

“Am I Mute? COVID-19 Through the Eyes of a Preschooler”

Andrea L. Tochelli-Ward

Le Moyne College

Amelia Ward, Age 5

tochelal@lemoyne.edu

What is the coronavirus?

You have to stay home.



Photo from a dance class through Zoom.

How many days have we been home?

A lot of weeks.



If you wore protective clothing what would it be?

Mask.

Do you want to go back to school?

Yeah!



Photo from a music class recorded and presented through Facebook.

Do you like Zoom to talk to your friends, classmates, and teachers?

Yes.



Photo from a school Zoom session. Students are generally muted when they aren't talking.

What's the best part about Zoom?

Not being mute.



Both the photo above and to the right are from Occupational Therapy sessions conducted through Zoom.

Do you like using Zoom to work with your therapists? [Physical Therapist, Occupational Therapist and Speech Therapist]

Yes.

Why?

I like it because I don't like being mute. I like not being mute.



Is Mommy a good teacher?

Yeah.



Amelia requested to do this after being shown a different activity using that board and white board markers.

What are your favorite activities we've done at home?

Games.



What's the best thing about having to stay at home?

I get to play.

Are you enjoying staying at home?

No.

Why not?

Because it's lonely. [She's an only child].



Playing restaurant with her dolls. She was cooking tacos for the dolls seated at her table.

Reflections/Explanations from Mom

Amelia began using the phrase "am I mute?" during Zoom calls with her classmates and often repeated this phrase when video calling family members. She was not terribly pleased to be muted as indicated by her responses to a number of my questions. The phrase has struck me because it would never have come up in her daily vernacular if not for the regular attendance in Zoom sessions that COVID-19 made necessary for engaging with others. The questions I shared here came partly from a Facebook post a friend shared interviewing their child about the virus while some were my own.

COVID-19 has greatly impacted the end of her preschool experiences as we needed to stop physical attendance to her play-based school in March. "School" has been weekly Zoom meeting with her peers and whatever activities I've found to use each week. Amelia was seeing a Speech Therapist, Occupation Therapist, and a Physical Therapist twice a week when the shut down began. With a short delay, she began weekly sessions with two substitute therapists with a longer delay in beginning Physical Therapy online due to agency differences. She has adjusted fairly well with the first two but Physical Therapy online has proved to be challenging.

While she has progressed in academics and with her therapies, trying to connect with playmates has been challenging since March. As an only child, we have tried to keep her connected to family, friends, and experiences, such as dance, music, and yoga classes, as best as we can while also encouraging time to play and learn without technology.