DEFINING NON-FORMAL & COMMUNITY EDUCATION

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Introduction
The purpose of this paper is to review the definitions of non-formal and community education contained in recent reports of official bodies with a view to identifying some of the sources of confusion.

Confusions over terminology and definitions in the field of 'adult education', continuing education', 'life-long learning', 'community education', 'community development', 'non-formal and informal education' and 'non-formal and informal learning' have a long history. These confusions can be explained in part by noting that all definitions are contextual: they serve specific social purposes within particular historical contexts. Thus for example the different definitions of nonformal learning and education advanced by people such as Colin Gunn (1986), Philip Coombs and his colleagues (1973 & 1974), and Tim Simkins (1977) can only be evaluated in the light of their social and political purposes. As Marvin Grandstaff points out, "...there is no single 'right' way to define the concept of non-formal education. Instead, definition must depend upon context..."(1978: 181)

In this paper I will deal with only three concepts: 'community education', 'non-formal education' and 'non-formal learning' and I will go back only as far as 1987 - to the publication of the He Tangata report(Interim Advisory Group on Non-formal Education, 1987).

The He Tangata Report of 1987
This report specified that: 'The essential element which distinguishes non-formal from formal education is that non-formal groups control their own learning independently of imposed curricula, of outside professionals or of institutions'.(p6) This definition begs a number of questions. For example, what is a 'non-formal group'? When does a group cease being non-formal and become a formal group or organisation or even an institution? Is the definition intended to include or exclude national organisations such as the WEA, Te Ataarangi and ARLA from the field of non-formal education? What is meant by 'control' and 'outside professional'? If for example the same courses or workshops on Nuclear power and the Pacific, Women's health issues, Fund raising, and Patriarchy, taught by the same tutors drawn for the most part from the local polytechnic and university, were offered in two different contexts, firstly as part of a school, polytechnic or university community studies programme, and secondly at the invitation of a number of community groups, are the former to count as formal education and the latter as non-formal education, or are they both to count as 'formal education' since they all involve 'outside professionals' in teaching, facilitating or controlling the programme? Are all paid (professional?) community educators and community workers to be precluded from participation and involvement in non-formal education? Or does this apply only to certain categories of professionals or paid workers e.g. those employed by educational institutions?

Clearly the definition was not a precise one and can only be understood in the light of the overall social purpose of the group which was to advance the argument that a very much greater proportion of the resources from Vote: Education should be allocated to community groups to organise and direct their own educational programmes and that these programmes should be recognised as a legitimate and important part of the educational system. However, in doing so, it may be argued that the group used a number of concepts and dichotomies which were ill-defined, confusing and misleading. Moreover, in its recommendations, the report confused the issue still further by using the term 'non-formal learning' in a way which suggests that it is synonymous
with 'non-formal education' and by implying that 'community education programmes within institutions' form a sub-set of the more general category called 'non-formal learning', thus negating its own previous definition. (p11)

When Community Learning Aotearoa/New Zealand (CLANZ) was established in 1988 the term 'non-formal learning' continued to be used in its terms of reference in a way which suggested that it was synonymous with 'non-formal education' as defined above. However its terms of reference do suggest clearly a difference between 'non-formal learning' and 'community education within institutions'. As one of its tasks CLANZ was responsible for advising 'the Minister of Education on all aspects of non-formal learning and also (my emphasis) on community education within institutions'(CLANZ, Information Paper, November 1989: 1).

The Hawke Report, 1988
The question of definition is next taken up in the Hawke report(1988). This report did not use the term 'non-formal learning'; instead it reverted to the use of the term 'nonformal education' and suggested that this could '...be defined as structured learning opportunities in which groups control their own learning independently of imposed curricula'(p96). It then went on to suggest that: 'These opportunities aim to assist an individual or group to take control of their own lives, to make informed choices, and to develop their own communities. At one extreme, the boundary with entirely individual activity is unclear. At the other, so is the boundary with "mainstream" activities by PCET institutions. Polytechnic community studies programmes and university and secondary school continuing education classes merge with nonformal education'(p96).

