



Report to USAID/Bolivia

Ted Ward

Report on a Field Assignment in Bolivia, March 26 – April 7, 1977
Consultation and Training for Rural Education-I Project

Participants:

Richard Crespo
Ted Ward

Michigan State University
East Lansing, Michigan

Monday, March 28, 1977

The research component for the nonformal education sector is perceived here as providing a foundation of data for formal and nonformal education planning activities. All involved seem to agree that the research activity should feed into both the formal education curriculum reform activities and serve as a continuing monitor of the effect of the whole Rural Education program on the local communities. For example, in our preliminary proposal, we identify a primary focus on the needs of the communities. It was observed that we should be careful to define “communities” broadly enough to cover the whole scope of the rural school program. In other words, we should not focus the research on the nonformal education sector alone, even though it is the nonformal education sector people who have been assigned the responsibility of doing the first data gathering. It might be possible, in the long run, for us to see the nonformal education sector as a sort of community liaison group engaged in the data gathering and various sorts of broader community relations.

The Rural Education projects are “outside fund” projects and may live and die in accord with the availability of outside funds (specifically, USAID.) On the other hand, the Division for Adult and Nonformal Education has the long-term legal status that will make it outlive any project funds. Thus, it is strategic that this group be involved in the thinking, planning and, perhaps, in some phases of the operation of the nonformal education activity within the Rural Education project. We are hoping to begin building this bridge during the present assignment in Bolivia, but if that should prove impossible, it should be a major concern for the next stage of our involvement.

In terms of next steps, the road seems clearest with reference to our contributions in the area of research. Because of our commitment to research that will make a difference in action, we may want to push the matter of research-based training for the nonformal education people and research-based curriculum change mandates for the Rural Nucleo School curriculum. It seems feasible to develop a mainstream research plan which would call upon our periodic assistance to those Bolivians who would be enlisted for work on the research sector. Appended to this mainstream plan could be a menu of correlated training workshops with specific targets as various elements of the data dictate and as various facets of the project unfold.

Tuesday, March 29, 1977

We went to the Ministry and had no trouble getting in to see the Director of the Rural Education Division. The Director, Sr. Carlos Orozco, was pleasant and hospitable, though his major message for us was a fairly strong one: he wanted it known that, as far as he was concerned, the Rural Education-I project was operating in a manner that was not altogether pleasing to the Ministry of Education. Sr. Orozco is apparently quite knowledgeable about what is going on in the Rural Education project, though he seems to have little direct responsibility for it.

Rural Education-I (like so many other change-oriented projects) in order to gain leverage, tends attach itself directly to the Minister and, thus, effectively bypasses all the ordinary structure and organization of the management of the Ministry. Orozco emphasized the need for coordination, especially between the Rural Education project and the other somewhat fragmentary and proliferated activities, such as the long-time projects of the University of Utah and the new project of the World Bank, UNICEF. He insisted that we be aware that the convenio for Rural Education-I stipulates that the Division for Rural Education must be involved. Since they are not directly involved, he feels that the project is running amiss. The Division for Rural Education has a unit for community education. It is largely concerned with the extension of schooling and the reclaiming of out-of-school people. He wishes that it were somehow more directly involved in the Rural Education project. Orozco asked that we be sure to report back to him after we have completed the week of training in Cochabamba.

Orozco was also very quick to get us in touch with the parallel division to Rural Education, the new Division for Adult and Nonformal Education. This division is parallel to both the Rural Education and Urban Education Divisions as one of the four major divisions of the Directorate General of the Ministry of Education. (The fourth being an administrative and supports unit.)

The World Bank project is designed as a huge project for piloting comprehensive formal and nonformal integrated education activity, ultimately to be expanded into a national reform for the curriculum and teacher training for both rural and urban education. The scheme that the World Bank has undertaken is the largest in its scope of any that we know. On the other hand, it is rather clear that the approaches that they are using have built-in limitations. For example, they are working with one normal school and a cluster of eight intermediate schools (middle schools in our terminology) and a series of new construction projects that will expand the available elementary education in the region where they are operating.

