

Chapter 12: Education During the Pandemic

The introduction to this chapter references the fact that children spend more time at school than they do with their parents. That changed drastically during the COVID-19 pandemic. The high risk of transmission of the virus in classrooms meant school closures were among the earliest responses to the pandemic in most countries. As teachers rushed to provide online curriculum supports, parents who were lucky enough to keep their jobs were forced to take on the roles of teachers and coaches while trying to manage full-time employment.

Ongoing discussion of the challenge this presented to economic productivity brings to mind, once again, Merton's concept of the latent function. In Canada's current economy, it is increasingly imperative that both parents of lower- and middle-class families work. In 1977, the [percentage](#) of families with two incomes (and at least one child) was 36%; in 2015, it was 69%. For these families, kindergarten to Grade 12 education plays a vital role in childcare. Clearly one of the important latent functions of education, especially in a country like Canada that does not have universal daycare, is taking care of children so both parents can work. This is vital for the functioning of our economy. While Canadian politicians have treaded lightly on this latent function of

education-as-childcare (while acknowledging the link), American president Donald Trump has more explicitly (one might say crudely) made this connection by threatening to [defund schools](#) that might not re-open in the fall of 2020 due to health and safety concerns.

It is clear that when schools are unable to open, a number of economic and societal inequities become more pronounced. If workplaces reopen while schools, camps, and daycares remain closed, for example, lower- and middle-class parents may have to sacrifice their jobs and livelihoods while wealthier families have a number of alternative options available to them. There is an even darker implication: families struggling economically will be under enormous pressure to send children back, even if they are unsure of their safety, because they cannot afford to not work.



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As you read the chapter, consider the following questions:

- Citing a Statistics Canada labour force survey from March, Lindsay Tedds, professor of economics at the University of Calgary, [says](#) women, who have already been hit harder economically by the pandemic, will suffer most if schools remain closed. Thinking back to earlier chapters on gender and class, why do you think this is?
- In this chapter, we discuss online teaching and access mainly through the lens of postsecondary education. When the pandemic hit, students of all ages moved to online learning. While it is important to acknowledge this was an emergency response, and the efforts teachers and students made should be applauded, this shift raised questions about “access.” Many families don’t have a laptop (or multiple laptops), tablets, Wi-Fi, or even a quiet place for a child to attend an online class. Thinking about these issues, consider these questions:
 - Who might be negatively impacted by this move to online learning? (Consider a wide range of variables such as socio-economics, urban vs. rural differences, the personalities of students, and sociological variables like race, gender, class, and ability.)
 - What might be the long-term impacts on social inequality in Canada?
 - What could governments do to address this issue of “access”?
- One way postsecondary education institutions have dealt with government cuts to the sector is by [increasing reliance](#) on the enrolment of international students (who pay much higher tuition fees at Canadian institutions). International students hugely benefit our postsecondary institution in ways beyond overcoming budgetary shortfalls; among many things, they bring diversity of perspective to our classrooms. That said, institutions also have to develop supports for the unique challenges students face when studying far from home. Otherwise, we risk creating an underclass of students. How has the pandemic exposed the issue with relying on international students as a key source of funding for postsecondary institutions?



Additional online resources

This provides a discussion of some of the pros and cons of online learning and whether it’s here to stay.

- Alphonso, C. (2020, March 26). [‘The education world has been turned upside down’: Online learning may reshape the classroom](#). The Globe and Mail.

This interview provides greater insight into the increase in dual-income households in Canada.

- CBC News. (2016). [Dual-income families on the rise](#) [Video].

This article describes some of the dangers in opening schools during an ongoing pandemic.

- Cillizza, C. (2020, July 8). [The very clear dangers of Donald Trump’s push to reopen schools](#). CNN.

Should the government be obligated to ensure all families have equal internet access if schools are closed?

- Mills, S. (2020, April 2). [Shift to online learning could spell trouble for rural families](#). CBC.

This article expresses a parent’s frustration at how the pandemic has affected working parents.

- Perelman, D. (2020, July 8). [In the COVID-19 economy, you can have a kid or a job. You can’t have both](#). The New York Times.