

Types of Education: Formal, Non-Formal, Informal; Role of Various Agencies in Education.

FORMAL EDUCATION

Formal education corresponds to a systematic, organized education model, structured and administered according to a given set of laws and norms, presenting a rather rigid curriculum as regards objectives, content and methodology. It is characterized by a continuous education process named, as Sarramona1 remarks, which necessarily involves the teacher, the students and the institution. It corresponds to the education process normally adopted by our schools and universities. Formal education institutions are administratively, physically and curricularly organized and require from students a minimum classroom attendance.

There is a program that teachers and students alike must observe, involving intermediate and final assessments in order to advance students to the next learning stage. It confers degrees and diplomas pursuant to a quite strict set of regulations. The methodology is basically expository, scarcely relating to the desired behavioral objectives - as a matter of fact, it is but seldom that such targets are operationally established. Assessments are made on a general basis, for administrative purposes and are infrequently used to improve the education process. Their character is, for the most part, punitive, obeying a mono-directional methodology that fails to stimulate students and to provide for their active participation in the process, though in most cases, failures are ascribed to them. The setting-up of a formal education system does not consider the students' standards, values and attitudes that are relevant to the education system which, generally, is not tested or assessed at the level of student acceptance, as well as for efficacy and efficiency. The subjects are presented in isolated blocks, whether as to content or methodology. Thus, for instance, in the case of Physics, for techno-administrative reasons the subject is divided into theory, laboratory and exercises and, their adequate order and correlation is disregarded. In general, the objectives aimed at the personal growth of students are neglected and, the basic principles of learning fail to be considered in the planning and the performance of education systems. It is not excessive to say that in the case of formal education, for the most part teachers pretend to teach; students pretend to learn; and, institutions pretend to be really catering to the interests of students and of the society. Thus, generally, formal education cannot disguise its aloofness from the real needs of the students and of the community.

NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

As seen, formal education has a well-defined set of features. Whenever one or more of these is absent, we may safely state that the educational process has acquired non-formal features. Therefore, if a given education system is not presential most of the time - noncontiguous communication - we may say that it has non-formal education features. Likewise, non-formal education characteristics are found when the adopted strategy does not require student attendance, decreasing the contacts between teacher and student and most activities take place outside the institution - as for instance, home reading and paperwork. Educative processes endowed with flexible curricula and methodology, capable of adapting to the needs and interests

of students, for which time is not a pre established factor but is contingent upon the student's work pace, certainly do not correspond to those comprised by formal education, but fit into the so-called non-formal education. Proportionally to the number of formal education factors that are absent from a process, we find several grades of non-formal systems.

These preliminary considerations emphasize the need clearly and objectively to establish the possible basic features of non-formal education. This, however, is not an easy task. Notwithstanding the above, even a preliminary analysis of the existing non-formal systems reveals the constant presence of two features:

- (a) centralization of the process on the student, as to his previously identified needs and possibilities; and,
- (b) the immediate usefulness of the education for the student's personal and professional growth.

Non-formal education seems better to meet the individual needs of students. Main features of non-formal education, diversely from formal schooling, shows that participants are led to non-formal programmes because these offer the expertise that they hope to acquire and the necessary assistance for a better understanding of their own selves and of their world. As non-formal education is focused on the student, it perforce presents flexible features as regards the initially established and adopted procedures, objectives and contents. It is therefore quicker to react in face of the changes that may affect the needs of students and of the community. With basis on these preliminary considerations we may easily conclude that the non formal label encompasses a wide variety of educational systems endowed with features that either led them towards or away from the established formal systems. Thus, we might infer the existence of a certain degree of continuity linking the formal and the non formal education. This view is not limited to a merely academic interest because, as will be seen below, it is an extremely objective and practical one in the search for alternative solutions to educational problems. Given its scope, non-formal education is comprised of an ample diversity of educational situations, many of which have played a significant role in the renewal of educational systems. We shall now analyze three educative processes, namely:

“Correspondence learning”,
“Distance learning” and
“Open systems”

Correspondence Learning: organized, structured correspondence schools date from more than one century. Several works and authors mention that in 1856, in Berlin, Toussaint and Langenscheidt founded a correspondence languages course. Correspondence course participants are found in all age brackets and economic-social classes. But, which are the main features of correspondence learning? It is a planned and systematized activity, based on the preparation of printed educational materials which are forwarded to students who are physically separated from the teachers who can give but a limited assistance to them. Correspondence learning is an individualized learning system that allows students to proceed at their own pace, according to their interests. The institutional materials are for the most part printed and are generally prepared by a teacher who has not enough didactic and technical knowledge to prepare top quality educational material. Although a number of correspondence courses currently offer other types of instructional material - audio-tapes and videotapes, kits, etc. - we shall for classification purposes solely consider the printed materials offered by correspondence courses. A degree may

or may not be obtained and there is no pressure - the student's motivation is the basic factor for the program's success. It is not difficult to see that correspondence courses do not incorporate several features of the formal education and are thus classified in the field of non-formal education.

