

# CULTURE, PERSONALITY AND EDUCATION

*Mark Braham*

One of the essential problem areas in the social foundations of education is that of the relationships between Culture, Personality and Education. That there are very definite relationships is, of course, unquestionable. But what these relationships can, or should be, is always open to question. They are the concern of the present discussion.

## I

First, three definitions: Culture, Personality and Education. By *Culture*, I understand the shared ways of believing, behaving and thinking common to a group of human beings within a particular environment and maintained over time.

By *Personality*, I understand the individual human unit as such, a nexus of genotypic and phenotypic traits, tendencies, dispositions and capacities engendered, repressed, modified or qualified by the particular cultural conditions in which he exists and with which he interacts.

By *Education*, I understand the processes of guidance and instruction through which successive generations of human young are: (a) integrated into their culture (enculturation), (b) helped to develop their potentialities and capabilities and become self-aware, (c) taught to apply and contribute their knowledge, understandings and abilities to their culture, and (d) taught to transcend themselves and their culture and contribute to the world. Transcendence is not

taken to mean personal or cultural negation or denial, but is regarded as the most positive kind of self and cultural affirmation, a contributive extension of self and culture into a wider environment. This generally depends on the achievement of a high degree of maturity.

Additionally, I should note the place of the school as a culturally developed center for instructing and guiding in the educational categories listed above. To the extent that the schools contribute to individual and cultural development, they are educative. To the extent that they repress, distort, or even destroy individual and cultural development, they are mis- or non-educative. Schools, therefore, are purportedly, but not always, educational institutions.

Schools and cultures are inseparable. Like Mary and her lamb, wherever the culture goes, the schools go trailing after. If the general tendencies of the culture are future-oriented, the schools are rapidly called upon to fulfill the culture's new demands. If the general tendencies of the culture are conservative, the schools will likewise be conservative, working possibly to strengthen or repair weaknesses in the prevailing culture structure, but providing little for change and progress. And in cultures where too much education is regarded as harmful to the existence of the status quo, schooling will be limited accordingly. Whatever the goals and aspirations or limitations that a culture accepts for itself and its progeny, the schools will accept them in their own programs and practices. It has been traditional that the schools are handmaidens of, and subservient to, the dominant interests in the culture; he who pays the piper still calls the tune.

There are many reasons why there is such a close rapport between culture and school and many reasons why there should be such rapport. The continual question, however, is whether there should always be this kind of rapport. Should the schools always be subservient to the dominant interests in the culture?

## II

Schooling enters the human situation where instinct is transcended and parents are increasingly surpassed as agents in the development of human life. Nature has left the human infant with the greatest deficiency of instinctive adaptive patterns of any known life forms. Consequently, the human infant more than any other kind of offspring must learn in order to live and must go through an extended period of postnatal nurture and training in order to

become stabilized in his environment and achieve some modicum of independent functioning. Taken in a naturalistic perspective, education is not merely a cultural activity, but has a biological function as well.

The biological function of education, which is to take up where instinct has left off in the course of human development, takes us beyond culture as the sole criterion for our educative activities and introduces a second element into our thought, that of evolution. We are to understand from biology that evolution has by no means ceased, but that it has been increasingly appearing on psycho-social rather than on biophysical levels. In man, at least, evolution can be understood as the continual, if not always smooth or unbroken, transition from instinct to intelligence, and from minimally differentiated and diffuse to highly coordinated and complex intellectual functioning. This is a process that is still continuing, and man with his multiplex and adaptive mind represents the growing tip of the tree of life.

In *The Phenomenon of Man*, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin quotes Julian Huxley's somewhat poetic but serious suggestion, "Man discovers that *he is nothing else than evolution become conscious of itself.*"<sup>1</sup> But more pointed perhaps is Huxley's statement that evolution

. . . is a self-maintaining, self-transforming, and self-transcending process, directional in time, and therefore irreversible, which in turn generates ever fresh novelty, more complex organization, higher levels of awareness, and increasingly conscious mental activity.<sup>2</sup>

From the standpoint of culture, we find that there is a consonance between "increasingly conscious mental activity" and cultural complexity such that cultural complexity can be shown to be derived from and, in a cybernetic sense, to give rise to the increasingly conscious mental activity — or rate of cognitive complexity — of its members.

In this perspective, as cultures become more complex, their requirements for living are increased, and these in turn require an extension of education, which in its turn facilitates mental activity and the development of intelligence. Thus, through the medium of education, intellectual and cultural evolution go hand in hand. Education thereby serves the biological function of enabling men to overcome their inherent deficiency in instinctive adaptive pat-

terns by helping them to learn in order to live, and it serves the anthropological function of being the means through which cultures assure their own survival and continuity by transmitting their patterns, beliefs, values and activities to their ensuing generations.

