

# The Normative Foundations of Lifelong Education

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'Lifelong Education' is a term which is bandied about nowadays with equanimity and fashionable ease wherever educationalists of whatever kind get together for brainstorming sessions about educational problems or to discuss policy or strategies. But, more often than not, the ways in which it is used demonstrate radical limitations and even misconceptions in the minds of many of its users, who tend to misemploy it. Either it becomes for them a handy slogan, or else they use it in a manner which demonstrates its equivalence in their minds with certain limited areas of educational policy; usually adult educational or vocational retraining programmes. These equivalences are, however, both misleading and oversimplified; adult educational and vocational retraining programmes are only partial strategic elements within an all embracing policy blueprint for education. Underpinning this blueprint is a complex educational philosophy with a central humanistic core. At the same time, lifelong education concurrently presents itself as a pragmatic educational response to several observed problems and aspirations of a mankind living in a unique historical situation. The set of issues that represent the humanistic core of lifelong education all gyrate around a particular concept of 'universal' or 'generic' man, those representing the pragmatic justifications of lifelong education are concerned with 'concrete' man. It is with these issues and justifications that this paper is concerned.

Paul Lengrand, in his seminal book *An Introduction to Lifelong Education*, declares:

"The true subject of education is man in all his aspects, in the diversity of his situations and in the breadth of his responsibilities, in short, man as he really is."<sup>1</sup>

The same observation in a more extended and elaborated form is found in the Faure Commission report entitled *Learning to Be*, which has the status of a source book with educationalists working

within the perspectives of lifelong education:<sup>2</sup>

"Man, considered as the subject of education is, in a large measure, the universal man – the same at all times and in every place. However, the particular individual who becomes the object of a particular educational process is an eminently concrete being able to reconcile dialectically the two aspects of human nature in the course of his limited existence in time and place. . . . Every learner has his own history which cannot be confused with any other. His personality is determined, more and more so with age, by a complex of biological, psychological, geographical, sociological, economic, cultural and professional data which are different for each individual."<sup>3</sup>

From the point of view of the philosophy of lifelong education the fundamental task of education, as stated in the latter quote from the Faure report above, is to 'reconcile dialectically' the two aspects of human nature referred to, the 'concrete' and the 'universal'. It is well therefore to say something further about these two aspects and how they are elaborated in the same report. We can begin by re-quoting the observation that 'concrete man' is 'the particular individual who becomes the object of a particular educational process'. In other words he is the inhabitant of a determinate geographical space and of a particular span in time, the possessor of a distinct and distinctive on-growing stream of experiences and attitudes, the participant in a particular cultural milieu, the inheritor of an eventful and potentially meaningful past, the potential aspirant for and initiator of a challenging and purposeful future. About this picture of the 'concrete man' there should be no controversy, because the picture is a descriptive one. The concept of a 'universal man' lying inherent within each concrete individual is more difficult, and I propose to elaborate it by reference to two further quotes from the Faure report, wherein is indicated also how the dialectical nexus referred to

**Education is to 'reconcile dialectically' concrete and universal man.**



between the two component perspectives on man can be obtained. The first says:

“Individuals must be able to use the power inherent in consciousness through the agency of historical and group consciousness, through research, through preserving their authentic identity and, finally, through each individual’s feeling that he fully belongs to the entire species. In this way, the twin poles of the singular, which is irreducible, and the universal, comprising diversity within identity, will achieve expression. This age, which has been called that of the finite world, can only be the age of total man; that is to say, man entire and all of man.”<sup>4</sup>

