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**RESEARCH ON INNOVATIVE NONFORMAL EDUCATION
FOR RURAL ADULTS:
IMPLICATIONS FOR LITERACY MOTIVATION**

**Prepared for Bellagio IV
Workshop on Educational Research
with special reference to
Research on Literacy**

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The views expressed in this paper are of course my own and do not necessarily reflect the opinion either of AID or of those many people whose thought and experience have gone into the development of this project.

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**Research on Innovative Nonformal Education
for Rural Adults:
Implications for Literacy Motivation**

Over the past few decades, we have poured millions of dollars into educational programs focused on making out-of-school adults literate. Yet when we look at the statistics and the results of these efforts, we find that, by and large, we have failed. Why?

Many factors may contribute to the failure of specific literacy programs—administrative structure, timing, teaching techniques—and these factors will vary from program to program. But the dropout rates of programs whose primary focus is literacy education provide us, I believe, with the clue that will help us focus on a critical factor common to many failing programs.

Let's face it. The basic factor in the failure of out-of-school literacy programs is the learner's lack of motivation.

In the 1960s and early 1970s nonformal or out-of-school educational programs were based on the assumption that literacy is a prerequisite for (or at least an integral part of) any educational activity if effective progress toward development goals is to be achieved. For is that not the purpose of making people literate: to enable them to acquire other skills and knowledge that will help improve the quality of their lives?

Policy makers and program administrators have seen literacy as a valuable and necessary tool for people to function successfully in modern society. They have assumed that illiterate adults or out-of-school youth would agree; that having lost their literacy skills or never having had the opportunity to become literate, they would be eager to take advantage of programs that promised them literacy and numeracy skills.

By the mid-1970s, however, it became clear that, despite the considerable expenditure of funds and energy on literacy campaigns, large numbers of

illiterate adults were not being attracted or retained by out-of-school literacy programs.

Each program has specific and perhaps differing reasons contributing to the failure of large-scale literacy efforts. But I would maintain, together with many esteemed colleagues, that the basic difficulty is neither program structure nor materials nor teaching techniques—though these may be important. The basic error is in the assumption that most illiterate adults place a high enough priority on achieving literacy skills to put the time and energy into attending classes.

Most illiterate adults acknowledge the importance of literacy skills. But when they are asked why they do not attend the literacy class in the village, there are always good reasons: "Classes are at the wrong time," "I'm tired after working all day," "I have to bathe, take care of the children, help in the fields ..."

In other words, though the importance of literacy is not denied, it is not given the priority by illiterates that it is given by program developers. Many illiterate adults do not make the same connection between cause and effect that the policy makers do. The long-term benefits of attending classes are not seen as sufficiently rewarding.

No one would deny the need for illiterate people to have access to opportunities to learn, including access to literacy-oriented programs. Access to such literacy programs, however, is simply not enough for most rural adults. Remembering that attendance in nonformal education programs is voluntary, I suggest that we look to the potential learner, the illiterate adult, to find out the reason for lack of interest. And I would further suggest, based on the results of programs in which World Education has been involved,* that the problem is not lack of interest in learning. Rather, it is the nature and content of what is to be learned and the benefit perceived by the learner that will make program participation seem appealing or unappealing. The key to motivation lies within the potential learner. For we must remember that we, from the outside, cannot move anyone to do anything. Initial curiosity may attract people to a program. But without true motivation and commitment, based on perceived and highly valued benefits, that curiosity will soon turn to disinterest and dropping out. It has been World Education's program experience that the motivation we are looking for comes when people are given an opportunity to learn things that they see as critical and of immediate value to them in their everyday lives.

*See, for instance, World Education REPORTS #13, "Special Report on BRAC: Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee," and "Integrated Family Life Education Project: A Project of the Ethiopian Women's Association," by John Pettit (World Education, January 1977).

