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## Don't Look Now, Chairman Mao: We're Preparing Facilitators to be Nonformal Educators

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## We're Preparing Facilitators to be Nonformal Educators

by David R. Evans and Arlen Etling

*Nonformal Education may become, "a landmark in the re-conceptualization of education for the entire world. The landmark could easily be of the magnitude of significance of the Chinese educational reform and the original land grant philosophy in the mid-nineteenth century. I do not say this lightly . . ."* [report to USAID]<sup>1</sup>

Even though possibly overstated, this assertion signals the potential of nonformal education (NFE) in the near future. As old as civilization, NFE is enjoying a resurgence of attention—especially by individuals and organizations who see the limitations of traditional schooling in facing the crises of education in the world today and tomorrow. So far, however, experiences with nonformal education have been desultory and mainly unrecorded. There has been little opportunity to identify and analyze the variables which might influence the preparation of educators for nonformal approaches. This article will look at the two-year old Ecuador Nonformal Education Project and attempt to identify the key issues which will be important in training nonformal educators. Based on the analysis of this limited experience, two training programs will be proposed.

1 Unpublished evaluation report to USAID on the Ecuador Nonformal Education Project by Ted Ward of Michigan State University.

### NFE Takes Many Forms Guasaso, Ecuador

In a small, lantern-lit room four farmers are taking turns throwing a handful of Children's A B C blocks onto a table. Working together the men form words from the letters which are showing. On a make-shift blackboard, one of the wives is recording all of the words that are formed. A small boy and his mother, who are looking on, select which symbol on the blocks represents the letter "A". In another corner a group of children are playing rummy. Each card, however, has a letter on its face. Points are scored when a word is laid down by one of the players. An old man sitting on the dirt floor with a notebook is writing his name repeatedly.

This Andean community in Ecuador has a high incidence of illiteracy and a high dropout rate from formal adult literacy classes. One of the villagers was invited to receive training as a facilitator for improving literacy in the community.

After a two-week introduction to nonformal philosophy, methodology and materials, he began an evening learning session. Attendance is voluntary. No classes or lectures are held. A variety of games and materials are made available whenever an individual or group shows interest. Literacy and numeracy skills are developed through group participation

in letter dice, number dice, ring-toss, letter rummy, writing, reading comics, and discussing daily problems.

### Western Massachusetts

A woman enters the small office located in the basement of the community center and asks the young man how to find out about starting a day care center. The man asks her to fill out a card indicating her desires and also indicating what skills or interests she would be willing to share with others. The woman hesitates and then says she really has nothing to offer someone else. They talk awhile and she mentions that her friends regard her as the best soul food cook in the country. Her dinners are famous. With encouragement she admits that if someone were interested she could teach them how to prepare a wide variety of dishes. Together they consult a card file and discover that a woman in an adjoining town is interested in child care and previously ran a center in Boston. They note her phone number and the man suggests that a call be made that evening.

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The man in this example is operating a learning exchange. He matches learning needs to resources through a simple card file. A few hundred to several thousand participants can be kept on file and matched in this manner.

A group of twelve people are gathered around a small portable tape recorder in front of an adobe house. They listen intently to the playback of a critical incident which they have just improvised and recorded. One person took the role of a poor farmer and the other played the local miller in a dispute over the price of the farmer's wheat. When the tape finishes the people seem happy with it and make arrangements to have the leader take it to the radio station at the end of the week. Then, the group goes into the house and turns on the radio. The first half hour is a series of episodes including some music by a band in a nearby village, a discussion of crop prices by another group of campesinos, and a short humorous sketch by two members of the next village. During the broadcast the villagers listen intently, occasionally recognizing a voice belonging to a friend or relative. Following the program the national educational broadcast comes on and the campesinos work on literacy or math skills with the help of the local facilitator.

A high-contrast, black and white photograph of a man in a suit pointing towards a chalkboard. The chalkboard contains handwritten text in Spanish, including "DIE JA", "Luton", "S CUELA", and "Santiago". The man is standing in the center, gesturing with his right hand. Two other people are partially visible in the foreground, looking towards the board.

solutions common to the villages in the area.

