



Effective Learning: Lessons to be Learned Related to Formal and Nonformal Education¹

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Worldwide, formal schooling is in upheaval. In America, exemplary of a thoroughly schooled society, critics find eager audiences for critical and cynical writings. Parents, students, and educators seem ready to believe the worst. Study after study, volume after volume, describe the alleged bankruptcy of an educational enterprise once envied the world over. In a prosperous and industrialized society such as the United States, continued investment in a dysfunctional mode of education is simply an unfortunate and regrettable misuse of human and material resources; but in a less developed nation, it is a disastrous and tragic policy leading to national frustration.

The desire of many less developed countries to achieve the same level of economic development, evidenced by attendant material wealth as possessed by the United States, leads them to copy their richer, much envied and idealized neighbor in the key area they feel is within their grasp—education. The situation is analogous to the pathetic efforts of a Pacific Cargo Cult hopefully constructing nonfunctional replicas of airliners and clearing landing strips in the jungle to welcome wealth-laden planes from the skies, thus expecting to enrich their impoverished islands. Laborious and elaborate preparations over, the people wait vainly for the arrival of their dreams. So it is with many of the hopes invested in schooling.

Problems of Schooling

As Ivan Illich pointed out, for less developed countries to accept the “schooling hoax is to purchase a ticket for the backseat in a bus headed nowhere.” If the primary tragedy occurs in the attempts of poorer countries to imitate a dysfunctional system, then those dysfunctions can be most readily explored in the mother model itself. In the course of this paper, the failures of formal schooling in North America will be examined as they manifest themselves in the Third World. In so doing, it is hoped that a theoretical base will be developed which will suggest some directions and principles useful in the creation of an effective, nonformal educational system to meet the national needs of countries not served well by formal education.

In a country with little wealth to begin with, the commitment of nearly half of the national budget to an educational system that invests half the educational expenditure on one percent of the school-age population, as is the case in Bolivia, is of dubious wisdom. The passive acceptance of lower status by those excluded (because of social and environmental factors) from the credentialing process via the schools, however, is only slightly less tragic than the elevating to positions of power those who have been concerned less with getting along with their fellow students than with getting ahead of them. The

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lack of concern or understanding demonstrated by the leaders and economic elite can be traced in part to the struggle for credentials and “superiority” fostered by competitive schooling; and this struggle does not lead to increasing the concern for what is being learned or its relevancy to national needs and conditions. Motivation for learning in school is commonly derived from a fear of academic failure and the consequent entrapment by poverty and powerlessness.

While schooling can create and reinforce social stratification, it has proven remarkably ineffective as a means of closing these gaps. It would appear that less developed countries cannot look to the formal education system to provide greater equality of material and power distribution or to draw a larger proportion of their population into the dynamic process of nation-building.

It seems apparent that the elaborate structures and facilities of American education are out of reach of most less developed countries. But less clear is whether this is a detriment or an advantage. The benefit/cost ratio of American education is under attack by anxious school boards across the country. Obtaining little in return for enormous expenditures has turned the public into an angry camp. As a result of the schools’ tendency to grow even larger and to hide their operations in forbidding structures often set apart physically as well as psychologically from the community they are supposed to serve, education has become so detached from local needs and conditions and from reality in general that the product is largely lost to society, at least as a critical, capable, aware, mature participant.

Literacy

Besides the general shortcomings and high cost of formalized schooling, the possibility of implementing a system of formal education is highly doubtful for a number of reasons relating to the particular conditions of developing nations. In many countries the population is increasing twice as fast as the literacy rate. Relying on formal schooling to close this gap has proven unsuccessful. For many, the threshold of opportunity for learning is literacy. Formal education is structured to exclude those who cannot read and write. Thus formal education’s first task is assumed to be development of literacy skills. Learning quickly to read well is the royal road to educational advancement and to the employment opportunities for which formal education is the gate-key. Many intelligent people, lacking in motivation for formal schooling during childhood, are condemned to relatively restricted opportunity. This situation is especially serious in societies aspiring after the degree-credentialed, economic-status system of the colonial tradition.

People are not more intelligent after they learn to read. In certain societies the skills of aural learning are more highly developed than outsiders can imagine. We should learn to “connect” with these existing learning skills before we push the new learning skills that literacy demands. When a society is organized around aural communication, print media can seem unimportant. That means, for nonformal education, resisting the temptation to make literacy a requirement for practical learning and human development.

