

Consumers' Association of Penang

SEMINAR ON EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT

18 - 22 NOVEMBER 1983

PENANG, MALAYSIA

THE IMPORTANCE OF NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

by

JOHN DORAISAMY  
FACULTY OF EDUCATION  
UNIVERSITY MALAYA, KUALA LUMPUR

Copyright: CAP and AUTHOR

Consumers' Association of Penang  
87 Cantonment Road  
Penang  
MALAYSIA



## 'The Importance of Non-formal Education'

by

John Doraisamy

Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen,

My first duty on this occasion must surely be to congratulate CAP for having decided to activate a seminar on Education and Development. Over the years those of us who support CAP have been happy to see the dynamic manner in which it has grown. Through determined leadership it has become not only a household word but a force for the betterment of the human condition in Malaysia. I know how much the academic community respects and values CAP programmes and publications.

I am billed to speak on the importance of non-formal education. I think it is best to begin by defining my terms. 'Education' we all know or at least we have definite images in our mind about the word. Generally speaking, the layman thinks of education as a span of years covering childhood and adolescence during which prepared syllabuses have to be covered and textbooks studied diligently so that certain public examinations can be attempted successfully. Well I don't quarrel with that set of ideas. But what has been described just now is **FORMAL EDUCATION**. We have to distinguish it from **NON-FORMAL EDUCATION**. What is the difference it might be asked?

Schooling

Schools make a very important contribution to education but to formal education. However in our day and age there is a wide variety of institutions involved in the education through not formally of young people as well as adults. The home the place of worship and its traditions, the print and electronic media and community organizations are significant agents of non-formal education.



Education refers to all the learning experiences the individual has in interacting with the physical and social environment. It is a continuing and life process. Schooling which has a more limited purpose refers to the learning activity planned and conducted by a formally structured agency which influences individuals during a specified period. In the Malaysian context the primary school years stretch from the age of ~~six~~ to the age of ~~eleven~~. Secondary schooling covers the next span of five years. A fraction of pupils stay on in the post-secondary forms and they may proceed to higher education while the great majority will enter the world of work.

Non-formal education is the present day preferred term for ADULT EDUCATION. It is synonymous with adult education and there are good reasons for employing NFE. Other expressions are continuing education, continuous education and in particular distance or extension education.

Whereas formal education is very strictly confined to primary and secondary and tertiary institutions, non-formal education covers a broad-perhaps I should say very broad spectrum of educational activities ranging from non-vocational courses of general interest to the acquiring of special vocational skills needed in agriculture, industry or commerce.

Non-formal education will be looming large in our consciousness for a simple reason. The concept of education is fast changing. From its former status as a once-for-all activity it has now become rather different. The present-day and concept of education is rightfully that of a process continuing throughout life. Does that mean that everybody attends classes, studies textbooks intensively and sits for examinations? Not at all or shall we say not necessarily. We must not look at non-formal education from the perspective of formal education and its practice. For example CAP's activities are a good example of non-formal education. Through seminars, publications, press releases and memoranda CAP informs, sensitizes, influences and goes the community into action. Its activities are educational in character without using the methods of the traditional school.



Defects

What are the defects or weaknesses of the formal school system? The Principal weakness is its rigidity. Pupils are expected to stay in a particular standard, or form for a uniform length of time, namely one year. No soldier must be out of step with the rest of the regiment. Even if a pupil is capable of following a more challenging level of work in say language or mathematics he is condemned by the system to stay with the cohorts of his age-group. Similarly the slow learner is also condemned to remain with the masses, if I may use that expression, and is pushed on irrespective of his true scholastic standing. The system is as frustrating for the slower ones as it is bewildering for slower learners. I have no doubt that this was the right system to adopt when the formal school system was first established and was spreading far and wide. But does not mean that we should hold on to it for ever. If there is any one development that is becoming a veritable trend in many parts of the world it is a growing disenchantment with the rigidity of the traditional school system and the irrelevancy to life of much that is taught within its four walls.

Adequacy

There is a great need to accept the fact that formal education as we know it today will not be adequate to serve all the educational needs of our society in the decades to come. Formal education is but one stage in an individual's life. After the formal education stage is over, non-formal education can and will have to play a bigger role to ensure that the corpus of knowledge, skills and attitudes of mind that will be required for sustained economic and social development will not become obsolete and irrelevant. Whatever may have been the attitude in the past a feeling of complacency about the requirements of the future will simply not do. This thought was admirably expressed many years ago by the late A.N. Whitehead who said, In the conditions of the future the role is absolute. The race that does not value trained intelligence is doomed.

Education opportunities are changing. In the past when someone dropped out of school it was assumed that his education was finished forever. Now many people are discovering that there are many alternative routes to learning. The door to continuing education is as close as the nearest training institution. We find throughout Malaysia



John Doraisamy

that there are all kinds of academic, institutions, institutes, schools and tuition centres run on strictly commercial lines. Doubtless they provide many a youth with a skill which enables him or her to earn an honest livelihood. Historically for example education for the world of commerce was a particular feature of private schools rather than the public or government school system.