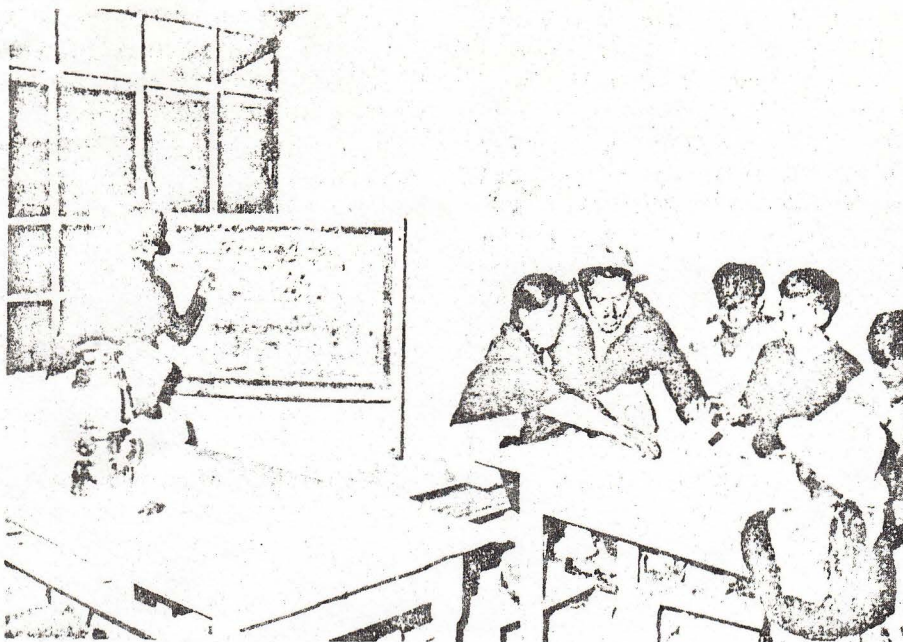
On a rainy Thursday night a group of fourteen men are seated in front of parts of an automobile engine which has been dismantled in a large garage in a central part of the city. The men are paired off and one member of each pair seems to be teaching identification of parts to the other man. At 8:30 the learners are replaced by six other men who bring out writing diagrams and begin teaching the original teachers.

operation for a year, and there is a lengthy waiting list for the small number of openings which occur every six weeks.

Preparing facilitators to create and maintain NFE networks is not a simple task. The initial problem lies in achieving a general understanding of the nature of NFE. Although proponents of this phenomenon vary greatly in their definitions, we can limit the meaning to *organized attempts to provide relevant education for those who are not served by schools*.

The school today tends to be an institution where there is age-grouping compulsory attendance and a professional teacher. NFE is an approach, a collection of *alternatives*.





where paraprofessional or non-professional "facilitators" interact with learners of all ages who participate voluntarily. The school features a highly structured curriculum, testing, grading, and certification. NFE stresses a "cafeteria" curriculum of several unstructured alternatives and endless variations. Emphasis is on acquisition of skills and the criterion for mastery is competency which is often defined by the learner.

Schools tend to be expensive. NFE strives to find *inexpensive* alternatives and relies on local resources. School systems are usually vertically organized and depend upon a governmental or religious bureaucracy. In NFE horizontal relationships among people predominate.

Rewards from schooling tend to be delayed and are sometimes irrelevant to individuals' needs. Objectives are institutional; the institution is highly controlled; and one of the main functions of schools is socialization. NFE stresses content which is immediately *useful* in daily life. Objectives are those set by the learner; learning is informal; and one of the principal functions of NFE is the development of critical awareness, in the individual. NFE, more flexible and diverse than schools, can more easily take account of sub-cultures.

Cole Brembeck, a professor at

Michigan State University, observes that NFE may substitute for formal education for those who are denied schooling. "... it may complement formal education, performing other tasks not performed by formal education, or it may extend formal education maximizing its usefulness<sup>2</sup> (Brembeck, 1973). NFE, then, is not schooling. Any school may use non-formal approaches, but they still remain schools by design.

#### Issues in NFE Facilitator Preparation

*The Ecuador Project in nonformal education is a series of experiments seeking to develop promising materials and delivery systems which are low in cost, self-perpetuating and relevant to out-of-school populations. Co-operating in the endeavor are the Center for International Education of the University of Massachusetts, United States Agency for International Development [USAID], and the Ministry of Education in Quito. The Ecuador Project emphasizes the use of non-professional manpower to introduce attractive and self-instructional materials in rural areas.*<sup>3</sup>

One of the first administrative tasks for a UMass NFE training program would be to contact organizations working with NFE nationally and internationally. From those groups

willing to cooperate sites would be chosen which would welcome the focus of a campus based NFE training program. In many cases, especially when working in NFE in developing countries, it may prove counter-productive to bring trainees on campus since the nature of the institution, its pressures and temptations, are incongruent with education in rural or urban poverty settings. Provisions, therefore, should be made for a field-based version of the training program.

