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Revisiting Leirman's Four Cultures of Education: Expert, Engineer, Prophet, Communicator

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Revisiting Leirman's four cultures of education:
expert, engineer, prophet, communicator

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Abstract:
This article revisits the four cultures of education devised by Professor Walter Leirman, University of Leuven and published in 1993. The four cultures are: expert, engineer, prophet and communicator. The dimensions of each culture and their implications for higher education policy and practice are described as Leirman outlined in his original matrix. The fifth culture 'player' is explained and added to the matrix with some commentary on its ambiguities. The article ends with Leirman's two caveats about accepting his culture paradigms as more than the heuristic he intended.

Key words: cultures of education; expert master; charismatic teachers; edugames

1. Introduction

In 1993 Professor Walter Leirman, Catholic University of Leuven, published a book entitled: *Four cultures of education: expert, engineer, prophet, communicator*. Leirman was one of Europe's leading academics in the field of adult education in the 1970s, '80s and '90s. He was one among a network of senior academics concerned with the implications of societal change in Europe following the end of the Cold War and the restoration of nation states after the break-up of the Soviet Union. It was clear to academics at the time that there were several competing paradigms of education within nation states and across Europe as economies and political systems changed. They used terms such as 'the optimistic sixties' to the 'iron eighties' to describe how adult educators experienced the dominant paradigms: a technological paradigm linked to a belief in planned social change; an emancipatory paradigm catching the wave of liberation and conscientisation; and a socio-communication paradigm linked to communicative action (Leirman and Kulich, 1987). In the 1990s Leirman extended this global analytical framework beyond adult and continuing education to include structured, institutional forms of education, particularly higher education. This analysis led to the 1993 publication which was translated into seven languages and which subsequently exciting both admiration and critique.

Leirman's book was one of the contextual and conceptual works used to inform the design and analytical framework for the first major survey of adult education in Europe: *The Euro-Delphi*

Survey – The future goals and policies of adult education in Europe 1995. I was involved in that survey as a researcher and as author of the national report for Ireland in 1994 and 1995 under the direction of Dr Liam Carey, Head of the Adult and Community Education Centre, St Patrick's College Maynooth (now National University of Ireland Maynooth). In 1996 I discussed aspects of the survey process and methodology in an article for the Maynooth Adult and Community Education (MACE) occasional series No 1: *Radical Learning for Liberation* (Murphy, 1996).

Since 1996 I put aside Leirman's four cultures of education and moved with the trend to the new paradigm of lifelong learning, and the restructuring of higher education within the emerging technologies of qualifications frameworks, quality assurance and academic development innovations. In 2015 I had reason to revisit the methodology of the Euro-Delphi Survey for a doctoral student, particularly with regard to the challenges in developing acceptable criteria for comparability across multiple case studies. A search of my archives yielded up extracts from the text of Leirman's 1993 book and I re-read them to see if the four cultures of education could throw any new light on contemporary cultures twenty years later. There has been very little scholarly writing published in the English about Leirman in the intervening years, though there may be much in Flemish, German or French. But it was a surprise to me to find that Leirman had extended his four cultures to include a fifth culture - the player - in 2009 to reflect the major changes caused by the use of education technologies.

So, this article is essentially an opportunity to revisit Leirman's cultures of education and to make them available to a new readership. There is no attempt to compare Leirman's cultures with the many analytical lenses published since 1993. Nor is there a response to the rather gendered and stilted terminology in Leirman's text in English, even with the concession that English was likely to be his second, third or fourth language. Those comparisons and responses are left for the reader in her/his own context!

Leirman's working definition of culture is as follows
'By culture we mean three related aspects:
- *a culture contains a vision on man and society, with a set of values and norms*
- *a culture is a living community of people with a certain identity*
- *a culture is a social and institutional practice which reflects to a certain degree the vision and the community'.*

(2009, p4)

2. Four cultures of education: the summative matrix

Leirman's orginal four cultures of education were categories as: expert culture; engineering culture; prophetic culture; communicator culture. The summative matrix of those four cultures on Table 1 below differentiates among them vertically across ten dimensions: view of man; view of society, main objectives; mission; learning concept; strategy and process; functions; position of the educator; position of the learner; strengths and weaknesses.

