Education and the allocating time in the future

Edith L. Stunkel

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Whether education, work and leisure must come in that order may be seriously questioned.

Education and the allocating time in the future

By Edith L. Stunkel

Writing a futuristic article is somewhat akin to describing an amoeba—the nucleus is there, but the potential configurations of the perimeter seem to increase exponentially with the length and scope of the projection. To continue the metaphor, the nucleus of this paper is future cohorts of older adults, and the amoebic perimeter is the nature and distribution of educational opportunity in U.S. society.

At the lowest common denominator, education is a way individuals expend their time. In industrial society, time has been reified into a resource which is allocable much in the way that labor, capital, and natural resources are. Thus, to state that education is one use of time implies that there are alternative uses. The role of education, then, cannot be separated from its coexistent alternatives—namely, work and leisure. Currently in the United States, education appears to be in a transitional period from industrial society to what has been variously described as post-industrial, post-affluent, and post-macho society, education is still defined mostly in its relation to work. Education is an activity primarily designed for the young, with the expectation that the educated young will become productive members of the labor force. Out of a total federal education budget request of $16.5 billion for fiscal year 1981, only $120 million or .7% has been requested for adult education. This focus on instrumental education, oriented toward future gratification as through payment for work, relegates education to a secondary role in a society where the primary orientation for adults is toward work. For youth, education is accepted as a major component of living; for adults, however, education is either considered just one of many alternative uses of discretionary time after work obligations are completed or it is viewed as a means to improve one's position in work. What type of society we are "posting" into will determine whether education will emerge as a primary delimiter of time or whether it will remain secondary or even tertiary in its claim on how societal time is structured.

Viewpoints about the future are often dichotomized into polarities such as optimists vs. pessimists, centralists vs. decentralists, or individualists vs. collectivists. More useful scenarios might be those characterized by the philosophies of Thomas Hobbes and Ralph Waldo Emerson. The Hobbesian future would entail such attributes as:

- heightened individual and group competition for income, wealth, position and power;
- increased inequality and concomitant social tension;
- economic crises in employment; and
- an expanding urban underclass.

The Emersonian future, on the other hand, depicts:

- societal and cultural growth with the human potential movement in the lead;
- alternatives to traditional work patterns;
- rejection of intolerance of excess consumption; and
- increased citizen participation, collective consumption and broadened educational opportunities.

In the Hobbesian future, values would revolve around economic power and leverage; constraint, control and exploitation would be widespread; and relative deprivation would be acutely felt. Values in the Emersonian future would be noneconomic or transcendent to economic want; friendship, leisure, education and cultural activities would provide substantial grist for the mill of nonmarket consumption.

Education will be a factor in either scenario, and its possible roles include creator or reflector of these emerging futures. Another way to describe the metaphorical amoeba introduced above is to contain in its nucleus the four basic components of society: population, technology, resources and values. The perimeter, then, will be shaped by the forces of these four components. A fifth major societal component into which education falls has been identified by Gappert as "the institutional and organizational arrangements of our society." This fifth component is the amoebic perimeter—its pseudopods. These pervasive structures are subject to instability and impermanence, and their form and nature are plastic in relation to the other four components. The organizations and insti-

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tions of the society... are not only a confluence of events, they are also subject to social purpose, the public interest, and planned innovations."

The Hobbesian future is positioned on the assumption of scarcity—scarcity of natural resources, jobs and positions at the top of the pyramid. In this future, education, and particularly post-secondary education, would have a dual thrust: to prepare those who will vie for the scarce positions at the top with the mental tools necessary for fierce competition, and to provide vocational training to the masses of individuals who will be spread along the base of the pyramid. In the Hobbesian future, there may also be a role for "progressive" education which, according to Entwistle "is still to think in terms of how to help the masses, slaves to the conveyor belt, to come to terms with their experience."* Inasmuch as the Hobbesian future is essentially a projection of current economic rigidities, educational in-

