

YOUTH: THE RIGHT TO A PLACE IN THE SUN

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ABSTRACT

Changing population patterns aggravated by the financial crisis unleashed in 2008 reveal altered population dynamics that include increased longevity, population ageing and an expanding moratorium on youth. As generations that are more markedly defined sociologically take shape, a population bulge of young people awaiting work opportunities and the chance to become productive adults has now formed that demonstrates revolutionary potential. The transformations underway are leading to a re-dimensioning of traditional intergenerational resource transfers and underscoring the vulnerability of the various generations, particularly the adult generation, which is under increased pressure. In this context, education appears to be a dead end in several countries, since it no longer functions as a means toward social ascension. The over-rated value of the diplomas being conferred has become apparent and contrasts sharply with societies that are actually dedicated to reducing jobs and making employment increasingly precarious. It is a crisis scenario in which the legitimacy of education is seriously being questioned.

KEY WORDS

Youth; Demographics; Labour; Education.



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Youth: The Right to a Place in the Sun¹

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In memory of Amanda, pole star,
celestial anchor in the navigation of the known
and the unknown.

INTRODUCTION

The millennial dynamics of the human species involves generational succession whereby adults prepare the new members of society for the future, grow old and then gradually withdraw from the scene, while the youths grow into adulthood and become full-scale protagonists. This cycle has been as dependable as the rising and setting of the sun, and has only been broken by natural or man-made catastrophes such as the crushing defeat inflicted on peoples by war. Now, however, the times seem to have heralded the advent of a generational abyss of a different kind. The prolongation of human life and other factors such as job cuts have seemingly prolonged the limbo of youth. Although today's youth have been better schooled and prepared than their forebears, their entrance into adulthood, typified by the constitution of new families in which they are the main protagonists, is being increasingly postponed. Admittedly, this new generation has a lot to teach its predecessors, and could transform the monologue that once prevailed into a dialogue. Yet adults are being called on to maintain their offspring longer so that their children eventually acquire the means to retire. Worse yet, there are some

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among the elderly who would prefer to see their deaths hastened in order to benefit society at large, as said by Japan's finance minister (Hills, 2013).

This unprecedented rupture seems to have intensified following the global financial crisis that began in 2008. It has shaken a generation that fully expected to achieve inter-generational ascension, since it enjoyed a longer period of formal schooling; instead, it now finds itself facing the reality of unemployment and precarious work. It is highly significant that this scenario, for which some writers blame the "laws" of the market, along with the desire of some to see the elderly usher themselves out of this world, stands in stark contrast to human rights, a concept that seems to be fading the farther we drift from the post-war period and enter a formerly unexpected dystopia. If this "lost" generation is to fully enjoy its human rights, these rights, in sum, will include the right to a place in the sun, not just for personal benefit, but to avoid the unprecedented societal suffering that may come about from the rupture of a type of generational succession that has been in place since pre-history.

This introductory text seeks to delineate the profile of the current situation, its unprecedented risks and some of the social-educational implications it harbours. It is the educators' job to be highly aware of developments taking place in their fields so that they are able to assess the transformations that are taking place in the present and those that are likely to come about in the near future. In effect the evidence shows that educators' Sisyphian efforts are becoming increasingly painful, subject as they are to new and uncertain routines.

SISYPHUS & JANUS

Although Sisyphus's torment may be worsening, we may be somewhat heartened by looking into the past as a way of dissipating the mists that envelop us. In this respect Janus, the god of portals and doorways, invites us, in his literally two-faced capacity, to look back and to look forward. As we straddle the threshold of the two doorways it would be well to remember some palaeographic data and demographic history. Research informs us that early hominids rarely lived longer than forty years. Thirteenth century English aristocrats who managed to live past the age of 21 could expect an additional 43.1 years of life. In the middle of the Enlightenment, life expectancy in



France was just 43.1 years. In the United States from 1900 to 1902 it was no more than 49.2 years, but by 2007-11 it had jumped to 78 (Gomes, 2012). While it is admittedly risky to generalise, it is fairly safe to assert that the movement that expanded the populational accordion ended up giving rise, at least in the West, to our current concepts of childhood and youth and to the definition of numerous stages to categorise – not only youth – but old age as well. The asymmetrical stretching of the age-group accordion, first of all cuts childhood short, or according to Postman (1994) leads to its disappearance altogether. The expanded adolescence that follows ends in an ambiguous period of change that is typified by a marked postponement of the moment when the youth is to assume typical adult responsibilities such as working at a relatively stable job, establishing a conjugal relationship, having children and maintaining one's own household. Galland (1997) calls this period post-adolescence and it consists of a prolongation of the period of waiting and expectation, often occupied by efforts to acquire higher schooling levels in the frequently frustrated hopes of obtaining a better future. Authors like Arnett (2004) prefer the term “emergent adulthood” and they describe it as a dilated period of self-focusing and exploring possibilities throughout one's twenties, but also as a phenomenon that is geographically, culturally and socially determined.

Focusing his analysis on the United States, Arnett also explains that this stage is linked to the fragility of the job scenario that has come about as a result of economic globalization, deindustrialization and the exportation of employment positions. It is a reality that contrasts sharply with that of the past when, upon finishing high school, young people were in a position to set up their own families and raise children. The situation begs the question: what came first, the chicken or the egg? Did the prolonged period of waiting arise from the socio-cultural and educational conditions or is it the result of the shrinking field of jobs and the fragility of employment conditions? If the latter case is true, does it mean that schooling, right up to its highest levels, plays the leading role in a farce designed merely to pass the time and promote false hopes of social insertion?

