

 parents

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Do Kids Even Want To Go Back To School In June?

BY JOSEPH WILSON

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Will they or won't they? That's the question that's been on many parents' minds these past few weeks. With only four weeks left in the school year, the prospect of in-person schooling seems remote, yet remains a tantalizing possibility based on news last week (<https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/1902234179864>) that the Ontario government was seeking advice on when to re-open.

As pandemic-era parents, we're used to having our expectations upended. The kids have been bouncing back and forth between in-person and remote schooling all year. We're never sure what to expect beyond the horizon of a week or so. I expected my children to jump for joy at the suggestion they might be going back to school this June to see their friends one last time. Their responses surprised me. All three of them were conflicted.

Earlier this pandemic, Joseph Wilson asked his daughter to help write an essay, in an effort to think beyond online learning. Read that here (<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/online-learning-covid-19-parenting>).

“I really want to see my friends again,” says Sonia, 10. “But I don’t want to give back my computer.”

The girls currently each have a laptop on loan from the school. Over the months, they’ve invested time in figuring out how the computers work and using them to connect with their classmates. They are no longer “the school’s computer” but “my computer.” As such, the devices have become part of their identity, a social lifeline in this period of isolation.

“I also really like working in groups,” says Sonia. I assumed she meant in person, but she corrected me. “Online we get to work in private rooms,” she says with a grin, meaning they can tell jokes and gossip without the teacher continually glaring at them. At an age when children are starting to become more independent, a private place to socialize without the glare of adult supervision is a treat.

“My wife and I gave up a long time ago forcing her to do all the activities suggested by her teacher.” “I

don’t want to give up CoSpaces!” says Elizabeth, 8. She has been busy exploring escape rooms, pirate ships and labyrinths in this virtual world, and even tried her own hand at coding a space. “I love it there!” using wording that suggests that she sees it as a real place. Emotionally-speaking, it is a real place. I explain to her that we can still access CoSpaces from the family computer, but her eyebrows furrow. “It’s not the same.”

Our youngest daughter, Maude, is only four, yet she too was leery of going back to school. “If you want to say anything at school you have to hold your arm up in the air like this,” she says, demonstrating. “It’s soooo tiring,” she says, grimacing with the effort. I ask her if she wants to see her friends again, but she shrugs. “I like doing whatever I want,” she says, referring to the fact that during large chunks of the virtual school-day, she often just plays with her Barbies with the laptop open beside her. My wife and I gave up a long time ago forcing her to do all the activities suggested by her teacher. “So you have lots of freedom right now, but nobody to play with,” I say, reminding her that she often gets bored when everybody else in the house is trying to work and she just wants somebody to play with. “I guess so,” she concedes.

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(<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/i-dont-want-my-kids-to-have-a-nature-deficit-disorder>)

While for me, a parent trying to complete just one full day of work without interruption, the kids heading back to school is an appealing prospect — but for them it's a little more complicated. Sure they get to see their friends again, but the online routines they have built up over the last few months will once again be disrupted. The people they have become through the mediation of their laptop screens will have to adapt, once again, to a new educational reality.

So even if the kids do go back to school in June, it won't be a triumphant return to the old normal; it'll be yet another period of readjustment.

After relying on screens for so many months, we'll just take them away again, forcing them to recalibrate once again to a world that is constantly changing.

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