CHART I

Estimated Lifetime Distribution of Education, Work and Leisure
(U.S. Males, by Primary Activity)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-School</th>
<th>Formal Education</th>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Retirement &amp; Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
<td>Average WorkWeek: 53.2 hrs.</td>
<td>66.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 yrs.</td>
<td>8 yrs.</td>
<td>32.1 yrs.</td>
<td>3.1 yrs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Life Expectancy: 48.2 yrs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-School</th>
<th>Formal Education</th>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Retirement &amp; Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
<td>Average WorkWeek: 43.9 hrs.</td>
<td>65.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 yrs.</td>
<td>8.6 yrs.</td>
<td>38.3 yrs.</td>
<td>9.3 yrs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Life Expectancy: 61.2 yrs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-School</th>
<th>Formal Education</th>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Retirement &amp; Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.6%</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
<td>Average WorkWeek: 40.5 hrs.</td>
<td>62.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 yrs.</td>
<td>10.5 yrs.</td>
<td>41.4 yrs.</td>
<td>9.7 yrs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Life Expectancy: 66.6 yrs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-School</th>
<th>Formal Education</th>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Retirement &amp; Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>18.0%</td>
<td>Average WorkWeek: 39.1 hrs.</td>
<td>59.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 yrs.</td>
<td>12.1 yrs.</td>
<td>40.1 yrs.</td>
<td>9.9 yrs.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Life Expectancy: 67.1 yrs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-School</th>
<th>Formal Education</th>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Retirement &amp; Other</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Life Expectancy: 7.7 yrs.

* "Primary Activity" designates the main activity of a person during normal working hours.

has been shifted to increasing years of education prior to entering the labor force and increasing years in retirement. The decrease in percentage of lifetime education between 1900 and 1940 was the result of a dramatic increase in life expectancy. Since 1940, however, life expectancy has remained relatively constant and the trends in lifetime allocations of work, education, and leisure for men have been consistent. If current income transfer policies prevail, the demand for increasingly scarce jobs predicted in the Hobbesian technologically oriented scenario will widen the economic gap between workers concentrated in the middle and nonworkers at either end of the lifespan. An additional pressure on both young and old will be created by the demographics of an aging population and the resultant economic demands of a growing retired sector. An ironic result of eliminating mandatory retirement may be the emergence of mandatory work for those who would have otherwise opted for leisure. Palliative measures to mitigate some of these tensions might include programs along the lines of Entwistle's "progressive" education, that is, educational programs which are expressive rather than instrumental, but which would lose their innovative character in light of their reactive origins.

Although the role of education in the constraints of a Hobbesian future might best represented by the cell wall of a paramecium, education in the Emersonian future returns us to the amoeba. Unlike the Hobbesian future, where the form and location of education is assumed not to vary from present modal structures, education in the Emersonian future is expected to be innovative and diverse. The table of contents of this journal gives but a small sample of the diversity anticipated with the Emersonian scenario.

In the Emersonian future, a balance of expressive and instrumental education would emerge, and both types would be valued and valued for their unique contributions to social goals. Instrumental education would still primarily occur during the pre-labor force years of youth, although flexibility in the linear life pattern would increase educational opportunities for adults of all ages. The prototypical linear life pattern is characterized in Chart II; one alternative to this pattern, called the cyclic life plan by Best and Stern, is represented in Chart III.

One point on which futurists generally agree is that lifespan leisure time will continue to increase. The differences revolve around how that leisure will be distributed. As discussed above, Hobbesian-type futurists predict a compression of work into the middle years, for a linear variation of Chart II; Emersonian-type futurists are open to such arrangements as depicted in Chart III, as well as shortened work weeks, shortened work years (longer vacations, job sharing, a growing permanent part-time labor force, sabbatical plans, and phased or gradual retirement). This author has elsewhere proposed the abolishment of the term retirement on the basis that the terms disability, unemployment, earned or unearned leave better describe the conditions of post-work leisure for older persons. Semantic discrimination is a subtle barrier to increasing options not only for older adults but for younger ones as well. Instrumental educational opportunities are essentially nonexistent for the person whose social status does not entail the possibility of employment. Conversely, expressive education is virtually denied younger adults in a society which does not value leisure coequally with work for those cohorts.

FOOTNOTES
2. U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging Memorandum, Vol. XII, No. 1, Feb. 4, 1980.
3. Gappert, op. cit, p. 11.
6. The 1978 Amendment to the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1977 removed the age ceiling for practically all federal employees and raised the protected age to 70 for nearly all other workers. It is generally anticipated that the age-70 ceiling will ultimately be removed also.
REFERENCES


Senate Select Committee on Investment Priorities and Objectives, California Legislature, Leisure-Sharing, Nov. 1, 1980.


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CHART II

Linear Life Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age in Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
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</tbody>
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- [ ] Worktime
- [ ] Education and Leisure