

Original Paper

Racial Apartheid Education: The Politics of Online Learning, Traditional Education, Self Learning, and Independent Study in the United States

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Abstract

Unfortunately, there has been vehement debates throughout the United States about how we should educate our students—that is, whether we should use a hybrid mix of educational tools, to impart knowledge to all Americans. For example, will virtual learning be embraced by all educational institutions? Not surprisingly, online education is a frequent topic of conversation with teachers, professors, administrators, and other educators. Still, there is uncertainty about what some of our venerable education institutions should do. Suffice it to say, colleges and universities must underscore the importance of providing a first-class education for all its people. For example, African American students shouldn't be denied educational opportunities. At stake: Minority students might be left behind. Indeed, education diversity will become a self-perpetuating problem if blacks and other students are left behind, particularly because of a lack of technology access. Furthermore, a long-overdue, educational reckoning with systemic racism in all systems and levels of education is in order. It is important to be on-point about these controversial matters.

Meanwhile, education groups in the United States are struggling with ideas of incorporating distance education programs, Independent Study, and virtual learning in respective curriculums; but are such notions really about educating all our children? Needless to say, the increasing importance of online education has become the so-called new thing. But the jury is still out on whether such education technology can be effectively put in place for all students. In this regard, some colleges and universities haven't entirely lived up to certain educational principles. No doubt, the internal struggles for

providing a good learning experience for students is on-going at colleges and universities, especially when it comes to admission standards. In the final analysis, students must shrewdly learn how to navigate the various education systems, and find strength in their abilities to learn traditionally or online, without resignation.

Keywords

virtual/remote education, older students, racism and educational separation, brick and mortar schools, discrimination, self-learners, Independent Study, admission standards, and white segregationists

1. Introduction: Dimensions in American Education

The way in which we obtain knowledge, and educate ourselves in today's education market (in the United States) takes many forms, like acquiring a higher degree online, apprenticeship programs/on-the-job training, and other traditional learning endeavors. Educating ourselves also allow people to have better lives, while becoming productive members of our society. When it is all said and done, "the purpose of school [at all levels] is more than training the future workforce; it is one of the foundations of our democracy." To say the least, education at schools "should also be the pathway through which [American] students learn the knowledge and skills to reach their full potential as informed, engaged citizens" (Jimenez, 2018, p. 3). The goal, of course, is to determine whether we should have a more fully integrated and inclusive education system in America. In so many words, a well-rounded education (for all our students) should be an unambiguous undertaking, without uncertainty or politics, particularly in regards to public, private or "for-profit," online schools. Unfortunately, it is hard to know exactly what level of success these respective, online schools, throughout the United States, will have on modern-day education, and traditional, academic institutions. Because in the end, online learning and Independent Study are examples of turning the reality of higher education and traditional education systems on their head. It should also be noted that our current education systems are deeply rooted in having students study "in-person" with a professor or teacher. Which is to say that, "in more complex societies, [like ours], where there is more knowledge to be passed on, a more selective and efficient means of transmission—the [brick and mortar] school and teacher—becomes necessary" ("Education," 2000). Understandably, some students need the personal touch or interaction from teachers and educators, to succeed in school. However, alternative, technological approaches to education are rapidly moving ahead in the United States.

Yet, there are legitimate reasons to believe that the specific needs of *all* students will not be met, as educators, in American schools, struggle to get their heads around speculative policies that are concerned with "in-class," and distance education. Moreover, can teachers and professors educate *all* our students remotely in the same way? And who exactly will finally decide on the number of students who will be educated in elite American schools, especially with the new order of challenges in online education? These questions are important to understand, because as educator Stanley D. Frank (1996) has written, "more than 95 percent of college-bound high school seniors lack the necessary reading

skills to enable them to succeed in their college, business, and professional lives.” Additionally, “50 percent of [our] students who enter college never graduate” (p. 8). The question is: Why? Is it because some students lack academic discipline or interest? Columnist for *The New York Times*, David Brooks (2015) explains:

Universities are more professional and glittering than ever, but in some ways there is emptiness deep down. Students are taught how to do things, but many are not forced to reflect on why they should do them or what [they] are [there] for. They are given many career options, but they are on their own when it comes to developing criteria to determine which vocation would lead to the fullest life. (p. 3)

After all, as already intimated, students are “attending college so they can get a good job and make more money. They [students] want to end up [as] authorities in their fields; [and] they want to end up well off financially” (Brinson, 1999, p. 17B). This objective is, perhaps, indelibly etched into the minds of almost every American student. Nevertheless, and unbeknown to most Americans, “about one in three students who enroll in college never earn a degree” (Leonhardt & Chinoy, 2019, p. 8). Investigative reporters Davis Leonhardt and Sahil Chinoy “suggest that the problem isn’t the students—it’s the schools” (p. 8). This means that some colleges and universities will likely be negatively affected by their actions toward *gullible* students. It should also be noted that: “The for-profit college industry is struggling under the weight of declining enrollment, stiff competition from traditional universities and an image battered by past misdeeds” (Danilova & Lardner, 2020, p. 16A); and many exist without accreditation. So are “for-profit” schools more like a *Kafkaesque* education situation? Perhaps. We must keep in mind that “for-profit” schools in the United States have been the bane of traditional, public education. Therefore, traditional colleges and universities shouldn’t take anything for granted, despite the obvious educational headaches from “for-profit” schools. Moreover, we must highlight the principal merits of our traditional education systems. Meanwhile, traditional colleges and universities in the United States shouldn’t misrepresent themselves, or their own distance education programs, because virtual learning for some students is educationally unfriendly or remotely *untenable*. Indeed, some American students are having a hard time adjusting to the technology, which is at the heart of the distance education issue today, as it is not the conventional way of educating our students.