The question becomes "How?" We may find the answer in our original premise: that the basic purpose of eradicating illiteracy is to enhance adults' ability to become more productive members in family, village, and national life. It seems to me that we have been putting the cart before the horse. If we want illiterate adults—or any adults—to take steps to improve the quality of their lives, then let us assist them to solve some of those development problems they define as critical. Enabled to deal with such issues as health, nutrition, agriculture, or perhaps income generation, they may also begin to feel that they need to acquire or improve literacy skills in order to continue to bring about lasting changes in their lives. Or they may not. But they will have been grappling with the conditions that concern us all.

Indeed, a basic premise being put forth here is that ultimately development goals such as improvements in health, nutrition, agriculture, basic education, income, and so forth are shared by village residents, community development workers, educators, and policy makers. But in order to achieve such development goals, education at the community level must address the needs of villagers in their order of priority—not in the outsiders' order of priority. Only then will individuals be motivated to take active part in educational programs for development.

If we pursue education for development purposes from that point of view, then the challenge becomes how, without the use of literacy, to provide education that responds to the felt needs of adults who do not see literacy as a high priority.

In 1975 the Education and Human Resources division of AID gave World Education a research grant for developing and doing some preliminary testing of an educational process with three essential conditions:

- o that the learning materials not require literacy, so that both literates and nonliterates could use them; that they be low cost; and that they be easily produced locally;
- o that the content of each session be determined by the learning group itself (literacy would be introduced only if the group saw it as a skill they wanted—or needed—to learn);
- o that the educational methods involve participation, discussion, analysis, decision-making, and, if required, group action.

This process was developed over a six-week period in several villages in the Philippines in collaboration with the Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement. Evidence from that trial period was sufficiently encouraging for AID to

fund a two-year research grant to develop and refine this methodology further and to determine the long-term impact of the approach on both the learning groups and individual participants and the extent to which it enables individuals and groups to achieve their goals.

The second phase is being carried out in six villages in Kenya, in collaboration with Tototo Home Industries under the auspices of the National Christian Council of Kenya, and in six villages in the Philippines in collaboration with the Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement.

It may be helpful to elaborate here on some other important principles and assumptions of the project: *

- o Women's concerns must be addressed without excluding the legitimate concerns of men. Learning groups are constituted based on existing group patterns in an area. Where women cluster together the learning focuses on them. When men are part of the cluster, learning issues include their concerns.
- o Education is to develop self-sufficiency; this entails learning to use existing resources and to increase access to resources.
- o Individuals control their own learning. Education succeeds only when it stems from the participants' experiences and connects with their inherent ability to solve problems. Facilitating (teaching) is enabling individuals and groups to remove the obstacles that impede their progress.
- o Learning materials are used to help create a process where participants can share and reflect on their experience and consider new actions. They must also enable the needs of participants to be continually illuminated.
- o Education at the community level must address needs in the order of priority of the learner. (During both Phase I and Phase II, the priority need stated most frequently was increased income.)

Although this paper is not meant to focus on the actual operation of the project, I believe it is important to describe in some detail the educational approach being used—which we have termed the Self-Actualizing Method (SAM).

* The rationale for the educational approach used is described in detail in Volume I of Noreen Clark's Education for Development and the Rural Woman, to be published by World Education in January 1979.

At the village level, the program follows this sequence of activities:

- 1. Village leaders are consulted and their cooperation and approval assured as prerequisites for initiating the program in their village.**
- 2. A local person meeting criteria set by the local agency is selected by the village to be trained as village educational coordinator.**
- 3. The project field staff—both the village coordinators and the full-time facilitators who are experienced community development workers—undergo intensive training conducted by the central staff. This covers needs assessment, instructional methodologies, materials development, field observation, and evaluation. As each of these is discussed, the trainees learn the process of developing the tools, then actually develop and field test each one.**
- 4. The village coordinator explains to the adults in the village that the program involves a high degree of learner participation, both in the learning experiences (since there is no traditional teacher who supplies all the answers) and in the decision-making process (topics to be covered, program structuring). The coordinator also explains that literacy is not a prerequisite to participation, answers any questions about the program that may arise, and invites the villagers to attend the initial sessions to decide for themselves whether to join.**
- 5. In carrying out the initial needs assessment in each village, a team composed of facilitator and village coordinator finds a common meeting place and engages the villagers in a variety of informal, information-gathering activities (including having them tell stories about pictures, reacting to taped open-ended dramas, answering projective questions).**
- 6. In analyzing the data generated during the needs assessment, the project staff looks for common themes in learners' interests. Based on these themes, they develop initial learning experiences and materials that will give the learners the opportunity to determine which topics are of greatest interest and, given the local resources available, which are feasible to pursue.**