These new rites of passage, with their comings and goings, unlike the rites of yesteryear, most certainly benefit increased consumption, whilst the young, as confirmed consumers, after forcibly leaving behind their life as chrysalises, seem never to get beyond the butterfly stage. Instead, they flit from flower to flower for as long as someone is prepared to finance them or,



which is rarer, for as long as they finance themselves. This labyrinth of disillusionment is fertile ground for a generation that neither works nor studies. As research progresses into inter-generational transfer of resources, it has become clear that someone needs to finance the generation that is ageing and its respective successors. However, having verified that the gates are closed (and have been locked even tighter since the 2008 crisis), the young have had to find spaces to stagnate in, even though, since early childhood, they have been urged to be more precocious, independent and pro-active about their own lives. Thus, it comes as no surprise that some, unable to access the scintillating world of consumerism, have vented their frustrations by taking part in rebellious, splinter movements in which burning cars and buildings and looting shops is the order of the day. The whole scenario intensifies the overall feeling of fear and instils in these youth the impression that they have become the “extradited members of an underclass” (Bauman, 2011).

AN AGEING WORLD VS. YOUNG PEOPLE IN LIMBO

Long-term statistical forecasting regarding population is not known for its precision. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that such extrapolations are useful insofar as they manage to indicate probable direction. Table 1 delineates the profile of a world with a smaller population of children, adolescents and young people and adults and a much larger population of the elderly, who are expected to quadruple by 2020. The future also promises to show a concentration of population in the world's least developed regions. In the year 2000, there was one inhabitant in the developed regions for every five global inhabitants. This ratio is expected to go to one for every eight by the eve of the 22nd century (table 1). At the extreme end of the ageing gradient, in 50 years Europe can expect to see its percentage of older people triple. Its overall population will diminish through to 2100 with children and adolescents making up only 14.6% of the population (using current classifications for the terms) in 2050. Portugal, in turn, is expected to lose one third of its present population by 2100 and become a country in which about one third of the population is elderly. By the year 2050, it is predicted that the Portuguese population of 14 and under will reach its minimum level of 12.5%. The 15 to 64 age group will end up predominating at 53.5%.

TABLE 1 - POPULATION PROFILE BY AGE IN CHANGE, 2000-2200

Age groups (years)	2000	2050	2100	2150	2200
WORLD					
0-14	30.1	20.1	16.4	16.5	16.5
15-64	63.0	64.0	59.2	56.0	54.7
65+	6.9	15.9	24.4	27.5	28.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Millions	6,071	8,919	9,064	8,494	8,596
MORE DEVELOPED REGIONS					
0-14	18.3	15.7	16.9	16.4	15.7
15-64	67.4	58.4	55.5	54.4	52.4
65+	14.3	25.9	27.7	29.3	31.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Millions	1,194	1,220	1,131	1,161	1,207
LESS DEVELOPED REGIONS					
0-14	33.0	20.8	16.4	16.5	16.6
15-64	61.9	64.9	59.7	56.2	55.1
65+	5.1	14.3	23.9	27.2	28.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Millions	4,877	7,699	7,933	7,333	7,291
EUROPE					
0-14	17.5	14.8	17.0	16.5	15.9
15-64	67.8	57.3	56.1	55.0	52.8
65+	14.7	27.9	26.9	28.5	31.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Millions	728.0	631.9	538.4	550.4	573.7
PORTUGAL					
0-14	16.2	12.5	15.4
15-64	67.6	53.5	54.0
65+	16.2	34.0	30.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Millions	10,016	9,027	7,335	7,401	7,729

Source: United Nations (2004). Projections: medium variant. Portugal: population by age: UN, Population Division (2004), *World Population Prospects: the 2010 Revision*, pp. 22, 27-8, 49, 68, 233-5.



It is clear, therefore, that the revolution in course is affecting all sectors, altering the focus of production, consumption, taxation, and public and private transfers by age groups. With regard to education, schools are expected to be virtually or totally empty or hobble on throughout the period of youth as institutions with thinly disguised custodial functions. That is, if they manage to survive up till then at all, somewhat like old remnants sewn onto a new piece of cloth.

Obliged, as they will be, to break down time-honoured bureaucratic barriers, educational institutions will find themselves in a position where they not only have to attract and retain young people for much longer periods of time, but also identifying and addressing the needs of adults and the elderly throughout the course of their lives, which involves providing vocational education. All of these changes will alter the direction of research and teacher education. At this point, adults and old people are the huge X factor of the equation – unknown yet increasingly indispensable – and it will be important to analyse how they learn best and what they actually want to learn. Scenarios can be envisaged wherein the demands of those protagonists being educated will override whatever “mature” generations have prescribed for the “immature ones” (Durkheim, 1968). The future may well oblige continents to learn to live with the shrinking of their economic activities and renounce sacrosanct concepts such as the continuous growth of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which is calculated on the basis of supposedly aggregated wealth. This would be, however, without subtracting the value of natural resources they consume, especially the non-renewable resources.

The populational horizon appears both bright and gloomy. Will declining population lead to less consumption, lower productivity and profits and an overall deterioration in the fiscal situation? Will it imply less military, political and civil power? Are there, at the same time, prospects for a better capital-to- population ratio and a reduction in the costs caused by congestion and overcrowding? The knowledge generation and technological innovation are positive factors, but which countries will be privy to them? (Coleman & Rowthorn, 2011; Eberstadt, 2010). Do all of these doubts spring from a process that has only just started?