Admittedly, a virtual learning environment (or online/remote learning) doesn’t work for some students, as it can be impersonal and frustrating. It has even been argued that “in-person” instruction is better than online education. No doubt, some of our students believe that they can only learn by instruction in the classroom. Or, they can learn “more from in-person instruction” (Quintana, 2020, p. 2D) (Note 1). More importantly, some American students may feel disconnected from each other with distance education. Simply put, there is no substitute for “in-person” instruction. Equally important, some “Instructors may deal with new technologies and ways of teaching that [might] leave them uncomfortable” (p. 2D). Moreover, it may be harder to find appropriate educators or academics who

want to teach online or virtually. Education expert Julie Yaeger (2019), however, tells us that: “Technology can provide dynamic tools for monitoring student achievement, timely communication with parents and guardians and at times increase student engagement” (p. 7) (Note 2). But, with computer technology, will colleges and universities damage the long-term hopes of U.S. students to achieve their educational goals to graduate? This question comes across most clearly when schools work hard to set-up unchanging, or entrenched, but appropriate educational priorities, including distance learning programs, and “classroom instruction that encourages a balance of technological and non-technological opportunities for learning” (p. 7). Hence, we must continue to take such practical approaches that would allow *all* students to be educated. Paradoxically, at the back end of our traditional educational spectrum, we must consider that some students and “many individuals choose to develop their intelligences” by other means, like “personal study and [even] individualized learning projects” (Armstrong, 1993, p. 163). So will distance learning/education, with computer technology, and flexible courses, become the way we educate ourselves (or students) in the 21st century, and beyond? Equally significant, will students and others gain the same level of educational expertise (online) needed to have a successful life and career? According to educator R. Lee Viar (2019):

Online degree programs can be challenging, and are sometimes even more difficult than some of their on-campus counterparts because they require the adult learner to be more self-disciplined and manage their time effectively. However, the convenience of online [education] is the tipping point that enables many adult learners the opportunity to earn their degrees while working around their own schedule. (p. 10)

2. The Failure of School Admission Standards

By and large, technology is like a seismic, learning shift when it comes to educating all students. However, it is not the *panacea* for all our education problems in the United States. Furthermore, we must keep in mind that, “technology is also forcing [educational] change[s],” particularly at the higher education level. This is also to say that, “Online course[s] make the transmission of [educational] information a commodity” (Brooks, 2015, p. 3). Professor of education, Thomas Armstrong (1993) has written that, “an estimated 40 million American adults participate every year in educational activities through these [online] and other learning channels” (p. 163) (Note 3). Therefore, “if colleges are going to justify themselves, they are going to have to thrive at those [educational] things that require physical proximity” (Brooks, 2015, p. 3), and remote learning. Moreover, through continuing adult education programs, “a person [or student] can engage in a wide range of learning activities across the spectrum of intelligences,” and education levels. Armstrong (1993), goes on to write that, “there are even educational brokering services that can assist [students] in identifying [their specific] needs, [while] setting goals, and linking up with educational resources in [their home] area[s]” (pp. 162-163) (Note 4), or states, particularly in regards to higher education. However, it should be noted that so-called consulting or brokering services can backfire for parents and students, as it did with college consultant

William “Rick” Singer, who founded the *Key Worldwide Foundation*, which was a fake “charitable front for laundering money and helping wealthy families [illegally] get their [unqualified] children into [prestigious] college[s]” (Westfall, 2019, p. 46) (Note 5) and universities. We must ask: How long has this cheating and bribing (by parents) been going on, to get mostly white (children) or students into top colleges and universities? We may never know. But according to U.S. District Judge Nathaniel Gorton, “Higher education in this country aspires to be a meritocracy. [And] those [students] who work the hardest or make the best grades [are] rightfully [supposed to be] accepted into the best schools” (Garrison, 2019, p. 6A) (Note 6), regardless of their socio-economic status. Fortunately, many American parents value education, and are doing the right thing when it comes to enrolling their children into colleges and other schools. But in a broader educational context, college and university students (in the U.S.) must have the wherewithal, smarts and flexibility to adjust, without “hemming and hawing” about some kind of perfection when it comes to their education, as it is really up to them to get what they want out of the experience, especially at the higher education levels. Unfortunately, in this regard, some “students, teachers and reformers are pushing back against the [so-called] failures of mainstream higher education” (Worthen, 2019, p. 1) (Note 7), whether the education is online or in the classroom, because many, perhaps, believe that such schools (or school systems) cannot bring about the desired educational outcomes, as already discussed. But challenging higher education institutions shouldn’t be a reason to cheat, to get students through the doors of these great places of higher learning. Additionally, we shouldn’t look at student education through totally political lens, which might help with our admission problems—at all education levels. Moreover, *myopically* focused debates about such controversial matters can be counter-productive or counterintuitive to our education goals. Indeed, this education *lethargy* must be overcome in the United States—that is, if we are to be fair and honest with our students, especially when it comes to admission standards. Even more important, we must “look at [different education] technology and use it to better engage students on their [own] terms” (Murray, 2018, p. 34). No doubt, focusing on these education matters will (positively) influence *all* American students, and their capacity to learn, without cheating in some way.