In addition, they are planning their nonformal component to be largely based around a radio approach that they are sub-contracting to a group called RADIO-ERBOL. RADIO-ERBOL is a Catholic organization modeled after the famous Apcar project in Colombia. Attached to the radio component will be a series of community-level promotores, again in the manner of the Colombian experience. This group will gain expertise from several other Latin American countries and, thus, resolve one of the most crucial issues in Bolivian education development—the severe shortage of people who are competent to serve as trainers of the various project personnel.

We were unable to meet with the Director of the World Bank project, St. Gonzalo Romero, but we did meet with one of his chief assistants, Sr. Mario Salazar. Salazar was quite warm to the idea that if Michigan State University (MSU) is involved in the Rural Education project, we might work with him to establish better communication among these various projects, and that we might somehow resolve some of the issues with reference to the place and role within the Ministry of Education of nonformal education. He inquired if any of us might be available to serve as consultative and training personnel for the World Bank project. There is some hope here that, with the size of this project and the potential for political meaning in this investment, that there may be more “clout” than in the USAID loans.

One of the important features of the World Bank project is that it is neither rural nor urban, formal nor nonformal. Instead, it is called “Integrated Education for Bolivia.” In other words, they

are aware that the parceling out of different facets of educational development will ultimately result in a disjointed system. We might wonder whether or not they really have any solution to this problem, but they are proceeding as if they will be able to hold their various pieces and parts together. For example, they are directing much of their effort in curriculum development not in the direction of the Rural Education Division but of the Urban Education Division, recognizing that ultimately the curriculum development activities for the entire nation will be a unified function.

Salazar's attempts at coordination have been focused on the Ministry of Education, USAID, the Academy for Educational Development, and UNICEF.

Salazar was eager to have us meet and talk with the people at RADIO-ERBOL, the sub-contractor for the radio component. All in all, Salazar's attitude was one of openness and eagerness to find ways in which to collaborate.

During lunchtime on Tuesday, we met with our contacts at the Servicio Nacional de Desarrollo de la Comunidades (SNDC): Stephen Wingert and Lew Thornton. We gave them a draft of the revision of the proposal as prepared by Manfred Thullen. They agreed to be prepared to discuss it with us next Tuesday when we come back into La Paz.

The Workshop for Nonformal Education Group in the Pilot Project, Cochabamba

Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday were spent in an intensive workshop from early morning until late in the afternoon. We had originally expected to have six days with these technicians in the pilot project, but it was necessary to confine our training activity to the three days of this first week because they had been committed by the Project Coordinator to be in the field gathering data on their community surveys during the following week.

Rapport was built within a relatively short period of time and things began to move more smoothly. The members of the group have a common background in rural education. A number of them had been rural schoolteachers and principals. Several are older and apparently have significant political connections. We were particularly impressed with several of the people who showed a remarkable insight into the ways that one goes about getting data about the learning needs of people.

Our workshop concentrated on an action-oriented approach to moving the data analysis forward from the data they had already collected. When we were in Bolivia five weeks earlier, they had begun a survey of community needs. By now, they had collected data on most of their communities and had actually made the numerical tabulations by the time we arrived, but they weren't sure what to do beyond the tabulations. We spent the first day developing a general understanding of what the analytical processes are; on the second day we moved them into a practical exercise using data from some of the communities that they had surveyed. We focused on matters of credibility of data, worth of data in decision-making for nonformal education, and ultimately we moved them on into the matter of specific program planning.

The step-by-step procedures that we used were ultimately written down in Spanish and left with them as a guide for their subsequent analyses of data. We did everything possible to make the experiences practical and replicable for their future use.