Leirman argues that offering a clear profile of differences and oppositions is preferable to constructing a 'harmonisation' (1993 p 125). He considers the plurality of theoretical approaches more as evidence of richness and vitality than of fragmentation, and less of evidence of paradigm wars. But he does argue that positivist, interpretivist and critical positionalities can variously influence education cultures in specific times and specific cultures. He concedes that one of the tasks of education services is to explain the present and to predict change: thus his synthesised matrix of cultures. The matrix and text following, therefore, are Leirman's tentative analytical framework to describe and explain dominant, emergent or declining cultures of education across time and place, with particular applicability to Europe.

Table 1: Leirman's four cultures of education 1993

CULTURES -> DIMENSIONS ↓	EXPERT CULTURE	ENGINEERING CULTURE	PROPHETIC CULTURE	DIALOGIST CULTURE
VIEW ON MAN VIEW ON SOCIETY	HOMO SAPIENS ENLIGHTENED SOCIETY	HOMO FABER PROFESSIONALISED SOCIETY	HOMO VIATOR MORAL COMMUNITY	HOMO DIALOGALIS COMMUNICATIVE LIFEWORLD
MAIN OBJECTIVE MISSION	RATIONALISATION TRAIN CRITICAL CITIZENS FOR WELL-INFORMED SOCIETY	ACTION PROFICIENCY TRAIN SKILFUL ACTORS FOR EFFICIENT SOCIAL SYSTEM	RAISING MORAL CONSCIOUSNESS EDUCATE VALUE-CONSCIOUS CITIZENS FOR JUST SOCIETY	STIMULATE COMMUNICATIVITY DEVELOP COMMUNITY OF DIALOGICAL ACTORS
LEARNING CONCEPT	COGNITIVE INFORMATION PROCESSING (comparative, goal-directed, network, context)	TRANSFORMATION OF ACTION STRUCTURES (learning-by-doing)	LEARNING TO MORAL MODEL (value transmission, clarification)	OPEN EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING (empathy, illocution, perlocution)
STRATEGY/ PROCESS FUNCTIONS (exemplary)	RATIONAL-EMPIRICAL 1. KNOWLEDGE SEARCH 2. PERSUASION 3. TRIAL/DECISION 4. EXPANDING KNOWLEDGE BASE	SOCIAL-TECHNOLOGICAL 1. DIAGNOSIS OF DEFICIENCIES 2. ACTION PLAN 3. TRAINING 4. EXPERIMENT/TEST 5. IMPLEMENTATION	NORMATIVE - TRANSFORMATIVE 1. CONCIENTISATION 2. SELF-CONFRONTATION 3. MOBILISATION 4. CONSOLIDATION	DIALOGICAL- GROWTH-ORIENTED 1. EXPLORATION OF LIFEWORLD 2. NEEDS EXPRESSION 3. CONSENSUAL ACTION
POSITION OF EDUCATOR	EXPERT / INFORMANT	PLANNER/ PROCESS-MANAGER	CONCIENTISATOR/ MORAL EXAMPLE	DIALOGIST/ FACILITATOR
POSITION OF LEARNERS	INFORMATION PROCESSOR PROBLEM SOLVER	DECIDER/ "DOER"	MEANING MAKER/ MORAL ACTIVIST	EXPERIENTIAL EXPERT/ PARTNER
STRENGTHS WEAKNESSES	ANALYTICAL RATIONALITY/ PROBLEM - SOLVING LOGOCENTRISM_ INSENSITIVITY TO VALUES/EMOTIONS	PLANNING/ TECHNICAL CREATIVITY TECHNOCENTRISM TENDENCY TO ACTIONISM	VALUE ORIENTATION /PERSPECTIVE TRANSFORMATION MORALISATION/ PRAGMATIC SENSE?	ORIENTATION TO LIFE EXPERIENCE & COMMUNITY-BUILDING DISREGARD OF GLOBALISATION

3. The expert culture: *homo sapiens*
This is the culture reminiscent of a view of classical Greece, of rational, thinking man in a society which seeks and needs enlightenment based on knowledge, facts, explanations, comparisons, frameworks, underpinning principles, recognition of structures, and placing of things in their actual and historical context. The mission of education then is to provide formation of experts who will achieve sufficient mastery to solve significant problems experienced in real life.