Non-professionals would be sought as trainers as well as trainees. NFE training would aim to provide inexpensive, immediately useful, self-perpetuating, learner centered, education to cooperating individuals and groups whose education needs are not met elsewhere.

*Split between Quito and Amherst, the Ecuador Project staff is designed to be mobile and flexible. In Amherst the staff consists of the principal investigator, secretary, administrator, materials development specialist, and evaluation specialist, of whom the last three are graduate students. In Quito all except the field administrator are Ecuadorians, a change in standard USAID policy. A project director, field coordinator, evaluation specialist and materials development specialist are aided by secretaries and associates. Some staff members are hired for short-term, product-oriented activities. Staff effectiveness has depended heavily on the extensive decision making by Ecuadorians.*

Since NFE training programs would be short and intensive (one week to six

<sup>2</sup> Cole S. Brembeck, *New Strategies for Educational Development: The Cross-Cultural Search for Nonformal Alternatives*, Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath and Company, (1973, p. xvi.

<sup>3</sup> The ideas and materials in the Ecuador Project were developed by a group of Ecuadorians and North Americans. For further details the reader may wish to purchase some of the series of Technical Notes or the book length document on the Project entitled *Let Jorge Do It*, by James Hoxeng. These documents are available from the Center for International Education, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Mass. 01002.



months) it would be inappropriate to create a field staff which would be limited to one setting. A more permanent trainer pool could be based in Amherst to serve the campus based program and to respond to different field settings. Temporary field trainers could be recruited in each training program setting. The permanent training staff pool might include specialists in training program design, materials development, the facilitator role, evaluation, administration, and community resources. Local (temporary) trainers might include specialists in community resources, the local sub-culture and ongoing NFE programs. A permanent and temporary training staff could be assembled depending upon the needs of the trainees, the characteristics of the situation, and the opportunities available. Trainers, in all cases, would be selected on the basis of competency and experience relevant to each particular training program.

*Initially facilitator training in Ecuador was done by Patricio Barriga and Enrique Tasiguano of the Quito staff. Seven Andean villages agreed to cooperate. Each village chose two or three persons from the village to receive training as a facilitator. During a two-week program in Quito the facilitators were trained to start evening learning sessions in the villages in order to introduce a variety of learning devices such as games to facilitate learning and practice in literacy skills, numeracy skills, self-expression, self-efficacy, use of important institutions and social awareness. A modified Freirean dialogue method is employed. The materials and approaches, developed in Quito and Amherst and adapted in the field must be relevant and motivating because there is no compulsory attendance. Village visits by the Quito staff and end-of-year reunion of the facilitators provide for supervision and evaluation.*

*After several months of operation of the facilitator network, villages around the original seven asked for NFE training. The original group of facilitators organized a training*

*program which produced "second generation" facilitators in new villages. There is some optimism that a third generation of facilitators will be trained with little direct intervention by the Quito staff.*

#### Facilitator Skills

Training for NFE must focus on the skills and behaviors which will be demanded of a facilitator. The facilitator role seems to consist of a mixture of community development agent, discussion leader, counselor, and some of the behaviors of teachers—particularly those who work in open classrooms. The skills can be roughly grouped into three areas: 1) relating to the community and its resources, 2) organizing learning settings and facilitating them, and 3) developing and managing an ongoing nonformal education process.

**Relating to the Community:** Included in this area are a range of skills such as gaining entrance to a community, establishing a communication network, and getting nonformal Education ideas accepted. Particularly if the learning facilitator is new to the community, a major part of the initial activities will consist of making contacts, gaining acceptance, and taking the learning pulse of the various sectors of the community. An example of a specific skill required for these tasks would be the ability to listen to others, to draw out people, and to relate to individuals of all levels of society.

The facilitator will need to be able to discover and articulate the variety of learning needs present in the community. He must also be prepared to identify the learning resources in the community. He will need training to recognize creative and unusual ways of using a wide range of people and activities as learning resources. Also a facilitator must be able to see the learning potential in individuals of diverse backgrounds and life-styles.