Some of the problems that we observed in the group are as follows:

1. The nonformal education technician group ranges widely in insight into the matter of nonformal education. Some are in a rather classical frame of mind with reference to educational planning; others are over-enthusiastic in their assumptions that a nonformal education team can solve any, and all, problems of every community.
2. There is a severe lack of understanding of the role of other agencies within the development of nonformal education experiences. The Ministry of Education people with whom we were dealing had not yet come to grips with the limitation of their mission. Thus, instead of thinking in terms of learning needs, they were thinking in terms of all

sorts of resource and economic needs. As we see it, many of the vital needs can only be solved by multi-agency efforts.

3. Within the group were people with several different specialized backgrounds, for example, home economics, health, agriculture, and rural crafts. Each of these specialized backgrounds showed up in the way the people interpreted the needs of the community. In other words, we were quite unable, in this short time, to help them get a more objective view of themselves and of the data, and to get freed from the presuppositions that they brought to bear because of their technical backgrounds.
4. In several crucial matters, their acceptance of verbalized ideas was much more substantial than their practical application of those ideas. For example, in reference to the cyclical nature of community assessment and project evaluation, they seemed quite willing to accept the idea that it should be a continuous activity. But we are rather doubtful that they will be in a position, at this point in their training and experience, to really do much in reference to such continuous assessment activity. In other words, they are willing to give verbal assent to all the right propositions, but haven't yet had enough background to be able to see the ways that these things can be accomplished.
5. There is a severe lack of articulation among the various parts of the pilot project. The nonformal education group is the only group that has really been established and staffed in full.
6. Because of the way the project has been structured, in terms of its administrative relationship to other parts of the national rural education administration, the pilot project lacks some much-needed inter-relationship with the district-level management and authority for rural education. These new Nucleo Schools risk creating increasing tension between the new and the old aspects of the educational efforts within the District of Cochabamba.

The workshop experiences were well received and by the end of the third day there was a good feeling on all sides. We were particularly impressed with the overall competency of this group of people. Though there were certain notable exceptions, they seemed to be largely a well-selected and complementary set of persons. Their potential for continued development, as people who can be counted upon for good educational planning, seems high. As the workshop ended, the group was talking warmly in terms of follow-up activities and additional training along this line in the future.

Visit to the Rural Nucleo Schools at Piusilla (northwest of Cochabamba, high in the Andes Mountains) Monday, April 4, 1977

We were invited to visit one of the Nucleo Schools where some surveying was to be done that week. We arrived in the village of Piusilla in the late morning and departed for Cochabamba in the mid-afternoon. We were not able to see very much except the nature of the countryside and the sorts of scattered communities of small numbers of Indian families that are one of the major human resource targets of the pilot project in Cochabamba. The village was a small cluster of huts and farms on either side of the little one-lane mountain road. The major feature of the village was the Rural Nucleo School. It now consists of about eight classrooms and has levels of schooling. Attached to the school are some specialized personnel in agriculture, health, home- and family-living. It is not clear that these people have yet been able to get any particular activities underway, but they surely have the general idea and resources are beginning to fan out.

There was evidence of community participation in the development of this Nucleo School. While we were there, two farmers were plowing with teams of oxen to prepare the school farm for planting potatoes. These two farmers had donated a day of work each as a contribution toward the project. Other people in the community had contributed material and time to build the little stone and

adobe structures that were the classrooms. The general economic condition of the region was reflected in the school: in several classrooms, there were insufficient benches so some children had to stand at their desks all day; other children had to kneel at their too-short desks.

We made inquiries, particularly about the nature of the formal education aspects of the Nucleo School at Piusilla, but didn't learn too much about the potential for nonformal education. If nothing else, the experience was a dramatization of the importance of the research on the needs of the community to affect, not only the nonformal education planning, but also the re-design of the curriculum itself. Here were children who were largely from Quechua-speaking homes being asked to come to school in an alien language—Spanish. They were being asked to proceed through the ordinary and worldwide schooling subjects with apparently little regard for the reality of their home-life and their probable future.