Following Huxley, we may note that "Psycho-social evolution — human evolution for short — operates by cultural transmission."<sup>3</sup> Or following Waddington,<sup>4</sup> we note that evolution in the human phase proceeds through socio-genesis; the "inheritance" of culturally acquired characteristics through the socio-genetic or transmission system of *education*. Whether we start from evolution or from culture, education is essential to both.

### III

We arrive then at the fairly common notion of education as cultural transmission. However, there still remains, and no doubt there will always remain, the problems of deciding what is to be transmitted. Quite often "cultural transmission" is taken to imply the transmission through schooling of the modal characteristics of a culture, and anything that goes beyond the bounds of such transmission is considered to be beyond the office of the school, which is the culture's official transmitting agency. In contrast, those educators who have been irked at the restrictions "cultural transmission" appears to place upon education have sought to deny that the task of education is necessarily or sufficiently that of cultural transmission.

It seems to me, however, that we can usefully hold on to the notion of cultural transmission as the prime function of education, but with some essential qualifications. There is little point in limiting ourselves to a narrow view, whose criterion is stasis and whose effects, unless marked by strong discontinuities and counter-forces, are cultural stylization and crystallization. Cultural, and thus human, evolution proceeds through a three-fold transmission: the transmission of history and tradition, thus stabilizing the child in his culture; the transmission of present-time needs, interests, technology and understanding, thus orienting the student to the current problems of living; and the transmission of future possibilities, thus setting "ends-in-view" as a directive power for personal-cultural development.

Spaceships to Venus with all they imply for a new orientation to the universe are as necessary for cultural evolution as are our

most viable and fundamental values necessary for cultural stability. It is only as the new frontiers of human possibility become transmitted to the rest of us that we are able to act upon them, incorporate their meanings into our thinking, and re-orient ourselves to a continually modern world.

Significantly, there is at present a basic trichotomy (with shades of overlap) that runs through our educational thought and practice and lies at the source of many of our educational arguments and conflicts. First, we have those educators who tend to recognize an evolutionary, or at least a naturalistic criterion for education, whose orientation is future time, and who call for an education that will free us, personalities and culture alike, for the fullest expression of our potentialities and possibilities. Second, we find those educators who regard the school as primarily a reflector and servant of the dominant interests of the culture and for whom cultural conservation is a prime concern without too much emphasis either on progress or history. Finally, there has been the recent emergence of what can best be called cultural historicism, whose educational leaders call for exemplars based on history ("the grandeur that was Greece, the glory that was Rome") rather than on present-time or futuristic norms.

In general, the first category of educators seeks change, the next seeks stability, and the last seeks a return to the past, and all demand that the schools adhere to their bidding. In their responsible moments each of these positions can be shown to be internally coherent and consistent, and at every moment can usually be shown to be in direct conflict, if not contradiction, with each other. As human, and thus organic organizations, each system displays the phenomena of all organizations towards self-maintenance and perpetuation, with all the selective perception, bias and self-validation of every system that seeks to remain alive. Such diversity may be desirable, but it is also problematic for it tends towards endless argument, bickering and hostility which engenders a confusion that runs right through the educational system at large. It leads, I would suggest, not so much to cultural diversity as to cultural conflict since the culture is the recipient of the "messages" transmitted to it through its educational system.

The educator who is open to possibilities rather than to ideologies is, it seems to me, still faced with his problems. What kinds of school programs with what kinds of orientation shall he develop?

To whom does he, essentially a public servant, owe his allegiance? To the future? To present-time demands? To the cultural heritage and its historic exemplars?\*

#### IV

I should like to shift back to some evolutionary thinking which, I believe, may suggest some resolution for the problem of education ideologies and the wider problem upon which they bear, that of the relationship between culture, personality and education. The factor of personality has been temporarily side-tracked but will be returned to as part of the present discussion.

For purposes of examination I find it useful to distinguish between what we may term the *evolutionary* and *cultural* functions of education. By way of illustration we can envisage the evolutionary function being represented by a vertical continuum, a continuum of increasing complexity of cognitive operations which has its base in instinctual and non-reflective life and its upper reaches in the highest conceived state of human consciousness. In Teilhard de Chardin's terms, this would describe the transition from the Alpha to the Omega in human evolution.

