Work/Education Relationships in Malta and the Concept of Lifelong Education

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Education, Work and Ideology

The matter of the proper relationship of education to work is a complex one because it involves different possible permutations and because the socio-political and ideological stakes involved are usually high. The polar edges of the spectrum of possibilities are: (a) that there is *no* proper relationship between education and work; that education is for something else, *not for work*, (b) that education is *for work*, that the requirements of the labour market should primarily determine what is taught. For the sake of convenience one can label the first a theory of classical liberalism (underpinned by the view that education has to do with the transmission of knowledge which is intrinsically valuable), and the second a theory of utilitarianism or instrumentalism.

Both theories can be criticised extensively from different points of view. The classical liberal theory of education is criticised by Marxists as classist in different ways; in its emphasis on the cognitive (a criticism which is shared also by many non-Marxists), and on the centrality of liberal and middle class values which it projects and hides behind the claim that they are 'intrinsically valuable'. The liberal theory sidelines the practical and scorns the educational and cultural value of the manual. The only relevant form of work it is indirectly related to is the intellectual. Classical liberal theorists implicitly, and sometimes also explicitly, admit that theirs is an elitist formulation of education (though they would define the elitism as meritocratic rather than classist) since it does not lie within the reach of all given the intellectual demands that it makes, while its critics accuse it of discriminating against the culture of the working class.

Utilitarianism, on the other hand, is criticised because of its narrowness. If the classical liberal theorist's focus on the mental ignores other important aspects of the human personality and other important needs of the human person, the same can be said for the utilitarian's focus on the economic. Moreover utilitarianism, like classical liberalism, is also open to political judgement. From this point of view it can be criticised on the basis of its inherent conservatism, and this consideration becomes particularly serious when it is the proposed policy within political and economic systems that are morally objectionable; there can be no moral justification for a narrowly conceived policy of 'training for work' if the systems of production are exploitative and manipulative and part of a repressive political system, because the policy merely becomes an agent for the domestication of the work-force. Finally, utilitarianism views the relationship between education and work from the 'wrong' end. It asks *first*, what are the economic and industrial 'realities' of the nation, it then defines a programme of training which responds as efficiently as possible to these realities; the individual receives secondary or no consideration in the programme, he/she is viewed as 'a worker' not as a person. The 'right' end is the opposite one; asking first what should be the proper (moral) relationship between the individual and work, educating according to this analysis *and* setting up productive systems that respond to it.

The most significant theoretical contribution towards an approach of this kind is probably Marx's. The most central element of Marx's discussion of human nature was the human person's *capacity to produce*. Marx continually refers to human production as 'life activity', as the vital element in individual self-realization. In 'Alienated Labour' he contrasts human with animal production in the sense that animals produce under the domination of immediate physical need while truly human production is both *concious* and *free*, or creative. Free and conscious production was for Marx the characteristic activity of humanity, its 'species-being', and this understanding of production applies not only to the means of subsistence (work as it is usually understood) but to the entire life-activity of human beings in the world. Through the act of production, in fact, Marx says, human beings 'objectify' the world, they appropriate it for themselves and interpret it. The act of production is therefore the way in which human beings form their consciousness. Within this analysis, as is well known, Marx introduced another concept which he used to describe the absence of these conditions within capitalist modes of production; the concept of 'alienation'. The worker is alienated from his product within capitalist modes of production: because his relationship with the product lacks understanding, choice and creativity on his part, he merely produces mechanically what is indicated to him; and because he has no say as to how the product is eventually disposed of; not only, his labour, by adding to the wealth and power of the system contemporaneously helps to contribute towards his own greater enslavement; he is alienated from the market in another sense in which he himself becomes a mere commodity; and finally, he is alienated from his fellows - from his bosses with whom his relationship is merely mercenary, and from his fellow workers through the isolation and absence of communication that are characteristic of systems of production like the production line.

Marx's is, in fact, a powerful analysis with rich educational implications. But before these can be

worked out fully and assessed against the claims of classical liberalism and of utilitarianism one needs to establish the educational context of the analysis which is, as the title of this paper indicates, the conception of education as a lifelong process and it is to this context that I next turn.

