

TECHNOLOGY,
EDUCATION, AND
PANDEMIC:
GLOBAL ISSUES

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Volume 6 · Number 1 · 2022 · Pages 202 - 236

Note: This essay was submitted for peer review in August 2020. Within a month, the United States coronavirus (COVID-19) death toll surpassed 200,000. Much has changed since that time: the number of reported COVID-19 related deaths in the United States as I write in January 2022 is now more than 870,000. I have nevertheless opted to present it as it was submitted as a snapshot of an historically important event. I have, however, added elements of a second snapshot by providing updates and additional material as of January 2022 in {brackets}, as well as minor editorial changes.

Background

The world is in the midst of a COVID-19 pandemic which may turn out to be more devastating than any since the Great Influenza of 1918. {An estimated 675,000 Americans died during the 1918 epidemic. During the current pandemic some 870,000 Americans have died in COVID-19 related deaths.} In the United States this situation has been exacerbated by three

longstanding and largely ignored, but intimately related problems: systematic racism, poverty, and police violence.

As a result of systematic racism, many black and brown Americans have been excluded from opportunities to build wealth that other citizens have enjoyed, such as home and business loans and educational opportunities. Many of these Americans are either unemployed, or else employed in low paying jobs that are deemed “essential” and that thus tend to involve higher levels of exposure to viral agents. There have also been increases in pandemic-related economic insecurities such as the prospect of homelessness due to foreclosures and evictions, and remarkably, by efforts by the {former} Trump administration, even in the midst of the pandemic, to repeal the Affordable Care Act on which millions of Americans rely for health insurance.

These conditions are hardly new, but they have become more conspicuous and more pressing as a result of the pandemic and they have been raised to a new level of public consciousness due to widely published cases of illegal and brutal force perpetrated by police against people of color. Consequently, polls now indicate that it has become

apparent to an increasing number of Americans that the current situation is untenable and that significant structural change is called for.

Poverty, Education

Although there are many potential entry points to thinking about change, one of the most important involves education. One of the keys to expanding educational opportunity involves addressing the underlying causes of poverty. Simply put, there are many students in America who regularly experience food and housing insecurity and who are therefore educationally handicapped. According to a recent report, 32% of African-American children grow up poor. That rate is nearly three times that of white children. Moreover, “26% of black children currently live in neighborhoods where the poverty rate is higher than 30%. Only 4% of white children do.”¹

According to a recent Census Bureau report, since the beginning of the pandemic “[a]bout 10% of adults reported

¹ “Staying Apart,” *The Economist*, July 11, 2020, 14.

that they did not get enough of the food they needed some of the time or often. Another 32% report getting enough, but not the kinds of food they needed.”² According to a 2018 USDA report, “6.0 million children lived in food-insecure households in which children, along with adults, were food insecure.”³ In many of these cases it is schools that provide the main nutritional support for students from those households. Although nutritional resources tend to be unavailable when schools are not open for in-person education, some non-profits such as Feed the Children provide supplemental meals.

Remarkably, however, according to a study by Jeehoon Han and Bruce D. Meyer of the University of Chicago and James X. Sullivan of the University of Notre Dame, the fiscal policy implemented the U.S. Congress in

² Jane Callen, “Weekly Census Bureau Survey Provides Timely Info on Households During COVID-19 Pandemic,” *United States Census Bureau*, May 20, 2020, <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2020/05/new-household-pulse-survey-shows-concern-over-food-security-loss-of-income.html>.

³ “Food Security in the U.S.,” United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, September 4, 2019, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/key-statistics-graphics.aspx>.

response to economic downsizing caused by the pandemic has resulted in a slight improvement of this situation.

