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I'm Thinking Beyond Online Learning, So I Asked My Daughter To Write Half This Article

BY JOSEPH WILSON

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The very afternoon it was announced in Ontario that classes would be suspended until April (and now, at least until May (<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/ontario-students-covid19-1.5516104>)), my inbox started to fill up with emails from worried parents of my daughter's classmates. They were concerned about "learning loss," that their kids would fall behind and forget how to do math. Feral children would be running around the house like caged animals — long lost was their ability to read.

The solution, everyone agreed, was online learning.

Curio.ca — a teacher resource — is now free for families. Learn more about it here (<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/curio.ca-a-teacher-resource-is-now-free-for-families-to-use>).

Parents traded links to resources; so many resources. Some of them were good, but most of them were not.

And what they certainly lacked is the only thing parents could provide: human contact. My advice to parents at the time was to relax and not look to the internet as a saviour of the school year. The internet can't teach my kids better than I can — mostly by virtue of the fact that I am physically here with them in the same room.

What Online Learning Gets Right

The one thing I believe online learning does well is occupy our kids while we're trying to get some work done. This is an entirely legitimate reason for using online resources, I think. For me — and I am fortunate enough to be able to do some work from home — one of my roles as a parent is to salvage what work I can. As I write this article, one daughter is climbing on my back, another is reading on the iPad and the other is trying to fit slices of apple up her nose.

My wife and I have tried to set up a house full of learning opportunities that we don't have to always personally supervise. Instead of me touting the benefits of our regime, I asked my eldest daughter (9) to chime in with her opinion. (Also because, as discussed, I'm looking for educational things for her to do that don't consist of her staring at a video with an animated question mark trying to explain the difference between verbs and nouns.)

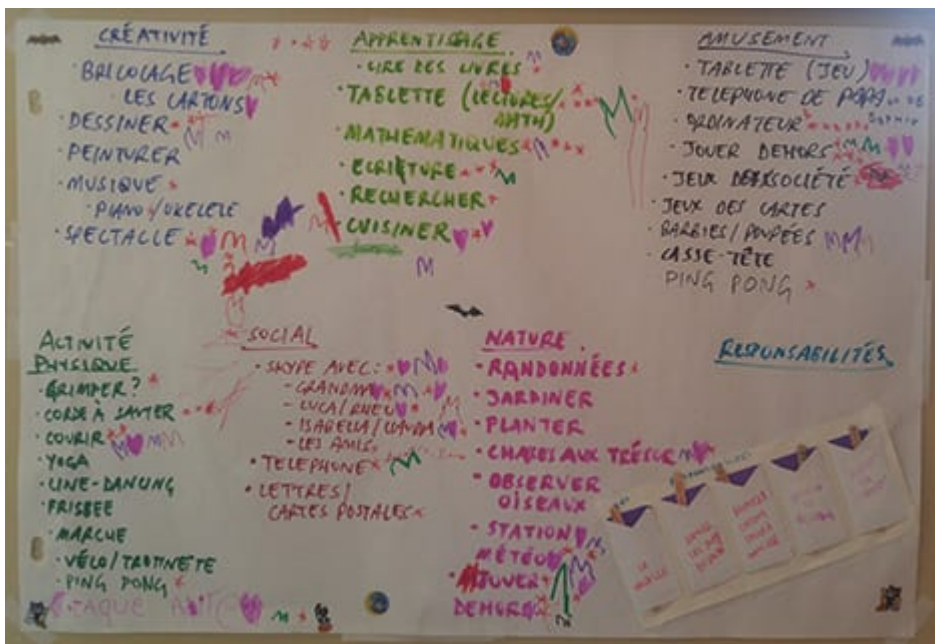
How 9-Year-Old Sonia Feels

“Mom and dad decided they had enough of it all the time hearing, 'What can I do?' and they decided to make a poster with activity ideas. The poster is a large paper with categories like learning, fun, nature, physical activity, social, with ideas of activities classified by where they should go. An activity can go in two categories, but we are the ones who invented the activity ideas, for example playing computer games (this is my favourite activity).”