A Lifelong Education Analysis

A lot of different meanings are attributed to the term lifelong education. Mine is just one understanding of it; that which is held by the movement which has hitherto gravitated mainly around UNESCO, which includes writers like Gelpi, Faure, Dave, Lengrand, Cropley, Suchodolski, etc., and to which I subscribe. This understanding has crystallised mainly through the publications of these writers and through different reports and projects (of which the most influential has been the Faure report, *Learning to be*, Harrap, 1972). Dave attempted to capture it in his 'concept characteristics of lifelong education' (Dave, R.H. *Reflections on Lifelong Education and the School,* U.I.E. Monograph, 1975), and Cropley in *Lifelong Education: a stocktaking* (U.I.E. Monograph, 1979), attempts that are critically assessed in my own *Philosophy of Lifelong Education* (Croom Helm, 1987) which also attempts a synthesis of the different views and breaks new grounds.

According to my understanding of lifelong education: (1) the concept implies the complete re-conceptualizing of education as a lifelong process (2) that education and 'life' must be so interrelated that each draws upon the other; (3) that the kind of learning constituent of education includes not merely formal but also informal and non-formal learning; (4) that education must be of the whole person and that it must be a process of liberation and growth; (5) that the formal aspect of lifelong education, that obtained through schooling or under the guidance of teachers or educators should have the learner's self-direction or autonomous learning as its goal.

Principles (2) and (4) reject the view that education is *not* for work as absolutely as they reject the opposite view that education is *for* work in its utilitarian sense. Paul Lengrand in his important book *An Introduction to Lifelong Education* (1975) proposes that work be considered a part of culture, an important part of culture. For this to happen, he argues, our concept of culture needs itself to be radically changed; we must move from what he calls a 'geographical' conception of culture to one which is personalised. Within the 'geographical' concept of culture, culture is a 'a self-contained domain comprising the sum total of knowledge accumulated over the centuries'. (p. 13) As a domain one has the option of entering or staying outside, of occupying more or less of its territory, or none at all. The 'geographical' conception of culture divides the world into the cultural rich and the cultural poor, the privileged and the victims, the initiates and the uninitiated. Constrasting with it is the personalized conception of culture which locates culture *within the individual*, where 'A man's culture is the sum total of efforts and experiences through which he has become steadily more himself'. (p. 52) Within this personalised conception of culture each person becomes his own cultural project, and this is what education is all about, making this possible.

In brief, the view that education is of the 'whole person' implies that work, as an intrinsic part of every individual's life experience, is a primary source of concern for the educator. On the other hand work is not the whole of the individual's life experiences, and there are arguments and considerations to sustain the view that it should not be. Lengrand suggests how work should be held in relation to life, namely as part of the individual's personalised cultural project. But if we consider the individual personality ideally as an *integrated* whole than in each case, for every person, we must consider the implications of having to integrate his work experience with the other components of his culture. We have to consider, in other words, that the worker is not merely a worker but several things else besides, depending on his personality and background and we have to find ways to help each to integrate work with these other things in the course of his continuing education. This is in line with the Marxian viewpoint: Classical liberal education on the other hand contrasts with it by placing work *outside* culture and therefore outside education, while utilitarianism errs in ignoring the cultural aspect of work and in the process also the other aspects of the worker's personality. Both may, in some sense, be viewed as philosophies of alienation, but I am not going to press this point further. Instead I shall dwell briefly on the other principles of lifelong education outlined above and consider how they affect the relationship between education and work. Beginning with (1), reconceptualizing education as a lifelong process requires, lifelong education theorists have argued, holding a unitary view of education both in terms of its personal dimension, alluded to in the previous paragraph and captured by lifelong education theorists through the concept of the 'vertical integration' of the learner's educative experiences, and in terms of its social dimension through the 'horizontal integration' of the different potential educative agencies with which the individual comes into contact during his life.