Our results indicate that at the start of the pandemic government policy effectively countered its effects on incomes, leading poverty to fall and low percentiles of income to rise across a range of demographic groups and geographies. Simulations that rely on the detailed [Current Population Survey] data and in aggregate closely match total payments made show that the entire decline in poverty that we find can be accounted for by the rise in government assistance including unemployment insurance benefits and the Economic Impact Payments.⁴

It is arguable, therefore, that one consequence of federal attempts to adjust to the economic effects of the pandemic points the way to addressing the types of racially-based

⁴ Jeehoon Han, Bruce D. Meyer, and James X. Sullivan, “Abstract: Income and Poverty in the COVID-19 Pandemic,” *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity*, June 25, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Han-et-al-conference-draft.pdf> (retrieved July 15, 2020).

poverty that hinder learning opportunities among many minority students. In short, it may be that what is needed is more, even much more, of what these researchers claim to have been modestly successful.

{The Enhanced Child Tax Credit expired at the end of 2021. According to the Center on Poverty and Policy at Columbia University, “The fifth monthly payment of the expanded Child Tax Credit kept 3.8 million children from poverty in November 2021. The Child Tax Credit reached 61.3 million children in November and, on its own, contributed to a 5.1 percentage point (29.4 percent) reduction in child poverty compared to what the monthly poverty rate in November would have been in its absence.”⁵ One of two key Democratic senators responsible for blocking the extension objected that the cost would be too high and [according to the Wall Street Journal] he “privately voiced concerns that recipients [presumably including his own West Virginia constituents] could spend the money on

⁵ Center on Poverty and Social Policy, www.povertycenter.columbia.edu/news-internal/monthly-poverty-november-2021 (retrieved January 18, 2022).

opioids.”⁶ The senator reportedly did not provide evidence for his concerns. Current NPR reporting (January 27, 2022) indicates that Child Tax Credit funds were in most cases spent on essentials such as food, housing, and utilities.}

Will it be possible to expand this type of fiscal policy to the point that every American has the opportunity of full employment with a living wage, and that poverty will therefore no longer be an impediment to educational opportunities? Economist Stephanie Kelton, former chief economist of the U.S. Senate Budget Committee, has argued that it will. In her view, it is inflation, not deficits, that is of primary concern. And inflation, she argues, can be controlled by monetary policy.⁷ She points to the World War II economy of the United States as a successful example of expanding the money supply to meet urgent needs. Of

⁶ Ben Casselman, “Child Tax Credit’s Extra Help Ends, Just as Covid Surges Anew,” *New York Times*, Published Jan. 2, 2022, updated Jan. 3, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/02/business/economy/child-tax-credit.html> (retrieved January 18, 2022).

⁷ Stephanie Kelton, *The Deficit Myth: Modern Monetary Theory and the Birth of the People’s Economy* (New York: Public Affairs Press, 2020).

course there are dangers: on one side there is the possibility of an unanticipated and rapid onset of inflation, and on the other there is the temptation of lobbyists and the politically connected to divert funds targeted to address poverty into their own pockets. Nevertheless, it is possible to point to application of versions of this strategy. In Germany, the administration of {former} Chancellor Angela Merkel {proposed} significant deficit spending and potentially forgivable loans to help finance efforts to contain the COVID-19 virus. Germany, it is important to note, has a healthy economy, free university tuition for undergraduates, and universal health care.

{As of January, 2022 the sources of rising inflation are unclear. Supply chain issues, pent- up demand for goods, rising wages for essential workers, and “the great resignation” of workers for whom minimum wage jobs are not sufficient compensation for exposure to COVID-19 (thus creating significant labor shortages), appear to be contributing factors. Some argue that the rise in inflation is temporary, while others see long-term issues. One respected investment letter predicts that “Inflation will start the year

high, but fall below 3% by year end.”⁸ The Federal Reserve is expected to raise short term interest rates several times during 2022.}

A potential impediment to the success of this type of {fiscal policy} proposal is the fact that, according to a study by the Federal Reserve, about 6% of Americans are unbanked.⁹ One possible solution might be to follow the example of Kenya, which has made great strides in solving this problem by means of mobile banking apps.¹⁰ The United States is now playing catch-up with banking apps from Walmart, PayPal, and others. In addition, “[Democratic candidate] Joe Biden’s campaign for the White House {included} . . . ideas, which would allow the

⁸ “The Kiplinger Letter: Forecasts for Executives and Investors,” Vol. 99, No. 1, January 7, 2022.

