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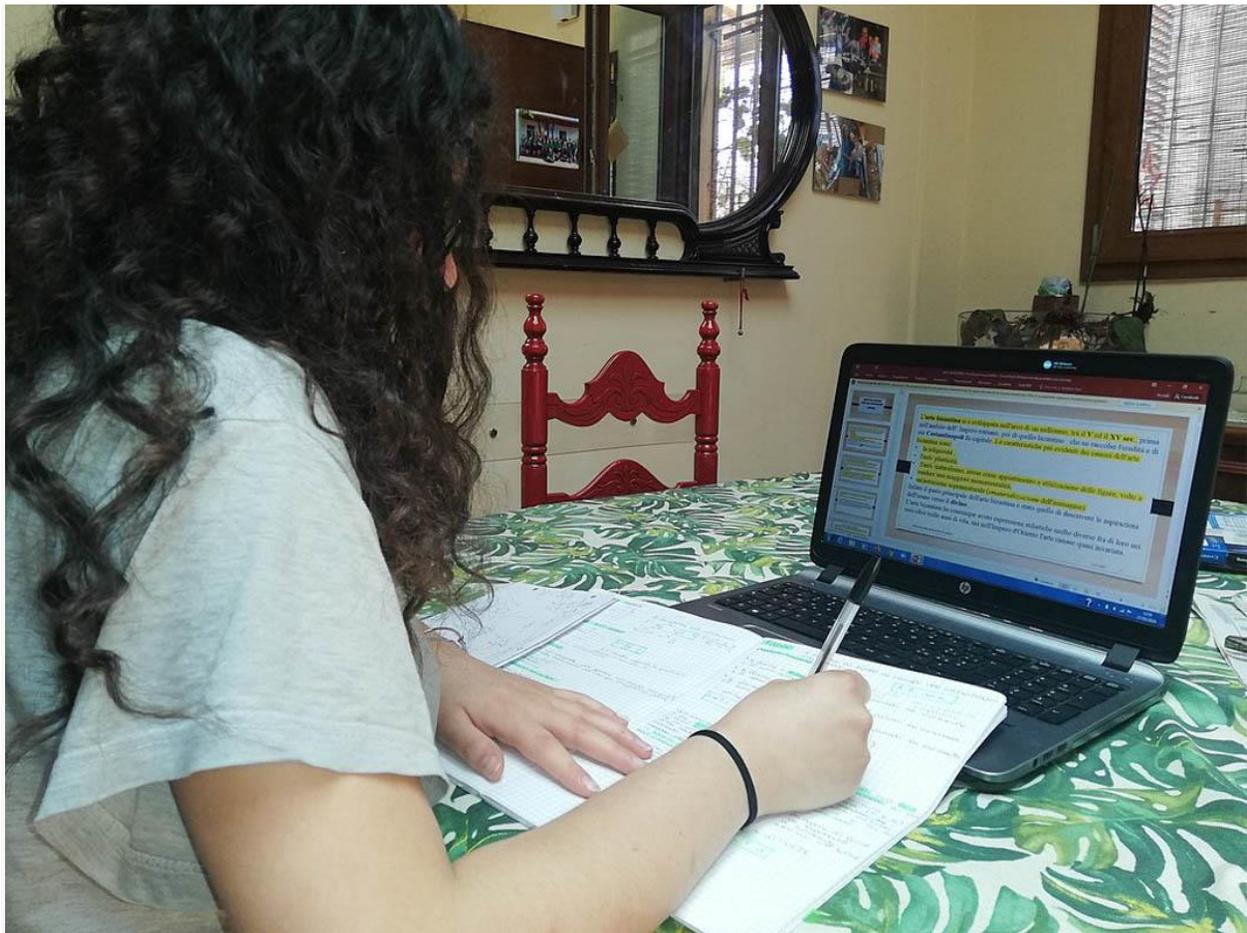




Reality of My Daughter's Home Schooling During Pandemic Has Begun to Sink In

By Lillian M. Hernandez Caraballo
UCF Forum columnist
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This is hard for all of us parents, and a time to be supportive to one another, not critical or negative.



(Photo by Wikimedia Commons)

A new semester is upon us, and this past Monday I helped my fourth-grade get ready for her first day of school.

As always, we woke up at 7 a.m., washed up, had breakfast, got ready, and I did her hair — but one thing was different. Instead of getting in the car to rush to school, this time, we merely took a short walk from the living room to her in another room. She is doing at-home eLearning because of COVID-19.

For the past few weeks, I've watched as my friends post pictures of their kids' first day of school on social media. They have on masks, gloves and face . The wording on the posts is often of uncertainty, fear, anger and confusion.

“I can't stand sending my kid to school with that mask on her face all day,” one mother said. “Pointless. They don't even work.”

While I may not exactly agree with all her sentiments, I understand. As much as I support wearing face coverings in public right now, I also wouldn't want my child subjected to wearing one for seven hours a day, every day. It must have been a hard decision for her to make.

“Praying that teachers are extra cautious this year and that the kids remember our new reality, so everyone can make it home safe and healthy,” another mother said.

Again, I understand her concern. I don't leave these things up to faith, but I also know that kids can only be held accountable for so much. My daughter is clean and well-behaved, but she's still a kid. They forget about germs when they play, they like to share and are very social. As far as teachers, they can only be in so many places at once. So, I feel that mother's worry.

My daughter understood that going to school would mean having lunch basically by herself every day, as she would sit six feet apart from everyone else.

The decision was hard for us, too, and not everything went according to plan. My daughter understood that going to school would mean having lunch basically by herself every day, as she would sit six feet apart from everyone else. Same with her workspace and play time during recess would also not be the same. She understood that she would not get to see her grandparents, as they are 84 and 94 years old, and we could not risk exposing them. She understood things would have to be different even between us at home, and that she would have to be responsible and careful in school, perhaps to an unreasonable degree.

As we watched Florida hit record COVID numbers, the choice to stay home was mainly hers. She knew it would mean sitting at her computer for long hours each day. She understood there would be isolation but figured it wouldn't be much better at school, and that she's much safer at home. She also understood the sacrifice was necessary to protect her family. And while she understood that this isn't all part of a “normal” childhood, I was surprised at how willing she was to just accept an electronic reality.

These kids are not like us.

Fact is, she's already proficient in Zoom. She uses apps like Duo and FaceTime to talk to her father in Texas and with me when she's out there visiting him. She uses Hangouts and other apps to keep in touch with her friends and play remotely with them.

While to me this seems like the wrong way to nurture relationships, video communication is a norm to our kids. Some of them even prefer it.

What was the future in sci-fi movies — with holograms and video calls — is now here: a quick, reliable, easy and safe way to conduct business and gather with friends, even meet new people. She has been excited to log on and again “see” her friends were all “there,” too. I could tell this all feels just fine to her. They are so adaptable, so unafraid.

For some of us, we see this as they are missing out on “real life.” We hold these standard experiences as important just because we lived them, even though we grew up differently from how our parents did, and hated it when they would say the same thing about the way we lived then, too. Change is the only constant.

As I sit here, about to start making calls and sending emails to change my entire semester schedule to fit my daughter's needs, the reality of this decision and how sacrificial it is has begun to sink in. This is hard for all of us parents, and a time to be supportive to one another, not critical or negative. No one decision was easy to make, and we all have our own ideas of how we wanted our kids' school experiences to be. It's okay to be mad and sad about it. It's okay to figure it out as we go along. No one has all the answers.

Anyway, I've got to take off my writer hat and switch to my lunch-lady hat now. It's almost time for lunch, and I have four college courses and an internship to work through, as well.

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