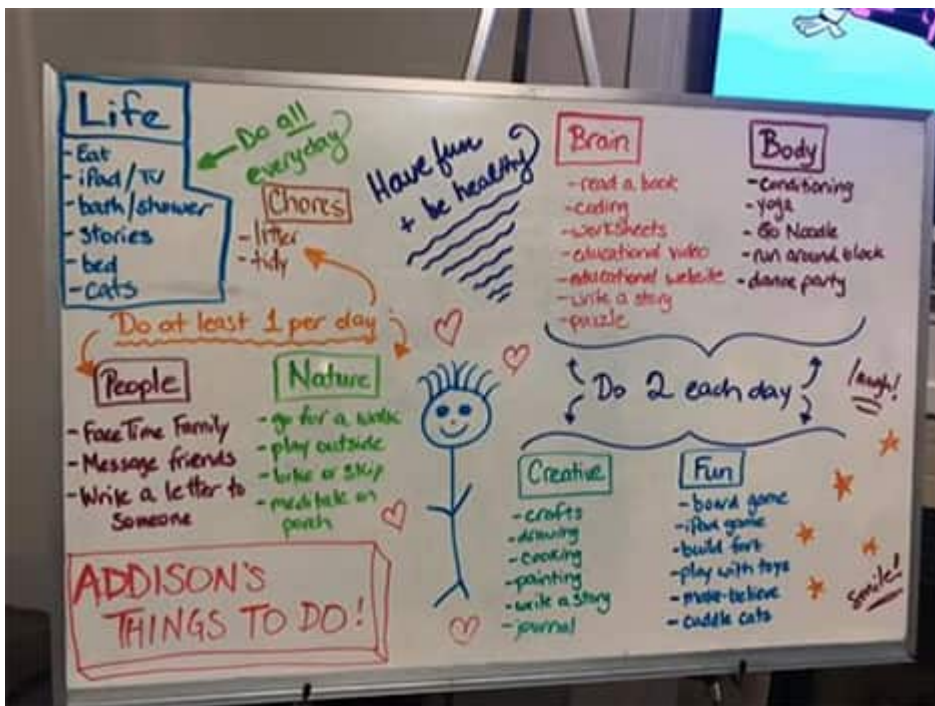
Note from Joe (dad): Also ping-pong! And writing postcards! And classifying leaves outside! And other non-screen-based activities!

How Sonia Makes Learning Fun

“I like having a poster with categories and activity ideas, and also the challenge of doing one (or more) activity from each category every day. It's fun to have something to tell us what to do, apart from mom and dad.”



Note from Joe: I stole this idea from a friend of mine who isn't a teacher but probably should be.



What Sonia Thinks Is The Worst

“The worst part about learning at home is I don't like not being able to see my friends, not touching them. I can just talk to them on the phone or Zoom. In short, I don't like not seeing my friends and staying at least two metres from other people (but not my family).”

Note from Joe: Zoom's stock price has doubled (<https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/stocks/ZM>) since December.

“My teacher told me that, on Teams, she was going to have a meeting with the whole class on Monday. She said that this time it would be just to test but the other meetings would be to learn. This is how I keep learning. I also learn on the internet, like on the tablet I do Boukili (<https://app.boukili.ca/>) and on the computer I do Netmath (<https://www.netmath.ca/fr-qc/>) or educational games.”

Note from Joe: But also ping-pong! And writing postcards! And classifying leaves outside! These are also ways to keep learning that are not screen-based but I'm realizing right now aren't nearly as fun!

What Sonia Finds Annoying

“Because sometimes mom and dad work at the computer (or not) when we have a problem, we just have ourselves to solve them. But on the other hand, when only dad, or only mom works, then we have the other to help us. So it's just annoying when the two are working.”

Note from Joe: Sorry, but a) food, b) bills, c) mortgage and d) wine).

So I guess in the end the internet *is* my saviour, but not because it can magically make our kids learn. I firmly believe that my kids can learn just as much, or more, by playing ping-pong with their family or drawing or playing the piano. I just have to drag them away from the iPad first.

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