The approach to learning in the expert culture is primarily cognitivist and goal-oriented. The culture is essentially pragmatic with a belief that well-informed strategies which are rational-empirical and underpinned with research, lead to innovation and continuous confrontation with reality. In the empirical-expert culture the educator is a supra-expert purveyor of knowledge and information. The expert relies on the authority of the knowledge-base as reproduced in scientific publications and training systems. The learner is the processor of new information and is guided by the expert in phased problem-solving.

The expert culture is confident in its analytical rationality and knowledge content, and in its practical application to presented problems. Its weakness is its logo-centrism and its persistence in a worldview which is frequently ambiguous about affective dimensions of the learning process, and silent with regard to values, norms and attitudes.

4. The engineering culture – *homo faber*
In the engineering culture the 'thinking' man is largely displaced by the 'performing' man, the 'doer', the 'activist'.

In the engineering culture the mission of education is to seek to produce an efficient society with skilled citizens capable of managing the practical needs of society – Sparta rather than Athens. Learning-by-doing in the site of knowledge application is highly valued. Engineering education cultures are characterised by clear economic and societal objectives, medium and long-term development plans, well-resourced training strategies, reviews and evaluations.

The educator's role is largely as a manager of education systems that encourage practical application and problem solving. The learner is encouraged to be autonomous, goal-oriented and actively involved in the learning process.

The engineering culture is characterised by detailed planning and is generally pedagogically innovative. Its weakness is its tendency for over-reliance on technicist planning models and atomistic control of learning content and delivery.

5. The prophetic culture – *homo viator*

The 'pilgrim man' of the prophetic culture of education is in search of guiding moral values and a just society rather than rationality or technical skills. This entails encouraging learners to develop sensitivity to moral norms and values, and to interrogate the moral world presented to them with a view to sustainable moral action.

The prophetic culture stresses the role of the individual as a conscious actor and agent of change. It stresses what 'ought' rather than what 'is', and explicitly 'colonises' the lifeworld, or at least part of the lifeworld.

In the prophetic culture the role of the educator is less 'transmissive' or 'professional', preferring greater emphasis on moral overtones. The teacher is a moral model who sets an example for learners to follow. The charisma of the teacher and the leadership power of that charisma are more important in this culture than the content or structure of the educational situation. Such leadership can be outside the education system as the cases of great community 'educators' Friere, Ghandi, Martin Luther King or Mandela.

6. The communicator culture – *homo dialogis*

The communicator culture of education views existence as communal dialogue between the human lifeworlds of culture and personality on the one hand and the socio-economic system on the other hand. Its mission is to generate authenticity and truthful dialogue. In this culture authentic learning is achieved in communal learning settings where experiences are exchanged and empathy developed.

Participants in communal settings confront the contrast between their lived situations and desired lifeworlds through which they achieve a common understanding and agree priorities for

action. The educators in the communicator culture lead from an ethical stance and are partners in dialogue with participants.

This culture tends to be specific to local contexts of communal experiences and actions. While the overall model is generic, the process and outcomes are less global.

7. Similarities and differences among cultures

Leirman argues that while the matrix indicates that the four cultures are distinguished by unique worldviews, objectives and missions, that it is possible however to see partial re-groupings in relation to strategies, process, functions and the roles of educators and learners. In this regard the expert and engineering cultures constitute a strategic pair of rational, change-oriented cultures, whereas the prophetic and communicator cultures constitute a less strategic pair of ethical conversationalist cultures by emphasising either 'preaching' or 'dialogue'.

Leirman also argues that the first three cultures are clearly distinguishable from the communicator culture in that while the former troika are imbued with a belief in the human subject is an agent or problem-solver, a creator of structural change and a moral reformer, the culture of the dialogist rejects subjectivity and stresses the existential priority of the inter-subjective community.