3. The Education of Older American Students

While assessing more significant opportunities, many older students/learners who lack higher education, specific credentials, or a college degree are going back into the college classroom, in record numbers. This is a very good thing, indeed, because older adult students are highly motivated, competent, and usually complete the classroom work/lessons and assignments without much prompting. Older students also question things that don’t seem realistic, or practical. Or they might ask about academic things that sound suspicious or wrong, to make the best decisions about their education. Furthermore, according to educator Laurie Carlson (1989), “some of the major obstacles faced by [older] adults trying to obtain education or training” include the following:

- On-campus residency requirements.

- Classes offered at inconvenient times.
- Unavailability of the courses they want to take.
- Home and job responsibilities.
- Commuting to class.
- Credits taken at a previous school are not accepted at another school.
- Living too far from a campus.
- Child care; and
- Fear of competing against younger students in a classroom. (pp. 9-10)

As a practical matter, these obstacles must be continuously addressed by adult student/learners. Older students might also start a traditional academic career only to find the classwork too hard, or educationally stifling (Bronner, 1997, p. C23), and finally give up. Therefore, older adult learners/students are trying to learn, and educate themselves through alternative methods, like rigorous online classes, because they are “focused on trying to find opportunities that match... their specific career path, which is challenging [traditional] institutions to rethink their [education] models.” Essentially, this means that the “on-ground experience or full degree experience doesn’t [always] meet the demands of today’s [older student or] learner” (Murray, 2018, p. 34). Therefore, older students/learners can educate themselves online, and receive a (higher) degree without leaving home or attending the hollowed grounds, so to speak, of a *brick and mortar* school. In the final analysis, this is, again, a good thing. Ultimately, we should all be interested to see what direction our education endeavors take when it comes to educating the older student/learner.

4. Racial Apartheid Education and Minority Students

Angry voices (in the United States) from some minority parents criticize the “traditional college curricula as [being] shamefully distorted due to an emphasis which they view as overly white, excessively male, and skewed far too much toward European cultures and values” (Davis, 1994, p. 11). To say the least, there must be tailored learning strategies for proactive, traditional and online classes, and/or remote learning, which should include minority students, without equivocation. In this regard, it is essential for colleges and universities to pay close attention to the various stakes for U.S. education, while opening up schools to *all* students, regardless of the color of their skin, or financial backgrounds. In other words, if we are to be successful with our goals, systemic racism must be addressed at all levels of education. It also should be remembered that:

Being poorer, black children are more likely to attend substandard schools, and less likely to graduate from college, than whites. This depresses future earning power, and keeps blacks over-represented in jobs that offer no benefits or retirement plans. They have less money to put towards home-ownership, and homes account for the largest share of wealth for both black and white families. Thus low wealth perpetuates itself. (“Waking Life,” 2013, p. 25) (Note 8)

To be sure, the education realities (in the United States) are quite different for blacks and other minority students. This is to say that affluent, white, upper-middle-class families might always have the upper-hand, or an unfair advantage, because of educational inequalities, better resources, segregated schools, or *racial apartheid* education. Historian Lynn Hunt (2018) tells us that, “it is almost impossible to grasp how difficult it [is] for minority students to make their way in the university” (p. 73) (Note 9). Consequently, some believed that African Americans and other minorities are deprived a well-rounded education. Indeed, according to journalist Nicholas Kristof (2019), “the largest group of all that falls through the [U.S. education] cracks is probably made up of those from poor, chaotic or working class backgrounds.” Kristof goes on to conclude that, “Children from the top 1 percent are 77 times more likely to attend an Ivy [league] college than kids from the bottom 20 percent” (p. 11) (Note 10). It is also more than disturbing that poor black American students and other minority students cannot even afford a *lap-top* or other computer technology. It is also suggested that minority students are hurt the most by distance education, because they don’t have access to wireless Internet connection. So can these American students really be educated correctly, and remotely *via* online classes if they cannot afford to pay for the necessary Internet technology? The major problem is that online education can (absolutely) reinforce *racial segregation*, making some U.S. schools more unequal. Hence, *diversity* is critical for educational institutions, even if classes are held online. It also should be made abundantly clear that American colleges and universities must make education accessible to all students, all things being equal, even if it means providing the specific technology needed for *at-risk* or *high-risk* minority students. Otherwise, these vulnerable, poor students might fall behind academically. This issue should be of primary concern for U.S. educational institutions, particularly as it concerns learning traditionally, or online. Either way, it is more democratic if our society educates students from all ethnic groups in the same way. In general, as Pulitzer Prize winners Will and Ariel Durant (1968) write: “If equality of educational opportunity can be established, democracy [in the United States] will be real and justified. For this is the vital truth beneath its catchwords: that though men cannot be equal, their access to education and opportunity can be made more nearly equal” (p. 79) (Note 11). Which is to say that educating minority students in America has always been shown to help them rise above their poverty-stricken existence. Therefore, qualified minority and *low-income* students should be accepted at prestigious schools, no matter their financial circumstances.