This definition reflects the spirit of the He Tangata report. It is however somewhat more precise and recognises and attempts to come to terms with a number of the ambiguities contained in the previous definition. In particular it does not preclude the possibility of professional and institutional involvement in 'nonformal education'. The key questions here relate to control over the curriculum, and the definition implies that, although there is a readily definable core of non-formal education activities, the boundaries between them and 'formal' education activities are not as clear-cut as was suggested in the previous report.

Community Learning Aotearoa/New Zealand (CLANZ)
In the meantime CLANZ, had developed its own definitions of 'community education' and 'non-formal learning' and, following the lead established in the He Tangata report, abandoned the term 'non-formal education' altogether. Other groups since that time have followed its example. CLANZ stated that: 'The term community education is used to describe those education activities for adults that give opportunities for social and personal development without usually being directed by a set curriculum. Activities take place through institutions as well as through a variety of community groups. Non-formal learning (on the other hand) is the process by which ideally community education takes place. It is characterised by a blurring of roles of learner and tutor (facilitator) and learner control of the process and content. It most commonly takes place outside of institutional control because of its flexible, developmental and ad hoc nature.' (CLANZ Information Paper, November 1989, pp3-4).

In certain respects the definition of 'community education' developed by CLANZ was similar to the definition of 'non-formal education' contained in the Hawke report. It is however very much broader and embraces equally institutional and non-institutional education, provided that it gives adults 'opportunities for personal and social development without usually being directed by a set curriculum.' Nevertheless it is a concise definition which establishes the core characteristics of those activities that count as community education activities, whilst acknowledging by implication that the boundaries are not clear-cut. Somewhat ironically, and perhaps unintentionally, through its use of the phrase 'personal and social development', its definition of 'community education' appears to focus attention more on individual development and less on community development than the definition of 'nonformal education' contained in the Hawke report.
CLANZ appears to have been the first official body to have attempted the difficult task of defining 'non-formal learning'. Through its definition CLANZ expresses its commitment to a particular philosophy or ideal of learning and teaching, which it argues is most commonly found outside institutions. This philosophy reflects a time-honoured tradition in the field of adult and community education. It is however but one of a number of such traditions (See for example J. L. Elias & S. Merriam, 1980, and Ian Shirley(Ed), 1982) and has come in for some criticism from within the field of community education itself, and especially from some of those who have been working with the poorest and most oppressed. Thus, it has been argued that under conditions of exploitation and oppression, the blurring of roles and the handing of control over process and content to learners are two strategies that may be used to disempower people and to maintain structures of inequality. Instead it has been argued that emphasis should be placed on establishing political solidarity with and commitment to the causes of oppressed people, and that greater attention should be paid to the processes of negotiation and the setting up of agreed decision-making procedures, and the need to achieve greater, rather than less, clarification of roles and responsibilities, always within a climate which respects the autonomy and dignity of all involved. (For some different perspectives and emphases see Bob Ashcroft & Keith Jackson, 1974; Paulo Freire, 1970; Gerri & Colin Kirkwood, 1989; and T. Lovett, C. Clarke & A. Kilmurray, 1983.)

A further difficulty with the definition arises out of its claim that the process it describes '...most commonly takes place outside of institutional control...' This is an empirical statement and may or may not be accurate. However unpublished studies undertaken in Christchurch since 1989 by groups of graduate students do raise some questions. Sixteen groups drawn from the community and from educational institutions have been studied. In this admittedly small and non-random sample it was found that 'non-formal learning' processes, as identified in the definition by CLANZ, characterised some of the groups drawn from educational institutions and that they did not characterise some of those from the community. Despite this, participants in each of the groups have expressed a high degree of satisfaction and enthusiasm for the group experience and for the ways in which the facilitators or tutors have organised the learning.