However, Leirman admits that his culture types are themselves logical-theoretical and rather abstract. He suspects that his constructs are fluid, or at least move back and forth across dimensions of two or more cultures to become dualistic, such as the positivistic-pragmatic or the naturalistic-ethical.

He also concedes that the dominant culture can be combined with, or be temporarily replaced by, another culture depending on the problem to be solved or as a result of changes in a local context. Likewise the matrix masks the reality that pedagogical practices often range across the cultures regardless of the dominant management culture.

8. Why add a fifth culture of education – *homo ludens?*

In his publication *Cultures of Learning and Education: complementary synthesis 2009* Leirman gives considerably more theoretical attention to learning within the matrix. He says that this addition arose from critical feedback he got on his 1993 publication in the intervening years. In this recent publication he takes the opportunity to revisit the original four cultures of education and to illustrate them with examples from realworld contexts across the globe, including South and Central America, Asia and the former Soviet countries. Additionally Leirman augments the learning dimension of each culture with reference to significant learning and social theorist *inter alia* Dewey, Vygotsky, Kolb, Bennis, Habermas, Gramsci, Buber, Mezirow, Friere, Althusser, Lyotard and Argyris.

Leirman's critical friends additionally pointed out that the original four cultures failed to differentiate sufficiently between education as a planned system and the process of learning itself inside the system, especially with regard to the importance of play for learning-in-the-world. Leirman accepted that criticism as a deficit in his original matrix, admitting that he simply hinted at it in earlier writings and tried to address it in the 2009 publication. He invented the category of *homo ludens,* or playful learning and education, as the fifth culture and argues for a culture of education which stresses the power of non-structured, 'playful' activities. He starts his argument by discussing how young animals and children learn their worlds by playing at them, through experimentation and role imitation. He then moves to a discussion of the significance of Huizinga's play theory in human society (Huizinga, 1938, 1955). This leads to a discussion of discovery learning and experimentation within structured education, including the significance of digital gaming and new media, broadly referred to as 'edugames'. However, the ambiguities apparent in game theories of learning leave questions about the use of pre-designed games in education largely unanswered.

Following the pattern of the 1993 matrix, Leirman outlines the ten dimensions of the 'luden' or 'player' culture. Within that culture there are no explicit goals to be achieved through play. Yet in structured education, play is a facilitated opportunity for creativity towards pedagogical objectives! In both instances the learning concept is 'discovery learning': sometimes planned, sometimes open-ended and spontaneous.

Again, there are contradictions with regard to the process and function of play, with play in structured education being knowingly instrumental in design and application. In that context the teacher can be either facilitator or instructor. In both cases the learner is essentially an 'explorer'. The strength of a gaming culture is the pleasure and satisfaction involved in the process. The weakness is its unpredictability. Figure 2 below presents the 2009 synthesised matrix of five cultures.

