

Tragedy or Opportunity?

As I sit at home writing this on a Monday morning, I cannot help but feel like I have more experience related to this prompt than expected. No, I am not in quarantine; my family and I have been fortunate enough to evade the grasp of the virus. I am simply one of the millions of American students once again earning their educations virtually. While to many, the COVID-19 pandemic (and 2020 in general) seems like the brainchild of King or Atwood, I assert the opposite. Never before in my life have I had a better opportunity for learning.

Self-reflection is a practice I have always valued, and now, more than ever, it reveals fascinating truths. Upon pondering my experiences with remote instruction, I have realized three facts that I believe should guide every student in these unprecedented times. The first of these is that self-motivation is the key to accomplishing any worthwhile task. Without a teacher as an extrinsic motivator, it is often difficult for students to find the motivation to continue their educations at home. But because there are few things more worthwhile than education in a teenager's life, an alternative source of motivation—one that is found within—is necessary for success. The second truth I have come to realize in my time of remote learning is that it is always a good idea to start schoolwork early. Whereas at school, teachers can give immediate verbal feedback regarding a question, at home, there is significant lag in the question-and-answer process. It is this lag that has taught me to refrain from waiting until the last minute to begin my work. It only takes one nearly late assignment to convey this message. The third truth remote instruction has taught me is to seek complete understanding when presented with new material. This fact took me the longest of the three to comprehend because I could not experience it in any way other than through remote instruction. Students' responses to new material in the classroom are some of the most valuable tools for teachers to assess comprehension on the subject, so when teachers cannot see all their students' faces, a problem arises. With no way to gauge comprehension, they often move on in the curriculum not knowing if the class is ready to do so. Through this realization, I have learned that it is now, more than ever, my responsibility to understand the lessons my teachers are teaching me.

My experiences in remote instruction have enabled me to create a list of three things I think every school district should do to prepare for a return to remote instruction. Firstly, I think administrators should make sure every teacher is properly trained to use the technology required for remote instruction. Without a strong foundational knowledge of the electronic learning platform, I believe it is unreasonable to assume that quality education is possible virtually. Secondly, it is the responsibility of the school district, in my opinion, to ensure that all students are comfortable with the necessary technology. Ensuring this before a shutdown is put in place allows for the smoothest transition from in-person to online learning. Finally, I believe it is in every school district's best interest to prepare a hybrid education model. Perhaps the most important thing I have learned through my experience in remote instruction is that nothing can replace in-person learning. Face-to-face interaction is invaluable in an educational setting, so I believe it is the duty of the school district to create a plan that allows for as much in-person learning as is deemed safe.

Although it is easy to reduce 2020 to a year of darkness and confusion, I assert that I have never before had a better opportunity for learning. The values I have learned through remote instruction are ideals that are much harder to learn in a traditional, predictable school environment. Additionally, through the preparation they have already experienced, school districts can use what they have learned to be better prepared for whatever the future holds. If we fail to stop thinking about this year as a tragedy, we will miss its great opportunities.