In the light of this it seems to me that there are real difficulties and indeed dangers in any definition which links programmes and activities organised by community groups and voluntary organisations with any single philosophy or strategy of learning. Any such definition will tend to be exclusive rather than inclusive, and it may well have the effect of restricting rather than expanding the options available to community groups in organising their own programmes if they wish to receive funding from government.

Learning for Life: One, February, 1989
The policy statement issued by government in February, 1989, under the title Learning for Life: One, presents a picture of some confusion within government on the nature of non-formal education/learning. At one point it states that, 'Non-formal learning - including community education programmes offered within institutions - is seen by the Government as a valuable educational opportunity for people who have found formal institutional programmes unsuited to their needs' (p7), and at another point it states that 'Non-formal education and training is recognised as a significant part of post-compulsory education and training' (20). No formal definition is however attempted, and one may interpret these statement as implying that the government wished to give its blessings to non-formal learning and non-formal education, but that it was not at all sure what they were, except to the extent that they implied some notion of second chance education for those who could not cope with the requirements of formal institutions!

The Reports of the Non-formal and Community Education Working Group, May and July, 1989
Following the publication of Learning for Life: One the government set up a large number of working groups to take its policies a stage further. In its draft report (1 May 1989) the Non-
formal and Community Education Working Group stated the following: 'Non-formal Learning refers to the way in which learning takes place. It is essentially learner directed and controlled with a blurring of learner/facilitator/tutor roles, accepting that everyone has knowledge and skills to share. Community education refers to programmes and activities in which people participate to develop their potential and that of their communities. Normally, such activities are not part of a full-time education programme nor do they lead to recognised educational qualifications. They are in general not specifically employment directed or focused.'(p14).

In its final report (7 July 1989) however both definitions were modified significantly and in the latter case broadened substantially. In this report, 'Non-formal Learning refers to a distinct learning process common in community organisations. It is essentially learner directed and controlled. Accepting that learners, tutors, facilitators, akonga, kaiwhakaako, kaiwhakarite, kai awhina all have knowledge and skills to share. This learning is purposeful, structured, and takes place in venues and at times selected by the learners'. The Working Group goes on to state that 'Community education is a general term that describes a range of delivery mechanisms and styles. Community education is delivered through community organisations, institutions and sections within institutions, where people participate to develop their potential, that of their communities and to address issues of social concern. Such activities can sometimes be part of a full time education programme and may lead to recognised educational qualifications. Community education involves such learning experiences as wananga, one to one tutoring, counselling and support, liaison, needs analysis, courses and workshops. Non-formal learning is an important component of community education. Community development is an enabling or empowering process that is inseparable from non-formal and community education'(p11).

These definitions appear to grow out of and attempt to clarify and/or elaborate upon the definitions first developed by CLANZ. The definitions contained in the draft report are brief and concise. The definition of 'non-formal learning' is similar to that provided by CLANZ but is not phrased in terms which suggest that it is an ideal. On the basis of this definition, then, it is perhaps easier to make a judgement as to whether any particular activity or programme meets the criteria necessary for it to count as 'non-formal learning'. Although the claim that non-formal learning takes place most commonly outside institutions is not made in this definition, it is nevertheless open to the same criticisms of restrictiveness that were levelled at CLANZ's definition. The definition of 'non-formal learning' given in the final report elaborates on that given in the draft. Inter alia, it states that the learning must be purposeful and structured (presumably to distinguish it from informal and incidental learning), and specifies some of the aspects that should be controlled by the learners e. g. venue and time. It may be argued that the phrase 'Non-formal learning refers to the way in which learning takes place' contained in the draft report is clearer than the phrase 'Non-formal learning refers to a distinct learning process...' contained in the final report. In addition it may be argued that the greater specificity of the latter definition has the effect of making it even more restrictive in its application.