On a worldwide scale, the youth dependency threshold has tended to increase and will be at age 27 by the year 2200. The elderly dependency threshold will go up from age 54 to age 79 in the course of two centuries. In just half a century, post-retirement duration is expected to drop from 11.8 years to 8.7

and only overtake the year 2000 figure again in 2200. Even when the data are broken down in line with the economies that are more or less developed, one sees a noticeable convergence of tendencies with regard to population ageing. In Europe, the youth dependency threshold will reach its height of age 29 in the year 2050, while the dependency threshold for the elderly will jump from age 65 to 75 in just half a century and by 2200 reach the age mark of 82. Social welfare problems are hidden by the figures for post-retirement duration, which in Europe will tend to fall only to increase again later, reflecting the probable cycles of overburdening and relief in the relations between beneficiaries and contributors of various generations.

Different parts of the world are displaying situations of either demographic dividend or debt, the former being a result of fewer children and adolescents linked to a proportional increase in the numbers of productive adults before the group of old people has begun to expand. The latter is due to the adult group's diminishing birth rates because of the high cost of raising children, while at the same time, longevity and the number of elderly are increasing. In Europe, the dividend has already been spent, while in Africa it is just beginning.

In the midst of the demographic debt, aggravated by crises like the one sparked in 2008, and in the presence of a decline in fertility and birth rates, a population bottleneck has been formed. In short, there is a bulge of young people awaiting their turn for a place in the sun, while the older generations struggle to maintain theirs while enjoying the fruits of a social security system they have contributed to over their lifetimes (tables 2 and 3). Unfortunately, such bulges are liable to generate political violence when waiting gives way to desperation. The sense of hopelessness is fuelled by factors such as the size of the bulge and a youth gender ratio in which males predominate in the respective age groups involved (Urdal, 2012). Indeed, the world as a whole and the less developed regions alike tend to have a higher ratio of youths to adults, which may decline somewhat over time, but will nonetheless continue to remain high.



TABLE 2 - DEPENDENCY THRESHOLD AGES AND POST-RETIREMENT DURATION,
2000-2200

Area/region	2000	2050	2100	2200
WORLD				
Young dependency threshold*	14	22	26	27
Old dependency threshold**	54	66	74	79
Post-retirement duration***	11.8	8.7	9.0	13.0
MORE DEVELOPED REGIONS				
Young dependency threshold*	23	27	26	28
Old dependency threshold**	65	75	78	82
Post-retirement duration***	11.0	7.5	10.7	13.9
LESS DEVELOPED REGIONS				
Young dependency threshold*	13	21	27	27
Old dependency threshold**	50	65	73	78
Post-retirement duration***	13.4	9.2	8.8	12.9
EUROPE				
Young dependency threshold*	24	29	26	28
Old dependency threshold**	65	75	77	82
Post-retirement duration***	9.0	5.7	10.3	13.7

Source: United Nations, 2004, p. 75.

* Age at which dependency must end if young dependents are to be limited to less than 30% of the population.

** The earliest possible retirement age if old dependents are to be limited to less than 15% of the population.

*** Difference between life expectancy and the retirement threshold age.



TABLE 3 - YOUTH BULGE: PERCENTAGE OF YOUTH POPULATION OVER ADULT POPULATION,
2000-2100

Region/Years	2000	2025	2050	2100
World	45.7	30.3	27.0	25.4
More developed regions	41.1	31.9	35.5	38.2
Less developed regions	43.2	31.9	27.5	25.4
Africa	59.2	49.5	39.7	28.5
Europe	41.1	29.6	33.1	37.9
Portugal	44.4	28.1	27.4	35.5

Source of the original data: UN, Population Division estimates, 2010 Revision.

Youth defined as the 15-24 year age group for the world, less developed regions and Africa.

Adult population defined as the 25-64 year age group for the same regions.

Youth defined as the 15-29 year age group for more developed regions, Europe and Portugal.

Adult population defined as the 30-69 year age group for the same regions.

The panorama is further complicated because economies and technologies have emerged that increasingly require less and less manpower, and especially less manpower engaged in steady employment, which is the basis of funding social welfare initiatives. In addition, the bottleneck keeps getting narrower because job creation is slower than the economic expansion when the latter actually does occur. It should also be noted that just as income groups do not necessarily form social classes, age groups do not automatically constitute conscious generations (Mannheim, 2011) with their own clear objectives. Thus, certain situations may explode into destructive movements with little leadership, similar to the European riots of recent memory or the revolutionary upheavals of the 60s.

LOSSES AND GAINS: NATIONAL TRANSFER ACCOUNTS

The relationships involved are so complex that systematic research has been undertaken into the intergenerational transfer of resources. The age groups that consume income rather than generate it have been identified as child-



hood and old age. Between the two lies the age group of adults. Income not only meets this group's needs but stretches to provide transfers to both the young and the old.

Three resource situations are linked to this sequence of groups: deficit, surplus and deficit again, in old age. The Net Intergenerational Transfers (NIT) project (Lee & Mason, 2011) found that in 2010, there were 23 aged economies. By 2040, there will be 89, and by 2070, 155. According to their study, somewhere around the middle of this century, most of the adult group's resources will actually be devoted to their predecessors. Although it is not the intention of this work to enter into details, some points must be highlighted:

1) The age group consisting of the elderly is not necessarily a deadweight. They may actually give rise to another form of demographic dividend since, as happens in Spain (Paxtot, Rentería, Sánchez-Romero & Souto, 2011), they contribute to co-financing young people by, among other things, living with them and looking after their grandchildren. Of course this scenario depends on the compression of morbidity and may even involve extending the time that old people work. Thus, the elderly may not necessarily represent an impediment to economic growth. However, a dilemma may arise in this case: should resources be channelled to the children, adolescents and young people and used essentially for their health and education, or should they be funnelled to the elderly and used mainly for health care? These options, however, are not necessarily mutually exclusive in all circumstances.