What is universal, then, about the individual according to this point of view, is partly what he has inherited from history and from his community. At this level it can be explained historically and sociologically; what is universal is not the possession by man of some inherent potential ideal which seeks actualization and which is subject to metaphysical explanations, it consists in what he shares in historical and cultural inheritance both with the other members of his species and with the other members of his more localized community. But there are other levels of universal identity suggested in the report. In another place the report further emphasizes the fact of humanity’s universal biological need to be constantly over-reaching itself; this is true both of the general human species itself and of individuals within it. The report refers to man’s ‘permanent incompleteness’, his need to learn unceasingly in order to survive and evolve, his possession, at the same time, of ‘potentialities which may miscarry’ (which is why he needs education).<sup>5</sup> This biological argument is taken as a basic one for lifelong education. Finally there is also a certain universality at the psychological level:

“If there are permanent traits in the human psyche, perhaps the most prominent are man’s rejection of agonizing contradictions, his intolerance of excessive tensions, the individual’s striving for intellectual consistency, his search for happiness identified not with the mechanical satisfaction of appetite but with the concrete realization of potentialities, and with the idea of himself as one reconciled to his fate – *that of the complete man.*”<sup>6</sup>

In sum, this composite picture of man which is presented by the Faure report, indicates two levels of educational needs within him that, it can be argued, point inexorably towards an educational policy of lifelong education. Universal man, or rather the universal or generic component in man, with his permanent biological need to be constantly over-reaching himself, with a historical and cultural background with which he constantly needs to come to terms, and which at the same time,

properly assimilated and approached, offers him inexhaustable possibilities for creativity and development, with a psychological constitution which drives him consistently in the direction of aspirations that have to do with his own self-realization and identity and away from ‘agonizing contradiction’ and ‘excessive tensions’, must come to terms with concrete man, who, as we have said, is very much a creature of his times, and whose needs derive from the actualities of his current situation. This is the tension that education needs to resolve, the synthesis it needs to achieve, and it can do it, it is argued, only if it is an education ‘for life’ (in the temporal sense of the expression) and one that is intimately interrelated with life at all its levels. This picture of total man is already an elaborate one, but it needs to be rounded off if it is to be seen for what it is; an attempt to justify lifelong education.

What still needs to be rounded off, I feel, is an even further elaboration of our picture of concrete man. We need to fill him out with flesh. Concrete man, we have said, is man living in a particular determinate historical and temporal context. For us he is industrial and post-industrial man; man living out our current civilization. It is this type of person we should have in mind when we design our educational strategies, this type of person specifically. It is currently within the context of an industrial and post-industrial existence that one needs to search for a synthesis with the universal aspirations of man, which, we have said, are marked by his strivings towards self-realization. It is the potential sources of his alienation within his own existential context, those factors that can create the ‘agonizing contradictions’ and ‘excessive tensions’ referred to, as well as the potential sources of his advancement towards that target of self-realization, that have to be kept constantly in mind when we define our educational priorities.

The Faure report says that

nothing, to the present day, is comparable to the scientific-technological revolution in its consequences for men’s lives and more particularly men’s minds. The technological revolution it says, has simultaneously conquered the physical and the mental world with its immediate transmission of information over any distance, and its invention of increasingly perfected, rationalised, calculating machines.<sup>7</sup>

It draws attention in this way to the positive potentialities of the scientific-technological revolution which characterises the industrial, post-industrial context, for modern men’s lives and for the quality of their civilization. But there is another side to the same coin. This same scientific-technological revolution has created problems for these same men unknown to their ancestors in any previous age. Most fundamentally contemporary man is

**Universal man’s need to overreach himself.**

required to overcome what has variously been described as the most pervasive and intense existential and metaphysical problem of our times; the problem of rapid 'change' at all the different levels of his life, the physical, cultural, occupational or vocational, ideological, and so on. Enough has been written about this phenomenon elsewhere, and only passing reference to some of the more relevant problems it generates need be made here. Thus we know that the scientific-technological revolution has created an environment that is potentially and often actually, as incomprehensible and mystifying to modern man as nature is to the savage. It has created a situation wherein our knowledge and skills become swiftly dated or even obsolescent, with radical consequences for the character of jobs, vocations, professions and naturally, for the individuals who occupy them. It has created levels of abstraction and fragmentation, crises in ideologies and cultural beliefs that have reached to the deepest levels of man's faith and knowledge and that threaten his very understanding of his life and his sense of identity.