Turning to the definitions of 'community education', the draft definition has some similarities with CLANZ's definition. However they emphasise different aspects. CLANZ's definition states that community education activities are not '... usually ... directed by a set curriculum'; the working group's definition makes no reference to curriculum. CLANZ's definition states that, 'Activities take place through institutions as well as through a variety of community groups'; the working group makes no reference to this. It may be argued that both of these factors weaken the working group's definition as compared with that of CLANZ. On the other hand the working group's reference to the role of community education in community development is stronger and clearer than that of CLANZ, and it is more specific in establishing (albeit in negative terms) other core attributes of community education i.e. that it is not normally part of a full-time education programme, that it does not normally lead to recognised educational qualifications, and that in general it is not specifically employment directed or focused. At the same time, through its use of words such as 'normally' and 'in general' the group makes it clear that the boundaries between community education and other forms of education and training are relatively open.
The definition of 'community education' contained in the working group's final report elaborates considerably on that given in the draft report. It builds on CLANZ's definition by stating explicitly that the term '... describes a range of delivery mechanisms and styles', and that it '... is delivered through community organisations, institutions and sections within institutions...' This had been left implicit in its draft report. However the use of such terms as 'delivery' in relation to community education may be criticised in that it implies that the services or activities are produced externally rather than being produced or generated internally by the participants or by a process of negotiation between educators and participants. Furthermore the use of such terms serves to reinforce the notion of education as a commodity.

The definition emphasises even more strongly than the draft report the link between community education and community development by claiming that, 'Community development ... is inseparable from nonformal and community education.' For the first time attention is drawn to what might be described as the role of community education in promoting active citizenship through its reference to people participating in community education '...to address issues of social concern.' Explicit reference is made to the fact that 'Non-formal learning is an important component of community education.' This had been implicit in its draft definition. In addition, for the first time, this definition identifies a range of activities or types of '... learning experiences (such) as wananga, one to one tutoring, counselling and support, liaison, needs analysis, courses and workshops' which are considered to be involved in community education. Finally, in at least one respect this definition appears to turn the draft definition on its head. Whereas the draft definition had stated that community education activities, 'Normally ... are not part of a full-time education programme nor do they lead to recognised educational qualifications', the final definition stated that, 'Such activities can sometimes be part of a full time education programme and may lead to recognised educational qualifications.'

Clearly this suggests that the two sets of definitions were designed to achieve two different purposes. Those provided in the draft report appear to be designed as working or operational definitions setting forth the central or core characteristics or attributes of non-formal and community education. By way of contrast, those contained in the final report (and especially the definition of community education) appear to be intended not only to add further central or core characteristics which had been left out of the draft definition, but also to educate and inform the government, key policy-makers and others on the breadth of activities that could count as 'non-formal and community education' and the pervasiveness of the field of community education. The working group appears to have been aware of this, since it specifically states that the definitions should not be used for statutory purposes.

**Learning for Life: Two, and Beyond**

Most of the key recommendations of the working group were accepted by government and incorporated in *Learning for Life: Two*, the second and more detailed statement of government policy published in August 1989. This document did not however include any further definitions of key concepts. The task of developing operational definitions was thus assigned to a Non-formal and Community Education Task Force. This task force (May 1990) developed the following definitions among others: *Formal Learning* refers to any purposefully organised learning process which is substantially controlled by the institution in or through which it is delivered. *Non-formal Learning* refers to any purposefully organised learning process which is intended to serve an identifiable group with specific learning objectives and which is substantially controlled by the participants and/or local community. *Informal Learning* refers to learning processes which are ongoing, pervasive and incidental (for example: learning via the media). *Community Education* refers to any purposefully organised learning process, the primary intention of which is community development and action'(pp12-13).

The definitions of formal and non-formal learning developed by the Task Force received the tentative endorsement of the Ministry of Education when they were included in a publication.
Education Terminology: A Users' Guide published by the Learning for Life Implementation Unit (June, 1990), while the definition of community education was broadened as follows. It was defined as: 'Any purposefully organised learning process, the primary intention of which is personal and/or community development and action.'(p5)

