

Opinion: This is not home schooling, distance learning or online schooling.

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Get Schooled Blog 14 hours ago By Maureen Downey

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Stephanie Jones and Hilary Hughes are University of Georgia professors in the Department of Educational Theory and Practice and co-directors of the Red Clay Writing Project.

They say something today that needs to be repeated daily like a mantra: *What is happening is not home schooling. It is not distance learning. It is not online schooling.*

In this guest column, Hughes and Jones explain what it really is that we are doing.

By Hilary Hughes and Stephanie Jones

Gov. Brian Kemp announced today that schools won't re-open this year, marking a historic moment in time that none of us have experienced or imagined before, a time that will shape us all – and possibly education - moving forward. It's a time to pause, take a collective breath, and learn to be in this new reality so our path forward is one that we can be proud of when we look back on it.

What is happening is not home schooling.

It is not distance learning.

It is not online schooling.

There are philosophies and research guiding those ways of teaching and learning; theories and pedagogies that are enacted in intentional ways. So, we need to guard against using language that we already have about education.

What we are doing right now is something different. (Think "Hunger Games." "Contagion." "Grapes of Wrath.") Schooling and its purposes can change in the blink of an eye when a society is in shock and crisis.

So, let's call this what it is: Covid-19 Schooling; or better yet, Teaching and Learning in Covid-19.

What we're doing today is teaching and learning to be in Covid-19.

Over the last two decades, much about education has turned into what some might call a rat race: rigid and narrow academic expectations, standardized test scores linked to students' value and teachers' pay, extreme competition among students and schools (often leading to cheating and anxiety); militant, inequitable behavior management and discipline, near elimination of the arts and humanities, de-valuing of social and emotional well-being, decreased time outdoors, diminished physical movement and health, and more time "measuring learning outcomes" through a variety of expensive and otherwise costly assessments.

These conditions have hurt children, teenagers, their teachers, and their families. They exist within a system that has seduced us into believing that education is linear, predictable, and quantifiable.

The system runs on stress and pressure, moving targets of success, and micro-managing every aspect of school (and home) life in a way that has pushed educators out of the profession and students to the point of believing that anxiety and depression are normal.

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Hilary Hughes

It is a system that has forgotten the important things about life and learning.

But then everything changed and no matter how we got to this point, everyone's lives have been altered forever.

In an instant:

PK-12 schools, colleges, and universities have been shut down. Teachers and professors have had to reimagine what their teaching looks like from a distance and what is even possible for students to learn and do in their own homes.

Educators are working from home. Many are also parents and/or caretakers for sick and elderly family members, and they're not only still trying to work but are also to manage their children's school assignments and their families' needs. They are trying teach their kids while they work or figure out how to pay bills because they've been laid off.

Single parents and guardians are doing things without another adult's help.

Young people have been cut off from physical social interaction with friends, while navigating this new world of schooling. They are subjected to the exponentially increasing horrors of Covid-19, helping with their families, and watching parents and guardians plot out how to safely get food, go to work each day, work at home, locate emergency aid, and/or shelter them (or not) from all they can that is this new reality.

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Stephanie Jones

This is not business as usual and it is unethical to act as if it could be. No one can (or should) expect the Covid-19 schooling happening at home to be anything close to usual, and perhaps this moment is providing all of us a chance to do something different: learn to be.

Learning to be will take some work, and maybe we're in a moment of system decompression right now. All of us: children, teenagers, college students, teachers, professors, administrators, parents, and guardians might finally be getting to a point of taking a collective deep breath.

There is no "transforming" face-to-face teaching and learning into Covid-19 teaching and learning overnight. And even if that was possible, doing so might not make sense in this time of national and global emergency.

Learning to be could be paying attention to the ups and downs of emotions, the highs and lows of motivation, the grief of losing routines, of familiarity, of human touch, of loved ones.

Learning to be could be talking about keeping hands clean, not touching faces, sanitizing every surface, and not visiting family members and friends as a way to keep our whole community safer.

Learning to be could be not stressing about messes (or assignments), thinking of creative ways to connect with each other, letting kids explore and do things that are of interest to them.

It could be wearing pajamas all day some days and getting dressed other days. It could be reading together or alone, dancing, making YouTube videos, building forts (inside or outside), singing, playing video games for hours, snuggling pets, watching old movies, cooking weird and new things, writing bad poetry, learning about something you've always wanted to know more about, playing board games, making board games, texting, napping, walking, riding bikes, and doing whatever works for you and yours.

Learning to be means putting an end to the rat race, taking away tests (state mandates are already lifted), stopping the busy work, forgetting about the grades you expected to be putting into the system, ending judgment and punishments, and determining how you can best support your students (and yourself) during this life-altering moment. Teachers can learn to be with students and not over them.

If all of us can take a collective breath and allow ourselves to be in this moment, we can also give our students and their caregivers the space and time everyone needs to learn to be during this time. Together. And apart.

This is not home schooling. And it's not online schooling. Teaching and learning in a time of Covid-19 is what we're doing, and we're figuring it out day by day.

We have a collective opportunity to answer the call of our unprecedented time and make today's education as humane, generous, caring, and yes, even as joyful as we possibly can.

We can all learn to be.

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