

Socio-Economic Status (SES) Trends, Schooling /Human Services in the Information Age: Surfing the New Cultures

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I. Introduction: Definition of the Issue

Trend #1: Social-Economic Stratification

Since 1980, a change in the American class system has become so noticeable that social scientists have begun to chart and project a trend, with a sixth social-economic class emerging at the lower end (Eitzen & Baca Zinn, 1991; Smeeding and Gottschalk, 1998; U.S. Census Bureau, 2002; Lapham, 2003). The trend has the following characteristics (based on data from the U.S. Census, and the Department of Labor): 1) the upper class percentage appears to be increasing to 3% by the early 1990's; 2) the affluent upper middle class is declining approximately .25% - .5% per year; 3) the lower middle class is declining at a similar rate; 4) the working class population seems to be gaining slightly; 5) the working poor class is increasing by .25% - .5% a year; 6) a new class, the permanent underclass may be emerging. Current estimates of the present permanent underclass (those persons not allowed to enter or become part of either the economic or social life of the mainstream culture) are between .5% and 1% with some slight annual increase.

A large middle class (2/3 of the population), has traditionally been the heart of the social-economic fabric of industrial America. If this social/economic trend continues, and the current course of information/technology-based changes indicate that it will, the consequences for traditional American capitalism and historical political and cultural beliefs seem prone to serious change in this century. With a shrinking middle class, a number of whom move down to a lower SES level; a growing underclass; and a slight increase in the upper class, the increasing discrepancy between the *haves* and the *have-nots* becomes a more serious social, political and human services issue. It is clear that the existing capitalist system must change in manner. How it would change is not clear because the seeds for several different changes exist within the American culture, and in spite of the current conservative political climate of the Reagan-Bush years, some scholars and a few leaders in both parties have discussed the realities of the information age and its consequences for the culture. (Eitzen & Leedham, 2004; Toffler 1970; Naisbitt, 1978; Reich 1970).

The upper ruling class in the U.S. has always been able to depend upon a large conservative middle class to maintain the *status quo* social order and culture, except in times of economic depression or recession. This may not be possible with a smaller middle class and dominant lower classes. Of course no ruling class has ever given up or shared power and status. The increasing ability of the conservative ruling class to control presidential national elections and the administrative processes of government seems at times clearly impressive. Yet an ethos



of democracy runs deep in America and as inequality among the classes becomes clearer and more fixed, it is doubtful that those with less than their parents would be inclined to docilely accept their fate, especially as they grow in number. This emerging social-economic reality will impact national elections, to include the voices of the lower classes.

Trend #2: Age, Family and Sex Social/economic

This September, approximately 3.5 million young Americans began their education in public and private schools. What do we know about these children and what the future holds for them if present trends and conditions continue? 1) Fifteen percent are children of teenager parents. 2) Fifteen percent are physically or mentally challenged, many due to drug abuse by the parents. Some of them carry the HIV virus. 3) Fifteen percent are children who speak some language other than English as their native language. 4) Fourteen percent are children of unmarried parents and another 12 percent are living in some sort of foster home with neither their father nor their mother. 5) Forty-five percent will live in a broken home before they reach the age of 18. 6) Ten percent have illiterate, or poorly educated parents or guardians. 7) More than 25% of them will not finish high school; 8) More than 33% will become latch key children with no adult supervision outside of school for long periods of time; 9) Nearly one in five families in the United States is now headed by a woman and two thirds of these mothers work; 10) About half of the children who enroll in the first grade this fall will have lived in a one-parent home by the time they graduate from high school. (Annie Casey Foundation, 1992, p. 13; Quint, 1994, p. 11; National Center for Education Statistics, 1988; Lawson & Anderson, 1999).