Pragmatically, the problem is that so few non-literate people see the value of learning to read and write. The mysterious processes of coding and decoding marks on paper are remote from the pressing problems of daily survival, and even more irrelevant for the typical peasant who has not even grasped the vision of participating in the determination of his or her own destiny. At a deeper level, the issue is to decide at what point and for what purposes literacy will be seen as important by the learners, and to use non-literacy-based procedures up until that point.

Out-of-school Youth: The Issue is Practicality

The assumption that a national educational program can reach only those who have achieved a level of functional literacy is both impractical and ineffectual. Despite the massive expenditures for schools and related expenses that occasionally claim over one-third of a nation's total budget, indications are that the number of students not receiving a basic education will continue to rise in many countries.

As education becomes less directly involved with fishing, with eating, or in fact, with anything directly and obviously related to living a more satisfactory life, education is said to have become formal. In such a condition, education is serving formalized purposes; whether or not these purposes are functional or pragmatically valuable has become a remote consideration.

The nomenclature of formal education makes a distinction between *education* and *training*, typically placing a premium on education while stigmatizing training. The current excitement about nonformal education in developing nations suggests that the distinction between education and training is changing. After years of eager emulation of the Western world's ladder-pyramid style of formal education, practical learning is suddenly acceptable and respectable. It is now called nonformal education!

Adult Learning

The dream of universal schooling is far in the future, if realizable at all. Large percentages of the populations of many countries will continue to live, learn, and work in societies without the benefit of "functional" or even "basic" literacy. If an educational system devised to meet national needs cannot develop methods for reaching, motivating, and enabling its clients, literate or illiterate, to affect their environment, it will probably enjoy only limited success.

There are clear indications how such a program should be constructed. First, such a program must be capable of accurately assessing the learning style preferences and the developmental levels of the clients and then be flexible enough to adjust to their stage of cognitive development. Schools have proven notoriously incapable of adjusting to differences in learning styles and have effectively excluded those unable to cope successfully with the abstract, complex mental operations that schools assume to be basic to the most valuable learning experiences.

The non-schooled adult is not always unlearned or uneducated. Large amounts of knowledge relating to social and economic life have been learned through word-of-mouth transmission and through modeling. Social roles, agricultural and construction skills, crafts, history, language, and so forth, are passed on from generation to generation through an informal but often highly refined system of learning. Whether the learning takes place through informal tutoring, supervised on-the-job training, apprenticeship or by listening to stories and legends recounted by elders, the informally learned individual is primarily discovery-oriented and is usually operating at a concrete level of mental operations. In other words, the informal learner is exposed to and searched out answers to concrete problems such as those confronted in agriculture, irrigation, hunting, etc. Success, and the consequent reinforcement and retention of learning, is perceived not by abstract rewards such as grades or credentials, but by very real and immediate rewards such as physical health and survival and social well-being. The material, skills, and concepts being learned relate directly and intimately to the concrete reality of the learner's world. Thus the informally learned person, in contrast with the formally learned person, would seem to be more discovery-oriented, more an organic, holistic learner operating at a concrete level of cognitive process. Where this is the case, it would seem probable that informally learned persons, especially those who have relatively low literacy skills and levels of

modernity, would have a learning style that is inconsistent with the pedagogical style of the formally constructed educational system. If it lacks an educational process which will reach them at their level, informally learned persons will almost certainly experience a high degree of frustration and failure in school and will either opt out or be shut out. In effect, they will be excluded from access to social credentials and relegated to personal poverty, powerlessness, and social unproductiveness.

In adult learning, emphasis is placed on using illustrations from life situations with which adults are familiar, and for which they have readily available mental images. It would also mean using drawings, pictures, and tangible models, to present materials graphically and through the senses. We would provide for direct, on-the-job experiences wherever possible, legitimatizing the home, the field, or the factory as places to learn.

We would create environmental conditions in which adults would be encouraged to consider alternative solutions to problems, to manipulate variables in their surroundings while they control others, and to engage in other complex behaviors. Rather than being bound by the mere ability to manipulate objects, however, Paulo Freire emphasizes the need for learners to comprehend their culture and their ability to work upon their environment.

It is clearly absurd to expect a 40-year-old illiterate peasant to possess the same cognitive processes and to have the same needs and concerns as a child of an urban, middle-class family. Yet this has been precisely the assumption upon which most formal educational systems have operated. There has been little effort to assess the needs of the clients or to offer optional learning situations. Formal education has been largely ineffective in meeting the demands for alternative learning styles; it has shown itself capable of serving only those segments of society who can emotionally, culturally, psychologically, and pedagogically conform to its demands.

