

Oxford International Conference on Education and Development
September 1999

Out of school strategies for proper education

Hilary Perraton

Director, International Research Foundation for Open Learning

12 Hills Road, Cambridge, CB2 1PF 01223 584601 Fax 01223 355207 Email: H.D.Perraton@open.ac.uk

Abstract

Three propositions are stated and examined: that formal education is effective as a means of empowerment; that it is not meeting its targets; that alternative approaches have generally been disappointing. In relation to the third of these there is a contrast between the expectations of using mass media for national development and education, most marked in the 1960s, and subsequent achievement. Out-of-school alternatives have failed to gain political or public support. In contrast to this, the evidence both from the experience of using mass-media approaches to agricultural and nutrition programmes and from that of the world's open universities, suggests that combining mass media with local support can provide an effective alternative route to education. Proposals are therefore made for practical steps to reinstate this kind of approach on to the educational agenda.

This paper starts with three propositions: that formal education works; that there isn't enough of it to go round; that out-of-school strategies have generally disappointed. From these propositions - and especially the last - it goes on to try to chart alternative routes to empowerment.

Proposition one: formal education is remarkably effective as a means of empowerment. Rate of return analysis, whatever one's doubts about it, points to this conclusion: alongside any contribution to economic development, education tends to help people get richer. But the more telling arguments come from health and from agriculture. The recent Oxfam report summarised: 'There is a particularly close correlation between parental education and child mortality. In almost all countries, child-death rates are inversely related to the level of maternal education. Simply stated, the more educated the mother, the healthier she and her child are likely to be' (Watkins 1999: 21). In agriculture, Jamison and Lau demonstrated in 1982 the link between education and agricultural productivity, reaching an overall conclusion 'that farm productivity increases on average by 8.7 percent as a result of a farmer's completing 4 years of elementary education' (Jamison and Lau 1982: 8). Their location in the World Bank helped people take note of the finding. The demonstration that education can bring individual, economically measurable benefits is not all that new: Foster, 35 years ago, commented on Ghanaian 'very canny calculation of the alternative rewards accruing to different kinds of schooling' (Foster 1965: 293). What is relatively new is the wealth of documentation that builds an economic buttress on to ideological arguments for educational expansion.

Proposition two: formal education is not meeting its targets. The international agencies' statistical review for the 2000 assessment of education for all will give us the detail. The general picture in terms of enrolments is already clear. At the time of Jomtien we thought there were 130 million children out of school. By 1995 the reported figure for 6 to 11 year-olds had risen to 145 million. In 16 countries of sub-Saharan Africa net enrolment ratios have worsened since Jomtien (Colclough 1993: 1; UNESCO 1998: 18; Watkins 1999: 12). Figures on expenditure tell the same story. If we express the figures in constant currency, then total developing country expenditure on education fell from 1998US\$201 billion in 1980 to \$152 billion in 1985 and only crept up to \$211 billion in 1994. Cost per inhabitant had not recovered from its 1980 peak of 1998US\$61 by 1994 when it was still only \$50 (UNESCO *Statistical yearbook*, various years; Perraton forthcoming: 5).

The first two propositions show why the third is important. If education works rather well at empowerment, but we do not have enough schools for children or classes for adolescents and adults who missed out on their education, then it is worth exploring whether there are alternative routes that can reach those outside school, and

can do so economically. We once thought there were. Schramm (1964) had a book entitled *Mass media and national development*. Coombs, looking at the world educational crisis in 1968, had a chapter heading 'Nonformal education: to catch up, keep up, and get ahead' (Coombs 1968: 138). Around that time:

Governments and nongovernment organisations began to use mass media, often linked with some kind of face-to-face activity, for adult education, sometimes with broad social aims, sometimes with much more specific ones. Governments used mass media to set up alternative schools ... and to buttress their work in agriculture, health, nutrition, family planning and political education. Much government activity involved the use of mass media, from radio to mobile cinema vans, to reinforce and support the work of regular extension services. Alongside this work went a series of projects, including radio learning groups and radio campaigns, that tried to use a different organisational structure from that of conventional extension programmes. Some nongovernment organisations, notably the radio schools of Latin America, had broad programmes of adult education, offering something like an equivalence to schooling. Others, like INADES-formation and the African Medical and Research Foundation, had more focused programmes, mainly in agriculture or health.