Coincidentally, this take on educating minority students in the U.S. begs the question: Should all students “demand that college curricula devote substantial attention to the role of women, minorities and other long-excluded or neglected groups and cultures?” (Davis, 1994, p. 11) In a diverse society, such as ours, African Americans, indigenous and other people of color should never be undermined, neglected or left behind when it comes to higher learning and education in the United States. To be sure, we must recognize the negative impact of systemic racism in education. Or are American education systems rigged against poor, marginalized people? Consider: Segregation and discrimination, as well as racial disparities in education, at all levels, must be eradicated.

5. Self Learning and Traditional Education

Unfortunately, some American students, perhaps, “in both external and traditional [education] programs consider their efforts to earn a degree [as] nothing more than a credit chase—[or] a race to accumulate as many credits as possibly by any means available” (Duffy, 1994, p. 25), to graduate. But higher education must never be a *zero-sum* game, where the wealthy are always winners and marginalized people are the losers. Furthermore, it should be established that some adult learners are brilliant, self-educated, and have no need for some kind of educational structure or guidance, like Sir Richard Branson, Bill Gates or the late Steve Jobs, to name a few individuals. These wealthy men prevailed and became experts in their respective fields, without a college degree. Which is to say that they succeeded by their own devices, while conducting complicated research and becoming self-made scholars and authorities in their own right. Self-learners, therefore, believe that they can achieve success without higher education or a college degree. Although he was highly educated, Albert Einstein was a Swiss patent clerk, while working on his general theory of relativity; and he would later become the world’s most famous physicist (“Great People,” 1996, pp. 132-135), and an American citizen, teaching at Princeton University.

Einstein, of course, was considered a genius, a self-learner, and a great problem solver, while often working on his own; but while at the University of Zurich, he was not a very attentive student. Nevertheless, Einstein was still able to graduate. So why was he so different? Davis Lewis and James Green (1982) explained it this way:

For his tremendous contribution to human knowledge, Einstein has justly been termed a genius. But this does not mean that his brain was uniquely different or that he possessed intellectual abilities that must always lie beyond the range of most people. Like so many great thinkers, his performance in school was dismal and only a frenzied bout of last-minute studying, together with extensive coaching from his friends, allowed him to pass his final [university] examination. (pp. 240-241)

As professor Ronald Gross (1993) has pointed out, “Independent scholars,” and self-learners, like Einstein, and others in the United States, “are often impelled by social purpose. Their pursuit of knowledge and understanding frequently focuses on some issue or problem that affects people’s lives.” Equally important, many self-learners are confident about what they are trying to achieve intellectually, without ambivalence, for the most part. Additionally, “their [insightful] books [and works in the public square] may present new, vital facts about ourselves or our society, or they may report original research as well as synthesizing prior studies of an important, interdisciplinary problem” (p. 145). In this respect, today, *online* learning becomes a *harbinger* of necessity that must be made a part of our lives (even for the self-learner) when it comes education. Another question: Can we really get a traditional education totally or entirely *online*, especially if some “for profit” schools *jilt* unsuspecting American students out of their tuition money? Unfortunately, this question remains to be seen.

6. Independent Study and Continuing Education

Independent Study also becomes part of the education equation, because it defies the traditional education norms of colleges and universities, and other educational avenues/outlets. Therefore, Independent Study, or learning through an extensive reading program, is also important because it allows the student the flexibility to learn and grow without constraints, possible roadblocks or other limitations. Thus, Independent Study shouldn't be an objectionable endeavor when it comes to education. More importantly, "earning [a higher] degree through alternative methods," like with Independent Study, "can be an exciting and rewarding experience" (Duffy, 1994, p. 25), or proposition. Take for example the Master's Degree in Military History offered by distance learning/education at the University of Birmingham in England or the United Kingdom. Although students in the United States must access the course materials *via* the University's Virtual learning environment, in England, they only have to write six 4,000-word essays and a 15,000-word dissertation, with no written exams, in order to receive the MA degree ("The Centre for War Studies," 2020) (Note 12). In this regard, American educators and administrators must be willing to shift gears, and preemptively strategize to provide such independent *ways* and *means* to achieve a higher education degree. Therefore, should American colleges and universities and other schools embrace Independent Study entirely in some way? Probably not. Nonetheless, our educational institutions must seriously look at alternative ways to solve our collective education/learning problems. This is why incorporating Independent Study in the curriculum is extremely important. To say the least, this method allows adult learners or students to explore what they want and to research education topics without any rigid or set formulas. Indeed, students are not at the mercy of an educator's ability or lack thereof, to teach, because they are essentially in charge of themselves, and can get out what they put into the effort (Carlson, 1989, p. 3). As students in pursuit of advanced degrees in the United States, we must all take these independent matters about education to heart, along with advanced and strategic learning, particularly using computers, and the Internet in higher education. Hence, the educator and student can, perhaps, ascertain in this paper that, the use of computer technology at higher education institutions is increasing exponentially. We should also bear in mind that attaining a diploma/degree from an innovative, non-traditional institution (or a directed Independent Study program) offers a holistic alternative for already accomplished individuals.