If “effective learning takes place when educational opportunity intersects with vital daily concern,” then formal education, with its inflexible programs of pre-determined curriculum, lock-step labor, use of arbitrary time blocks, teacher of “depositor” centeredness, and use of the control model for classroom management, seems highly unlikely to provide much effective learning on a broad scale.

Human Needs as the Basis of Learning Effectiveness

Learning does not have to be coerced or artificially reinforced. Abraham Maslow asserted that behavior is motivated primarily by the desire for fulfillment of perceived needs. Jerome Bruner stated that in regard to learning, these needs are intrinsic, and provide constant, universal motivation for learning that needs only to be perceived and tapped into by the educator.

Nonformal education, on the other hand, is in a far better position to respond to the needs and situation of the individual learner, and thus to motivate. Nonformal education is largely voluntary, in that the individual is not coerced into participating but rather sees a concrete benefit accruing from participation. Unlike the school, participants are drawn to nonformal programs because they are offered a desirable skill or direct assistance in relation to their attempts to better understand themselves and their world. If the education offered is of no value to learners or does not better equip them to deal with the tasks they are confronting, they will simply refuse to participate further and the program will die or be obliged to become more meaningful.

Much nonformal education is a response to needs and articulated desires. To a greater extent than in formal education it relies on its clients to initiate programs and to determine objectives. Thus, by its

nature nonformal education can be flexible in pedagogy and content. It is not usually bound by certification requirements or other restrictions which limit the facilitator's ability to respond to the changing needs of the clients. Nonformal programs can and must change depending on the local situation and the developmental level of the clientele.

Learner's Views of Themselves

Formal education's insistence on uniformity of operation and performance has a negative effect on the self-esteem of the unsuccessful participant. This reduced self-concept virtually insures continued failure in the schooling game. The feeling of impotence is a product of an environment that oppresses the individual into a state of helplessness and hopelessness, a condition that is reinforced by schools that underscore the existing feelings of low self-esteem and inefficacy. And, given the language and cultural backgrounds of most poor, lower socio-economic-status students, there is little doubt that such feelings of low self-concept and impotence will indeed be present and reinforced.

The Search for Alternatives

There are two sorts of alternatives to be sought: the first and most historically venerable is the improvement of the schooling establishment itself. While not at all a new or untried idea, its past record of relatively low success does not inspire confidence. The second sort of alternative to schooling as it is known today lies in the development of resources for learning outside the school. The concept may be new, but the entities and programs it embraces are as old as education itself. Indeed the only thing new about the field is the term "nonformal education"!

To enhance learning effectiveness, nonformal education must avoid the pitfalls of formal education, meet the growing needs of developing nations for involving their people in the critical process of nation-building, and incorporate the wisdom and findings of contemporary educational critics.

While certainly not a panacea, nonformal education has tremendous potential and promise. Where formal education illustrates, by inference, where education could be, nonformal education is, to a great degree, already there. The legitimacy of schools is based upon their role as credentialing agencies while nonformal education will derive its legitimacy only from its ability to meet real social needs. Most school critics, in one way or another, assail formal education for its inability to identify and satisfy the real needs of *all* its clients. Nonformal education, on the other hand, starts from the assumption that effectiveness necessitates perceiving and meeting actual needs the people, including the old, the poor, the illiterate, and the unschooled.

Defining Nonformal Education

A comprehensive and standard definition of nonformal education is not yet available in common usage. Perhaps such a definition will not emerge until after much more study of the educational issues and potentialities inherent in the variety of experiences now called nonformal education has been done. The implied and real distinctions between formal and nonformal education should be seen within a systematic and holistic view of education. It seems useful at present to provide a tentative definition of our usage of the term "nonformal education" in order better to identify our current view among the many variations. Whether or not the term is viable in the long run, it is useful now to highlight alternatives to formal, institutionalized, educational enterprises. To use such a term is an honest yet unfulfilled attempt to distinguish among the major educative forces in a society.

Virtually all uses of the distinction between formal and nonformal education seem defective. The distinctions seem too arbitrary to be supportable as part of a coherent theory. The formal/nonformal

distinction is at best a subdivision of some larger construct. The problem up until now is that nonformal education has been relatively undefined because the non-school sector of education has been of little interest and concern to educational planners. Thus, though we now need a term to designate this large and sprawled sector of educative resources and operations, the best distinction we can make is arbitrary and disjunct from systematic theory.