With reference to community education, the Task Force appears to have developed its own more focused definition without drawing on the work of the previous reports or on the work of CLANZ. Despite the undoubted strengths of this definition it is very much more restrictive than those previously developed. Evidence that this was recognised by the Ministry of Education is to be found in the broadening of the definition to include personal development as well as community development in the publication referred to above which was published only one month after the publication of the Task Force Report. By the end of 1990 and early 1991 CLANZ had developed further its own definition. In its Newsletter of December 1990 CLANZ defined community education as: 'Structured group learning activities chosen by adults for community, social, cultural, economic and/or personal development. Activities are part-time, usually short-term, not designed to make a profit for the provider and developed in association with local communities', and in a report in March 1991 this definition was modified slightly by the insertion of 'usually' before, instead of after 'part-time', thus allowing for the possibility that full-time programmes, presumably of a short-term nature, could be included (CLANZ, March 1991).

By December 1990 CLANZ had also modified its definition of non-formal learning. This it defined as '... the process by which community education often takes place. It is characterised by learner control of content, process and outcomes.'(CLANZ, 1990 & 1991) When we examine this definition alongside that contained in the Task Force Report (May 1990) and the Ministry publication of June 1990, it seems that there were major differences of interpretation. CLANZ, it seems, is clear that non-formal learning should be seen as a major part or sub-set or common process in the wider field of community education. If however I understand the Task Force correctly it is suggesting that there is no necessary relationship between the two concepts, or alternatively that community education may form a part or sub-set or specific form of non-formal learning.

Conclusion
When we come to review the definitions of community education developed by CLANZ and the Ministry of Education in 1990 and 1991 it seems that they are not incompatible. There are differences in emphasis. The Ministry's definition is more action-oriented and restrictive, and CLANZ's definition spells out a wider range of possible objectives. However, both definitions focus attention primarily (and in my view appropriately) on the purposes and nature of the learning activity, rather than on issues of organisational or institutional sponsorship.

However, when we turn to the most recent definitions of non-formal learning, and especially that used by CLANZ, it seems that a number of the same problems that were raised in relation to the earlier reports still remain. The notion of learner or participant or local community control is not a simple one. It is contextual and multi-dimensional. Greater or lesser degrees of control may be exercised by the participants over such aspects as the development of programme goals and objectives, and of the curriculum and content, the recruitment and selection of participants, the selection of formats, methods and learning resources, the appointment or election of facilitators or tutors, the choice of the form and nature of evaluation, etc. Control by learners or participants and/or the local community is not an either/or phenomenon. At one level learners always exercise some degree of control over the learning process, and at another level they never have total control of it. In this respect the definition developed by the Task Force and endorsed by the Ministry, which refers to 'substantial control', is very much more satisfactory than that developed by CLANZ.

Finally, it seems to me that the use of such terms as 'process', 'learning process', and indeed 'non-formal learning' itself, in this context is problematical. It appears that the main purposes in
developing these definitions were: to gain greater recognition for those purposefully organised learning activities and programmes that are organised and/or directed by voluntary organisations and community groups beyond the educational institutions; to establish the notion that these programmes and activities should be recognised as a legitimate and important part of the education system; and ultimately to secure for these programmes and activities a greater share of the state's educational resources.

If this is the case, it may be argued that the use of such terms as 'process', 'learning process', 'learner control' and 'non-formal learning' is unnecessary and confusing. The difficulty of identifying the extent to which learners control the learning process has already been referred to. It is simpler to identify who is organising and directing a learning activity or programme than it is to identify who is controlling a learning process.

It seems that the term 'non-formal education' is preferable to 'non-formal learning' as a descriptor of certain kinds of purposefully organised learning activities and programmes. At a pragmatic level it communicates a greater sense of legitimacy and is a term in common international currency (albeit used in a wider sense than that proposed here). I therefore suggest that the term 'non-formal learning' be abandoned as a key descriptor or definition in the arena of educational policy formation and administration and that it be replaced by the term 'non-formal education'. I suggest that this may be defined as follows: Non-formal education (which forms an important part of community education) refers to those purposely organised learning activities and programmes which are organised and directed by community groups and voluntary organisations independently of externally prescribed or imposed curricula or of control or direction by educational institutions.

References