7. The field team of facilitator and coordinator then conducts the learning sessions, at a time and place chosen by the learners as most convenient. In addition to providing new learning opportunities, each session serves as a needs assessment process for the subsequent one. That is, instead of designing the total curriculum in advance, the field team plans one lesson at a time, thus being able to pursue a specific learning interest as thoroughly as the group wishes and to change the focus of the sessions as the group identifies new interests.*
8. In addition to choosing the topics to be covered, the learners help decide the structure of the presentations. Examples of issues for the group to handle may include the formation of small groups to pursue specific learning interests; the use of local technical resources and facilities; and an inventory of community resources.
9. Regular meetings with the central project staff assist the field teams in responding to changing interests and in preparing materials. At these meetings, the field teams exchange and develop new ideas and techniques with the aid of consultants.
10. As part of the ongoing evaluation, the field teams exchange visits between villages and the project director and field work supervisor make frequent field visits. There are periodic staff meetings and in-service training workshops. A critical part of evaluation is documentation of the goals and objectives of village participants at the onset. Outcomes attributed to the program will be documented in three major evaluations during the life of the project. In these evaluations data will be collected to determine if the methods used have assisted villagers to achieve their goals and objectives.

The formative evaluation system, which has been in operation since the beginning of the field work, yields ongoing data about the program operation, the educational approach and materials, and successes and difficulties encountered. The summative evaluation system, with midpoint and final evaluation for each site, will yield data concerning the impact of this project on both groups and individual participants.

*These interests are likely to include, for example, nutrition, health care, income-generating activities, or literacy.

From the data generated through the various components of the system, the project staff expects insight into a number of issues that now face policy makers and administrators of nonformal education programs whose primary purpose is to meet basic human needs and improve the quality of life.

We hope that the project findings will be helpful in answering some of the critical questions underlying this conference:

- o Will participation in this kind of program and achievement of success as defined by the learner motivate that person to seek training in literacy skills?
- o Are villagers more motivated to take part in and sustain interest in educational programs when village groups continuously define their own needs, interests, and problems and take responsibility for seeking solutions to them?
- o Does the improvement in the quality of a rural villager's life require literacy? or can illiterate adults learn sufficient problem-solving skills to meet their needs to their own satisfaction without literacy?

Other questions of interest to the project staff include the following:

- o What are the priority concerns of rural women?
- o What is the impact of this approach on the lives of villagers? Does it bring about change in nutrition practices? health? agriculture? income generation?
- o How do villager-defined problems correlate with priorities set by policy makers or educational planners?
- o Can this educational process initiate the kind of self-confidence and self-sufficiency needed for groups to continue to meet and solve their problems even after the project comes to an end?

Final results will be available in early 1980. But preliminary data already are beginning to show some interesting trends in relationship to these questions. For example, as was true in the trial groups in Phase I, most village groups in the project have identified development of income-generating activities as their highest priority. After four months of field activity in the Philippines and six months in Kenya, the data collected indicate that several groups have met with high degrees

of success in setting up small businesses to produce income.

One might conjecture that as these kinds of activities develop and expand, the illiterate participants may begin to feel a need to acquire or improve their literacy skills in order to improve their ability to operate the enterprise. Data from a site in Kenya show some evidence that this may indeed be the case, although it is too early to draw conclusions about trends and results. However, Noreen Clark, chief consultant to the project, and Concepcion Madayag, director of the project in the Philippines, will discuss their observations and reactions based on activity to date during the panel presentation.

Editors' Note: Volumes II and III of the series Education for Development and the Rural Woman will be published by World Education in 1979. Volume II will focus on the actual practice of nonformal adult education in Kenya and the Philippines, and Volume III will be concerned with the evaluation approaches used in these projects.