We can propose that major elements included in a definition of nonformal education applied to national goals include the following: 1) authority for content is based on policy; 2) both covert and overt procedures and methods are used; 3) instruction is planned, systematic and follows some sort of organized program; and 4) it occurs in a more flexible setting. If we put these all together we arrive at this tentative definition: *Nonformal education is a planned instructional design which uses both overt and covert procedures in a more flexible environment to teach towards a goal determined by a regulated policy authorized by an institution of that society.*

Nonformal education focuses on practical, functional, and often, work and job-related education. A primary value reflected in most nonformal education is the *immediate usefulness* of education, in terms of personal growth and occupational enhancement. A second predominant value is *person-centeredness*. Since those who are engaged in nonformal education are usually keenly aware of the practical and immediately useful goals for their educational experiences, they tend to center the instructional approach on the particular or categorical needs of their learners. In other words, nonformal education is need-centered. Particular content is determined by identified student needs. A third element is that often there is no certification of the instructional staff. As often as not, the teachers are those who themselves have mastered the cognitive-affective-psychomotor skills involved but do not have formal accreditation, at least in the sense that accreditation is used in the area of formal education to signify eligibility by virtue of a particular amount of formal education.

Relationship of Formal and Nonformal Education

Nonformal education seems difficult to define and to conceptualize except in juxtaposition to formal education. This is unfortunate since it may connote antithesis. Rather there are several positive relationships, which point to synthesis.

First, it is becoming obvious that few if any of the developing countries are wealthy enough to support two major national and competitive educational schemes, especially if they are in conflict. To do so would debilitate both personnel and financial resources and would tend to divide the country's resources than to unite them. It is much more intelligent to consider a single, workable educational program rather than to seek to build new or enhance alternative educational programs. Interestingly, there are a number of nonformal alternatives already showing themselves in many countries. The question then is what to do with them: allow them to continue to develop as competitive, alternative systems; repress them; adapt the formal educational institutions for the formal model; or integrate the whole into a broader concept and plan for educational development?

Second, while in theory the goals of formal and nonformal education seem to be different, in reality both are attempting to do many of the same things, but from different perspectives. Both are trying to bring a people and an economy to increased personal and national productivity. Both formal and nonformal educators are aware that education, of the right sorts, is an important instrument for national development.

Third, both approaches to education often use similar if not the same methods and materials. Even where this is not the case, minor modifications would enable the use of many instructional materials interchangeably between formal and nonformal systems.

Nonformal education is seen to be responsive to the cry of the masses for relevant education. Formal education has been beset with this demand for a long period of time with relatively little response. Now that alternatives to formal education are being planned and provided, formal education itself is belatedly attempting to become more practical. Thus the formal institutions are becoming somewhat less rigid and are patterning their approach closer to the nonformal model—suggesting points of ultimate parallel in materials and procedures. This can be seen most clearly in extension programs and in uses of radio and television to extend the schooling system.

Fourth, though both nonformal and formal education are working to increase the national level of education for national and human resources and development, they are both frustrated. Both nonformal and formal education realize the enormity of the task in terms of personnel, finances, and material. Formal education is beginning to recognize that it has not met the expectations of either its constituents or its own leaders: the problems have overcome the promises. Nonformal education, however, has several things in its favor that formal education does not. The fact that nonformal education exists in more flexible settings, is person-centered, focuses on practical uses of knowledge, and yet is systematic all tend to make nonformal education more effective and efficient for development. So then, while both formal and nonformal education are facing similar frustrations, they do so for different reasons: formal education because of its lack of efficient effectiveness, and nonformal education because of its inability to do more of what it is quite good at doing.

It is quite conceivable that nonformal education holds the key to learning effectiveness for both formal and nonformal modes. Formal education needs to continue to study the reasons for success of its nonformal counterpart and seek to adopt and adapt these to its own programs. On the other hand, nonformal education needs to learn from its more established counterpart some of the lessons of educational life, instructional design, and learning theory, to name just a few areas, so that it will be able to increase its efficient effectiveness in instruction.

It is necessary to add a cautionary note: nonformal education is regarded by many as “anti-establishment” education. It is often promoted as the antithesis of formal or institutionalized education. There is much room for doubt about this generalization. Especially since established educational agencies and institutions are getting into nonformal education the scene is changing. Whenever the “establishment” begins to use any devices or procedures (whether or not they are “non-establishment”) in order to achieve “establishment” ends, they become “establishment” functions. The distinction between formal and nonformal education is thus not the same as between establishment and non-establishment efforts.