If we build the work component into these two concepts we can see that they imply: (1) that the work experience should be positively integrated with all of the individual's other positive life experiences as part of his ongoing growth, something that is impossible, as Marx argued, unless the work situation, the productive process of which the individual forms part is itself an educative experience; (2) that the workplace, besides itself being an educative agency and viewing itself as such, should also coordinate its efforts with other agencies outside, the formal educational system, 'cultural' organizations, trade unions etc., so that the integration proposed in (1) is achieved for its workers (for instance through a creative use of educational leave); (3) that the school and formal education in general should note the implications of these processes for themselves and begin the process described in (1) as early as possible by building the concept of work positively into the consciousness of the learner as something potentially creative and as an essential aspect of one's self-fulfilment.

Unfortunately, as things stand in fact, in Malta as in other parts of the world a vast majority of workers, particularly those in the industrial or bureaucratic sectors of the economy, are still in the situation of alienation described by Marx; certainly their work experience satisfies none of the requirements described above. These belong mainly to the category of manual labourers but extend also to some of the skilled jobs. For these workers work is not education, it is toil. Its quality is at odds with the values projected by the liberal notion of education and it therefore enjoys a low social estimate and prestige, and this conflict is brought out, as Roy Edgley points out (1980, p. 6), by its general characterization as 'mindless' and 'mechanical', which is what it very often is. Nor has the recent rapid growth in technology produced the much promised 'liberation of the worker'.

I think it would be accurate to say that before the beginning of the 1971 Labour administration there was no sensitization at all in Malta to the problem of education in relation to labour. The outlook on education was, as one would expect given the country's long relationship with Britain, liberal. Since 1971 Labour governments sought to change this through socio-political and educational initiatives that have gone against the grain of this liberal tradition. How are these initiatives to be evaluated? This will be the question I will take up in the remaining sections of the paper.

The Maltese Context

Historically, the commonest way of viewing the relation between education and work in Malta has been to view the former as a preparation for the latter. Indeed it is hardly an exaggeration to state that most people in Malta have regarded education in the past basically as a preparation for work and have tended to gauge its value accordingly. This is not to say that people were not sensitive to other values like self-development, socialization, academic excellence and so on, but the main consideration has always been the value of education for procuring work. This has led to some tacit popular assumptions that have received wide circulation: (1) that education normally stops the minute you leave school and start working; (2) that whatever further education workers may need is all of a vocational kind relating to promotion opportunities, greater on-the-job efficiency, retraining etc.

With regards to the first assumption things have changed somewhat over the past few years as the concept of lifelong education has begun to filter through. But the side-effect of this very process has arguably been the consolidation among many of the second assumption, since the growing sensitivity to the need for lifelong education has arisen mainly from the perceived effect on the world of work and production of the rapid developments in technology that have forced the industrial world to re-assess its methods and programmes, contemporaneously creating new pressures to learn for those within. Thus, the concept of lifelong education has come to be linked in many minds with the growing need and demand for vocational and professional programmes for workers that will help them to update their knowledge and skill continuously in order to come to terms with the new technologies and, possibly, entirely new jobs. In other words the view that education is for work has, indirectly been strengthened.

Does this outcome conflict with the intentions of the more direct socio-political and educational initiatives engaged in by the Labour governments? It is tempting to reply no without any further reflection because during the time they were launched and after, different government spokesman explicitly stated that the government was adopting a utilitarian philosophy with regards to its educational policy, and utilitarianism is, as we have seen, the extreme and literal sense of the 'education is for work' formula. Also, there was no mistaking the intentions behind the newly introduced trade schools, to be followed by the creation of junior craft centres, extended skills schemes, the new drift in technical education, and a school for agriculture. Yet this reply would be too simplistic, for it is possible to read at least some initial theoretical ambiguity into the attitude of the Labour governments towards the general relationship education/work notwithstanding, though it is my theory that this ambiguity was gradually worn away by the opposition of the lingering liberal paradigm in people's mentality.