⁹ “Fed Survey: Unbanked Share of Americans at 6%,” *ABA Banking Journal*, May 23, 2019, <https://bankingjournal.aba.com/2019/05/fed-survey-unbanked-share-of-americans-at-6/>

¹⁰ Thomas McGrath, “M-PESA: How Kenya Revolutionized Mobile Payments,” *Medium*, April 9, 2018, <https://mag.n26.com/m-pesa-how-kenya-revolutionized-mobile-payments-56786bc09ef>.

[Federal Reserve] to directly serve those who do not have a private bank account.”¹¹

There are of course other proposals for coming to terms with the type of poverty that impedes educational access. A report in the *Economist* raised the possibility of government funded “baby bonds,” for all children, but more generously for children born in poverty, that would be worth \$50,000 by the time the child turns 18. The estimated cost of the proposal would be about \$80 billion a year, considerably “less than the \$207 billion the government will forgo this year [2020] by taxing dividends and long-term capital gains at lower levels than [ordinary] income.”¹²

Broadband Technology, Education

Another key to expanding educational opportunity involves expanding the broadband infrastructure. Although the technology of remote learning is changing rapidly, one

¹¹ Starting Over Again,” *The Economist*, July 25, 2020, 16.

¹² “Staying Apart,” 16.

thing is clear: the internet will be an increasingly important tool for educators. Estimates of households without broadband service vary, but Pew Research reports that “[r]oughly three-in-ten adults with household incomes below \$30,000 a year (29%) don’t own a smartphone. More than four-in-ten don’t have home broadband services (44%) or a traditional computer (46%). And a majority of lower-income Americans are not tablet owners. By comparison, each of these technologies is nearly ubiquitous among adults in households earning \$100,000 or more a year.” Moreover, [w]ith fewer options for online access at their disposal, many lower-income Americans are relying more on smartphones. As of early 2019, 26% of adults living in households earning less than \$30,000 a year [were] “smartphone-dependent” internet users – meaning they own a smartphone but do not have broadband internet at home.”

The Pew Report also addresses the “homework divide” – the gap between school-age children who have access to high-speed internet at home and those who don’t. In 2015, 35% of lower-income households with school-age

children did not have a broadband internet connection at home, according to a Pew Research Center analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data.¹³

In order to increase access to educational opportunity, it seems clear that broadband access at threshold speeds must be treated as a utility similar to electricity and water. It turns out that there is already a model for achieving this. In 1935 the Roosevelt Administration created the Rural Electrification Administration (REA). In 1936 Congress responded by passing the Rural Electrification Act (also REA), which provided low-interest loans to finance electrical generation and distribution in rural parts of the country.

Funds directed to expand broadband access to rural areas, together with broadband subsidies targeted at low-income urban areas would improve access for students who would otherwise remain on the wrong side of the “digital

¹³ Monica Anderson and Madhumitha Kumar, “Digital Divide Persists Even as Lower-Income Americans Make gains in Tech Adoption,” *Pew Research Center*, May 7, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/05/07/digital-divide-persists-even-as-lower-income-americans-make-gains-in-tech-adoption/>.

divide.” In a situation where interest rates hover near zero (or go negative), loans might be forgivable in whole or in part. Several states are already working on plans to address this problem. A recent Pew Trust report “identifies and explores these promising practices through examples in nine states: California, Colorado, Maine, Minnesota, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. Pew identified the practices through conversations with more than 300 broadband stakeholders, including representatives of state broadband programs, internet service providers (ISPs), local governments, and broadband coalitions.”¹⁴

Broadband access for households without adequate computing tools would do little to solve the problem of access to educational opportunities. There are already reports of school systems seeking funding sources to purchase laptops and tablets which will then be loaned to students. As I write {August 2020}, a basic chrome book sells

¹⁴ “How States Are Expanding Broadband Access,” *Pew Trust Report*, March 20, 2020, <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/reports/2020/02/how-states-are-expanding-broadband-access>.

for less than \$200 retail. {In January 2022 that figure is roughly the same.} One alternative for areas with no broadband or where it is available but not accessible for financial reasons are *Rume* and *Cell-Id*, two learning platforms with instructional materials that can be downloaded to mobile phones.