Figure 2: The synthesised matrix of five culture of learning and education

CULTURES -> DIMENSIONS ↓	EXPERT CULTURE	ENGINEERING CULTURE	PROPHETIC CULTURE	DIALOGIST CULTURE	LUDENS CULTURE
VIEW ON MAN / VIEW ON SOCIETY	HOMO SAPIENS / ENLIGHTENED SOCIETY	HOMO FABER / PROFESSIONALISED SOCIETY	HOMO VIATOR / MORAL COMMUNITY	HOMO DIALOGALIS / COMMUNICATIVE LIFEWORLD	HOMO LUDENS / PLAYFUL CREATIVE MAN & COMMUNITY OF PLAY
MAIN OBJECTIVE / MISSION	RATIONALISATION / TRAIN CRITICAL CITIZENS FOR WELL-INFORMED SOCIETY	ACTION PROFICIENCY / TRAIN SKILFUL ACTORS FOR EFFICIENT SOCIAL SYSTEM	RAISING MORAL CONSCIOUSNESS / EDUCATE VALUE-CONSCIOUS CITIZENS FOR JUST SOCIETY	STIMULATE COMMUNICATIVITY / DEVELOP COMMUNITY OF DIALOGICAL ACTORS	NO EXPLICIT GOAL (except LEBENSLUST) / INSTRUMENTAL: FORM CREATIVE LEARNERS FOR FREE WORLD
LEARNING CONCEPT	COGNITIVE INFORMATION PROCESSING (comparative, goal-directed, network, context)	TRANSFORMATION OF ACTION STRUCTURES (learning-by-doing)	LEARNING TO MORAL MODEL (value transmission, clarification)	OPEN EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING (empathy, illocution, perlocution)	DISCOVERY LEARNING
STRATEGY/ PROCESS FUNCTIONS (exemplary)	RATIONAL-EMPIRICAL 1. KNOWLEDGE SEARCH 2. PERSUASION 3. TRIAL/DECISION 4. EXPANDING KNOWLEDGE BASE	SOCIAL-TECHNOLOGICAL 1. DIAGNOSIS OF DEFICIENCIES 2. ACTION PLAN 3. TRAINING 4. EXPERIMENT/TEST 5. IMPLEMENTATION	NORMATIVE - TRANSFORMATIVE 1. CONCIENTISATION 2. SELF-CONFRONTATION 3. MOBILISATION 4. CONSOLIDATION	DIALOGICAL- GROWTH-ORIENTED 1. EXPLORATION OF LIFEWORLD 2. NEEDS EXPRESSION 3. CONSENSUAL ACTION	(No Explicit Strategy) INSTRUMENTAL: 1. GAME DESIGN 2. APPLICATION 3. GENERALISATION
POSITION OF EDUCATOR	EXPERT / INFORMANT	PLANNER/ PROCESS-MANAGER	CONCIENTISATOR/ MORAL EXAMPLE	DIALOGIST/ FACILITATOR	FACILITATOR INSTRUM.: INSTRUCTOR
POSITION OF LEARNERS	INFORMATION PROCESSOR PROBLEM SOLVER	DECIDER/ "DOER"	MEANING MAKER/ MORAL ACTIVIST	EXPERIENTIAL EXPERT/ PARTNER	EXPLORER
STRENGTHS / WEAKNESSES	ANALYTICAL RATIONALITY/ PROBLEM - SOLVING / LOGOCENTRISM _ INSENSITIVITY TO VALUES/EMOTIONS	PLANNING/ TECHNICAL CREATIVITY / TECHNOCENTRISM TENDENCY TO ACTIONISM	VALUE ORIENTATION /PERSPECTIVE TRANSFORMATION / MORALISATION/ PRAGMATIC SENSE?	ORIENTATION TO LIFE EXPERIENCE & COMMUNITY-BUILDING / DISREGARD OF GLOBALISATION	CREATIVITY – SENSE OF PLEASURE AND FREEDOM / USELESSNESS/DISRUPTING ESTABLISHED ORDER

9. So, does the fifth culture add value to the matrix?

Leirman argues that the value of the augmented matrix is in its combined horizontal and vertical reading approach. Vertical comparison emphasises differences: horizontal reading allows for complementarities. The reader can perform such analysis with ease accepting that the matrix is the basis for further discussion only, not a totality.

Leirman finishes his 2009 thesis with two caveats with regard to interpretation of his matrix. The first caveat is that dominant cultures tend to characterise particular decades or phases of history. He posits that contemporary education is still dominated by the mastery grand narratives of the expert-engineer culture that ironically have not prevented economic and environmental crises across the world, or prevented ethnic, nationalistic or faith-based conflicts from dominating international relations.

The second caveat is that individuals and communities have, in reality, very little influence over the dominant education culture which they do not themselves choose or construct: rather, they inherit it.

It is not clear if Leirman himself prefers a particular education culture to be dominant in our lifetime. There may be some truth in suggesting that he suffers from the angst of the adult educator. That angst is around having to 'be' an educator with a deeply held ideology or culture of education in a political and education context where a contradictory culture dominates. What may reduce the angst is the argument Leirman makes that the process of teaching can model a pedagogy of culture different to the dominant culture: pedagogy can be both transgressive and subversive!

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