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Oded Zipory

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Rethinking Leisure and Education

ODED ZIPORY
The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

The renowned economist John Maynard Keynes chose a strange time indeed to discuss leisure. In the midst of the global financial crisis that broke out in 1929, he wrote a curious essay called "Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren" (Keynes, 2009), in which he predicted not only that the global market would recover easily but that the next generations would have plenty more free time on their hands. He declared nothing less than the coming solution to man's ancient problem – scarcity and the necessity to provide for his needs. Then, Keynes argued, the real problem will arise:

> For the first time since his creation man will be faced with his real, his permanent problem – how to use his freedom from pressing economic cares, how to occupy the leisure, which science, and compound interest will have won for him, to live wisely and agreeably and well.

In the absence of economic necessity, men and women will be free to search for meaning. Speculating that this development would occur in around 100 years, Keynes was not totally off the mark. Already the working week is getting shorter in many developed countries and scarcity, when it exists, is often not in basic needs but in secondary, more leisure-oriented goods. In a way and at least in many parts of the world, Keynes' grandchildren do enjoy the fruits of technological and economic progress that allows them to concentrate – through leisure activities – on the meaning of their lives.

But Keynes was also aware that this change would not be easy to swallow. He believed that the "old Adam" mentality ("through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life") would be persistent, and that many people would still act out of "intense, unsatisfied purposiveness" even when it succumbs to absurdity. To welcome this desired change in the course of the human race, Keynes concludes with what we can see as an educational suggestion to make "mild preparations for our destiny, in encouraging, and experimenting in, the *arts of life* as well as the *activities of purpose*."

This collection of articles explores the relationship between leisure and education, and is driven by an unsettling notion that contemporary education is not directed toward leisurely "arts of life" as it should be but is composed of a variety of unfree and often purely instrumental "activities of purpose." We find that leisure is often discredited as not important enough or criticized as useless and in need of defense. Much like philosophy and education, leisure – historically and conceptually connected to the two – can be regarded as a "waste of time" or at least a potential one. Specifically, with regard to the relationship between leisure and education, the widely known fact that the word *school* originated from the ancient Greek word for leisure – scholé – speaks volumes to the historical and conceptual tie between the two as well as to the changes in our understanding of them, so much so that school today is not considered leisure at all.

Defending leisure, and an education based on it, against this accusation of uselessness can take a utilitarian approach, according to which leisure activities when taken in the "right way" can bring about desired goals like stress reduction, physical health or personal development. But the articles in this issue do not follow this instrumental approach. Instead, they regard leisure as primarily an end in itself, thereby following, and struggling with, the classic view of leisure.

Inspired by the ancient concept of scholé, Givanni Ildefonso-Sánchez argues against our current conception of leisure in which it is understood as primarily a consumer good within capitalist society, and in educational settings it is therefore discussed mainly as an unnecessary addition to real learning and schoolwork. Instead, she appeals to the classic *ideal* of leisure, which she connects to the concepts of culture and education, broadly understood, and following the Greeks she posits leisure as a precondition for the good life – a life that is not mere existence. Ultimately, Ildefonso-Sánchez suggests teachers can

treat leisure as a disposition and a "practice in everyday dynamics" that can lead to a profound way of looking at the world and at oneself.

A similar and perhaps a more melancholic way of understanding leisure is provided to us by Maximiliano López. In his essay, he studies the ancient notion of leisure and draws our attention to leisure being a complex phenomenon, not merely desired but also one that "is difficult to sustain … because it confronts us with a dimension of possibility." Leisure is unstable as it is "always threatened by boredom, melancholy, anguish, and despair" and is often transformed into work, entertainment, or consumption, therefore losing its unique character. To defend leisure, López calls for transforming leisure into the activity of study – a dedication that will take place in the school when it is brought back to its original form and allowed space not only for the necessary but also for the possible.

Oded Zipory also begins his discussion with the ancient Greek concept of leisure and compares it to our contemporary conception of "free time." He then engages the modern conception of work and especially its valorization, stressing the conceptual dependency of modern leisure on work (or its lack). Zipory argues that the old notion of leisure is no longer available to us and that leisure can be "saved" only by a direct confrontation with the cultural dominance of work.

Sharing Zipory's concern with work taking over moral and existential goals that once belonged to leisure, Jason Wozniak draws our attention to involuntary work and to those who simply have no time for leisure as they stubbornly work in order to pay off their debts. Criticizing what can be seen as an idealistic discussion of leisure, he highlights the material conditions required for leisure and their absence for the indebted person. He concludes by suggesting that teachers can still make "small contributions" to leisurely education by giving students experiences with free time that may exemplify leisure and can also lead to a realization of leisure in a later debt-free reality.

Lastly, Claudia Ruitenberg also explores the relationship between leisure and real-world problems. In her article, she examines how the concepts of vocation and avocation can function in regard to regenerative food growing. Arguing against the binary approach of work/leisure, Ruitenberg offers the concepts of "full-time interest" and "value practice." Taking what can be seen as an ecological approach both conceptually and environmentally, she calls for an education that is directed to an imaginary future world which exists outside and beyond the familiar concepts of work and leisure.

As a whole, the collection of essays brings about a complex and disenchanted picture of leisure and of the ways it operates in and through education. We are certain that technological developments as well as economic changes will complicate this relationship even more in the future, opening up more possibilities for leisure while at the same time endangering it. Hopefully, leisurely discussions, such as those included in this issue, will continue to inform educational practices.

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