In short, there is considerable evidence that major anti-poverty and broadband access proposals, both of which will be essential if there is to be adequate access to educational opportunities during the pandemic (and beyond), are beginning to be brought to the table.

{Since 2020, there has been significant progress on these issues. In November, 2021, President Biden signed a bipartisan infrastructure bill that allocates \$65 billion for expanding Internet access. Important issues now include how the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) will exercise oversight, including updating the federal government's aging maps on Internet

connectivity and addressing privacy and cybersecurity issues.^{15}}

Globalization, Educational Technology

Although I have discussed the situation in the United States at some length, problems of poverty and internet infrastructure are hardly unique to that country. Nor are protests against racism and police violence limited to the United States. Al Jazeera has reported that following the death of George Floyd there were large protests in Canada, Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, Kenya, Nigeria, Israel, Australia, New Zealand, and elsewhere.¹⁶

On an international scale, efforts are underway at the World Bank to provide broadband access to developing countries. Here is their statement:

¹⁵ Cristiano Lima, “The Technology 202,” “Biden’s big broadband ambitions mean historic hurdles for NTIA,” *Washington Post*, January 18, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/01/18/bidens-big-broadband-ambitions-mean-historic-hurdles-ntia/>, retrieved January 18, 2022.

¹⁶ Mohammed Haddad, “Mapping Anti-Racism Solidarity Protests Around the World,” *Al Jazeera*, June 7, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/interactive/2020/06/mapping-anti-racism-solidarity-protests-world-200603092149904.html/>.

The World Bank is strongly committed to affordable broadband access and has established the following goals to help address that goal:

Position at least 35 land-locked, fragile and small-island countries to develop affordable broadband Internet service for all residents by 2020 in support of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 9.c: “strive to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020.” An affordable entry-level broadband subscription would cost less than five percent of average per-capita income.

Provide technical assistance to (1) create national and regional frameworks enabling private and public-private investment in broadband service and (2) design investment-ready projects that will achieve the availability and affordability target.¹⁷

¹⁷ “Connecting for Inclusion: Broadband Access for All,”
World Bank,
<https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/digitaldevelopment/brief/connecting-for-inclusion-broadband-access-for-all>.

{It is not clear which, if any, of the 2020 targets established by the World Bank have been met as I write in January 2022. Nevertheless, there continues to be movement in that direction. For readers who wish more information on this issue, two World Bank reports may be of interest. 1) “World Development Report 2021: Data for Better Lives: Connecting the World,”¹⁸ and 2) “Fixed broadband subscriptions (per 100 people): Data,” which is a country by county report of broadband access as of 2021.¹⁹}

The implications of this project for educational policy are clear. As I suggested regarding the situation in the United States, internet and mobile phone access will be an important tool in the struggle against poverty by allowing people to leapfrog legacy banking practices (as has already proven to be the case in Kenya), as well as providing connectivity for students both at school and at home.

“Globalization” has been variously defined. In its economic sense it often refers to the movements of goods,

¹⁸ <https://wdr2021.worldbank.org/stories/connecting-the-world/>, retrieved January 17, 2022.

¹⁹ <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.BBND.P2>, retrieved January 17, 2022.

services, and capital investments across national boundaries. In its cultural sense, it often means international exchanges of people, ideas, and cultural practices (including cuisines). In educational terms, at the very least it ideally means the development of a sense of the interconnectedness of life on earth with respect to issues of peace and nonviolence; protection of the environment, including addressing climate change; attention to problems of poverty and global justice; and awareness of the importance of human rights, especially in times of mass displacement of people due to war, environmental conditions, or other factors.²⁰

Beyond that, “globalization” in an educational sense means access to learning tools, to contact with individuals of different social and cultural milieux, and to reliable information. It means access to resources that provide psycho-social support such as UNICEF’s guidance on how teachers should talk to children about COVID-19; digital learning management systems such as ClassDojo, which