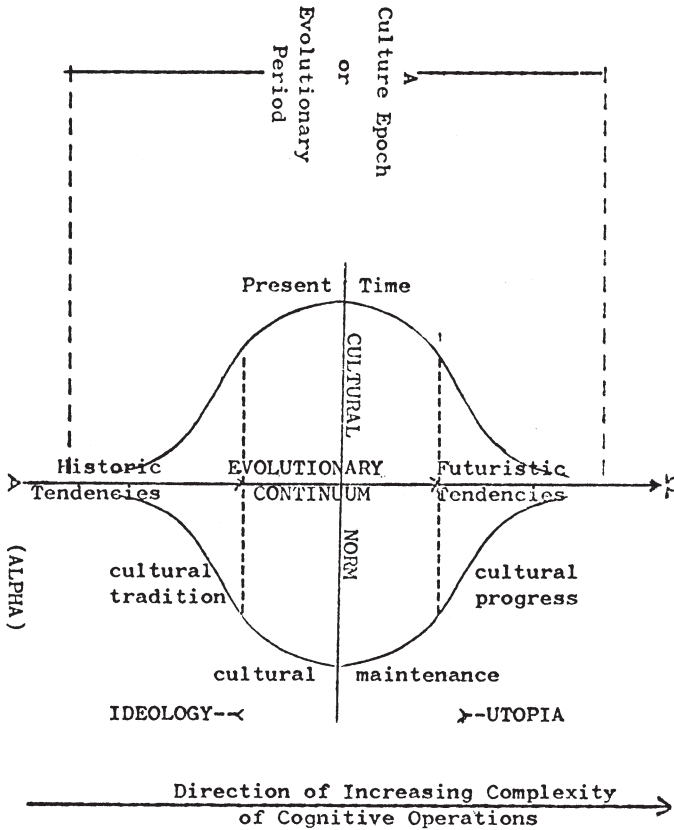
The cultural function of education can be represented by a horizontal line which can be drawn across this evolutionary continuum at any given point to depict the evolutionary condition of a culture. Placed within the schema of the *normal curve* we can then hypothesize that the horizontal line represents the particular cultural "norm" within a given evolutionary period. The "tails" represent the historic and futuristic tendencies of the culture respectively.

What is then disclosed is that within any cultural period or epoch each educational faction has a legitimate, but perhaps not equally legitimate, place in educational programming and practice. There is, of course, room for a big argument here. I am not at all sure, for example, that because of its bulk the "norm" should legislate over the "tails" in our educational thinking, for to what extent norms should be normative is highly debatable.

The tension that exists between the evolutionary and cultural functions of schooling is precisely the tension we find in the education profession with the differing arguments for futuristic, present-time, or historic orientation. Without doubt, should the futuristic

---

\*In the United States this trichotomy is neatly labelled in terms of *Progressivism*, *Essentialism* and *Perennialism* respectively.



concepts prevail alone, the whole stability of the culture would be in jeopardy and simply engender the kind of reaction to the recently passé Progressivist Era that has appeared in the United States with the emergence of such organizations as the Council on Basic Education and the return to *McGuffey's Reader* as a basic text.

Should the present-time concept prevail alone, possibility would be blunted and we would find ourselves with a marked increase in conflict between the demands for stasis and the pressures towards growth, which marks the existential dilemma of our time.

Should the historic concept prevail alone, we would rapidly be on the road to dysfunctionality by seeking to determine our direction from a past while living in a world that is rapidly seeking its way into the future. However, a complete denial of the historicist's concern leads to a break in the continuity from past to present to future, which gives a culture and its peoples much of their stability and identity.

The question then is can the school function as an agent of cultural progress, cultural maintenance and cultural tradition at one and the same time without endlessly contradicting itself? Or to put the point more sharply, can the school function as an agent of both evolution and culture and at the same time do justice to the requirements of personality for cultural identity, stability, and full development? Can we not say, perhaps, that there are three culture-functions for the school, all of which can be subsumed under "cultural transmission" within which evolution, understood as cultural evolution, cultural maintenance, and cultural identity are included? And additionally, from the standpoint of education in an increasingly international world, should we not also make provisions for cultural transcendence? The task, it would appear, is to find some unifying construct, some mode of integration that will enable us to order our conflicting claims and develop a more coherent set of educational principles and practices than now prevail.

## V

An inter-disciplinary approach to the problem suggests a three-fold relationship of cultural, personal, and educational development proceeding, theoretically at least, through four stages. Each stage can be understood as a "task" to be completed if potentialities and possibilities are to be recognized and utilized. The following general construct is suggested, which may perhaps be applicable to emergent nations (as in Africa) as well as to well-established ones.