**Designing Learning Experiences:** After identifying needs and potential learning resources the facilitator must make use of a whole catalogue of learning processes. The skills needed would parallel those typically found in

curriculum development but with a much wider range of options. The first step in this process is the articulation of learning goals. In some cases the goals may not even be learning goals, but rather a need for sharing, for companionship, for entertainment. Nonformal education can range from learning about self, to astronomy, to birdwatching, to understanding the town tax system. What limits, if any, are placed on learning goals depend on the particular situation.

Once goals are articulated, one needs to deal with the preferred learning styles of the learners and the abilities and inclinations of the individuals who act as resources. The learning process should generally stress participation, learner responsibility for setting and monitoring progress, and enjoyment. The latter is a crucial component in a program which is voluntary, non-degree or certificate granting, and often done at some cost to the participants. In general, to maintain participation, the learning experiences should be clearly related to felt needs of the learners, should happen at times and places which are feasible for them, and should proceed in a style which makes them feel comfortable.

A major problem facing the facilitator will be combating the school model firmly implanted in both resource people and learners. The tendency to act like a teacher will be strong in resource people and will often be encouraged by learners who have been taught to be passive receivers of knowledge presented by the teacher.

**Organization and Management:** Finally the facilitator must find ways to organize and maintain a flexible learning network within the level of resources available. This will probably require some new management styles where conscious tradeoffs are made between efficiency and tight planning in favor of greater flexibility and simultaneous pursuit of multiple goals. Essentially the facilitator faces the task of collecting needs and resource offers, sharing this information with potential participants, providing a framework in which learners and resources come together, facilitating learning with



groups, and providing some process for monitoring activities. The facilitator can anticipate conflicting needs, different learning styles, pressures from different parts of the community, and can deal with the permanent problem of financing.

The overall balance between these three skill areas will depend on the characteristics of the individual facilitator and the stage of development of the program in which he is employed. A training program however, must include exposure to all of these areas since at this stage one could reasonably expect most facilitators to initiate programs or join recently created ones.

## Two Training Designs

In preparing facilitators, a UMass program might feature two alternatives. To meet the needs of a diverse group of trainees unattached to an NFE site or program, a campus-based program could be developed. Corresponding to a semester it might look like this:

Orientation	1 week
Field Observations (3 or 4)	2 weeks
Campus Training in Philosophy, Methodology, Materials Development and Facilitator Skills	3 weeks
Internship (selected field site)	4 weeks
Further skill/material development on campus	2 weeks
Second Internship at the same field site	4 weeks
Placement and periodic followup through workshops	

A second design would be developed to train facilitators in the field. Since wildly diverse field-settings are anticipated the design could not be static like the campus-based design. An example of how it might potentially develop follows.

An organization working with Puerto Rican migrant tobacco workers in Western Massachusetts requests a nonformal training program for its staff. UMass agrees to help design and administer the program. Most of the

organization's staff, are volunteers from Amherst (students, professionals, housewives) who speak Spanish and have provided mobile libraries for the tobacco workers the past two years.

A task force is formed to develop the training program. UMass provides specialists in program design, materials development and nonformal philosophy/methodology. The organization is represented by one of its administrators and two of the volunteer staff (the people who will receive the training). Three tobacco workers are included since the volunteer staff will eventually use the training to meet the educational needs of tobacco workers.

Meeting at night, the task force decides the content of the training program. Since most of the volunteers have been educated in formal settings, part of the program will be devoted to a comparison of formal and nonformal approaches. Emphasis will be placed on limitations of formal education and opportunities of NFE. Tobacco workers will be invited to help orient the volunteers to the reality of life in a tobacco worker's camp. Since literacy is to be the initial thrust the volunteers will be trained to use a variety of participatory literacy techniques (games, modified Sylvia Ashton-Warner approach, modified Freirean dialogue, skill exercises) to adapt the games to unique circumstances and to develop new games and techniques for the tobacco workers. Meetings will be held nightly for two weeks at a local retreat house and the weekend will be used to visit tobacco camps, observe conditions, and talk with a variety of people involved in the operation of the camps.

When the training program begins fifteen volunteer staff have agreed to be trained. Three interns from the campus-based NFE training program have asked to participate. The three tobacco workers who helped develop the training program have agreed to participate as trainers/trainees, and they have brought along two friends from the camps. A foreman from one of the camps, representing a tobacco grower who is uneasy about NFE in his camp, the three UMass NFE trainers,

and four of the permanent staff of the organization that requested the training program, round out the training group.

