

When The Walls Close In: homeschooling and creative output in the COVID-19 era

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Abstract: This paper outlines the results of a research project using autoethnographic and performance-based methodologies, conducted in the field of creative practice-led-research, during the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020. It considers the role of compulsory home-schooling as a catalyst for the immediate cessation of all creativity, and locates the resultant loss of hair, sleep, humour and liver function within an inversely proportional relationship framework that takes into account the age and gender of the children involved, their access to high-fructose consumables, online streaming services, and gaming consoles.

Keywords: Homeschool, Pandemic, Pedagogy, Practice, Infanticide

Mum?

Mum?

MUUUUUUUUUUUM?

What are you shouting about?

I'm shouting for mum.

Yes. I can hear that. Why?

Because I want mum.

Mum's on a Zoom meeting upstairs. What's the problem?

Don't worry about it.

No, tell me what the problem is.

Dad?

Hang on a moment, honey. Let me deal with your brother first. Well, mate? Why do you need mum?

Dad?

I said hang *on*, honey.

It's nothing.

Then why were you shouting for her?

I wasn't shouting.

Mate, you were shouting so loudly that the neighbours all know you're looking for her.

[long sigh, with eyeroll]

So, you don't need anything?

Nah.

Right then. Have you finished your writing?

Yep!

All of your writing?

We don't have to do all of it.

Who told you that?

We just don't.

That's not what it said in the email your teacher sent out to the parents this morning.

Dad!

Dad!

One moment honey, I'm still trying to sort out your brother

I don't need sorting out.

Yes, you do. We all need sorting out.

DAD!

WHAT?

[lip trembles]

Sorry... what, honey?

Can I go to the toilet?

Yes. Of course you can go to the toilet. You don't have to ask.

We have to ask at school.

I know. But this isn't school.

You said yesterday that this was school, now. You said; "mornings are school with Dad, and afternoons are school with Mum." Those were your exact words.

I said we're *treating* it like school. But clearly some things are different. And needing permission to go to the toilet is one of th... where are you going?

To the toilet.

You went five minutes ago.

I need to go again.

Finish your writing first. Then you can go.

You just said I didn't need permission.

Sit down and finish your persuasive writing. How much have you done?

About half.

Good. Once I finish reading with your sister, then I'll take a look. In the meantime, you can keep going.

But I need to wee.

Then you'd better write faster.

Can I have my iPad?

What? No. We have to finish your reading.

But he's using his media.

He's using his Chromebook for schoolwork. When you're in grade 6 and we're locked at home in the middle of a pandemic, then you can use your Chromebook for school. Until then, we have to finish this book. Now, what sound does this letter make?

Eh.

Well, yes. Sometimes, but when it's written like *this*, it makes an 'ee'.

Why?

Sorry? What?

Why?

Because the vowel at the end of the word changes the... uhm. No, wait. It's because the consonant in the first syllable is... look, it just does, okay?

I really need to go. Like, I'm about to explode. Seriously.

Fine. Hurry up. Don't forget to wash your hands.

You don't need to remind me. I'm not five.

I am.

Yes. We know. Now, let's get back to this word. So that's an 'ee', what about this next letter?

O

Well, yes. Sometimes. But when it's next to a 'u' like this, it's actually an 'ugh' sound.

Why?

Never mind. It's one of the mysteries of the universe. Just trust me.

MUM?

STOP SHOUTING FOR YOUR MOTHER!

I'm not shouting.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN YOU'RE NOT SHOUTING? I'M SITTING RIGHT HERE, AND YOU'RE STANDING AT THE BASE OF THE STAIRS SHOUTING UP THEM! I JUST HEARD YOU SHOUT! I WATCHED YOU DO IT!

You're shouting. Not me.

Bloody hell, kids. This is *not* a difficult concept. Do. Not. Shout. For. Mum. It's her work time. And when it's... oh, shit!

What?

It's 11.15! I'm supposed to be on a meeting.

I thought you were supposed to teach us in the mornings? I thought you were doing meetings in the afternoons?

I didn't schedule this one, someone else did. And the Dean is in on it. Where's my laptop?