To return to our question: How can education help achieve the successful synthesis between the twin aspects of personhood described, given the problems and aspirations just outlined? The response of lifelong education is the *autonomous*, or *self-directed* learner. Given the aspirations of universal man towards self-realization taken together with the problems of concrete man to achieve it in a world dominated by the phenomenon of change, the fundamental aim of education, it is asserted, must be to create persons who have the motivation backed by the skills and opportunities to take charge of their own learning and to pursue it throughout their lives; an educational philosophy which is partial and static is disastrous for modern man.

The implications of this position can be radical indeed, both from an educational and from a socio-cultural and political viewpoint. Let us begin with the conditions of motivation and skills. The philosophy of lifelong education asserts that the task of the school, the traditional place where education takes place, can no longer be to produce the 'educated person', the educationally *finished* product, the person who, having completed his schooling can then get on with the business of 'life' falling back constantly and confidently on the stock of knowledge and skills acquired then, for this cannot be a coherent ambition in our day and age. It must be, on the contrary, to produce the 'educable person'; the person who can, and more important wants, because he sees its relevance, to get on with his education beyond the period of his schooling. The school must set its tasks within this perspective and must therefore see its role differently as a

preparation for education. This is because in the modern context a vast amount of a person's learning, in adulthood in particular, will have to take place through informal and non-formal channels, and will therefore require skills of a particular sort; skills which will themselves be evidence of the learner's autonomy. Moreover the motivation to learn in adulthood is vital and needs to be inculcated in the school, because it may be the very condition for the person's very survival in that same context.

As far as the opportunities for learning are concerned the philosophy of lifelong education takes up a very precise position. Suchodolski states,

"In philosophical terms, one might say that the indispensable condition for the realization of the programme of lifelong education is to overcome alienation. Lifelong education can only become a reality in surroundings that are neither hostile nor indifferent."<sup>8</sup>

In the Faure report and elsewhere it is frequently emphasized that the programme of lifelong education is only properly feasible in a 'learning society'; the 'learning society' ought to be the crowning goal of the future both from an educational and from a socio-cultural and political point of view. As Suchodolski points out, the first condition for the realization of such a society is that the problem of alienation be overcome, and this can happen only if the political basis of the 'learning society' is 'democratic'. The Faure report argues strongly that "strong support must be given to democracy as the only system compatible with progress and individual dignity."<sup>9</sup> But the same report continues to say that "the concept of democracy itself must be developed for it can no longer be limited to a minimum of juridical guarantees." Even earlier on in the report we read:

"What is known as formal democracy - which it would be wrong to deride, for it marked great progress - has become obsolete. The delegation of authority for a fixed period had and still has the advantage of protecting the citizen from the arbitrary exercise of power and of providing him with the minimum of juridical guarantees. But it is not capable of providing him with an adequate share of the benefits of expansion or with the possibility of influencing his own fate in a world of flux and change; nor does it allow him to develop his potential to the best advantage"<sup>10</sup>

The 'learning society' then, which is at the service of the autonomous individual learner, will enable men to realize both their concrete needs and the universal potentialities of their nature only if it is free from alienation and democratic. It will therefore need to be structured in a manner which is egalitarian in a meaningful way, in terms of equal

access to educational resources, and which will allow man to 'influence his own fate in a world of flux and change', in order to 'develop his potential as a person'; in other words it will be structured so as to educate him for autonomy. It must in addition overcome the challenge of technology at both the cultural and the political level by mobilizing itself educationally and by creating for itself a culture which writers define as one of 'scientific-humanism'.