In 1974 the first clause of the newly introduced republican constitution declared that Malta is a republic built on work. The object of the clause was partly at least ideological: to give work a new standing within the cultural consciousness of the people. The value of work, particularly the manual and vocational, was further emphasised in political speeches and government statements and declarations. Unfortunately, nearly contemporaneously, the idea was promoted, mainly through the speeches of prime minister Mintoff, that a dichotomous relationship exists between 'practical' and 'theoretical' knowledge with the former being more valuable. This was a distortion of the proper dialectical relationship between the two that could only be read as an attempt to redress the current social and educational bias in favour of the theoretical. But, in any case, it did irreparable harm and eventually prepared the way for the distortions of the reforms in tertiary education in 1976 which led to the abolition of all but the vocation-orientated faculties at the university. The other interesting move in this early part of the Labour administration was the initiation at about the same time of 'courses in culture' for the recently constituted labour corps. The courses collapsed nearly immediately because the workers complained about being forced to attend them in their free time, but the initiative itself is eloquent in its implications.

In the industrial sector the Labour government nearly immediately, initiated a process of workers' participation and ownership, to be followed by a system of workers' committees in government departments and places of work, and the system of workers' representatives (worker directors) on the boards of directors of parastatal and government controlled agencies. These were important positive steps since informal learning through participation has enormous educational potential, while the act of participating itself is a vital counter to alienation, as thinkers as diverse in outlook as Rousseau, Marx, Mill and Dewey have pointed out. There is no available published assessment of these particular initiatives but it is relevant to point out that after the initial outburst things cooled down considerably. There was no significant expansion of the programme, on the contrary there was some retraction (the workers' committees were discontinued) and a lot of distortion of its initial purposes.

A more direct educational consequence, connected with these industrial initiatives was the setting up at The University of Malta of a Workers' Participation Development Centre (the WPDC) with the twin purposes of monitoring the advance of workers' participation in the industrial sector and educating workers for participation. From the latter point of view the Centre has concentrated mainly on organizing different courses with an orientation towards the Social Sciences and in the skills of effective participation, leadership and mangement. There have also been other initiatives emanating from the growing consciousness over these years of the need for workers' education from the trade unions and from organizations like MAS (the Social Action Movement, with close ties with the Catholic Church) and GEM (the Ġuze Ellul Mercer Foundation, affiliated with the 'Labour Movement'). These run courses of a mainly formal nature, again with a predeliction for the Social Sciences. The unions contribute towards the funding of the WPDC which also regularly runs courses on their behalf.

The work on behalf of workers' education that is being done by these organizations is no doubt valuable and important, one could add to them the extra-mural courses run by the university though these mainly require a degree of academic qualification and are therefore outside the reach of many workers. The most important initiatives, in a sense, appear to be those taken by the WPDC through their courses in participation skills and leadership, the others appear to be adopting the more conventional approach providing formal 'enrichment' courses for the more 'educated' workers. The WPDC is also doing this, but, in addition, it is also furnishing the other component of the ideal mutual relationship between learning *through* participating and learning *for* participation. There is, nonetheless, a third vital component of the ideal relationship between education and work as identified by Marx, which is neglected by this analysis and is beyond the control of these educative agencies. This is the educational value of the work itself. If the work-experience at the place of work continues to be negative because of the implementation of alienating productive systems, then the value of the other two components is extremely relative. Workers' participation, in effect, is self-actualizing only if all three components are present.

The worker-student scheme was the Labour government's most dramatic innovation in the educational system aimed at creating a synthesis between education and work. When it was first introduced in 1976 it was described as having several ideological goals, namely: to facilitate access to the university of working class students by giving them a wage; to facilitate access to the university of workers already on the job; to break the dependence of students on their families for economic maintenance, to introduce university students as early as possible to the culture and experience of work; to render tertiary education in Malta more relevant to the world of production and to the emerging economic and social needs of the country. I am going to leave aside in this brief analysis of the scheme the first two of these goals which are purely social and economic and have no relation to education, and will turn, to the other two

where the relation clearly does exist and where controversy has been most rife.