Learning Effectiveness as a Political Issue

Perhaps one of the key elements in the controversy is that schooling has failed; not necessarily that education has failed. There is a high probability that under certain influences and in certain hands nonformal education also will fail. The issue is not necessarily school versus education, or schooling versus non-schooling, or anything of the sort. It is simpler than that: *Effective learning* is the issue. In our own domestic situation, and also on the world scene, we are just now coming out of an era of “oversell” in education. During the emergence of nations of the Third World, we have seen a kind of blind grasping for the economic and welfare gains that are thought to accrue from education. The

result has been that the modes and norms of education that have been grasped have been largely built upon models of education essentially foreign to these nations. Most of these models were created on common Western European and American concepts of educational design and institutional management, often irrelevant to other countries. As we emerge from the era of oversell, frustration has set in and there is a feverish search for alternatives—simple and culturally relevant ways to provide effective education.

As outside consultants and helpers, we must find ways to help without exploitation. The emphasis on nonformal education is not an automatic preventative against further exploitive operations. In fact, given the hands and given the motives, manipulated nonformal education can be as exploitative as any other form of outside management of institutions. Those who want to help must be constrained by a commitment not to repeat the impositions of technocratic achievements that have accompanied some “helping” activities in the past. As we begin to employ nonformal methods and modes, there is a need for a much more clear-cut theory of educational functions within a society. Such theory must be drawn from sociological, anthropological, and psychological sources. Our tendency in the United States has been to draw very heavily from psychological theory and to be less careful about drawing from anthropological and social theories as they relate to education. Today’s over-individualization of instruction (in which learners are sometimes “individualized” to the point of isolation) results from this tendency. A socio-anthropological view is concerned about the interaction of learners for their educational good. Adequate theory for the planning of educational functions within a society must be drawn from the whole range of social sciences.

What is education within a society, and how does it function? Here is the primary question that must be answered before beginning to innovate. The emphasis on nonformal education is less a matter of new information or ideas than it is a matter of new focus or emphasis. Nonformal education is now coming into primary focus in its own right. But if it is to be used responsibly as a total educational plan for national development, it must be seen in relation to the whole of the educational efforts that exist within a society.

One of the problems in education as it relates to national development is the tendency to state goals too generally. Usually when people come to a point of frustration in defining their goals, they adopt, instead, goals that seem to be self-explanatory. In other words, they will adopt a generalized statement that is supposed to define itself, and they substitute it for the very difficult work of really defining the appropriate educational goals. In many cases this tendency has been seen in the relating of formal education to national development. It is not that formal education is irrelevant but that it is not given a chance because its goals are not clearly brought into alignment with the fulfillment of stated national needs. In our eagerness to help in national development we may tend to bring goals that we have developed in our own framework (in another part of the world) and use them as *substitutes* for locally defined goals. The real question is what sort of education will most effectively relate to the next steps that can be justifiably taken? Involvement of American public and private agencies in national development overseas must be disciplined by objectives defined within those national situations. It is necessary to clarify the needs to which education is to be related.

Nonformal education is not a compromise. It is a response to a “now” situation. We have before us an occasion to revise and to innovate instructional modes. There is an exciting possibility that the nonformal education movement will open the eyes of the world to see alternatives to traditional didactic approaches to instruction. Also, we have an occasion to involve ourselves as technician-helpers rather than as goal-setters.

The Hopeful Future for Nonformal Education

People learn. Institutions teach. Some people are more effective learners than others. Some institutions teach more effectively than others. Any person can learn certain things better than other things. Any institution can teach certain things better than other things. Learning is at its most effective when a person is learning those things he learns best in the context of the institution that teaches those things best. Effective learning is necessarily involved with people and with institutions.

Inherent in our treatment of the elements of nonformal education are suggestions of what nonformal education promises to its practitioners and leaders. The first is that nonformal education promises to be a more effective approach to relating education to national development. Closely related to this is a second promise: that nonformal approaches offer education that is functional and practical, i.e., related to the life-needs of the people. It is probably true that practicability enhances effectiveness and effectiveness seeks to be practical. Nonformal education promises to start with the felt needs of the people in order to help them achieve their goals and by so doing helps the nation to develop. It does not take much imagination to perceive the relation of practicality and effectiveness.