Although the teachers seemed to be conducting school in a responsible manner, one must sympathize with them inasmuch as they are extremely poorly paid and live in unbelievably crude domiciles within the general compound of the Nucleo School. Clearly, one of the aspects of the Rural Education project that is most sorely needed is the part that is defined as “up-grading the incentives and conditions for the rural teachers.”

Conferences with Leaders from USAID and the Project Offices, Tuesday and Wednesday.

Johnson, Williams, and Jacobson from USAID, La Paz; and Paravicini, Project Coordinator, La Paz conducted the planning sessions for Tuesday and Wednesday. They arrived by plane on Tuesday morning and we conducted several sessions with them to analyze what had been done and what might be done in the future for the stimulating of this project. We were unable to express a number of the major observations that we had made and expressed our concern on many issues described in this report.

It is hard to describe any definitive outcomes of these meetings since there had been no Bolivian initiative to create an agenda or to set up a series of decisions to be discussed. There was, instead, a general agreement that what had been done was appreciated and maybe we should do some more of the same sorts of things in the future. This sort of planning falls short of what USAID is asking from the Bolivians, and certainly falls short of what we would need in order to make any commitment of resources from MSU.

Final Planning Sessions, La Paz, Thursday

We attempted to get more clarity by developing a written proposal that we submitted to USAID and to Professor Paravicini on Thursday morning back in La Paz. We also re-visited Orozco and Salazar.

We crammed a lot of activities into this final day in La Paz and ultimately felt that we had been able to pull a lot of the pieces together and set a reasonable basis for further work. We attempted to draw a fairly hard line about some of the things that we feel so concerned about that it would be difficult for us to negotiate in compromise of these positions. There was a substantive exchange on several of the issues during the morning session with the USAID leadership people, and by late afternoon we seemed to be getting together. We compromised on a number of smaller particulars in reference to items on the proposal that we had identified as being negotiable. For example, we agreed that the research plan for this project should not be created outside the project and laid on the project staff as if they were simply workers to carry it out; we agreed that a training approach is necessary.

It became clear that USAID's concern was that we not leave the matter of designing the research to local initiatives and understandings, but that it be done in ways that would be regarded as

scientifically and professionally competent, and then given to them to carry out. We agreed that this “given to them” would have to be in the form of a responsible approach to training.

Another important conclusion was that any training provided by MSU would serve as a catalytic series of situations in which other projects within the nation concerned with rural nonformal education might become more acquainted with each other and less hostile toward one another.

The proposal is to be translated into Spanish and sent to Cochabamba for comments by the pilot director and by the nonformal education team. We expect that they will be more positive than negative, and feel that it is a good idea to get them involved in response to this proposition rather than simply making executive decisions about it in La Paz. After the people in La Paz (USAID and the coordination office) have heard from the people in Cochabamba, they will let us know about what we might be asked to do.

All of these matters and issues are somewhat clouded by the fact that the long-term team of rural education specialists from the University of New Mexico will be arriving within the next month or two and will have a primary responsibility for the continuing consultative roles within the project. Time after time, we reminded all parties that we want to cooperate with the University of New Mexico and that we don’t want to be perceived as usurping any of their prerogatives. In this regard, Dr. Max Williams, the USAID Project Manager for Rural Education, has given us a green light to get in direct touch with the University of New Mexico’s people and attempt to establish communication and a professional-level understanding within the United States even before they go on site.

Of the principle parties involved in the project development and management in La Paz, the head of Education and Human Resources, Dr. Robert Johnson, is due for retirement within the next couple of months; the Contract Office Coordinator, Stephen Jacobson, is preparing to transfer to Haiti. Thus, the only long-term person that we see in the situation is Dr. Max Williams who is serving as USAID’s Project Coordinator for Rural Education.