2) The demographic dividend makes a significant contribution to economic growth, since having fewer children means that they will receive more resources and obtain better health care and education. In other words, the workers offer will be more satisfactory. However, in some societies like India, the lack of adequate preparation means that youngsters have low levels of employability (Chandrasekhar, Ghosh & Roychowdury, 2006). The bulge there means that on the labour supply side, while there are indeed more young people, they are not necessarily endowed with health, education or employability. On the demand side, however, what needs to be questioned is the creation of jobs and their quality, and what technologies and economic decisions should guide vocational structuring and the public and private capacity to allocate resources. Again, the existence of a large, young population that is supposedly better prepared does not necessarily mean that the demographic dividend will result in collective or individual benefits. The very abundance of available youngsters may create a queue for jobs in which

only the more “interesting” are actually employed, thereby boosting frustration among the throngs of remaining job-seekers.

3) Getting back to the three stages of life, it has been noted that in developed regions young people have had to wait longer for their turn, especially in times of economic crisis. Their dependence on their forebears is prolonged; and the time to form their own families is delayed. There are deleterious effects caused by long periods of precarious employment, unemployment and attempting to avoid the consequences of a bad beginning that might jeopardise their future careers. The powerful, far-reaching effects of the first job on a person’s career have long been known (Blau & Duncan, 1967). One of the results of this state of affairs is the possible shortening of the period of income/consumption surplus experienced by adults which, in turn, may have a negative impact on their retirement. Indeed, Lai (2011) has pointed out two important moments in the lives of young people: the moment of financial independence and the moment of economic self-sufficiency. In the case of the former, the age when labour income exceeds private consumption. In the case of the moment of economic self-sufficiency, the age when labour income exceeds total consumption. In Spain and the United States, those two moments occur at age 24 and 26 respectively. In Germany, they occur at 24 and 27. At the opposite extreme, in Senegal, these ages were determined to be 33 and 35; in Nigeria 31 and 32; in Indonesia, 27 and 29; and in Brazil, 25 and 30. The data seem to suggest that waiting periods differ among countries with different income levels, but not in the way one might expect. What can be said of Senegal, Nigeria, Indonesia and Brazil is that young people have to go through a painful rite of passage and overcome many obstacles to obtain any kind of employment that is not inherently precarious. In these countries, the widespread use of child and adolescent labour degrades prevailing labour conditions and wage levels so that even when young people are employed, their modest, unstable incomes can barely cover their private consumption or guarantee their economic self-sufficiency.

Thus, it would seem that the condition of youth is one of burdens. Some of these burdens are shared by all and vary only in the degree and nature of the precariousness of employment, the relatively low level of income, unemployment and underemployment, and devoting oneself to studying during the waiting period, which may be full-time or in tandem with work. There is also the other situation in which the individual neither studies nor works. If, as a result of national and social circumstances, the time young people

are obliged to spend before they can become full-fledged adults (something that for some of them will not even come to pass at all) has been greatly protracted, then, given the population dynamics described above, the consequences can be serious indeed (chart 1).

CHART 1 - SOME EFFECTS OF THE LONG WAIT IMPOSED ON YOUTH

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE	WORKING AGE GROUP	OLD DEPENDENTS
<p>Tendency to decrease ← in an indirect manner < fertility and birth rate.</p> <p>Consume over a longer period.</p> <p>Produce little ← precarious employment, low wages.</p> <p>Prolonged schooling, nevertheless, tendency to decreasing return on it.</p> <p>School has a merely custodial function.</p> <p>Longer period in the parental household.</p> <p>Child birth postponed ← < fertility and birth rate.</p> <p>Financing the consumption/ production deficit:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - need for greater public finance transfers whose main constraints are: - unemployment benefit constraints; - limitations to public financing for health and education. - Need for bigger private inter and intra-household transfers → deterioration of conditions in low-income categories. 	<p>Decreasing percentage in view of population ageing.</p> <p>When employed, produce more than they consume.</p> <p>Make private inter and intra-household financial transfers (to children and adolescents) over a longer period.</p> <p>Make private inter and intra-household financial transfers directly to their antecedents or through tax channels (old people) and also forever a longer period of time due to increased longevity of old people</p> <p>Need to generate greater income and savings to cover:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - own consumption; - offspring's consumption; - antecedents' consumption; - own retirement. <p>Tend to work for a longer period due to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - generalised longevity increase; - changes in social security regulations; - need to cover the longer waiting period of young people (smaller and later returns on investments under their care). <p>Tendency to decreased income when economy slows down.</p> <p>Significant difficulty in getting a job when over a certain age.</p>	<p>Increasing proportion of the total population.</p> <p>Consume more than they produce.</p> <p>Financing the deficit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - income from work (when employed); - re-allocation of assets accumulated over their lifetime's; - private inter and intra-household transfers; - other private transfers (e.g. philanthropic institutions); - public transfers; <p>According to culture and other conditions may make private inter or intra-household transfers to younger generations.</p>

In the past the adult generation has always formed the pivot. However, it is presently being squeezed at either end by the younger and older generations. Furthermore, it seems that an intergenerational trench is being dug as a result of the unprecedented delay in the younger generation's taking on the roles of adult life and the burgeoning bulge formed by the bottleneck that has obstructed their entry into the world of work. In addition to the stigma associated with precarious forms of employment, which marks people for the rest of their careers (Chauvel, 2010; Letablier & Sales, 2013), young people may be obliged to endure increasingly long periods of dependence until they are called on to occupy whatever positions have become vacant through the gradual passage of the adult generation into old age.