Third, nonformal education seeks to maintain a benefit/cost consciousness of what it does in order to *provide the most effective and purposeful consequences with the most efficiency*. There is an awareness of the potential contributions of instructional technology and communication media and principles that will reduce the amount of personnel while increasing the amount of impact. Involved in efficiency and effectiveness is the inherent commitment to seek for innovative means to achieve the goals.

Innovation, the mentality that looks for new, renewed or rejuvenated approaches to old problems, is the fourth promise of nonformal education. People in nonformal education are apparently less inhibited than those in formal education—not afraid to ask for a different approach, to try a new procedure or an unproven idea.

Fifth, nonformal education offers a more eclectic, multi-disciplinary approach to the problem of development in a country. The tendency to look towards one discipline for the solving of all problems is seen as insufficient. Instead, numerous disciplines are sought out in order to arrive at workable solutions. Formal education has, unfortunately, tended to isolate itself from its own basic disciplines, particularly in the social sciences. The resultant promise of this type of approach to education is that decisions and programs will be developed from a holistic view of the learners, their own sub-cultures, and the larger society.

Sixth, nonformal education promises to produce *short-term effects as well as long-term achievements*. A developing country cannot wait decades to achieve progress. People throughout the country want to have certain improvements as soon as possible. Nonformal education promises such accomplishments. True, such short-term gain may have more political than economic value, but the tenuous condition in many developing nations demands movement towards development of the entire population rather than merely an elitist few.

Seventh, nonformal education *assists in the decision-making of educational and developmental funding agencies* on both a national and international level. This is possible through the effects which can be observed after a short duration. The agencies do not have to wait for a whole generation to grow up into leadership before results can be assessed. Rather, effects can be sometimes seen in just a few weeks or at most a year or two, allowing funding agencies to make assessment and reassessment of the consequences of a program over a relatively short time. Related to this is the eighth promise, namely,

that nonformal education *provides a more rapid and immediate measure of the effectiveness of instructional design*. The objective of the nonformal educational processes are usually defined in the short-range, thus making intended behavioral changes, even though small, visible more rapidly. This, in turn, allows for prompt feedback regarding the relative effectiveness of the instructional design. Continuous analysis is possible, leading to continuous modification of the procedures to meet the needs, goals, and expectations of the participants.

Problems Confronting Planners of Nonformal Education

Nonformal education is confronted by several problems. The first is the tendency in many developed as well as developing countries to have a blind faith in instructional technology and media—especially the mass media. That these tools hold tremendous promise as part of the solution to development by education is unquestioned; but the tendency is to invest national programs in the facilities before more basic questions of needs, goals, and availability of instructional resources (personnel and material) are answered. It seems that advisors to nonformal education development must take care to avoid catching this “disease” from their clients!

Second, there is a closely related problem of avoiding the serious and difficult groundwork of cultural and sub-cultural analysis, goal setting and resource inventory before designing a delivery system. The great temptation is to adopt someone else’s system “lock, stock, and barrel,” or to develop a new system without knowing enough about the basic and determining factors in the environment of the learners. Again, the consultant’s responsibilities are to ask the hard questions that must be answered before proceeding into the actual development of an instructional system.

Third, it is evident from our observations that in some developing countries (as in the United States) bureaucratic conflicts are a practical problem with which one must deal. Jealousies and political fighting within, between and among bureaus and ministries can be a problem. It would be naive for planners and consultants on nonformal education to think that they will not be involved in the politics of bureaucracy. We will have to figure out how to work as much as possible within the existing bureaucracy without adding to it and without becoming frustrated.

Fourth, nonformal education can be oversold to developing countries. The result could be the promise of meeting needs that simply cannot be met because of limited resources, in terms of personnel, finances and material, and too little time to develop an instructional design that fits a particular group, sub-culture or instructional design that fits a particular group, sub-culture or nation. In other words, nonformal education might be seen as panacea—but without the time necessary to develop workable procedures and without the required resources. Advisors to the developing countries will have to bear in mind that although nonformal education does produce short-range change, it does not produce a full-fledged national development program within a short period of time. It must be remembered that even though a pilot project can demonstrate its significant effectiveness, this is not a fully developed program for the masses. Mass education does take time to be developed. It would be wise, therefore, to have realistic expectations regarding the changes that nonformal education can produce within a limited time period.

