdf>

to understand this paper, some information and ideas must be gathered from other papers. I call this to your attention simply to indicate that this paper builds on the papers of Dr. Coombs, Dr. Brembeck, and Dr. Anderson. Note their work and then move into my paper in terms of a way to get at the planning problem. When I say, *planning*, I refer in my paper more to the actual design of instruction than I do to administrative managerial planning.

I would call your attention then, by way of preamble, to a paragraph in Dr. Coombs' paper. In the printing that was prepared for this conference, we read the following: "We still know little about how to plan nonformal education. At least we do know that it is an educational realm where inherent resistance to experimentation and innovation is far less stubborn than in the traditional formal system." That is what I consider a hopeful statement. "Hence, nonformal education can, among other things, become a major laboratory for new ideas and approaches from which the formal system can benefit." And that I call doubly hopeful.

It is within that framework that I raise the possibility, at least, that as ministries of education and other governmental units begin to plan in the area of nonformal education, we may be entering a period of a new opportunity to start over again with reference to the procedures and tactics of educational planning. I suggest that rather than use the same procedures, and the time-honored but somewhat threadbare approaches to planning in formal education, that we seize upon this opportunity to employ new tactics of planning as befits this somewhat new focus on the planning of nonformal education.

In continuing this preface, I would like to share with you a viewpoint from Jack Mezirow. In a conference last week, he summarized in four steps in relation to educational development:

1. Instructional process questions, relating particularly to curriculum, methodology, and materials.
2. Organization and administration, looking particularly at the place of nonformal education within the whole context of educational planning. This point is consistent with Coombs' suggestion that a major purpose of conferences today on nonformal education should be to "fuzz up" the lines between formal and nonformal so that educational planners will see *much more* than the formal school and the establishment of the past; that they will recognize their involvement in and cooperation with other ministries with regard to educational phases of many other aspects of development education.
3. The set of problems that might be called *relationship of nonformal education to national development* which Dr. Coombs has described in his paper.
4. The politically loaded problem of the implications of national development on the *total* political scene. It is probable that nonformal education, if intensively expanded and developed, will constitute an imposing force for evolution (or revolution) of various sorts. This leads Mezirow to suggest that in each of our national situations we must recognize the implications of national development to the whole political scene in a given country.

Mezirow points out that these four points increase in difficulty. The easiest to deal with is the instructional process, and then as you move down, they become much more complex. But, more importantly, he asserts that the most important and basic issues are the other way around. You cannot solve problems of instructional process until you solve problems of organization and administration; you cannot solve problems of organization and administration before you face up to the problem of national development; and if you are concerned about national development, you must raise the question about how it relates to total socio-political change. For people within government agencies especially, this last point presents *difficult problems*. So it would be less than fair to you to begin with

anything less than a relationship between what I will focus on, instructional process design, and these much more complex and crucial sorts of problems from his last three sectors.

When we talk about effective learning, we are talking about the problem of how to produce the sorts of learning that have these characteristics: learning that will last, learning that will be valued, and learning that will change peoples' lives. These are the *three* elements that constitute effective learning in today's world from the standpoint, especially, of the design of educational experiences, whether formal or nonformal.

I would argue that there is an arbitrary distinction between formal and nonformal education that is not as useful for planning educational experiences. As those involved in the total development of human beings and in the development of societies, the major problem is to *spread out* our vision, not to add a second sector, but just to *spread out, to widen* our view so that we become more aware of the varieties of the things that are, in fact, educational functions. Further, when I am asked to write or to speak about the problem of effective learning in nonformal settings, I am quick to remind people that effective learning is effective learning—regardless of the experience. Whether it is a formal situation or nonformal, the elements that make it effective are similar.

In my judgment, people are not nearly as concerned about nonformal education as they are about alternatives. Alternatives are needed primarily because of the failure of educational experiences to relate to the social needs of a society, to the cognitive style of learners, and to the pedagogical expectations of people within a given society. Our intent here is to find ways to bring education to people who are not being reached by the formal establishment; and as we consider nonformal education, we need to talk primarily about the people who are not already being reached by educational services. One of the problems in adult education, historically, has been that it tends to reach the same sort of people. So the people in nonformal education are not altogether the same people who have been involved in adult education. It follows then that the need to relate to people while lowering costs will seem like an impossible problem. How can you do more, and do it better, with less funds? Obviously this presents a challenge to the need to direct educational objectives toward goals that are more practical and more closely related to learners' needs within their society.

I suggest that there are several steps in orderly planning that might be implemented regardless of the particular situation. When we think in terms of a system, we envision an orderly progression of tasks that allows us to identify what task we are working on at a given time. Naturally there are interrelationships among all these tasks and, of course, an experienced educational designer will say, *Yes, I'm still working on that one over there while I'm working on this one over here*. But part of the problem of educational planning is our tendency to constantly defer certain things until later. A systems view of instructional planning says let's come to grips with problems in the right order and actually wrestle them to the ground before we proceed with other events.