The whole process is conducted under the aegis of the educational function of "seed sowing" which, with the active collaboration of educators, has promoted the notion that acquiring more education will serve as a social "leg up". Obviously, young people will be conditioned by the variety of socio-economic realities in which they live (Pais, 1990). What then can one expect of this generation that lives with precariousness, and a culture of idleness in which the time is passed, devoid of hope or expectation and fraught with the despair that uncertainty has brought about? How will this generation be able to take its place in the sun after such a prolonged moratorium, and after having left school so long ago?

On the other hand, the glaring insufficiencies that have been noted, especially since the 2008 onset of the crisis, reveal how poorly the "seed sowing" has worked, because children living in the European Union today now comprise the age group that is most threatened by poverty and social exclusion (López Vilaplana, 2013). The situation has arisen against a backdrop of social moratorium in which no direct relationship has been established between precarious employment and fertility. It is rather a relationship that has been oriented by various factors such as each country's social policies.

Could all of this presage a downward spiral in which masses of young people are careening toward social disadvantage? Given the steady contraction of the "protected" labour market, which at this point still honours labour and social security rights, what chance will the squeezed generation have to save up and provide for its own old age? Indeed, the period of surplus after consumption seems to be relatively short: 27 years in Spain and 28 in Chile (Bravo & Holtz, 2011; Patxot, Rentería, Sánchez-Romero & Souto, 2011). How will these developments impact the fragile webs of social solidarity?



And how will they affect education? If available resources are shrinking and returns on supposed investments in schooling are increasingly disappointing, those who were formerly interested in education may easily become disinterested in the near future. With the yawning socio-economic and socio-cultural gap that separates the generations, the frustrated promises of schooling now threaten to widen the gap even further.

A DEPOLITICISED GENERATION?

The bitter experiences of youth are glaringly evident in many parts of the world. Chauvel (2006, 2010) questions the rupture of the generational pact in light of the “insider-ization” of the previous generation and the “outsider-ization” of the new generation. The failure to create jobs, especially those of a certain level and quality, the apparent fallacy of the educational promise and the additional strain brought on by immigration and its consequences with regard to socio-economic and cultural insertion, have engendered a breeding ground fraught with challenges. Youth now either mistrusts or is indifferent to politics. It has lost representation in the spheres of power, including the trade unions. Riots have broken out in big cities, recently even in Stockholm where like everywhere else, deregulation and “budgetary discipline” are taking their toll.

These desperate, violent demonstrations, carried out by poorly coordinated groups without any apparent political driving force, have been treated by the States and the public at large merely as matters for the police to handle. Could a revolutionary generation be in the making, or at least a large mass of youth that is heading towards anomic individualism and de-socialisation?

As mentioned above, Mannheim (2011) does not confuse generations with specific age groups. Instead he typifies generations as involving, among other things, shared horizons and a shared spirit of the times. Like social classes, they exist, but not in and of themselves. Certain generational units may constitute concrete groups such as the youth and student movements of the 60s. It would seem that unfavourable living conditions do not automatically lead to youth revolutions.

However, the onward progression of generations involves a loss of accumulated cultural assets (Weller, 2010). Accordingly, this implies that for youth there is interplay between the selective ability to remember and to

forget that is conditioned by a set of cultural filters that do not, however, enable one to foresee what will be discarded and what will not. Today's great gulf of separation makes intergenerational communication all the more difficult. This naturally impacts school life and communication between students and teachers, one of the most important cultural continuity bridges there is. Because these two groups have different generational orientations that include having grown up in different time periods and different ways of handling adversity, non-communication manifests itself not only in symbolic and physical forms of violence but in acts of rudeness and incivility.

These manifestations are taking place alongside a revolution in information technology. It is a revolution that is more deep-seated than the invention of the printing press and one that is perhaps more capable of mobilizing the power to forget than it is of sparking the power to remember. Predictions are difficult to make when we cannot anticipate what is likely to be forgotten.

There is a risk, however, that there will be a rupture in political socialisation and non-transmission of democracy from generation to generation (Chauvel, 2010). If young people discover that the political system they inherited from adults can only offer them a way down, they may very well turn their backs on it and/or seek to replace it. The similarity of today's predicament to the era of the Great Depression strongly suggests that we should not lightly dismiss the nefarious appeals of totalitarianism, authoritarianism and populism. Indeed a gathering mist seems to shroud the road ahead and our schools are not likely prepared to serve as the bridge to connect generations or even as an effective tool for repairing the damage that this new era is now inflicting.

IS EDUCATION A FARCE?

Education cannot remain indifferent to the scenario depicted above, because it is a major protagonist. Young people and society as a whole have been led to believe that education has noble missions, one of which is social stratification based at least partially on merit, which in turn contributes to social democratisation. If this premise is taken to be true, it then makes sense to spend more time in school, putting up with the tedium, enduring painful bouts of tests and examinations, and complying with the increasing number of laps that the powers that be keep adding to the race.



What is actually emerging, however, is a feeling that the promises have been false and that there is a lost generation – not lost for lack of schooling – but rather for an excess of it, because students' skills do not dovetail with the job market, and no occupational niches corresponding to the skills students have gained have been generated. Yet a considerable number of educators have been blind to these facts. In short, it has become easier to keep children and adolescents occupied with school to avoid their becoming occupied with other things.