(Perraton forthcoming: 16-17)

A central element to this thinking was the idea that mass media could be used, in association with face-to-face study, to accelerate educational reform and expansion. The multi-step theory of communication gave theoretical justification for this kind of link between broadcasting and group learning (Rogers with Shoemaker 1971). But the many projects of the 1960s and 1970s did not lead to any systematic expansion of media-based nonformal or equivalence education and the expectation, that mass media would be used extensively in the interest of national development and education, now looks like a false dawn. In 1980 the MacBride Commission found that:

Aid for development of communications is still not regarded as a priority matter. Many funding institutions remain little inclined to support general communication projects, which are largely outside the priorities of organizations such as UNDP and the World Bank, and wholly outside those of the regional banks and many institutions supplying bilateral assistance ...

In recent years the importance of communications for development has been constantly stressed both at the political and technical levels, in many United Nations forums and above all in Unesco, from the General Conference to numerous expert meetings, as well as within regional intergovernmental organizations and among the non-aligned countries. Nevertheless, this recognition has not been reflected in assistance to communication projects ... Neither the legislators nor the managers of development assistance have followed in the path mapped out by the policy-makers.

(MacBride *et al.* 1980: 221)

Ten years on and the Jomtien background document said, 'It can be argued that the literacy and basic education potential of the *new communication technologies* (and educational innovations) has never been fully realised' (Inter-Agency Commission 1990: 63).

It is not difficult, therefore, to establish the third proposition that, despite dramatic counter-examples that include institutions as varied as Telesecundaria in Mexico and INADES-formation in Africa, out-of-school strategies have generally disappointed. And yet: the 100 million shortfall of school places, the stubborn figure of 900 million illiterate people, and the evidence of the value of schooling, all suggest that it is worth examining the record in order to see whether we can construct a strategy for out-of-school education that is effective and convincing to learners and governments.

What went wrong?

We need to begin by distinguishing between adults and children. We might expect that out-of-school education for adults would have as profound and benign effects as in-school education for children. This was the starting point for conventional arguments for adult education. Nyerere argued, for example, that 'we must educate the adults of Tanzania ... we cannot wait until our educated children are grown up before we get economic and

social development; it is the task of those who are already full-grown citizens of our country to begin this work' (Nyerere 1973: 137). Unfortunately, we lack the evidence to show that adult education has measurable effects of the kinds that have been demonstrated for formal schooling. Or, as it is difficult to establish a negative, hard evidence of that kind has not received the wide publication accorded to findings on the outcomes of conventional education. If adult education is a route to empowerment, then we need to have this documented. The lack of this evidence is reported to be one of the main reasons for the World Bank's retreat from its brief flirtation with nonformal education and support for research in the area in the late 1970s (Personal communication; cf. also Romain and Armstrong 1987).

Out-of-school alternatives for children have struggled to attain economic or social credibility. At primary level, with the possible exception of *Acción Cultural Popular* in Colombia in the 1970s, it is difficult to find alternative approaches whose unit cost compares favourably with conventional primary schools (Perraton 1984: 170-1). And, if an alternative kind of schooling costs more and has lower status and less assured outcomes, there is not much sense in investing in it. At secondary level, there is wide experience, that includes *Telesecundaria* with 750 000 students, study centres in central Africa, and open schools in India and Indonesia, of programmes for children who cannot get to secondary school. The programmes are well-established and the Asian open schools are seen as having a significant role in the expansion of secondary education. There is some evidence of acceptable academic results (e.g. Murphy 1993). But they have not succeeded in convincing two key stakeholders - parents and governments. Parents, and children, look for opportunities to move out of alternative schools and into the regular school system. Governments are reluctant to fund parallel institutions, even when their unit costs are lower than those of the conventional alternative. In contrast with regular schools, the National Open School of India, for example, draws most of its income from student fees and the sale of books and materials and not from government grant; in Malawi the government was meeting 77 per cent of the costs of day secondary schools but only 50 per cent of the - lower - costs of study centres (Perraton forthcoming 186-7, Mukhopadhyay 1994: 40; Murphy 1992: 83-9). As a result institutions have lacked the resources to do their job properly. (Arger (1990) has documented this for a number of distance-teaching institutions; Guy (1992) has done so in a telling case study of Papua New Guinea.) Institutions set up to widen access have not been able to do so in a way consistent with equity. Out-of-school students tend to have to pay more, for an education perceived as being inferior, than those in school.