In addition, when it comes to higher education, we should not only expand the (set/established) curriculum; but American colleges and universities must also consider implementing different, creative and nontraditional ways to acquire knowledge. Such unique approaches can also be a learning experience for teachers and educators as well. When it is all said and done, American high schools, colleges and universities should definitely give our students a first-class, liberal arts education, but they should also give us educational alternatives, or options, like specific programs on the Internet that are dynamic, interactive, flexible and user-friendly. Such actions will expose our students to the larger educational world, no matter their learning difficulties. But it should also be noted that at the highest

academic levels, “remote [or online] schooling poses a special challenge for [American] families who are not fluent in English” (Rani, 2020, p. 4) (Note 13). Journalist Rikha Sharma Rani (2020) writes: “About five million American schoolchildren are classified as English-language learners, meaning they lack fluency, and even more come from homes where their parents speak a different language” (p. 4). Rani goes on to point out that, *online* education isn’t exactly ideal for non-English-speaking students. However, in the grand scheme of our educational universe, *all* students “need a much broader understanding of world cultures” (Davis, 1994, p. 11), and higher learning/education in the United States. Generally speaking, higher education allows students to expand their minds and their interests, because there is always something new to learn. Disappointingly, however, some conservative politicians in the United States have “complained that American higher education [is] in sharp decline due to the cumulative effects of affirmative action, moral relativism, political correctness, soft graduation requirements, abandonment of traditional subject matter, grade inflation, and lower course requirements” (p. 11). Of course, this harsh assessment isn’t entirely true: but the political dimensions of this education issue can’t be simply ignored, given that some American schools are dealing with constant uncertainty. And perhaps such criticism is how it should be, as it provides a *snapshot* of some of our national education woes. For example, it will be interesting for our schools to monitor exactly how educating American students in the future will be divided between in-class or online/virtual education. Or will we have a patchwork of education systems in the United States? Or should we start over when it comes to our national education system? Probably not. One more thing: The negative and positive education implications of our U.S. education system can be long term, at every level (see Figure 1).