The principle that tertiary education should be relevant to the world of work or production and directly related to the emerging economic and social needs of the country was translated, as was indicated earlier, into a utilitarian or 'functionalist' education philosophy. Utility became the university's declared policy. There was declared to be no place for the Science and Humanities Faculties, and whatever elements of the disciplines they included were to be taught were only to be incidental to, or part of the servicing of the vocational and professional courses. There was, in short, a total abnegation of liberal educational principles and values. It hardly needs saying that these moves were fiercely contested not only by the existing university itself but by many sectors and institutions within the Maltese society. The principle that university students should be introduced immediately to the culture and experience of work was controversial also, but in a different way. Some held to the classical liberal position of separating education completely from work, not necessarily on ideological grounds but because they believed that the work would be a hindrance to 'education'. Others held that the introduction of the work component into the course had important practical value; it enabled students to see the relevance of their theoretical studies to their later working life and made for more informed theory. The government's own position was ambiguous at first. The principle that the work experience is of equal value to the academic was often stated, and is implied by the fact that the year was to be divided equally for the student between the two components: a work phase and a study phase, but what was to be the relationship between the components? This was the crucial question.

At the beginning it appeared that it was to be a cultural one in line with the Labour Party's ideological principle of closing the social gap between the intellectual world and the world of work, especially of manual labour. So the early message seemed to be that the work could, and ideally should, *not* be related to the academic course, and that it should enable the student to experience different kinds and levels of work outside his area of specialization. But this approach was resisted from the very beginning and never gained any real foothold on the system. Instead the assumption grew steadily, until it eventually prevailed even with the government, that the work component of the course should be so related to the academic component as to be directly relevant to it. Very recently the Standing Committee of the Commission for the Development of Higher Education was reported to have declared that 'Attention is expected to be focused on efforts aimed at a more effective integration than has so far been the case of academic curricula and work experience; at a more rigorous assessment of the students' work phases ...; and at deeper and continuing contacts between faculties and students throughout the work phase.'

Conclusions

There are two things that must be considered when evaluating the relation between lifelong education and work. The first is whether work is itself an educative experience; whether it is part of the individual's growing self-realization over time,vertically integrated with his other positive educative experiences. The second is whether the workplace enters into a horizontal synthesis with the other educative agencies outside it; whether it is collaborating with and utilizing the resources of formal educational agencies and other non-formal agencies to the advantage of its members. It is not difficult to see which educational philosophy these considerations correspond with; they are certainly alien both to classical liberalism and to utilitarianism and fit better within a species of humanism to which Marx's analysis described in earlier pages is clearly a positive contribution.

I have described the major state initiatives in Malta in the political, industrial and formal educational field, over the past decade and a half or so to create a new synthesis between education and work. Their history has revealed ambiguity and uncertainty leading to changes of direction or outright abandonment. 'Cultural' courses for workers were short-lived, workers' participation has long stagnated, the cultural and ideological purposes of the worker-student scheme appeared to have hardened towards utilitarianism, like the trade schools and the other centres for industrial training. But, at the university at least, utilitarianism had appeared to be in retreat, and we were told that 'the stage has now been reached when ongoing worker-student courses should be supplemented by degree coursers in arts and science that will be more liberal in their outlook and less tailored to meet specific professional careers and vocational skills.'* The different educational reforms and the other initiatives of the government to destroy the old liberalism failed because liberal academic values continue to dominate the mentalities of politicians, administrators and social leaders within the ranks of the Labour Party itself.

On the other hand the initiatives of the Labour governments were instrumental in raising the necessary consciousness to the need of viewing the relation of education with work as *a* problem. The

failure has mainly been that of projecting it in its cultural dimensions as a human problem not merely a vocational one. What is needed now is a growth in awareness and commitment towards the kind of synthesis described in the opening paragraph of this section. Workers' participation is a vital element within it, and the WPDC's support of the process at the university is essential to it and should be expanded together with the process. The other initiatives by trade unions, GEM, MAS, and others are also important though the formal nature of the courses they organize and the nature of the courses themselves limit their efficiency and scope within the framework of the synthesis and should be reassessed for this reason. Workers should be exposed to the values of liberal education, but these should not be foisted upon them as 'education'. The main thing is that these values integrate with the values of work and active participation and that these features find their articulation within the growing personality of the individual.

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