We could draw two contrasting conclusions from this litany of disappointment. One is that the search for a media-based alternative to school is fatally flawed, that governments are wise to do no more than genuflect towards it, and that empowerment through education should wait for the expansion of formal schooling and otherwise rest with modest, ngo-backed, projects aiming at small and disadvantaged groups. The other is that perhaps there was something worthwhile in the early idea of an alternative route to education and that we should therefore continue to explore where the lessons of the past can be applied to nonconventional approaches in the future.

There is some evidence for the second view. A decade ago Hornik reviewed agricultural and nutrition programmes that used communication technology, and concluded bluntly that, 'most efforts to use communication technology for development do not do what they are meant to' (1988: ix). He went on from this discouraging assessment to examine three possible explanations for it: '(1) Information is no solution for lack of resources; (2) Audiences for information programs are unresponsive even where such information might help; and (3) Information programs have not worked because they have not been done appropriately' and concludes that the last is the major factor (*ibid.*: 155). In other words, we know how to run effective media-based programmes but do not in fact apply that knowledge.

The other strand of evidence comes not from agriculture and nutrition but from formal equivalence education. We have well-documented accounts of the use of distance education in teacher training where it appears both to be effective and to be able to operate at lower unit costs than conventional approaches (Perraton 1993). Some of these programmes are addressed to students with modest educational backgrounds. And, in contrast with the gloomy record examined so far, the big success story in alternative education and technology is the growth and spread of open universities: one in 1969 (on a narrow definition), half a dozen by the mid 1970s, over thirty today. Their record in producing graduates (Britain and China), enrolling a large proportion of tertiary students (Thailand and Turkey) and establishing their legitimacy to play a major part in national educational expansion (India) is a powerful counterpoise to the limited success of open and distance learning approaches at lower

levels of education. The record is surprising and unexpected: that early 1960s euphoria about mass media was about rural campaigns, and reaching villages, not about a new model of tertiary education. *Educating Rita* demonstrated that an open university can be empowering. Although we are short of outcome data, there are just enough around to demonstrate that the model works in both developing and industrialised societies. The record, from Hornik's work, from what we know of teacher education, and from the open universities, suggests that at the least we should not dismiss the use of communication technologies as part of an educational strategy.

That is the main purpose of this paper: to re-establish that, alongside the open universities, there is a role for education that uses the communication technologies, in a strategy to widen access. The need for the strategy follows from the gap that still exists between actual numbers within education and the targets, now for 2015. The strategy will need to be realistic about strengths and weaknesses. If we are to have equivalency programmes then their supporters need to face the problem of seeking parity of esteem and look hard at which elements or stages of education lend themselves to nonconventional approaches. On this interpretation of the evidence, for example, we should not generally be looking for an alternative approach to primary schooling: build more primary schools instead. There are, however, other ways in which basic education, and the next cycle, can be strengthened and extended. Both the scale of the needs, and the new excitement about the potential of information and communication technologies for education, may offer us a new opportunity to explore them.

It is tempting to stop there. But, at the risk of appearing didactic, and seeking a reductionist or recipe-book approach, I would argue that the mixed record also makes it possible to identify growth points for the future. Our own work at the International Research Foundation for Open Learning, suggests that eight are particularly promising.