It is not surprising to find that the ministries of education in various developing nations are thinking seriously about alternate forms of education. Virtually inseparable from the revolutionary motif is the redesign of institutional forms. It is apparent that leaders in education in Peru have been reading the major world figures in educational reform. Specifically, the influence of Paulo Freire can be seen in the emphasis on conscientization within literacy and basic community and rural development programs;

and the influence of Ivan Illich can be seen even in the titles of the documents produced by the ministries of education (as in the 1973 Peruvian publication entitled “Guia para la Aplicacion de Programas Desescolarizados de EBL.”) In some respects the attention to the essence of revolutionary thought in education is less evident than attention to facade. Specifically, there is good reason to wonder if conscientization is not merely being used as a camouflage for larger and slightly more effective programs of literacy, and if “de-schooling” is not being reduced to merely a label covering some rather school-oriented sorts of activities—legitimized because they are being done outside the regular school buildings.

Two basic problems seem to be embedded in the conceptual structure through which many ministries of education are dealing with nonformal education—or what they usually call “adult education.” First, too commonly, the ministry of education operates as if other agencies and ministries are not already deeply involved with adult education and community development. Though the ministry may point to a coordinating council through which policy and specific program clearance is coordinated with other units of the government, conversations with people involved in various other ministries leads us to seriously question whether or not the problem lies at so easily accessible a level. For example, the definition that the ministry of education uses for “adult education” may be so narrow as to remove from consideration the great variety of training projects conducted by the ministries of agriculture, health, labor, industry, and rural development. Any modern concept of adult education may reach out in so many directions through its “adult education” and “de-schooling” operations that it unknowingly duplicates and vastly competes with existing programs. (An equally hazardous extreme would be for the ministry of education to seek to bring all of these programs under its own control and jurisdiction.)

Second, there is quite clearly a tight grip on the old schooling concept. It is easier to think of nonformal education or “de-schooling” as a change of delivery systems than it is to think of a fundamentally re-conceptualized education. Much of what is being described today as nonformal education will ultimately fall back under the rigid framework of the step-wise schooling concept. Although we do not argue against the value of schooling for some purposes, the very limitations of step-wise concepts of education are part of the drain upon resources of all nations. When we find, for example, that one of the models most widely promoted as exemplary “nonformal” education is that of the British Open university,” we must seriously consider that such a view of nonformal education is certainly not equivalent to de-schooling! The open university idea suggests a system of examinations through which people can obtain schooling credits for studies gained through alternative procedures. The alternative procedures, once created, would feed into a system that still sees the formal education establishment as the standard and the ideal.

We must question whether or not ministries of education are the most promising units of government through which to stimulate nonformal education. In certain nations where the development scene is rich with various forms of nonformal education, the ministry of education is far from the most influential ministry and often it lacks experience in inter-ministry cooperation. The continuing boundary of thought seems to be located just about where the ministries of education characteristically have seen their limits: if it isn’t a national-scope centralized program they don’t respect it. Outstanding rural development, community development and other successful programs of nonformal education are sometimes criticized out-of-hand by the ministry of education people: “They aren’t as good as formal education because they are too local—too much related to a unique community—not really a program of national scope.” Yet a close look reveals that the people from the ministry of education

who make these criticisms are essentially a group of strangers to nonformal education. Other than a few untested ideas about alternative delivery systems for classical schooling, they don't even talk the language of nonformal education.

No wonder that we find genuine fear on the part of community development workers—fear that the new wave of interest and promises of support are but the front edge of a steamroller of control and ultimate assimilation.

In certain situation there is such a high degree of political sensitivity that every act seems to have a political meaning. Only the most irrelevant, abstract of roundabout forms of education are encouraged by governments that fear the uprising of the peasant classes. Yet, clearly it is exactly these peasants who have the greatest needs for human resource development.

Much nonformal education operates today without benefit of government support or regulation. And we believe that is as it should be. When government moves into nonformal education some things change. Especially at the village or local community level such changes are a threat. Consider the loss of effectiveness when the new nonformal education technician (agent or instructor) is perceived as a government agent. The program no matter how good it is, will be less effective than it was under the person who was there before, who was known not to be a government agent. Confidence and credibility are fragile. Government support, among people who have no strong reasons for confidence in that government, will run the risk of becoming an overpowering phenomenon. The focus on learning effectiveness involves issues of political initiatives; it is likely impossible for *any* aspect of nonformal education, even the elemental aspects of effectiveness, to be free from political implications.