A polemical book on this very issue emerged out of the flames of the 2008 crisis: *Le Déclassement* (Peugny, 2009). It addresses the question of social descent. Contrary to what the French Republic proclaims, social ascension is harder than ever for youngsters belonging to the poorer classes. And even for the offspring of the better-off, downward mobility seems increasingly probable. The prospect of a society based on merit has gradually disappeared while the ties linking social advancement and schooling have weakened and the social status of the parents is strengthened, insuring the position of the inheritors.

Other research works such as those of Dore (1976) and Collins (1979) had already discussed such latent frustrations. The idea of education for all to some extent embodies certain ideals of modernity stemming from the Enlightenment. At the time it was supposed that entering school and sticking it out would awaken the powers of reason, making human beings better people and, more pragmatically, providing the means to climb the social ladder. Social upward mobility is a declining stimulus for keeping children, adolescents and young people at school, in a context of cultural plurality and social background diversity. Under the often contradictory pressures of school demands and peer groups, this begs the question whether it is better to be a well-adjusted youth and a poorly adjusted student or the other way around.

As the promises of fulfilment gradually disappear into thin air, it becomes harder and harder for students living in consumer societies to stay in school. They experience mounting waves of irritation, boredom, non-conformity and difficulty in accepting rules that are often obsolete. As the gradual breakdown of the educational system marches on, schools increasingly resemble custodial institutions whose main function is to keep society's younger members under control. A portion of the students, however, manage to be sufficiently practical and resistant and soldier on, adopting the attitude that without sufficient schooling, things could be even worse for

them. There are at least two persuasive arguments that work in the school's favour:

- (1) As Collins (1979) pointed out in his treatise on credentialism, at the official level, schools have a total monopoly of the credentials that are most valuable for social insertion, that is, the diplomas and certificates they issue.
- (2) As the number of credential holders in a given society goes up, the value of the credentials goes down. This sparks an inflationary process that is further aggravated when job opportunities and the employment market fail to increase in the same proportion, or worse, spiral downward, as they have today.

Although these arguments are rational enough, they do not help to allay the frustration, social decline, concentration of income, poverty and feeling of uselessness that arise when the dominant cultures apply them to the development of identity. If the ship of education is already leaking badly, is there any way to make schools seaworthy in the future? Are new horizons opening up for a society without schools (Illich, 1971)?

With regard to this subject, the literature examines at least three fundamental contradictions underlying the school as we know it: an institution that has ostensibly been designed to put the ideals of modernity into practice (Touraine, 1992):

- (1) Although schools maintain the official monopoly on credentials, they have lost their monopoly of scientific and technical knowledge and have now become a competitor among a host of many others.
- (2) In many countries, the modernist ideal of making education accessible to all has been achieved. However, new populations entering the system have brought with them a variety of different social issues that were formerly only raised outside the school walls.
- (3) When education was a privilege, school was viewed as a selective, prestigious institution and those outside were anxious to enter. With the democratisation of education, schools have received populations that no longer find it as desirable as others did when it was elitist and that do not bring with them the socio-cultural legacy that marked the students of the past (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970). Thus, for many school-goers, the experience is synonymous with failure. As a result, some students defend their own



subjectivities, alienate themselves and rebel against the educational system, finding this experience to be more acceptable and less damaging than internalising failure.

If indeed *all* people are equal before the law and schooling is “a good thing” (Dubet, 2001) that is the fulfilment of a human right, then schools should cause everyone to achieve success. Yet, in reality, the price of failure, including educational inflation, is tantamount to social exclusion.

Most sociologists believe that the world has traversed a number of diverse frontiers that include post-modernity, late modernity, liquid modernity, network society and global risk society. Unfortunately, it seems that school systems are dealing with these diverse challenges and contradictions with the efficacy of a cracked, old vessel being made to hold new wine.

KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY OR ALIENATION?

Addressing the crisis that began in 2008 and focusing on the United States, Brown, Lauder and Ashton (2011) discuss the intense level of competition in global capitalism that has brought about lower costs, including labour costs, higher profits and, in many cases, lower prices. This has led to a feverish wave of public and private investment in education, research and innovation based on the premise that the higher people’s level of schooling is the more likely they are to obtain better the jobs and higher incomes. Disappointingly, however, large scale competition has actually led to the simplification of work-related tasks and cuts in both staff and salaries. Thus, only certain skills that are considered “strategic” reap lavish rewards for performance like those that guarantee high corporate profits, which include certain positions in the banking sector.

Thus when global capitalism launched its investment strategy targeting human skills and capital in an attempt to see who would yield more, it decided to do a classic 180. That is, it decided to see which of the more highly qualified workers would accept the lowest salary in return for giving their absolute best. The drive to see who will yield the highest quality for the lowest cost primarily victimises young people who are attempting to get into the labour market. This does not mean that the knowledge economy and society are baseless or that technology and innovation are not absolutely vital for

the new economic order but rather that global capitalism, in its bid to lower costs, is doing its best to make labour markets more “flexible”, which actually means more precarious. In the labour arena competitors range from unprecedentedly large groups of well-qualified individuals in the developed countries to slave or semi-slave labour in the less developed countries, such as the unfortunate individuals whose lives were snuffed out in the collapse of a building in Bangladesh that was more unsafe than the slave quarters in Brazil during its colonial era. Thus, a competition is in full swing that actually begins upon a person’s birth or even prior to it, that involves a quest to obtain a bit of the educational system’s inflated currency while it is still worth something as in the case of countries with greater cultural capital.