Historically and culturally schooling and human services delivery in America have relied upon a partnership with a family structure where there was a mother and father, one of whom was at home most of the time to provide support, nurture and follow through on school work. The family was supposed to provide certain values and motivation for children coming to school/human service agency. The school/ human services agency was supposed to support the family values, provide education in basic skills, knowledge, and citizenship. In the 1950's and before, when only 50% of the school age children were in school beyond the 8th grade and many working class and unskilled working poor jobs were available for those who did not attend school beyond the 8th grade, that family model worked well. A majority or large percentage of a school community would have children in school and could be counted upon to support school levies and bond issues This school-family partnership was at the heart of successful American schooling and funding (Lawson & Anderson, 1999).

Today, that model of schooling fits 20% of the families and schools, and they are largely found in affluent suburbs and some small communities and towns. Today, 70% of women with school age children work outside the home and that figure continues to climb. It is estimated that by 2000, 80% or more of the homes with school age children would be single family homes where the parent works or families where both parents work (Eitzen & Baca Zinn, 1991). There is no way to wish away this new trend or insist upon a more traditional form of families or parenting. The challenge to human services must either be ways to provide high quality services for all children, regardless of family-origin, or to allow the social status of parents to determine (even more than they now do), the outcomes of services. If the latter, then the incentive for both parents to work and be away from the home may increase. If families can help, that is an added

benefit. However, if American schooling/human services continue to allow the social status of the parents to largely determine the outcomes of schooling/human services, then the future of public education/human services is bleak (Wilson, 1987), because the number of families from disadvantaged racial and ethnic groups that face reduced real incomes may increase in the next century. Human services work and education should continue to emphasize the inclusion of people from all racial/ethnic groups and social-economic status by highlighting skills which their students might bring with them in addition to those that the educators gleaned from their own backgrounds.

The new jobs being created as part of the transformation to an information/technology based culture are largely information processing, sales and service-oriented jobs (including human services). The jobs being eliminated as part of the transition are good, well-paying manufacturing positions, or skilled production jobs and middle and upper management positions. Thus, if a family is to maintain its social/economic position, both parents have to work. Twenty-five percent of today's working women are married to men who make less than \$20,000 a year. This trend is increasing (for example, two people making \$18,000 replacing one, who made \$36,000). Such a dynamic requires more jobs that are less rewarding in many ways.

Additionally, of course, women are being freed from the cultural requirements of having to stay home. It is becoming more and more accepted in the culture for women as well as men to have the right to seek fulfilling careers. Many different roles of parenting are emerging. Generally, there is a growing belief in a notion of "quality time" as parents as opposed to being able to spend large amounts of time with children. A natural consequence is that parents would focus upon parent-child relationships and may be less inclined to include schooling concerns as part of that "quality time." Increasingly, schools are being asked to provide the totality of the educational responsibility. In the next century human services such as pre-school and day care, Big Brother Big Sister, as well as extended day activities (e.g. Boys/Girls Clubs) could be part of the regular schooling responsibility, thus opening up jobs for professional human services workers specializing in this area. Human services must be there to be with the children, when they are not at school or not having "quality time" with their parents. Those seeds have germinated and are growing.

II. Discussion of Possible Delivery Outcomes and Implications for Education/Human Services

Four possible outcomes could emerge from the social-economic trends we discussed above. These four are not the only four, or even the most likely four. They are four that can be seen to logically flow from the information presented above, if logic has anything to do with it. Each of the four might exist in different forms or in relationships different to one another. They are neither predictions, nor suggested possibilities. They are provided with the hope of encouraging the reader to begin to project possible outcomes.

Possible Outcome # 1: Participative Structures

One of the concepts already embraced by corporations (Megatrends, Future Shock, Second Wave, Gaining Control of the Corporate Culture) is developing participative structures (Lampe, 1999). Team building, collaborative leadership, shared decision making, problem solving relationships, etc. are all part of what are viewed as effective organizational cultures in an information/technology society. There is some evidence (Kilman, 1985) that many corporate organizations, particularly those that are directly involved with changing and advancing technology are developing these types of organizational cultures. If such a trend continues and expands, the impact of such organizational cultures could be dramatic. Partnerships, collaborations that include shared status and power relationships, could become dominant cultural norms in other types of organizations within American culture. Institutions such as government bureaucracies, old line organizations, human service/cultural agencies, including schools and universities, could begin to develop these cultural norms as well. If public policy also become participative, as opposed to the current adversarial structures, then the potential for developing a cohesive, multicultural society would be present. This might allow the United States to develop both nationally and internationally the types of structures and relationships necessary for maintaining the United States as a just society.