TABLE 1: U.S. EDUCATION SYSTEM AND POTENTIAL CONSEQUENCES

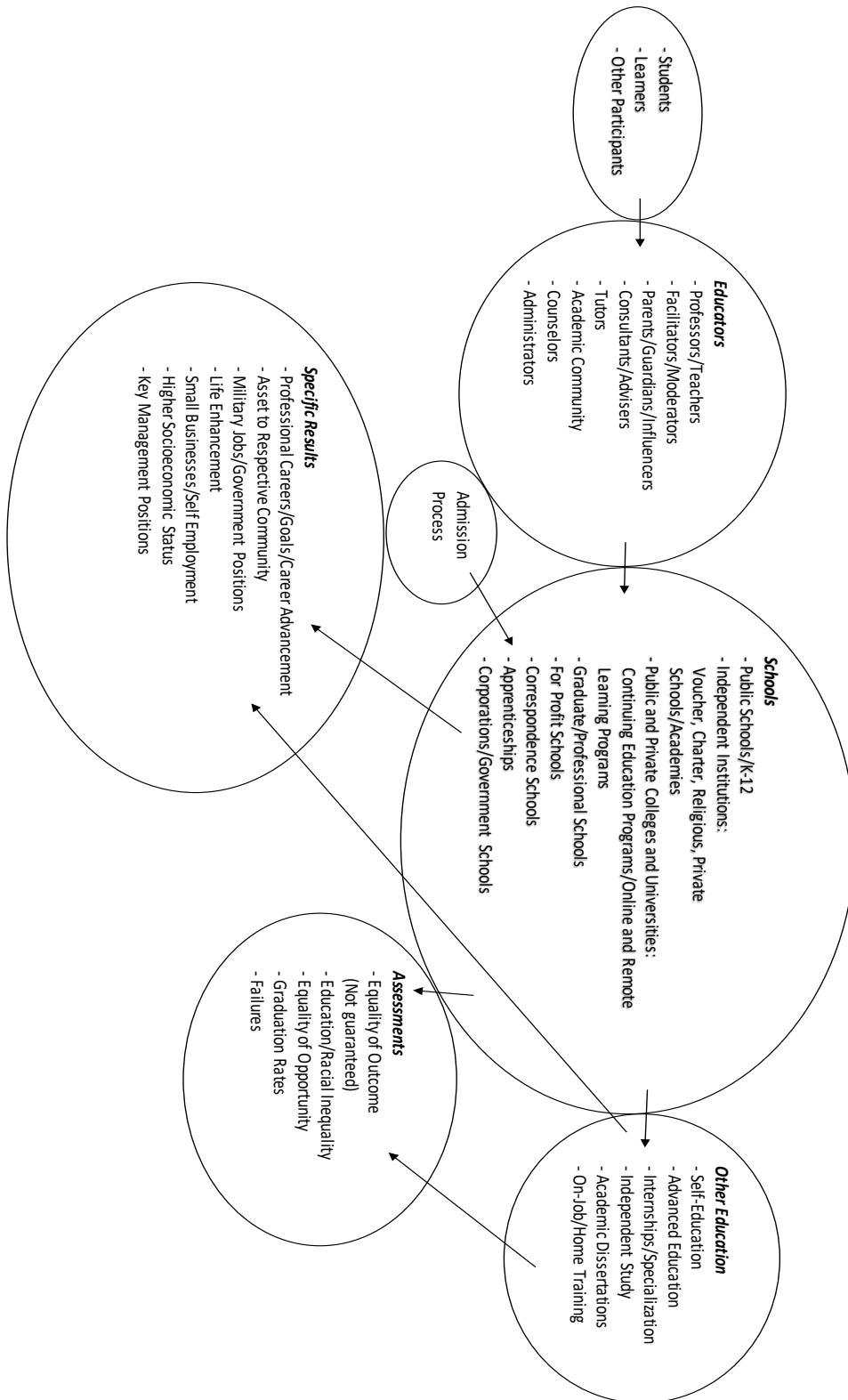


Figure 1. U.S. Education System and Potential Consequences

7. Conclusions

Ironically, some of the controversial things brought out in this paper don't change the fact that distance education, as well as other educational alternatives, will continue for the near future. Even more critically, traditional colleges and universities must be able to shift to online/remote teaching, or some kind of *hybrid* education at any given moment for the good of the student. Notwithstanding, as education journalist JoAnn Tyler Arlington (1996) writes: "Perhaps one of the smartest, if not wisest things [American education] administrators can do for our [students] is to train and support—or inspire—teachers to know how to help every [student] in a classroom feel important, special, cared for and valued" (p. 3C) (Note 14). Otherwise, we might be wasting our time in educating our students, at all levels in the United States, whether it is done virtually (or online), or in a traditional, in-class, educational manner. Therefore, schools must have a sense of urgency for properly educating *all* our students, regardless of their ethnic background. This is particularly important to note, because of our *clouded* and *ugly*, segregated education history. The American people should also be tired of the incessant debates about improving our education systems, when we already know what is needed, and what we should do to improve student education in the United States. For example, distance education allows schools to expand their notions of what education should be for students.

Furthermore, traditional education, Independent Study, distance learning, or the use of the Internet for all American schools, colleges and universities is not only the wave of the future, but many higher education institutions will probably not survive (or operate effectively) unless they make use of such rapidly expanding computer technology. In so many words, effective distance learning cannot happen without the appropriate technology. This is also to say that our education systems might (one day) be totally dependent on computers, "coupled with software such as electronic mail, calendar automation, [online conferencing], and [respective,] shared databases" (Ramos & Schroeder, 1994, p. 164) (Note 15). Therefore, we must not *pooh-pooh* or demonize the technology of *online* teaching, learning and/or distance education. By almost any education metric, learning by computer access in the future is not an *anomaly* or just a technological fluke; but it just might be an affordable way to earn an education, and precious knowledge. This means that a person (or student) will be able to start and complete college without going on some campus, by using computers connected to appropriate American education institutions that offer such courses and other educational requirements. This is what distance learning and nontraditional education is all about: Independent Work/Learning. To be certain, the Internet is an invaluable tool in the education process for most educational institutions in the United States (Ramo, 1996, p. 58) (Note 16). However, some students might pose the question: Why aren't they learning *anything* practical, or things that will help them in the *real* world? American students might also ask: Why should they care about history, philosophy or political science? Furthermore, are today's academic institutions responsible for assuring a student have a successful career, an important position or a job? Of course not. Or how can American schools guarantee equality of outcome? Moreover, why are some students even questioning an educator's ability to teach? Should we assume that they know more?