#### Economic Reasons

The production of goods and services is becoming more sophisticated. It is inevitable that higher levels of educational attainment will become prerequisites for finding employment and for retaining employment. Employers cannot by any stretch of the imagination rely on the initial educational qualification of their employees whatever they may be as adequate to ensure proficiency in their respective jobs. From an economic standpoint, education can be regarded simply as an investment in human capital. Employers are willing to invest in non-formal education and training as it has a direct bearing on productivity and maintenance of a competitive position.

The schools are expected to discover and cultivate the talents and capabilities of the child and to assist in his growth to a mature, creative and productive adult. This means of course that schooling must play a large role in the development of the child's basic physical and mental skills and in the cultivation of his intellectual powers and moral, artistic, and spiritual sensibilities. But the school can never hope to turn out the finished product. The so-called educated individual. It can start the job or the process if you like but education must be continued. This is a truism that needs wider recognition, understanding and acceptance in Malaysia.

#### What should be done?

There is a substantial number of non-formal education activities in existence in Malaysia today. Not only is that the case but the number of NFE programmes is growing rapidly both in the government sector and in the private enterprise segment too. Frankly that is a development or trend that I for one welcome. What I would like to recommend is that a proper, nation-wide survey be made of the present provision of non-formal education facilities, not simply of those that are directly concerned with economic productivity but also those that are addressed to civic, health and other components of non-formal education.



We have had at various times fairly thorough reviews of the formal education system in Malaysia. Everyone of those reviews or reports by Education Committees in one case a Royal Commission led to far-reaching changes in the school system. ought to think seriously of something similar for the rapidly growing non-formal education field covering the public as well as private sectors.

#### ht perspective

To foster a proper and sensible attitude to lifelong education we should view academic achievement or acquisition of qualifications in the right perspective. Some years now university convocation ceremonies have been reported in the media though when a bachelor's degree or a diploma examination has been passed the student has 'arrived'. A colourful graduation ceremony marks a kind of entitlement a place on the familiar superscale escalator and modern living. There are signs and symptoms <sup>that</sup> tradition cannot last much longer. Along with the initial qualification an individual who remarks on a career will have to update his skills and be prepared to learn and master new skills.

#### ia

There is existence an entire Division within the Ministry of Education to produce programmes for broadcast by radio and television for school children, as a useful supplement to the formal education they obtain in schools. Why not a 'University of the Air' in which academicians can provide talks or discussions on subjects of undergraduate courses? These programmes would be of value to listening students as an additional source of knowledge. No such arrangement exists for adult continuing education. More can be done to increase and enrich the educational content of radio and television programmes.

#### Form of schools

The formal education system or the statutory school system as we call it officially in Malaysia has to reorientate its methodologies. With the impact being felt by the lifelong education trend, the schools have to institute some much-needed reforms. This view is admirably summed up in the following sentence I found in an American pamphlet:



It is more important to generate intellectual curiosity and a passion for knowledge, and to cultivate good habits of thought and inquiry than to concentrate on learning countless detailed facts which may soon be forgotten or abandoned.

I agree that this may call for very radical changes and a rethinking of much that is now assumed to be appropriate in our education system. The best contribution that the formal education can make is to teach people how to learn.

### Professionalism

There is also a need for professional courses for instructors, tutors and lecturers in the non-formal education field. The teaching of adults requires some grounding in subjects such as adult psychology, non-formal teaching methods, media resources and so on. We know it for a fact that most if not all instructors, lecturers and tutors in public sector training institutions do not possess any professional qualification related to their work in the teaching-learning process. The only exception are staff of teacher-training colleges. The general practice seems to be that an official who has had some years of practical experience in his department is transferred to a position as instructor in the training institution. It is simply one more duty post in the officer's career in the public service. I feel serious thought ought to be given to a variety of courses aimed at providing all types of lecturers and instructors with exposure to ideas on the fundamentals of the teaching-learning process and on methodology of communication. It has often been said of education that there is no substitute for charismatic teaching. With so many millions being spent on training institutes and training institutions it is worth ensuring productivity of a high order in the instructional cadres. It ought not be very difficult to draft suitable courses of the kind I am recommending. There are also excellent university courses leading to the award of a diploma in adult education available in a number of Commonwealth countries which would be suitable for Malaysian needs.

### Looking ahead to 1985

Malaysia must take a greater interest in the world-wide trend towards non-formal education. The fact that Malaysia was not represented at any of the three World Conferences on Adult Education that were held in 1949, 1960 and 1972 is



sufficient proof that very low priority has been accorded to nonformal education by the decision-makers. It is to be hoped that Malaysia will not be conspicuous by its absence when the fourth World Conference on Adult Education takes place in 1985. Hopefully, if Malaysian educational planners are exposed to the ideas concepts and trends in contemporary non-formal education we may see a new and more encouraging attitude to non-formal education.

Thank you.

JPD/rs  
9.11.83