We begin with two important problems: specifying the learning to be achieved and describing the target population. I submit that in those two steps the strength or weakness of planning will determine the success or failure of the system, formal or nonformal. Especially as we are being given a new opportunity with reference to nonformal education, may I stress that we need to be much more thorough in specifying the learning to be achieved and in describing those target populations. It is easy for a person within a country to reject opinions from a person from outside the country by saying, *But you don't understand our people*. But I say, *You don't either!* And I firmly believe that just because an educational designer is a citizen of the United States doesn't mean that he or she understands the

coal miner in Kentucky. This is the issue—how thoroughly are we approaching the matter of studying the particular target population?

In the United States, I believe that we are vulnerable for having tried to do create something that fits for everyone within a school for example. What actually happens is not that you create something that fits all, but that what you create turns out to be rather tightly focused on certain people. And we are discovering, especially in the cities of the United States, that what the formal education establishment has done is to create a system in which you have to be in the middle class in order to succeed within that system. And far from being an adequate ladder for social improvement, as we have characterized our education in the past, what is happening today is that education tends to stratify and hold people within their particular stratum of society. We must re-examine this problem within our own country. And we must use procedures where we take seriously the need to describe the target population before defining or describing the instructional task. After having done these things, you can begin to build the management system that is required to do the job as well as focus on the levels of performance. There is a concept that goes something like this: If you are serious about everyone achieving, make sure that the goals you are setting up and specifying as objectives are achievable by everyone. Then see to it that the system succeeds with everyone. The systems design view of instruction sees the instructional system as having failed, not the learner as having failed. If you are seriously interested in avoiding one of the fundamental shortcomings of formal education, whether in the British system, the French system, or the American system, or whatever else has been your influence in the past, if you are seriously interested in getting into the new era and away from that old, traditional, colonialist view of education, somehow break free of the notion that some *must* fail. Move into a frame of reference that views it possible for all to succeed. Of course, this perspective does not suggest that you pull all people into collegiate education, that you pull all people into some advanced, complex skill. Define your target audience well enough so that you know what sorts of opportunities are appropriately to be offered for particular people.

I have much less hope than most people do about using instructional material from one situation in another situation. For example, many parts of the world use English, but I dare say that an instructional material developed in Kenya would not work well in Singapore. The language is not the whole issue. It is the cognitive structure of the mind, the way people look at information, the way people associate ideas, plus the different sorts of starting points that people come from as learners. You must remember that learning is essentially the chaining of new ideas to old ideas, the tying of new information to old information; and every one of us comes with a somewhat different previous experience. Therefore, what we tie to that experience has to be attuned to that previous experience. For effective learning, nonformal education should be designed to operate within a management system capable of correlating human and physical resources as well as articulating *all potential contributory agencies*. This particular administrative problem can block effective learning. It is the problem that, for example, keeps the agency of agrarian reform from involving the education ministry in the planning of educational operations in the village. What kind of coordination is required within a country? How much more important it is to get collaboration within a country, among the various agencies that are involved with various educational missions.

For effective learning, nonformal education should operate within an evaluative structure that provides data for continuous improvement of the instructional procedure. There is no such thing as the design of a perfect educational experience. There is no such thing as the design of an ideal educational program. There is only the design of faulty systems. There is only the design of poor programs. The issue is, *What mechanism have you built in to guarantee that over time that system improves because*

it profits from its own mistakes. Many times, paper plans are analyzed with reference to their strengths and weaknesses and until a plan is perfect, it is not implemented. In such a situation, nothing much happens. In other situations, people say, *It has problems. I don't see a solution, but let's try it; let's find ways to evaluate and recycle the system.* Now, by recycle the system, I mean take data out of the end and put it back at the beginning. As we evaluate the learning again, what are we evaluating? The success of students? No, the success of the system, the success of the scheme, the success of the program. We take data from that source and plug it in again to refine our understanding of that target audience and to refine our specifications of the learning. I close with five observations about how this sort of evaluation may be accomplished.

1. Make a general statement of the problems or needs for which the nonformal education is to relate. What is the *general* problem?
2. Then make a statement of goals and objectives that will meet those needs. Don't worry at this point about how you are going to do it, just work on some things that will have to happen.
3. Then move on, determine and operate a set of procedures that will likely achieve the goals. Determining and operating. That's where the big design problem fits in. But we're not done yet.
4. Carry on a continuous evaluation and a modification of the procedures to assure that they *do* achieve the goal. Don't be satisfied with the excuse that says, *But these learners are not able.* Ask the question, *Is our system able? Are our procedures able?*
5. Assess the problems and the needs in order to modify the goals and the objectives of the system. Go back and re-define *these* from time-to-time.

One of the most interesting problems in national development is the characteristic of change in needs and goals. Often, about the time an instructional system begins to operate, national needs have shifted and the system is doing a beautiful job on the old goals. About the time we get a system working well, we find that our problems are different.

Now this brings me then to the matter of evaluation in nonformal education. Nonformal education is more apt to be involved with functional usable things than is formal education. We think it is easy to evaluate formal education because we think in terms of paper and pencil tests. I submit that that's not a test of the system at all. That is a test of students. There are some general ways in which it's possible to evaluate nonformal education *because* nonformal education is functional and because nonformal education is related to the individual's own set of decisions, not to the decisions of the state.

We are here to look at variations, and for hybrid new things that might work. So I go along with the notion of dropping the concepts of formal and nonformal, quickly. But let us pursue, then, the great variety of things, of modes of instruction and of learning, that might help us meet a great variety of our needs.