Probably not. Nevertheless, some American students often complaint about the competencies of their teachers, and the efficacy of *online* or distance education programs, where they “are expected to learn quite a bit as a result of an extensive [independent] reading program” (Duffy, 1994, p. 25) (Note 17), as earlier mentioned. Simultaneously, “it is important to review the methods of study that will help [students] maximize... learning from all [their] effort[s]” (p. 25) (Note 18). Unfortunately, some American students are still having trouble accepting the fact that *online* learning will be a serious component of higher education. Or many students, perhaps, see it as earning an educational degree the hard way. The truth is that *any* prevarication on distance education really doesn’t work. Moreover, these consequential and educational things cannot be pushed aside, because “in-class” teaching or learning *online* goes hand-in-hand. But does online learning increase the risk of some minority students dropping out of school entirely? Perhaps. And given this question, we must still worry about Wi-Fi connectivity, which is worrisome for some American students, educators and schools that are out of (respective) technology ranges. In this regard, also, we must consider the negative consequences when African American students and other students of color are unable to have Internet access, because they might not be able to afford Wi-Fi connection, to study effectively *online*. Indeed, can American colleges and universities manage the remote learning concerns of minority students and engender their active participation? Perhaps. Which is to say, will schools in the United States pay for the necessary technology to connect *all* disadvantaged students? After all, *low-income* students should be educated in the same way with Wi-Fi connection. But remote learning might not apply to some *at-risk* students—that is, if they don’t have the ability to access the Internet, like with poor and homeless American students. Therefore, *online* training and distance educational planning at respective U.S. schools must be of paramount importance. In addition, minority students and educators must have reliable Internet devices and connection, to achieve positive education results.

More important, American colleges and universities should be obligated to prevent the discrimination of *all* students, while providing traditional *online-centric* education, without violating the *civil rights* of students of color when providing particular or specific, educational classes. For some American schools, it is *uncharted* territory, as they are in the throes of eliminating *racial apartheid* education, and creating more diverse places for learning. More controversially, there is still racial bias, as pointed out in this paper, in schools throughout the United States, at all levels. Thus, American college and universities should also continue to brainstorm different and specific ways to combat racial prejudice, by implementing diverse *online* learning, and creating other appropriate education programs, including new ways of thinking about inclusion for *all* students. According to journalist Shawn Hubler (2020), for example, some U.S. colleges and universities have stopped “requiring the SAT and ACT tests for admission” (p. 22), (Note 19) as they can be bias and discriminatory. Hubler goes on to write that, “the California [school] system has become the biggest and best-known American institution of higher education to step away from the use of the two major standardized tests, citing charges that they disadvantage students who are poor, black, and Hispanic” (p. 22). Nevertheless, in terms of higher

education, our nation is woefully behind the power curb when it comes to rooting out the *inequality* that still remains in our school systems. Therefore, encouraging *diversity* in our schools is the way to go, because it helps with “a more equitable education system” (Chklovski, 2020, p. 7A) (Note 20), at all levels. On top of that, should *all* students have a choice between traditional learning and virtual learning? In a larger sense, some relevant questions about the incorporation of online education, also, still remain.

Even more important, will distance learning equalize things for American students, particularly “students with disabilities [that] have not been well-served in the transition to remote learning?” (Richards, 2020, p. 1A) (Note 21). This problem has been especially true with the advent of COVID-19, or the onslaught of the coronavirus pandemic. One thing is certain: *Diversity* is important in almost every educational setting. Educator Philip Goldberg (1938) argues us that, “in higher education and in professional training,” *diversity* is necessary for [American] colleges and universities, because it “make[s] for more intuitive [students] and creative professionals in all fields” (p. 221) (Note 22). However, *diversity* will mean almost nothing if our educational institutions cannot better serve students from different ethnic groups. Indeed, how will *diversity* be remotely achieved if American students, as mentioned, can’t access innovative *online* technology? According to journalist Katie Reilly (2020):

About 15% of U.S. households with school-age children [or students] lack high-speed Internet access, according to a Pew Research center analysis of 2015 Census bureau data. Rural communities lag behind urban areas, as do tribal lands, where about a third of people don’t have high-speed Internet, according to the Federal Communication Commission. (p. 39) (Note 23)

Suffice it to say, distance education for all Americans is paramount for a strong democracy. And when it comes to *online* learning, we must take the long view. This is to say that our colleges and universities must make adjustments and do their due diligence to incorporate distance education, no matter the situation. Indeed, for some older American students, it might be difficult for them to attend traditional college classes, signifying that *online* courses might be the only way that they can finish a higher education degree. Also, without a significant discussion about the consequences of excluding marginalized students from the larger educational scheme of things, *segregation* will take root again, in a serious way, in all our education systems. And this shouldn’t be tolerated. Question: Should a national education plan be put in place to make things equal in all aspects of American education? After all, there are no assurances that traditional or *online* learning is the solution to our education challenges. Indeed, even with access to the Internet and mainstream education, we cannot predict if blacks, indigenous and other minority students will graduate or complete their degrees.

Finally, the cynicism in distance education in the U.S. is profound and ingrained, where some students argue that they are not learning much of *anything*. However, the potential for *online* education is vast and necessary, even if some find it hard to come to terms with the technology. Therefore, we should ask: Will distance education be the only way that we can teach our students at all levels in the future? More

importantly, can virtual education replace the “brick and mortar” schools? Additionally, should we try to motivate *all* students to persevere, no matter the complications with technology? The best thing that educational institutions can do is to devise educational strategies that will educate all American students based on their academic prowess and abilities. According to Elaine P. Wynn of the *Family Foundation*, all students absolutely deserve “access to virtual learning” (“Ensuring Distance Learning,” 2020, p. 65), and other educational tools for learning. After all, as mentioned:

Education provides the skills necessary to expand horizons and allow for economic success.