After introductions a representative of the organization explains why the training program was requested and what purpose it will serve. Comments are solicited from all participants, especially the tobacco workers, and the purpose and general goals are negotiated in open discussion. The entire session is devoted to developing goals acceptable to all present.

The second meeting consists of orientation to life in the tobacco camps. By questioning the workers present the group begins to develop an understanding of the tobacco workers and their problems. The need for literacy and uses of literacy skills are discussed as they relate to the workers' needs.

The third evening session is devoted to an introduction of literacy materials suitable for NFE settings. Trainees learn about the materials by using them in simulated learning sessions. NFE philosophy and methodology are brought out as trainers introduce the materials in a hands-on setting. The last hour is spent playing "El Campo", a simulation game about life in the tobacco camps.

The fourth and fifth sessions, in the same informal group-discussion atmosphere, are devoted to differences between formal and nonformal educational philosophy, brief case studies of nonformal learning situations, and probable learning styles of the tobacco workers.

Over the weekend trips to tobacco camps are organized. Some of the literacy techniques are tried out in informal groups of workers whose opinions of the games are solicited. The workers in the training group have alerted the workers in the camps to be prepared to interact with trainees through dialogue and through the literacy games.

During the second week the training group uses feedback obtained from the camp visits to modify and develop new participatory learning techniques for literacy. Working in small groups materials and strategies are developed to be evaluated in group meetings.



After the training program the members of the training group pair off and enter the camps to form learning groups of workers. Two evening sessions are scheduled for the first week. On Friday night the members of the training group meet to discuss successes and failures and to map new strategies. Thereafter the training group will meet one night each month for self-evaluation and discussion as well as development of new materials. Evening learning sessions in each camp setting will meet according to the interest of the workers in each group.

### Impact of NFE

*The key to the Ecuador Project has been its ability to remain open, innovative and flexible. Individuals who have worked on the Quito and Amherst staffs have changed attitudes, acquired skills, gained experience and developed a greater awareness of the problems and potential of education in developing countries. Cooperating institutions have changed as they helped develop NFE approaches. All have acquired a deep respect for the Ecuadorian peasant and his ability to respond to educational opportunity.*

Any UMass NFE training program would also need to be open, innovative, and flexible. Training designs would need to provide for individual differences among trainees. The

distinction between trainer and trainee would be purposely vague and changing as one's role changes from learner to facilitator and back again. Heavy involvement of learners in all stages of the training would be mandatory.

A final question must be considered before implementing a training program for facilitators in NFE: "What are the future implications of NFE?" According to Brembeck:

Education in the future is less likely to be thought of as being the exclusive franchise of public schools and more likely find free expression in "schools of the public," open, available upon demand, accessible at any stage in life, both work and happiness oriented, and dedicated to releasing the natural joy of learning so widespread among human beings.<sup>4</sup>

Don Adams, chairman of the International Development Education Program at the University of Pittsburgh, observes that NFE offers "... more flexibility in imparting skills and knowledge, more responsiveness in adjusting to changing needs or demands, and, hopefully, a more equitable distribution of education opportunities"<sup>5</sup> (Adams, 1972).

Nonformal programs might provide retraining opportunities for the unemployed. Where traditional programs have often been expensive and slow to take account of shifting

employment factors and special needs of individuals, NFE might prove to be a better way.

Universal literacy is an aspiration of most societies. Increasingly educators are becoming aware of the schools' limitations in providing universal literacy. Even the U.S. finds that an embarrassingly high percentage of its citizens cannot read or write. Perhaps nonformal alternatives will help close the gap.

If any of these possibilities are to be realized, NFE training programs need to be started. The Ecuador experience should be analyzed and used to stimulate the development of programs in other settings. Pilot programs in a variety of localities should begin to give clearer indications of NFE potentials.

Nonformal education should not be compared directly to Mao's educational reform. The motivation, methods and goals, of the two phenomena differ greatly. However one must continue to be intrigued by the possibility of present educational problems crumbling before the onslaught of barefoot facilitators in developing countries and uncertified volunteer educators in the industrial nations.

4 Brembeck, (op. cit) pp. xvii and xviii.

5 Don Adams in the foreward to *Non-Formal Education: An Annotated International Bibliography*, edited by Rolland G. Paulston, New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972, p. vii.