In contrast, the poor in both groups of countries continue to be as poor as ever, if not poorer. To some extent, it is not surprising. A careful reading of the Human Capital Theory makes it very clear that the law of supply and demand forms the essential backdrop. The expansion or contraction of job structures and the changes in job profiles were always implicit and conditioned schooling. As empirical data confirm, the relationship between education and income is not linear. Even so, countless moths have been drawn to the open flame of more and more education, as if it were the pass key to social democratisation and development. In ideological terms, a falsehood was being purveyed and practiced. However, it is obvious that there is a lot to be done on the supply side in terms of increasing and improving schooling and the qualifications of young people in many parts of the world (UNESCO, 2012).

Another thing that must not be underestimated is the gap separating schooling from work. Moreover, we must be cautious not to reduce the vastness of poverty and under-education around the world to a question of educational credentialism and inflation in the developed countries. What we must remain is aware that these phenomena have become more widespread with globalisation.

It is not by chance that Thurow (1996) had already referred to capitalism’s Pyrrhic victory: by becoming the world’s only victorious economic system it would, from then on, be required to respond to and meet the world’s most pressing needs and aspirations and find solutions especially for poverty. The same author, shortly before the September 11 attack, discussed “social volcanoes” that were about to erupt such as religious fundamentalism, ethnic separatism, and the contradictions between democracy and the market. Naturally, structural changes call for structural solutions but these



much-needed solutions still seem to be out of reach because of a lack, among other things, of clear, viable utopias.

As far as schooling is concerned, history has shown us that the trajectory of all monopolies is that of a falling star. Even the monopoly that formal education holds with regard to credentials could hardly be expected to ensure, during these unstable times, that everyone would remain in school and that every student would be successful regardless of the social pressure to succeed. As with other fields, the school as an institution seems to have attained a certain outreach threshold and, at the same time, a certain fragility threshold. Being in the firing line, as an institution that serves as both the stage and target for various forms of violence, schools have become pressure cookers. Yet many of the proposals for solving its problems have merely put forth recommendations for more school and more confinement to address the already existing violence. However, perhaps the strongest prop supporting school today, is that they function as a place to leave children and adolescents in a society where there are few such places and where changing family dynamics, working parents and other societal pressures have created a context in which fear prevails.

Yet the conclusions of research into what adolescents do out of school cannot be ignored. Apparently, they manage to set aside time to do their homework, sometimes even hiding the fact from their parents. They often join school-sponsored initiatives such as sports and other leisure-time activities on their own hook. Many take part mass culture activities, especially those that cater to their particular age group. They learn about and use technology to foster relationships and forge ties with peer groups and take part in other activities that Barrère (2011) has compared to the ritual testing of the ancient Greek Paideia, which was designed to mould the individual's character (toward a socially defined "good").

The author concludes that the pessimism of many educators and society itself is short-sighted since, in the activities that the adolescents participating in her research have selected for themselves, they have met the challenges with clarity and equilibrium. Her research subjects by and large have sought self-expressive emancipation, as they educate themselves in spheres that are free from the school's institutional discourse which, in our view, often purveys values that are more preached than actually practiced. The activities the young people selected also have socialisation effects and tend to converge to some extent under the umbrella of values taught by the school. It would be risky to over-

value such curricula but the results suggest that the monopoly held by schools today, when educational inflation is at its height, is far from being absolute.

It is worth remembering that at the beginning of the 20th century, Dewey and other progressive philosophers proposed that school-based education be closer to real life, given the radical changes that had taken place in urban-industrial society. At the time, the historical-social construct of youth and adolescence, with their emerging identities and prominent roles was in the early stages of being delineated and described, albeit in a somewhat hesitant, experimental fashion. Thanks to the historical-social circumstances, the child-centred progressives proved to be far less successful than the administrative progressives (Labaree, 2010).

Social constraints today are no less severe than in those formative years of educational philosophy. Hopefully now the urgency of the crisis will offer opportunities for us to listen more closely to the voices and input of the students, thus helping us gain a more accurate understanding of their aspirations – including their need for self-expression. Heightened awareness on our part could lead to more effective student engagement in school.

It is a given that without the will of the students, which stems from deep inside each one and is both a factor in and an effect of social dynamics, the educational/learning process cannot succeed. Coercion may induce students to enter school and carry on with their studies, but soon after its limitations will be laid bare.

An alternative may be broad-based replacement of or alternative curricula, enacted outside the school environment, as some curricula already do. Depending on the flexibility of the school these curricula may eventually deplete the schools of their students. Putting romantic visions aside, youth obliges us to look beyond our immediate horizons.

Education outside school walls may reveal the performance, potential and contradictions of the educational system, warts and all. But in the meantime, a world with an ageing population that is getting ready to enter into decline is barring the gates to the cohorts of youth that are attempting to enter. In the not-too-distant future, however, those in decline will be dependent on those very same youthful cohorts, since the trend has been toward increased longevity.

The wave that has broken on the shore is taking too long to draw back, while the succeeding waves are held in abeyance, creating a long, empty space between. When the sea holds back, it is usually the sign of an im-



minent Tsunami, so it would be wise to make way for the cohorts of youth before they open the way for themselves with the sheer force of the generational bulge. If it is any consolation to people of our age, at the very least, we will be able to witness and indeed participate in dramatic changes that promise to alter the course of history.