Thus, organizationally, the 'learning society' will be underpinned by two important concepts of policy; those of *vertical* and *horizontal* integration, both aimed to achieve the most coherent mobilization of the learning resources of society within the all-embracing perspective of an education for life. In the first sense, a vertical integration of educational resources concerns the learning strategy for individuals within the perspective of lifelong education, and it means the organization of a person's learning life in such a way that it will proceed by stages throughout his lifespan but in such a way that at the same time the stages will cohere with each other to form a totality of experiences and a totality of vision. From this point of view society must organise itself in such a way as will provide the necessary provisions, and this leads us on to the other concept, that of 'horizontal integration'. The concept of 'horizontal integration' focuses not on the individual but on society; the integration it refers to rather than being that of the different stages in the individual person's learning life, is that of the different learning resources available to a society. According to the principle of 'horizontal integration', the 'learning society' must organize itself educationally in a manner that exploits or maximizes all the learning resources available to it. This means that it must look beyond the school and into the general community. This means, again, that rather than remaining the school's monopoly education in a 'learning society' becomes the joint responsibility of all those institutions with which individuals come into contact throughout their lives; their place of work, their trade union, their social club, political party etc. These need to be meaningfully integrated in a joint strategy in which the whole community participates, according to the principle of 'horizontal integration', so that the educational resources of the 'learning society' be they what they are, may be disposed in the best possible manner to service the individual's needs as an autonomous lifelong learner.

On the other hand the culture of the 'learning society', as has already been said, will be one of 'scientific-humanism'. Such a culture will be *humanistic* in the sense that it is concerned mainly with man and his welfare as an end in itself, and it will be *scientific* in that it recognizes that this welfare must be defined by the continuing new contributions of science to the field of man's own know-

ledge about himself and the world. In a society moved by such a culture it is evident that a major curricular aim becomes that of furnishing all its members with a solid scientific background. This will be necessary to overcome the threat of alienation and to guarantee individual freedom, for a democratic learning society with a scientific and technological base would have to guard itself against the danger of a technocratic elite taking over the reins of power on the basis of its own authority and enterprise, and that of the total mystification of the masses.

We have spoken briefly about the autonomous learner and the kind of society he requires to function as such and to fulfil his universal aspirations and satisfy his concrete needs as a person living in a determinate temporal and cultural context. Finally the Faure report also makes reference in its individualistic approach, to the additional and limiting condition that should accompany autonomy; I am referring to *responsibility*. Lengrand says:

"... for the right to be man is complemented by the duty to be man, and this means an acceptance of responsibility: the obligation to be oneself; to be responsible for one's thoughts, judgements and emotions; to be responsible for what one accepts and what one refuses."<sup>11</sup>

Lengrand calls this responsibility 'fearful'; even more so since it is a condition which man will inevitably face in our times, since freedom is forced upon man by his very need in coping with constant change, to make choices of all kinds, some even ethical.

In conclusion, then, the philosophy of lifelong education is centred upon a certain view of human personality (the one described in this paper), and a conviction that education is all about fulfilling the normative aspects of this view. In doing so it further projects proposals about the sort of society which would be supportive of its view with the ensuing educational implications. It is evident that the aim of this paper has been to bring the issues together and press them to the foreground, where they are in a better position to be realized and studied at greater depth.

## The 'learning society'.

## Scientific-humanism.

1. Paul Lengrand, *An Introduction to Lifelong Education*, London, Croom Helm, 1975.
2. Edgar Faure *et al.*, *Learning to Be*, London, Harrap, 1972.
3. *Ibid*, p. 157.
4. *Ibid*, xxxix.
5. *Ibid*, p. 157-158.
6. *Ibid*, p. 159.
7. *Ibid*, p. xxi-xxvii.
8. B. Suchololski, 'Lifelong Education — Some Philosophical Aspects' p. 11 in R.H. Dave (led). *Foundations of Lifelong Education*, Pergamon Press, 1976.
9. Faure, p. xxvi.
10. *Ibid*, p. xxiv.
11. *Op. cit.*, p. 37.