²⁰ Daisaku Ikeda, “Thoughts on Education for Global Citizenship,” (Lecture, Teachers College, Columbia University, June 13, 1996), <https://www.daisakuikeda.org/sub/resources/works/lect/lect-08.html>.

connects teachers with students and parents to build classroom communities; systems built for use on basic mobile phones such as Cell-Ed, a learner-centered, skills-based learning platform with offline options; systems with strong offline functionality such as Rume, which provides education tools and content to enable lifelong learning for underserved communities; and Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) Platforms such as European Schoolnet Academy, which offers free online professional development courses for teachers in English, French, Italian, and other European languages.

It means self-directed learning content such as Discovery Education, which furnishes free educational resources and lessons about viruses and outbreaks for different grade levels; mobile reading applications such as Global Digital Library, which provides digital storybooks and other reading materials easily accessible from mobile phones or computers and is available in 43 languages; collaboration platforms that support live-video communication such as Zoom, a Cloud platform for video and audio conferencing, collaboration, chat and webinars;

tools for teachers to create digital learning content such as Squigl, a content creation platform that transforms speech or text into animated videos; and external repositories of distance learning solutions such as Keep Learning Going, an extensive collection of free tools, strategies, tips and best practices for teaching online from a coalition of USA-based education organizations which includes descriptions of over 600+ digital learning solutions.

The descriptions of learning tools in the previous two paragraphs come from UNESCO's Global Education Coalition. The Coalition's introductory statement follows:

The list of educational applications, platforms and resources below aim (sic) to help parents, teachers, schools and school administrators facilitate student learning and provide social care and interaction during periods of school closure. Most of the solutions curated are free and many cater to multiple languages. While these solutions do not carry UNESCO's explicit endorsement, they tend to have a wide reach, a strong user-base and evidence of impact. They are categorized based on distance

learning needs, but most of them offer functionalities across multiple categories.²¹

Remote education will provide new opportunities for promoting global citizenship, even if the trends toward nationalist sourcing and the breakdown of international trade aspects of globalization continue. It will be up to international consortia of educators to ensure that channels of communication between international student communities continues as a bulwark against the types of extreme nationalism that are already present in some quarters and are likely to be further exacerbated by global crises such as pandemics and climate change.

John Dewey's Educational Ideas in a Time of Pandemic

I have so far discussed some of the technical solutions that have been proposed to alleviate structural racism and

²¹ "Distance Learning Solutions," *UNESCO*, <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse/solutions>.

poverty and extend broadband access, both of which are among the keys to achieving greater educational access in rich and poor countries alike. Although successes in these areas will not be sufficient, they would nevertheless constitute an important step forward. It will also be necessary to design the type of personal distancing and other safety measures that are called for by prudent practices during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond, and that present significant problems for the future of education.

It is now widely accepted science that climate change will be with us for the foreseeable future. Consequent displacement of non-human species from their accustomed ecological niches is expected to result in increased contact between humans and newly displaced animal populations. This, in turn, is likely to lead to increased exposure to viruses to which humans have not yet developed resistance. In short, the COVID-19 pandemic may well be a harbinger of things to come.

The consequences for education are profound. Tools for remote education, including its educational applications, platforms, and resources have enjoyed remarkable

development and growth in a short period of time. Especially in the areas of online research, curated transfer of information and ideas, development of technical and creative skills necessary for media production, self-directed learning, and online group meetings (such as Zoom), remote education excels.

The use of remote education, already a part of many learning environments as a result of personal distancing concerns, is almost certain to play an increasing role across a broad spectrum of educational institutions. Attention to digital literacy, “deepfake” literacy, and the importance of vetting even trusted sources should be at the core of remote education from early years forward. In addition to learning how to cross a street safely or ride a bike, children will need to learn how to critically assess claims on social media, blogs, vlogs, news organizations, and other online sources. Like other tools and techniques, remote education is neither good nor bad, but multi-valent. It will be a part of the task of educators to help their students sort out those values. Moreover, most educators know that remote education is not a substitute for in-person education because the latter

can provide a richer motor and sensory learning environment and more opportunities for socialization.