1. We can conceive of cultures as having four developmental tasks with full regard, of course, to the time-spans involved:

- 1.1 The first task of survival and maintenance, leading to
- 1.2 The task of providing for the clarification of purposes and the recognition and development of possibilities, leading to
- 1.3 The task of cultural reconstruction at that point where the prevailing structure is restrictive of further development, leading to



- 1.4 The task of cultural transcendence, of looking beyond the level of need-satisfaction and self-interest, and of participating in a wider sphere.

Without the assurance of survival and maintenance, of being a "going concern," no culture can clarify its purposes or develop its possibilities. Neither time nor energy can be turned to speculation and exploration until a basic organization with some working patterns of action has been established. However, once purposes have been clarified, or even modified, and possibilities recognized, a point is ultimately reached where the prevailing structure becomes inadequate for progress, and reconstruction becomes essential. The failure to reconstruct means rigidity. Through the processes of reconstruction, potencies are brought to the fore and can be actualized. Participation in a wider sphere in terms of cultural transcendence is tremendously difficult, if not well nigh impossible, until a culture has "come into its own," has recognized and established its selfhood. There can be no transcendence of culture until there is in fact a culture to transcend, and from the standpoint of an internationalizing world, this must still be regarded as an envisaged necessity rather than an immediate possibility, as many emergent states are finding out.

Now, each "culture-task" requires the manpower capable of carrying it out. A culture that does not face up to its manpower requirements simply fails to develop. A culture that is restricted or restricts its manpower to any one task orientation is in danger of: (a) not evolving with sufficient rapidity to remain viable in the modern world; (b) tending towards stylization and impending dysfunctionality by refusal to reconstruct; (c) becoming so concerned with itself that it becomes blinded to the problems of a wider world in which it exists; (d) becoming so future-oriented that it literally atrophies its own heritage. In other words, a balanced and progressive orientation to each task level is a necessity.

2. Immediately then, as it is human ability that is required in carrying out any culture "task," the personality dimension is involved. Four corresponding personality "tasks" can be suggested:

- 2.1 The task of learning to live in a particular socio-geographic environment, the task of "adaption, assimilation and accommodation" (Piaget) of the individual in that culture in which he has been born or transferred, leading to

- 2.2 The task of socially directed autonomy, which means the task of intellectual development, of being able to discern, reflect, judge, conceive and construct, leading to
- 2.3 The task of self-recognition and affirmation, qualified by knowledge which can be applied to cultural development and reconstruction, leading to
- 2.4 The task of group contribution, of cultural and trans-cultural contribution.

These personality "tasks" correspond in general to the following actual and possible developmental phases:

- |                    |                  |   |                          |
|--------------------|------------------|---|--------------------------|
| (I) Infancy:       | ego-centric      | → | socio-centric phase;     |
| (II) Adolescence:  | socio-centric    | → | egoistic phase;          |
| (III) Young Adult: | egoistic         | → | self-realization phase;  |
| (IV) Later Adult:  | self-realization | → | self-transcending phase. |

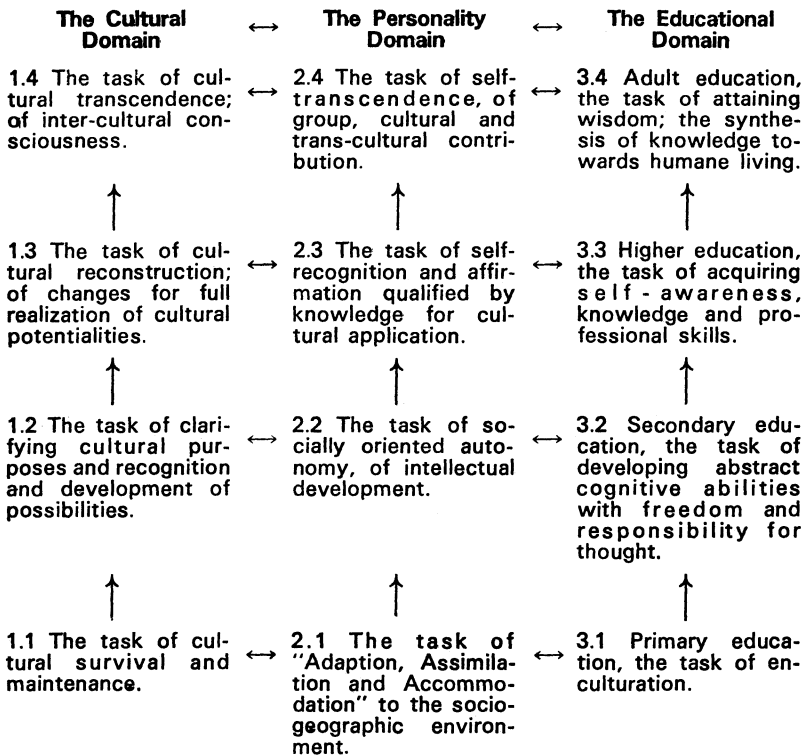
3. As we are not dealing with either instinctive or innate behaviors, except perhaps at the most primitive levels, the individual must learn his personality "tasks," and in so doing, as a member of a culture, learn the culture "tasks." As a child he needs to learn to adapt to and acquire his culture. As an adolescent he needs to learn to reflect about himself and his culture. As a young adult he needs to learn how to reconstruct himself and his culture. As a maturing adult he needs to learn to transcend himself and to help, in concert with others, his culture to transcend itself. He needs to so learn for the sake of his own becoming and his culture's maintenance and evolution in which he is integrally involved. This means then that there are some corresponding educational "tasks."