Distance Learning: According to Holmberg "Distance study is learning supported by those teaching methods in which, because of the physical separateness of learners and teachers, the interactive, as well as the pre active phase of teaching is conducted through print, mechanical or electronic devices." Distance learning is based on non-contiguous communication, that is, "the learner is at a distance from the teacher for much, most or even all the time during the teaching learning process". Based on this definition, we may infer that the concept of distance learning is wider than that of correspondence learning, with which it is sometimes confused. Thus, Butts⁸ remarks that "the rapid adoption, over the past 10 years, of the phrase 'distance learning' to replace 'correspondence courses' would seem to reflect the incorporation of media other than print (and particularly the medium of broadcasting); the fresh impetus coming from research into individualized learning and self-instructional methods; the broadening of the social base for open learning systems; and the development of courses and qualifications designed specifically to meet the needs of distance learning students."

The concept of open learning systems used by Butts is wider than that of distance learning, as below analyzed. In sum, according to Holmberg, the three universally accepted features of distance learning are as follows:

1. Typical of the whole distance study is that it is based on non-contiguous communication, the learner is at a distance from the teacher for much, most or even all of the time during the teaching-learning process.
2. A pre-produced course, as self-instructional as possible, printed and/or consisting of presentation brought about by other means than print (audio or video-tapes, radio or TV programmes, etc.) guides the study.
3. Organized non-contiguous two-way communication is a constitutive element of distance study. It is in most cases principally brought about by assignments for submission for the students to solve and answer and for the tutors to comment on (in writing or on audio-tape), but freer forms of communication also occur." The organization and administration of distance learning significantly differs from those of formal education. Thus, for instance, no students attend classes at the institution, except for occasional visitors. There are no classrooms; instead there are places where multidisciplinary teams comprised of redactors, authors, audio-visual experts, and so on, plan and compose the materials that will be used. In distance learning we find no "academic semesters". The students may at will discontinue studies whenever he needs or wants to do so. As per Holmberg, distance learning is comprised of the following basic activities:

- the development and technical production of distance study courses;
- the distribution of course materials;
- the non-contiguous two-way communication between students and tutors/counselors; and Record-keeping.

Holmberg also reminds us that, in some case, other activities may be required, as for instance:

- course certificate
- examination and degrees
- Supplementary face-to-face contacts between students and tutors/counselors.

A large experience has been obtained over these years through application of distance study at various levels, for different target populations. Our main concern in this Chapter relates to the use of distance study for higher level education. A well-succeeded example of such use is the Open University.

Open Systems:

The third instance of non-formal education corresponds to open systems or open learning, which have drifted much farther apart from the features of formal education, creating a wide, deep rift. Open learning systems are defined as those which offer students a measure of flexibility and autonomy, to study the programmes of their choice when and where they wish, and at a pace to suit their circumstances. As Butts points out, "...distance learning is seen ... as one type of open learning.

Some authors also consider rather freely the concept of open education - as synonymous with open systems. As Yalli says, "the idea of openness may be twofold: open as to structures, that is, a rupture of the physical barriers of educative institutions, so as to provide free access to schools; or open as to methodology and learning resources." And, he concludes: "The essential fact about open education is that it does not matter how knowledge is acquired, all means are valid. The open learning system aims at the formation of independent students who have capacity for self-discipline and a high capacity for synthesis and for analysis." This author defines that in an open system, learning is the function of an interaction between the student and the actual world.

INFORMAL EDUCATION

Informal education is quite diverse from formal education and, particularly, from non formal education, although in certain cases it is capable of maintaining a close relationship with both. It does not correspond to an organized and systematic view of education; informal education does not necessarily include the objectives and subjects usually encompassed by the traditional curricula. It is aimed at students as much as at the public at large and imposes no obligations whatever their nature. There generally being no control over the performed activities, informal education does not of necessity regard the providing of degrees or diplomas; it merely supplements both formal and non-formal education. Informal education for instance comprises the following activities:

- (a) Visits to museums or to scientific and other fairs and exhibits, etc.;
- (b) Listening to radio broadcasting or watching TV programmes on educational or scientific themes;
- (c) Reading texts on sciences, education, technology, etc. in journals and magazines;
- (d) Participating in scientific contests, etc.
- (e) Attending lectures and conferences.

There are many instances of situations/activities encompassed by informal education, from those that may take place in the students' homes - such as scientific or didactic games, manipulation of kits, experiments, reading sessions (biographies, scientific news, etc.) - to institutional activities - lectures in institutions, visiting museums, etc. It is easy to see that the higher the degree of systematization and organization involved in informal education activities, the nearer it will be to non-formal education. This is a relevant fact inasmuch as it suggests the possibility of transition

from informal to non-formal. We must ponder that, considered by itself, we cannot generally assert whether an educative action belongs to the formal, to the non-formal or to the informal universe. For instance, a visit to a Science Museum may be an informal education instance if arising from a personal and spontaneous decision by a student, as it is not directly related to his scholastic activities. However, if such a visit is part of an established curriculum, requiring from students a written report and including assessments by the teacher, or tutor, then it will probably be an activity associated to either the formal or to the non-formal education.

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