In such an event, schools, schooling and universities and colleges would take on a very different flavor. Elementary/Secondary schools and universities as organizations would have to begin to prepare their clientele for such cultures. There would be much more sharing and interaction between them and partnerships and collaborative relationships would become natural outcomes. School settings would probably become adult and professional learning sites by both university and school staffs. A variety of organizations would be involved in a school in addition to the normal academic and extra curricular programs. Human service agencies providing daycare, extended care, early education, adult and continuing education, independent pursuit of knowledge, and etc., would all find their way into schools as activities aimed at comprehensive and continuing education. Schools and universities would more than likely become extended families to children and adults as well. Such structures would require, at a national level, national policy making and collaborative relationships between the public sector and corporate cultures. Shared power with long term planning and direction would be the crucial ingredient. While the seeds of such a future culture exist within current social arrangements, this outcome may be the most unlikely of the four. Individualism, suspicion of government, racial and ethnic animosity, sexism, ageism, heterosexism (Petrie, 1996; Mehr, 1998), avarice for great personal wealth, conservative religious beliefs (especially the Anglo-Saxon white protestant (WASP) ethic), and a Social Darwinistic competition (Eriksen, 1981) are strongly held values within the American psyche and work against collaboration, cooperation, and participative relationships. Historically, Americans have tended to support these very conservative values, and continue to do so, whether privatization works or not (Ehrenberg, 2006). Fortunately, the human services movement aims at fostering co-operation rather than competition. Maybe human services workers can influence the rest of America to come along in realizing that education and human services are still a social good that yield benefits to the nation as a whole. Perhaps human service providers should think of providing education to needy children in non-profit organizations that depend on United Way, Community Foundation and other charitable funds.

Possible Outcome #2: The Corporate Nation

Within the next twenty years, this nation's social-economic and political life could be dominated by a few selective, large and global corporations that may or may not be owned by Americans. These corporations would have the need to develop a "corporate Culture" that would provide for continuation and survival of the corporation. Their wealth, power and size would exceed that of many nations, (Blake, 2006). They would therefore provide for such things as day care, pre-school, and schooling from the earliest grades through all higher levels. A variety of arrangements would be provided relating to who received what type of education and human services, but people would essentially serve a corporation from birth until retirement or death. The corporation would become the extended family. Schools would be run by the corporations without any form of public education being needed except for any persons not part of a corporation family. This public education would undoubtedly include the population of the emerging third world inner cities. Research would form around the corporations' particular focus and/or needs. Some form of public education or schooling also might be provided through whatever government existed, which means that such education and human services would more than likely be primarily related to military, police and security forces.

Impact on Higher Education

Human services educators will work in institutions of higher education which would exist as contractual agents for the corporations, or more likely, the corporations would establish and maintain their own research and scholarly institutions, along with professional schools, where human services workers shall be trained. Corporations might pay certain professional schools to develop some of their needed professionals (\$250,000 to train a doctor). Clearly corporations would have their own schools up through at least what we now would call Bachelor's Degrees. Schools of education and human services needed to train and prepare teachers and human service workers at all levels would likewise be part of the corporate culture. Schooling and human services would obviously make extensive use of technology and be as labor intensive and free as possible, with much of education being completed as a part of corporate culture. Earn while you learn if possible (Lyall & Sell, 2006; Longanecker, 2006).

