

Reflexions of a mother on home-schooling during the coronavirus health crisis.

It has been two peaceful weeks of a well-deserved break from home-schooling with the children. And surprisingly, I am feeling quite excited about resuming school although I know that we will still be stuck at home. I am more than aware that we are going to have to dive into a frantic race against time to read, decipher, understand, prepare, recite, add, multiply, divide, draw, write and respond to. And even though the last few weeks were extremely hectic and sometimes painful, I look forward to the start of a new chaotic school week.

This is probably the first time the sound level in my house has been so high with all the screaming, crying, door slamming and nervous breakdowns. I finally understood the meaning of « pulling one's hair » out of frustration when I had to explain for umpteenth time how to identify a fraction on a graduated line or how to transform a fraction into a decimal number. Or when we spent hours and hours trying to understand and master all the computer based tools being used by the teachers only to realise in horror after a few days that we had missed out most of the information and instructions and that we had not done half of the work that was expected.

I have lost count of all the emails that I wrote to the teachers to express my frustration regarding lessons and exercises that I could not understand myself and the children even less obviously. "They should be able to work autonomously", the teachers would say. Seriously! Not my kids! This was a totally imaginary and inconceivable concept for them. A new concept that they were not willing to embrace without putting up a fight. Every five minutes, I would hear, « mummy » and when I would pretend not to hear, I would see them appearing to ask for an explanation on things I did not even have a clue about.

But then, little by little, I put a hold on my bad mood and my frustrations. I decided to trust the teachers, my children and myself. I took the time to sit down with my children and I jumped into the confusion of grammar with its complicated tenses, i.e. past perfect and imperfect, subjects, verbs, attributes of the subject, complement of object, adjectives, agreement according to gender and number, etc. I rediscovered with as much antipathy graduated lines, fractions and decimal numbers. I tried to decipher algorithms in Physics and I enjoyed explaining the nature and the function of different types of signals such as scent, light and sound. I can't even describe the relief when after one, two, three hours, I could finally see the sparkle in my child's eyes saying: Oh mummy, I understand now!!!

I learnt about the etymology of words and reread with a lot of enthusiasm stories about the heroes of Greek mythology. I still remember the nightmares I had as a child after reading about the snakes on the head of Medusa. I witnessed the birth of the Republic and of democracy in Rome and I had an interesting debate with my child about the

advantages and disadvantages of modern-day agriculture. And when it came to the process of leaf decomposition in science, I can't even tell you how many hours were spent juggling between germicides, fungicides, sterilized soil, fungi, bacteria, worms, fragmented but non decomposed leaves to understand why, when and how....

I finally understood what it means to work according to a child's rhythm. How many times did I not hear, "mummy, I am tired" even though we had just started working! Oh! And I have to mention what a rude awakening it was for me to see their handwriting. They just write spontaneously, without putting capital letters or full stops! The sentence starts on a straight line and ends up on another line either above or below! Naïvely, I had assumed that such a way of writing was a thing of the past. Well I was so wrong! And if you have the privilege to have a dyslexic child, you cannot imagine the incredibly creative words and phrases that you come across. Honestly, I had to dig really deep into my emotional capacities to be able to handle all these surprises with patience, empathy and tolerance.

I am ashamed to confess but I tore some of their pages. I even had them rewrite entire lines to keep their notebooks clean. You probably will say that I am too much of a perfectionist or that I am overdoing it and that I should let them be because they are still young. Unfortunately, that is the only way I have found to teach them how to be better organized and careful with their things. Of course, it did lead to a few yells and anger outbursts. And yet despite the rage and the tears, you should see the pride and joy on their faces when they discover the amazing feedback and comments from their teachers regarding their work.

That is why today, I am looking forward to the start of a new school week and to spending more engaging time with my children. But don't be misled. Despite the enthusiasm, I do not have the pretence to say that everything is perfect or that I have found a new passion and developed new skills in terms of education. Of course, it is still very difficult. And I know there will still be tears and irritation on my side. Neither am I saying that I am a great teacher. My explanations are often disjointed and mixed-up. I see it in their eyes. A combination of confusion and anxiety. *"My God, how am I going to tell mummy that I did not understand what she just explained without her getting angry."*

But I try to do the best I can. This home-schooling requires a lot of sacrifices and effort. I have no idea what my children are retaining from my teaching. Maybe nothing much after all. The future will tell. At least I hope they will remember the positive moments interactions that we had together. But ultimately, what makes me happy today, is that my children are becoming more independent and autonomous as the weeks go by. Each day, I see them becoming computer gurus. And even though it is destroying all my efforts to limit their usage of screens and tablets, maybe it is not that bad after all.

I am learning more about my children with their strengths, weaknesses and qualities. I am discovering all their subjects and educating myself at the same time as they are. And despite the frustrations, I have also learnt to laugh and to marvel at the, sometimes, silly behaviour of my children. How imaginative and verbal they can become when it comes to finding excuses not to work! Undeniably, we are creating amazing memories that will forever be etched in our minds and hearts. And when the day comes for them to go back to school, it will be with a little twinge of sorrow that I will let them leave because I know that we will probably never experience such a moment of communion and exceptional discussions again.....

Praying and hoping that all parents will have the opportunity and the patience to experience those challenging yet amazing moments of communion with their children during these trying times which have turned into a test of strength and faith!!

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