- 3.1 The task of primary education, which is that of enculturation, of instructing the child in his cultural heritage, of helping him to participate in, and to understand his culture's themes, values and activities, leading to
- 3.2 The task of secondary education, which is essentially intellectual, corresponding to the development of abstract cognitive abilities in the adolescent. This is a period in which thought becomes refined, and the self as subject recognized as the agent in the act of knowing, with the accompanying responsibility and freedom for the organization and application of ideas.
- 3.3 The task of higher education, which builds upon the discriminating and reflective intelligence derived from later adolescence, is to provide the opportunity for self-awareness and the acquisition of knowledge and profes-

sional skills which can be synthesized into a culturally productive orientation. Thus, a basis is formed for cultural reconstruction, which demands both intelligent purposes and ability qualified by cultural — rather than simply self-interest — to effect positive change.

3.4 Finally, adult education. We may suggest here not the usual elementary or secondary education for adults (which should always be available as and where needed), but public and private, formal and informal study, leading maturing adults, who in many instances have increasing leisure time, into areas of wisdom which can utilize the increasing accumulation of knowledge which is available in the modern world.

**A SCHEMA FOR THE "INTERFUNCTIONS" OF CULTURE, PERSONALITY AND EDUCATION**



## VI

This is admittedly a highly compacted schema, one that is presented not as a last word, but as a suggestion for the ordering of educational thinking. Its purpose at this point is to portray what we may call the "interfunctions" of the three domains of culture, personality and education.

Seen in a naturalistic or evolutionary perspective, each stage in each domain is directed towards the increase in efficiency of form and function of that domain. Seen in cultural perspective, each stage gives limited warrant to the prevalent claims for historic, present-time, and future time orientations, with the addition of the transcendent orientation. The addition of the transcendent orientation is held to be essential, for once culture or personalities reach the stage of self-recognition and actualization, there is the danger of aggressive self-interest unmodified by a concern for other cultures or persons, and this is precisely the problem we must overcome for positive living in an already conflict-ridden world.

Although warrant is given to prevalent claims, two restrictions must be added. The first is that although having certain validity, the suggestion is that they are not valid, as their proponents would perhaps like them to be, across the range of stages, but rather represent valid central tendencies of operations at the given stages. The second restriction concerns methodology. This is to suggest that, for example, although there is a validity for "historicism" on the primary level, this does not imply that historic methods of teaching are still valid, that *McGuffey's Reader* is the best instrument. This is a matter for learning and instructional theories, which requires a separate discussion.

Finally, it should be emphasized that this is a tentative schema in which rigid categorizing is not intended and in which it is recognized that considerable overlap and blending occurs between the stages. The question which we started with — what is and should be the relationship of culture, personality and education — is not, I believe, to be answered by reference to one particular ideology whether of culture, personality, or education, nor by some eclectic pot-pourri, but rather by an analysis of, and reference to the "interfunctions" of the three domains and their respective tasks. Thus, it should be possible to conceive of a curriculum plan, a teaching methodology, or a theory of education on correlative anthropological, psychological and educational grounds.

*References*

1. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, London: Collins, 1959, p. 221.
2. Julian Huxley, "Evolution Cultural and Biological," *Current Anthropology*, 1956, p. 2.
3. —————, *Evolution in Action*, New York, New American Library (Mentor Books), 1957, p. 119.
4. Cf. C. H. Waddington, *The Ethical Animal*, New York, Atheneum, 1962.  
—————, *The Nature of Life*, New York, Atheneum, 1963.