Dunno.

Christ! Right. Okay mate, I need you to take your novel and go and read. You can go in the hammock if you want.

I finished it.

When?

Yesterday.

Really?

Yes.

Really?

[eyeroll]

Fine. Then start another one.

I don't know where they are.

There's a bloody big pile of them right there on the table in front of you. Take the top one.

I don't want to read that one.

Well, just pick any of them, then. And honey, you can do some colouring in, okay?

I'm bored with colouring in.

Fine then... ah shit!

Don't swear.

Be quiet. Fuckitty fuck fuck fuck!

What's wrong, Daddy?

The fucking router has fucking logged me off the wifi again.

Just log back in.

I can't remember my password.

Give me your computer. I know it.

No, you don't.

Yes I do. It's the same as the one for my Nintendo.

No, it isn't. That's the home network password. The...

[sound of an 11-year-old typing]

There. It's the same.

Is it?

I told you.

Huh! Well. Thanks, mate. Now you grab a book and... where's your sister?

She went outside.

What? When?

While you were swearing at the router. Also, you owe the swear-jar \$35 now.

It's not \$35.

One 'Shit' and six 'F-words' at five dollars each is \$35.

I never. Honey! Back inside, please. It's not break time yet.

You totally did.

I don't want to come in.

You have to. You still have to finish your reading.

I recorded it.

I don't want to finish my reading.

Yes, you do. You *like* readi... what do you mean you recorded it?

I recorded it. Here...

'...Fine then... ah shit!

Don't swear.

Be quiet. Fuckitty fuck fuck fuck!!!

What's wrong, Daddy?

The fucking router has fucking logged me off the wifi again...'

See? That's definitely \$35.

Why were you recording it?

[Shrug]

Dunno. I record lots of stuff.

You were supposed to be doing persuasive writing.

[Shrug]

Fine, then. I owe the swear jar \$35. Now grab a book and go read. And if you don't want to do colouring in honey, then you can write a letter to Georgia.

Does that count as my maths?

Does what count as your maths?

Working out how much you owe the swear jar.

No, it doesn't. Knowing what seven times five equals isn't algebra.

But it's maths.

Yes. And so is counting to ten, but that doesn't mean we include it as schoolwork. Now go and read, and let me get into my meeting.

How do you spell 'Dear'?

D.E.A.R. Okay. Unmute microphone... Hi everyone, sorry I'm late. Yeah. No, I'm on morning duties with the...'

How do you spell 'Georgia'?

Hang on a moment... Honey, you can't interrupt me when I'm doing a meeting.

But you said I could write a letter to Georgia.

I did. Why don't you draw her a picture instead? You could draw Elsa and Ana. I... yeah.

Sorry, no. Still here. Well, my feeling is that moving forward we're going to need to consider the possibility that with remote learning we'll have to....

How do you spell 'Frozen'?

...contact all our domestic students and... one moment... what honey?

How do you spell 'Frozen'?

I thought you were doing a picture.

I'm doing the title first.

F.R.O.Z.E.N. Now no more interruptions, okay?

Okay.

Yeah. I'm back. Sorry. Yes, the domestic students will need to be told about –

What comes after the 'R'?

O ... their second semester possibilities in terms...

And what comes after the 'O'?

Z.E.N – of unit offerings and, sorry Jason, what? No, I'm not doing meditation. Zen? Oh. Sorry, no. Crossed wires. Forgot to mute the mike. No. Frozen. Yes that's right. Elsa and bloody Ana. Yeah, it's on high rotation here at the moment. Okay, so yes – the second semester undergrad units –

I've finished my book.

One moment, everyone. Sorry.

What do you mean you've finished it? You just started it.

I've read it before.

What book was it.

Asterix.

That's not a book.

You said it was one of the greatest literary works of the twentieth century.

It is. But it's not a school reading novel.

Why not?

Because... look. Ah, fuck it. Go and play on your Nintendo.

Really?

Yep. What the hell. Tell your sister she can have her iPad too.

Awesome! Thanks Dad.

Whatever. School's out.