Although, this may have sounded like science fiction thirty years ago, the seedlings of such an outcome exist in the current culture and continue to bloom as we approach the next century. Indeed, the fastest growing divisions of large corporate organizations today are their education departments and programs. Large human services organizations, like Red Cross, Goodwill Industries, and Salvation Army have elaborate training programs. Very large corporations offer daycare and other family human services as part of the corporate culture in order to attract and retain the employees they want. If survival takes the form of developing large corporations able to compete with other nations and groups of nations, then such an outcome is easily one such possibility.

Possible Outcome #3: The Technological Culture

Another seed in American culture is a drive for independence and more control of one's own work. Today, an ever increasing number of persons, particularly in the consulting-service segment of society, work in their own homes. The need for businesses to have large office complexes and work areas is being eroded by technology. Providing members of a company with technology to use in their own home is very economical. It is estimated that 40% of the work force already work full or part time out of their homes. This trend could logically and practically continue, especially among human services providers of daycare, respite and other family services. The Department of Labor (1988) estimated that by the year 2000, or shortly thereafter, approximately 60% of those persons working in the workforce would work full or part time from their homes. Persons who handle information processing, management, sales, many professions and creative/developmental work can just as easily have computers, telecommunications, satellite communications, and video communications all connected from one's home and at a much cheaper cost to a business than buying the same technology and providing and maintaining a large complex to house them (Kozberg, 1998).

Businesses and corporations, including human services organizations, could hold meetings when necessary, in a variety of places designed for temporary use. This of course may allow for more dispersing of population (a trend we are already experiencing). Large cities would no longer be needed as places to collect workers. Large cities, or at least cities, would be home for those who work in them. Usually they would be lower class employed or working class (the emerging inner city third worlds). Reich (1970) and Toffler (1970) both describe such a future in work done two decades and a half ago and so far their projections appear to be accurate. Kilmann, and others (1986), to a lesser degree view a similar future. They suggest that human need for social contact and interaction would limit such trends.

Education in such a culture also becomes one of technology. Many of the children, whose parents may work out of their homes (60-70%), would have the same technology available to them. Teachers could be assigned and lessons, teaching, discussions and etc., could all be done electronically. Schools, including large university campuses, would not be needed. Teachers would be some of those workers who can work from their homes most of the time. Teachers would have at their finger tips large bodies of information in computer files, video cassettes, book disks and other similar curricular materials technology (Rosenzweig, 1999). Teachers would connect electronically with their assigned students and progress would be measured and maintained individually. One to one teaching, that type of teaching/learning educators identify as the most effective, would prevail (Kozberg, 1998).

Clearly the cost of such a system, even considering the "public" would provide the technology to the homes and teachers, would be cheaper than maintaining multiple school buildings with the same technology, and would become even more so in the future. For cost savings alone, future schools and universities may have to consider this option. In the third-world-emerging inner-city, children might be warehoused to the technology, or be allowed to use second hand technology in their homes as state of the art technological advances are made available to those "more advanced students." The cost for such equipment to be put into a home today would be \$1,500 a year over a five year period. In 1988 Congress passed a 30 million dollar Distance Learning Act that funds just this type of education for children who live in isolated and sparsely populated areas in the United States. The awards to four vendors to provide

this education were awarded in September of 1988. Such seeds do now exist and are very seductive. It disperses control.

Other cultural/social activities carried out by today's schools, including sports, debate, drama, and a variety of other extra-curricular activities would be done in other ways, in other human services organizations (such as YMCA, Recreation Parks, Boys and Girls Clubs etc.), and would no longer be part of school or university life. The effects this could have on families is dramatic. Consider only one possible effect: rather than having to be concerned about day care and extended family care, the big concern may become "cabin fever." Would children and students who are at home all day do their school work or university work when it was convenient for them and their families? The change in the type of person needed for university life might not be recognizable to many of us.