Although John Dewey died in 1952, long before the development of robust electronic communication, his ideas have influenced several generations of educators and remain highly relevant to the current educational situation. Many of the components of Dewey's educational program, controversial at the time, are now mainstream practices. In primary and middle schools, for example, many students no longer sit in rows of desks, but around tables where they can review each other's work and engage in joint projects. In most schools qualities of good citizenship, empathy, respect for diversity, the importance of teamwork, and regard for ethical norms are taught not as separate add-ons, but in ways that allow those values to permeate the entire curriculum.

If we take Dewey's model seriously, however, there are still educational practices that need reform. The most obvious example is the practice of teaching to the test, which tends to consume time that would otherwise be spent on

social studies such as geography and history; the visual, plastic, and musical arts; and physical education.

There is a danger that teaching to the test may become even more widespread than it currently is because of its natural affinity to some approaches to remote education. But teaching to the test provides a perfect example of what Dewey called “an affair of ‘telling’ and being told,” which he thought had little to do with education. He regarded education as “an active and constructive process” (MW 9, 43). It is “the direct transformation of the quality of experience” (MW 9, 82). He even provided what he called a “technical definition” of education. “It is that reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience” (MW 9, 82). On this view, remote education, as successful as it may be in many areas, falls short of engaging the whole student. It is worth noting that Dewey’s “technical definition” of education bears a striking resemblance the characterization of democracy in his 1939 lecture “Creative Democracy: The Task Before Us”. “Democracy is belief in the ability of human experience to

generate the aims and methods by which further experience will grow in ordered richness” (MW 9, 229).

Dewey’s notion of experience stresses the importance of motor and sensory learning that is difficult to achieve remotely. An “active and constructive process” especially in lower grades, involves tools and artifacts that are manipulable, and that involve the use and development of motor, olfactory, and gustatory skills. The children in his laboratory school built a small house. They planted and tended a garden, and they harvested, cooked, and ate what the garden produced. They engaged in activities that were practical in the sense of generating interest in the relation of means and ends.

No number of object-lessons, got up as object-lessons for the sake of giving information, can afford even the shadow of a substitute for acquaintance with the plants and animals of the farm and garden acquired through actual living among them and caring for them. No training of sense-organs in school, introduced for the sake of training, can begin to compete with the alertness and fullness of sense-life

that comes through daily intimacy and interest in familiar occupations. Verbal memory can be trained in committing tasks, a certain discipline of the reasoning powers can be acquired through lessons in science and mathematics; but, after all, this is somewhat remote and shadowy compared with the training of attention and of judgment that is acquired in having to do things with a real motive behind and a real outcome ahead. (MW 1, 8)

[Educational] practice requires that the school environment be equipped with agencies for doing, with tools and physical materials, to an extent rarely attained. It requires that methods of instruction and administration be modified to allow and to secure direct and continuous occupations with things. Not that the use of language as an educational resource should lessen; but that its use should be more vital and fruitful by having its normal connection with shared activities. (MW 9, 44)

One of the key concepts in Dewey's book *The School and Society* (1899) is "occupations." In Dewey's time sewing, woodworking, gardening and cooking were among the occupations of children in elementary school. Although these remain important, other occupations have been added over time: they include use of social media, video production, computer coding, web page design, 3-D printing, and robotics.

Dewey reminded us that educational occupations flow from the native tendencies of children. Children are naturally active and they are naturally curious. They enjoy making things. Educational occupations also tend to balance theory and practice. They maintain "a balance between the intellectual and the practical phases of experience" (MW 1, 92). They serve as a means to the end of socialization and social efficiency. "Occupations bring people naturally together in groups, develop a group of consciousness and power to divide and yet cooperate harmoniously. Knowledge, scholastic attainments, aesthetic culture, pursued, as at present, with only personal ends in view, tend

to egoism, social stratifications and antagonisms” (MW 4, 191).