1. Improve the documentation. Nonformal and out-of-school education remains under-reported. We are working on a thematic study, for DFID and the international agencies, as an input to the 2000 EFA assessment, but there is more to be done.
2. Evaluate adult education. There is an onus on its proponents to demonstrate that it is worth public resources.
3. Use technologies to apply leverage. The limited success of basic-education programmes addressed to children, adolescents and adults, and the significant achievements of teacher-education programmes, suggests that the most effective approach may lie in the inservice training both of teachers and of health workers and extension agents. AMREF and INADES-formation offer examples (Perraton forthcoming 22-30).
4. Explore telecentres. Just perhaps, the idea of a telecentre with public access to the internet may make social and educational sense. If the technology and costs are right then it might be possible to apply the lessons we have already learned about rural communication in the new context
5. Pursue the regional development of educational resources. The Commonwealth of Learning has begun to explore the regional development of teaching materials in science at junior secondary level. CIFFAD has begun to work regionally. Direct broadcasting satellites, for Africa and Latin America, may demand regional cooperation. Regional strength and variety may be a counter to northern homogeneity.
6. Use the technologies to strengthen junior secondary education. In many jurisdictions it is expanding, demands teachers who are not available, and addresses children who may by this stage be able to benefit from resource-based learning. There may, therefore, be scope to use similar methods and materials in and out of school, perhaps to establish links between schools and centres for out-of-school students on the lines being developed by the Indonesian Open School
7. Recapture radio. The privatisation of broadcasting has generally weakened or destroyed education's right of access to free production facilities and airtime. The other side of this coin is the development of small-scale community radio stations with possibilities for new kinds of alliance.

8 Apply the lessons we have learned. Many institutions are working sub-optimally and not applying knowledge that is available about effective educational techniques. We have begun to develop an action-research programme with allies overseas, working in both basic and higher education, to explore ways of doing this in a way that will yield local results as well as internationally usable results.

The eight are, of course, suggestions, neither an agenda nor a panacea. They have one feature in common. All spring from the scattered but solid evidence that, despite the dismal record over a quarter century, the combination of mass media and local support - the central and the local - can achieve educational results and therefore offer a route to empowerment.

© Hilary Perraton
August 1999

References

- Arger, G. 1990 'Distance education in the third world: critical analysis on the promise and the reality' *Open learning* 5,2 9-18
- Colclough, C. with Levin, K.M. 1993 *Educating all the children: strategies for primary education in the south*, Oxford: Clarendon
- Coombs, P. H. 1968 *The world educational crisis: a systems analysis*, New York: Oxford University Press
- Foster, P. 1965 *Education and social change in Ghana* London: Routledge
- Guy, R. 1992 'Distance education in Papua New Guinea: reflections on reality' *Open learning* 7, 1: 28-39
- Hornik, R. C. 1988 *Development communication*, New York: Longman
- Inter-Agency Commission 1990 *Meeting basic learning needs: a vision for the 1990s (Background document: World Conference on Education for All, Jomtien)* New York
- Jamison, D. T. and Lau L. J. 1982 *Farmer education and farm efficiency*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins
- MacBride, S. et al. 1980 *Many voices, one world*, Paris: Unesco
- Mukhopadhyay, M. 1994 'The unfolding of an open learning institution: the National Open School of India' in M. Mukhopadhyay and S. Phillips (ed.) *Open learning: selected experiences*, Vancouver: Commonwealth of Learning
- Murphy, P 1992 'Effectiveness of full-time second-level distance teaching in three African countries' in P. Murphy and A. Zhiri (ed.) *Distance education in anglophone Africa: experience with secondary education and teacher training*, Washington D.C.: World Bank
- 1993 'Costs of an alternative form of secondary-level education in Malawi' *Comparative education review* 37,2: 107-22
- Nyerere, J. K. 1973 *Freedom and development*, Dar es Salaam: Oxford University Press
- Perraton, H. 1984 *Costs and effects of mass media for adult basic education: a study in comparative evaluation*, (Unpublished University of London PhD thesis)
- 1993 (ed.) *Distance education for teacher training*, London: Routledge
- forthcoming *Open and distance learning in the developing world* London: Routledge
- Rogers, E. M. with Shoemaker, F. F. 1971 *Communication of innovations*, New York: Free Press
- Romain, R. I. and Armstrong, L. 1987 *Review of World Bank operations in nonformal education and training* Washington D.C.: Education and Training Department, World Bank
- Schramm, W.L. 1994 *Mass media and national development: the role of information in developing countries*, Stanford: Stanford University Press
- UNESCO 1998 *World education report*, Paris
- Watkins, K. 1999 *Education now: break the cycle of poverty*, Oxford: Oxfam