Whether we do it naively or knowledgeably, if we work in nonformal education we must be willing to face up to the political realities and the political conditions that exist at the community level. There are two problems: (1) the somewhat insular thinking in the administration of education that tends to assume that anything educational is the responsibility of "educators," and that when anyone else is engaged in anything called education (such as rural adult education for agricultural development) the ministry of education somehow ought to have its hand in it. If this problem were a basic issue in the United States, the County Board of Education would take over all agriculture extension work. People with "Education" as their label tend to use classrooms a lot; they tend to do things that schooling-type people tend to do—not because they believe that it is better but simply because they tend to think this way about organizing learning. Especially in countries where nonformal education is well developed in agriculture, and in the ministry of industry, the ministry of commerce, and all those other sectors where, for a long time there has been nonformal education, a danger now exists that new jurisdictional battles will break out. The ministry of education is waking up to the fact that you *can call these operations nonformal education*; and so maybe they ought to be under us.

The second problem occurs in the local community when a government agency (whether the ministry of education or the government as a whole) fears anything that it does not operate. We have observed many valuable educational projects that aren't financed by governments, and there is a danger of losing some or all of these in a massive total bureaucratic absorption of the whole of nonformal education in order to create a government-mandated and supported system of nonformal education. That this might happen has made us more than a little anxious.

Through experience in consultation with formal and nonformal education and through experiences with the manifest attitudes of governments, we have noted an unhealthy condition: anxious governments tend to divide educational operations into two classes: *safe* and *unsafe*. By “unsafe” we refer to politically unsafe or politically dangerous. Formal schooling is seen as “safe” because it is assumed to be manageable. Within formal education, the curriculum is structured and can be centrally controlled from an office in the ministry of education. Thus it is assumed that formal schooling can be made responsive to government policy.

By contrast, the sort of educational opportunities that operate outside of the government, through philanthropy, commercial or industrial initiatives, self-help within communities, or through governmental aid from other nations are suspect. If they do not allow for being regulated as does the formal educational establishment. Community development, for example, is usually concerned about health, welfare, and human rights—more concerned about basic human needs than about schooling or making people more school-able (making people able to pass tests). Such educational activity is thought to be “unsafe.”

The distinction is not realistic. In reality, *any* education delivered meaningfully to the peasantry in an underdeveloped nation is potentially revolutionary. Governments are deceiving themselves by making the distinction between “safe” and “unsafe.” They are wasting time and people when they militate against or persecute “unsafe” education. Such governments would be better off to recognize all of education as being potentially revolutionary and to see that when they advocate mass education they potentially advocate overthrow of totalitarianism. Therefore, any government that attempts to make this neat distinction while also claiming to advocate mass or common education is deluding itself. The potentiality for stimulating revolutionary behavior, so widely feared by totalitarian governments in reference to “unsafe” education, is also present even in primary education or government-sponsored literacy training. *Any* education, in any meaningful form, is apt to put ideas into people’s heads. It is apt to produce an incentive, a searching for, an urging for more opportunity, more grasping, reaching out for more of what that education might mean. Education tends to liberate, to free men and women to see their environment as being to some extent changeable, and to a great degree being in need of change! The world today shows clearly two examples of common, mass education being recognized as revolutionary. All of education has been harnessed as a revolutionary force to change the social structure in Cuba, and even more successfully, in China. In both cases, education, rather than being the enemy of the government, has been enlisted by the government to be an important agent of change. Education itself was deemed “safe” for the government’s purposes and “unsafe” for the status quo. What makes these situations different is that in both cases revolution was the *intention* of the government rather than the *enemy* of the government. But when governments are in the hands of socio-economic elite, any threat to the social structure represents a threat to the government. The people who have power are not enthusiastic about losing that power; therefore, they resist anything that is revolutionary.

It will be interesting to watch the progress and effects of massive investments in “safe” education in certain revolution-prone countries. It seems likely that even as a result of efforts to broaden the base of schooling and reach more people with “safe” education (government-controlled schooling) there will be social revolution—orderly or disorderly.

In the meanwhile, and much to our anxiety and grief, some of the “unsafe” programs of community development education we have identified as good examples of nonformal education have been gently but firmly taken over by government agencies subsequent to our identifying them. We wonder if we

are informers or agents being used against the very people that we thought to help by dramatizing the effectiveness of their work. Some of the nonformal educators we have come to respect have been removed and replaced by government functionaries. We can only wish that the false distinction between “safe” and “unsafe” education could be eliminated and the whole of education be accepted or rejected in terms of its learning effectiveness in the lives of people.