Education also exposes young men and women to the great ideas of our heritage—liberty and responsibility, participation and patriotism. And in doing so, we secure our democratic way of life. (Wicks, 2019, p. 3)

Of course, parents will always be worried about whether their children can get into the best schools, or get the best education; but such efforts must *never* be at the expense of *low-income* American families and students. Finally, regardless of the educational consequences, the overall goal should always be to ensure that American colleges and universities, and other educational systems/institutions do the right thing for *all* students, “in-class” or virtually/online. To be sure, all these education matters must be taken into consideration for the greater good of our democratic society.

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Notes

- 1). Indeed, some students widely deride what is happening in online education. Or they lament “online learning,” when they don’t excel or get all A’s. Therefore, we must educate our students in an appropriate way, while exceeding expectations.
- 2). The challenge for some colleges and universities, according to Yaeger, “usually surround professional development training to insure efficiency for the educator and the incorporation of lesson[s] or unit modifications to maximize learning through technology.”
- 3). Figuratively and literally, education at all levels must be scripted and in-line with the current needs of students. To be sure, our current education systems reflect a long-standing tradition with necessary, educational protocols.
- 4). It is honestly believed that minority students will be negatively affected in an educational system that is polarized or stratified because of white supremacists and white segregationists, and their racist thinking.
- 5). See also Evgenia Peretz, “To cheat and lie in L.A.,” *Vanity Fair*, September 2019, 134-139 and 183-186.
- 6). Unfortunately, some minority students are disenfranchised when it comes to higher education.
- 7). Time and time again over the years, we have seen the wealthy in our society cheat the education system, to find a way for their unqualified children to attend prestigious, or Ivy League colleges and universities. This is another education problem that we must fix in our education systems.
- 8). The fact that black children can’t go to good schools smack of racism and discrimination; and jeopardize their chances for a quality education, as well as fulfilling their educational needs and dreams. Therefore, *equality* and *diversity* must be of primary concern for all of us.
- 9). In so many words, some educators have noted that we cannot guarantee equitable outcomes for minority students; but institutional racism must be eradicated at educational institutions at all levels.
- 10). The most vexing question about learning and education is an undercurrent of frustration and exasperation—that is, why aren’t blacks and other minority students educated in the same way? Or shouldn’t there be more equality when it comes to educating minority students?
- 11). Education provides a unique opportunity for minority students, which is essential for addressing these diversity problems. We must bear in mind that education relies on reciprocity when it comes to democracy and equality of education for all students.
- 12). According to James P. Duffy, “most external degree programs place strong emphasis on learning through reading. Some schools call this guided reading, directed study, or simply independent reading/study.” See James P. Duffy, *How to Earn a College Degree without Going to College* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1994), 25.

- 13). Parents should be very conscious of the fact that schools are or should be able to incorporate an online component to their traditional way of learning and teaching.
- 14). Students must also share some of the responsibility for their own education. Finally, educator Meredith D. Call tells us that students can become better learners, and improve their study skills, which involves “planning, organizing their time, setting goals, solving problems, tracking down information, and communicating ideas.” See Meredith D. Gall and Joyce P. Gall, *Making the Grade* (Rocklin CA: Prima Publishing and Communications, 1988), 6.
- 15). Note that the future of online education is not predetermined; however, there might be challenges and unknown obstacles to proceeding effectively. The fact that public colleges and universities had to revert to online learning was inevitable or a foregone conclusion.
- 16). So will some students be negatively affected by remote learning in some way? Perhaps. Moreover, colleges and universities must be courageous enough to adjust their online systems without interrupting traditional educational routines.
- 17). Unfortunately, some educators are not worried that some students are not prepared, because they believed that most students are flexible and tuned into technology; but this may not always be the case with marginalized students.
- 18). Perhaps our methods of teaching our children will always be a contentious education issue. Indeed, how will distance education policies move forward throughout our education systems?
- 19). Critics have argued that “the [SAT and ACT] tests cite decades of data indicating that they are inherently biased in favor of affluent white and Asian-American students.” Therefore, “Admissions officers typically look at several data points, not just test scores.”
- 20). The bottom line is: Colleges and universities should ensure that all students be given the same educational opportunities.
- 21). According to journalist Erin Richards, “Teachers should provide students with more individual communication in a remote learning environment compared with an in-person class....” See the same reference and page number.
- 22). In this regard, should educators find out more about what students expect to get from respective courses, as well as their specific needs and interests? Finally, should we also consider the sacrifices made by some students who are trying to educate themselves?
- 23). Journalist Erin Richards suggests that, “If you don’t have the technology your child needs, or if the teacher seems to be struggling online, ask whether there’s a plan to receive high-quality, tailored materials in print form,” See Richards, “Not all online,” 1A.

Biographical Sketch

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