Possible Outcome #4: The Entrepreneur Culture

Because of advancing technology and increasingly diverse social and cultural life style, an entrepreneur culture could appear. Such culture would be built upon the belief that each person has the right to design and create their own sub-culture. This would include living in a variety of lifestyle and family configurations, including gay-lesbian and single member family sub-cultures. This could put children in multiple family sub-cultures. A parent may chose, for example, to provide for but not live with any children resulting from a particular relationship. Doing, becoming, and creating "one's own thing" would be the height of entrepreneurship.

School/ human services organizations would be run in the same way. Entrepreneurs would design and offer schooling/human services to match different lifestyles and sub-cultures. Affordability of a particular type and quality of schooling/human service would be a significant factor. There might be a certain amount of money available for each child as a basic education amount. Tax refunds, direct payments, or some other form of developing resources could be used to provide a basic minimum amount for each child. A variety of entrepreneurs would create "schools" and other "consumer human service agencies" to vie for this money. Others would, for additional money, create more advanced schools, universities or "specialized sub-culture" school/human service agencies for those consumers who could afford them. Already we have many private human services organizations that are doing this in corrections, sheltered workshops and job-coaching agencies.

Given the constant change of a capitalistic system, public human services organizations/schools would probably be those that provide services to those consumers who have or have not the basic grant to pay for their services (Hasenfeld, 1983). Even these "minimum" organizations, especially schools, would provide different service cultures, based upon ethnicity, religion, or some other form of belief system. Colleges and universities would be part of the entrepreneurial system both in training teachers/human services workers for the basic school/human services sub-cultures as well as different entrepreneurial school sub-cultures and professional schools. Schools and universities would probably specialize in certain entrepreneurial approaches to schooling for teacher training and professional life. Universities would very much have their own entrepreneurial school and could be commissioned to develop and promote new ones on demand. In fact, professors might have, as their major function, the

designing and developing of these new entrepreneurial schools and other human services organizations. The name for university workers might also change. Professing would have little to do with it.

Such an entrepreneurial system could provide schooling similar to the outcomes described in the previous outcomes, as well as others. It would have the social-economic advantage (to some) of being able to maintain an existing and stable social-economic class system within the existing American culture. It would be adaptable to whatever effect technological changes might require. Certainly the seeds for this type of schooling and human services would have strong currency among those advocates of free market capitalism and Social Darwinism in the contemporary American culture. (Supply side economics, laissez-faire, free enterprise, trickle down, and etc.). Such a system might, by mistake, also provide quality school/human services to the emerging third-world- inner-city populations, whose schools are “bleak fortresses with rotting classrooms and a few amenities to motivate the young.” (Mitchell, 1991; Kozol, 1991). Because entrepreneurship can sometimes get out of hand, creating a somewhat unintended social outcome, human services will continue to pick up the victims of the functions and dysfunctions of entrepreneurship. Human services workers, administrators and educators, must continue “to strengthen and enhance family life” (Eriksen, 1981), which is now challenged by technology, complex family configurations and long working hours. Fortunately, more jobs will open in the service sector.

IV. Conclusion

This leads to my conclusion. As I look toward the mid -21st century: I see: 1) A growing problem of poverty in America, both in the rural and the urban areas, and more neglected children. Human services working hard, mainly as caregivers and custodians, to ameliorate the problem. 2) Human services educators, practitioners and students continuing to need sensitivity training to cultures other than their own. 3) Human services workers increasingly working in schools and human services agencies forming partnerships with schools. Service-learning and the practicum being the mainstay of training. 4) Programs beginning to change, and future workers being prepared to offer more services in response to the changing work and family patterns. 5) An increasingly interdependent world, in which human services educators must learn to empower their students to discover patterns and understand that the U.S. agenda is not only national but global. 6) A more diverse student body, diverse consumers, educators and providers adapting their curricula/ programs/tastes according to this diversity. 7) A dangerous separation of consumer categories and generations. Young people living increasingly lonely and isolated lives from the elderly. All in dire need of programs and institutions planned for the different categories of consumers and generations to promote apprenticeship opportunities, and bring diverse populations together. Human services is the coming profession.

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