CONCLUSIONS: MODELLING THE FUTURE

In his famous research into how societies decide their own survivals or disappearance, Diamond (2006) analysed how erroneous group decisions were caused by the rapid forgetting of past experiences, misleading analogies with former situations, the aloofness of administrators, difficulties in perceiving slow change, egotism masked as rational behaviour, and the individualism of powerful groups and other processes. The principles Diamond applies to the Mayan cities, Easter Island, the state of Montana and Rwanda could very well be applied to the globalised world we now live in. If we narrow the focus to decision-makers in education, including classroom educators, then we can sum up some of the changes and implications as follows:

1. The age group accordion, which opens asymmetrically, alters the composition of groups of various ages that are in need of education. On the verge of a prospective inter-generational gulf, children, adolescents, young people, adults and old people are not what we have traditionally thought they were. Serres (2012) is right when he states that before teaching anything at all to anyone, it is essential to at least know who that 'anyone' is. However, we actually know as little about these newly classified and categorised children, adolescents and young people as we do about adults and the increasingly older elderly. This means that the educational sciences are faced with new challenges and that it behoves us to understand that we are acting in the present in accordance with a past that has already faded away.
2. In reality, capitalism has achieved a Pyrrhic victory. Exclusion has its limits and the reactions to centralised accumulation of wealth and globalised uniformity from time to time become explosive, both on the streets and in the media. As capitalism's legitimacy crisis deepens (Habermas, 1975), how long will cohesion be maintained through coercion? Will the solutions involve the democratic State? Utopias exist, but

are they sufficiently clear? The anti-capitalist rhetoric often found in educational discourse is often window-dressing. And it is worthwhile to ask to what extent the words are serving as a smokescreen to hide the lack of concrete changes that are actually within our educators' reach.

3. The promises of education have come to resemble deceptive propaganda as positive returns fall off in the face of costs, and students are increasingly less willing to accept school failure. Violence of, in and against schools is transforming them into hells on earth in which both educators and those being educated suffer. What structural changes need to be made to ensure that we do not keep on spinning the same old wheels? When will we move away from the details of course contents and how to manage texting in class and address the more relevant challenges affecting learners? When are curricula going to mirror to real life?
4. Across the board, exclusion has affected developed and undeveloped regions alike and young people call out for the right to a place in the sun, while society only offers them a social moratorium. While we remain in this holding pattern, the highways and bridges of education are being deconstructed and the concept of education itself progressively loses much of its legitimacy. Faced with a future that we have taken too long to perceive, how can educators maintain Ariadne's thread, which is essential to ensuring continuity between civilization's present and past?
5. The school as an institution is like a granite castle: symmetrical, enclosed, reinforced and shielded by bureaucratic rules for almost every situation. These features make it very difficult for schools to respond to societal turbulence, which has become globalised, heterogeneous, fluid and flexible. This upheaval has led to an ongoing process involving the most radical opening up of access to knowledge and the most intense development of subjectivity of the last few centuries. Education today not only has to deal with the intergenerational gulf but also with the difficulties generated by inter-civilizational dialogue. An intra-civilizational breach has opened up in Western society; on one side of the gap is technical knowledge and on the other, values, feelings, beliefs, ethics and morals. It is a situation that makes social and school unrest inevitable.
6. School education in its present form resembles that castle surrounded by bureaucratic moats and rigid temporal and spatial boundaries. Education is centred on important but transient knowledge which, in many cases, is quickly becoming obsolete. Its pace is slow and often tedious.



It is based on the unilateral nature of a relationship in which there are some who “know” and who are charged with teaching those who “don’t know”. As an institution that supposedly embodies the ideal of modernity (Touraine, 1992), the school emphasises reason and minimises emotion, which is so closely linked to the ability to learn. It concerns itself mainly with the strictly cognitive aspects of knowledge and far less with values, attitudes and feelings. Although it is aloof from the times and societies of today, it is actually a product of historical reconstruction. Despite being out of synch with the times, transformation will not come about without great effort, which of course includes the efforts of educators themselves, who wish to see formal educational systems survive.

7. Conditions, which are in constant flux, appear to call for a less structured, more informal kind of education, one that is flexible enough to detect and deal with different age and cultural groups. It should be a system of education that is untrammelled by time and spatial constraints and wide open to inter and trans-disciplinary methods of dealing with issues. It should include groups that meld face to face socialization with modern forms of distance socialisation. The solutions found would hopefully consign compartmentalised, academic specialisation to the dustbin of history and revolutionize the rigid model of teacher – class – subject. The educational system might even become less bureaucratic owing to the lesser importance conferred on credentials.
8. Revealing the need for change is the easy part. What is hard is to take the historical steps to transform an institution that has become crystallised into one that is truly dynamic. It is easy to say that we not only must predict, act, and reform but revolutionise. But it is much harder to know how to act strategically, especially in light of the resistance that prevails not only within the institution itself, but primarily outside it: within society at large. At first glance the task appears urgent and Herculean but success will depend largely on the ability of young people to act in an articulated manner as a generation. If they manage to do so the new wine may actually remain within and gain character from the old vessel it is poured into. Will the process be gradual or quick and tumultuous? The tendency of those in power is to give up the ring so as not to lose the finger but that only happens when there is an historic deadlock. Should we come to a deadlock, which portions of the judicial-political heritage will our youth remember and which parts will they forget?

9. In spite of all the risk and anxiety, there are some glimmers of hope. Young people have heeded the call for indignation made by an old intellectual, Stéphane Hessel, who survived the Nazi death camps and today is one of the world's outstanding examples of physical and intellectual longevity. Throughout the course of his life, he has renewed his ideas and taken it upon himself to sound a warning to today's young people: that the worst attitude is that of indifference. Reliving the reasons he joined the Resistance in the first place, and spotting new enemies in the field, Hessel (2013) posed a fundamental question. Why, today are the resources lacking to maintain and prolong the existence of those human rights and freedoms that were so hard-won in the post-war period when Europe was in ruins?

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