Dewey also recognized the importance of peer-based learning both inside and outside the classroom. Much of what children learn, they learn from one another. One of the challenges of educating children in a time of pandemic will be how to organize alternatives to peer learning and socialization that normally occur in the schools.

Learning Pods and Innovation

This brings us to the subject of “pandemic pods” or “microschools.” Among the very wealthy, parents will be sending their children to exclusive private schools. Moderately wealthy parents are forming learning pods that comprise a small group of children and a professional instructor. The cost to parents is approximately \$20,000 for the school year, or “about twice the annual spending for each public-school student in most states.”¹⁷ Other, still less

¹⁷ Kevin Welner “Report”, in “Lessons From the Pandemic’s Education Pod Parents,” Valerie Strauss, *Washington Post*, August 7, 2020,

wealthy parents will rely on public schools, some of which are forming their own no-cost learning pods during school hours. Due to funding issues, attendance in some cases will be limited to those students with the most need. Other parents are seeking pod partners online and plan to share instructional duties.

Kevin Welner, an attorney and professor specializing in educational policy, calls for substantially increased funding for public schools during the pandemic. Provided with adequate funding, he argues, public schools can do the job that most parents require for their children. In his view, “pandemic pods are teaching us one more crucial lesson: cavernous societal inequality creates opportunity gaps for children and is exacerbated in times of crisis.”¹⁸ Moreover, “the pod people are telling us what... schools should look like: learning environments with personal relationships and attention, connecting children to teachers ‘at their sides,’ engaging the students in projects and experiments. But

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2020/08/07/lessons-pandemics-education-pod-parents/>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

we're not stepping up. The alarm bells are ringing loudly, while policy makers are covering their ears and emulating the emotionless pod people of [the] 1956 [horror film]."¹⁹

Welner has recapitulated some of the main elements of John Dewey's educational model. But it is important to go even further. Dewey argued that his own ideas were merely a starting point. What he called "the sources of a science of education" would not be found solely in the social sciences or the ideas of professional educators. They would instead be found in actual, day-to-day educational practice, the interaction of parents, educators, students, policy makers, and communities as all stakeholders cooperate to meet the evolving educational challenges of evolving educational challenges.

The technological challenges of a time of pandemic can be positive: they can stimulate major innovations in the way we view education. A time of crisis can open a policy window for change. Impediments to fair and equitable educational opportunities can be addressed and overcome.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Funding for public education can be increased. And teachers can be afforded the respect that they deserve.

As I write, during late August 2020, the need for change is urgent and the next steps on the path are clearly lit. It would be tragic to waste this opportunity.

{As I write in January 2022, it appears that many opportunities to improve education in the United States may be squandered. One positive consequence of the pandemic is that parents have taken a larger role in the education of their children. But this phenomenon also has a darker side. The recently elected governor of Virginia, for example, yielding to parent-pressure, has established a “hotline” for parents to report teaching that they regard as “divisive.” What some parents deem “divisive includes lessons on the history of structural racism, LGBTQ+ issues, and sex education. There are also reported efforts to purge school libraries of books that some parents regard as having the potential to make their children “uncomfortable,” such as award-winning Young Adult books and even books by Pulitzer Prize winners.

Sadly, the leaders of one of our national parties and their allies are casting their lot with those who reject the proposition that every eligible voter should have ready access to the polls, that every child in America should be free of hunger and housing insecurity, that teachers should be free to teach the best of professional scholarship, and that school libraries should be free from censorship.}

I will allow Dewey the final word.

The American people, including American business men, say a great deal about the practical idealism of America. Now if there is any one phase of human life in which there is need of idealism and need that that idealism be practical, it is in the upbringing of the young. This is the one thing, it seems to me, before which every serious-minded person must stand in awe when he considers the immense issues which are at stake both for individuals and for the future of society. Any genuinely practical idealism will go upon the belief that *what the wisest and best of human parents want for their own children, that the community as a whole*

should want for the children of the community as a whole.

It is a shame to our supposed idealism in any degree in which we come short of making any effort to live up to that ideal. (LW 3, 284, emphasis added)