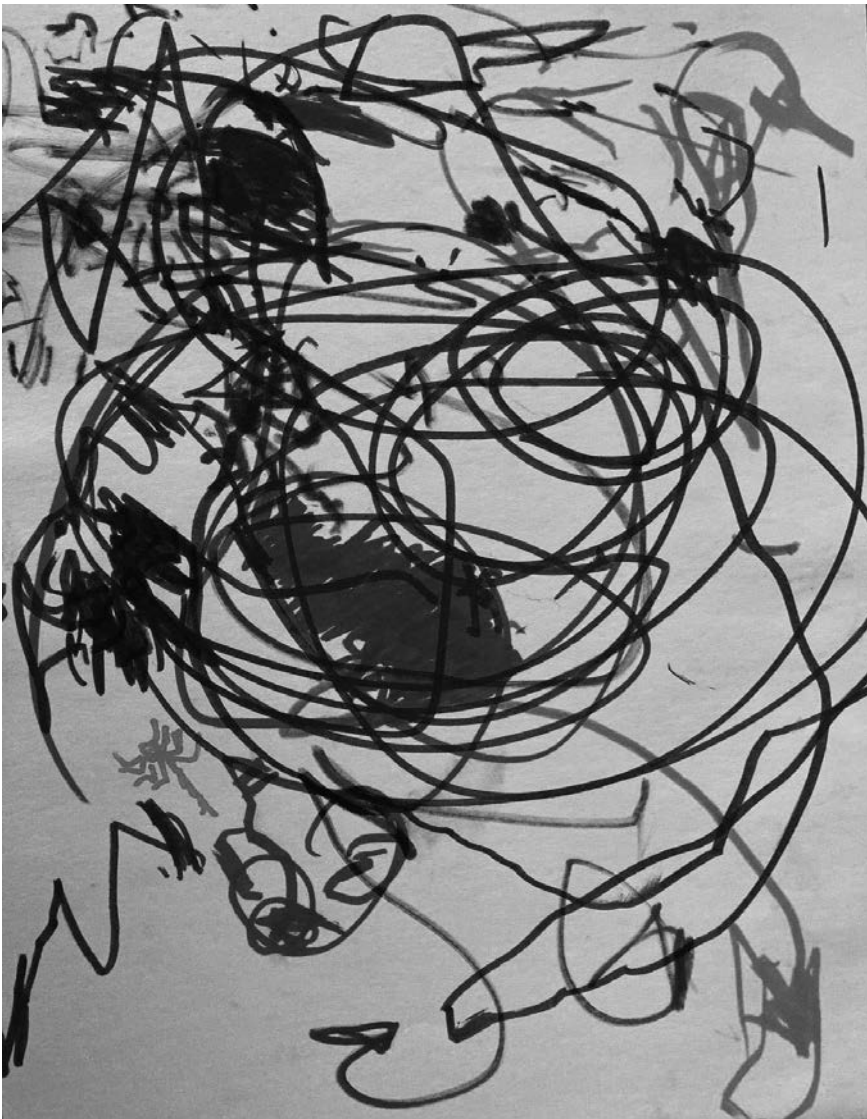# At School but Alone
with the Screen

The COVID-19 pandemic lockdown has not been easy for anyone, but perhaps one of the hardest hit sectors has been students. From pre-school to university, the pandemic has prevented them from continuing their day-to-day activities inside and outside the classroom. Here is the testimony of six students.


Laia (three years old)

When the pandemic started, Laia had been going to a daycare center for a year and she liked it very much. When she was sick and couldn't go, she got angry. Now, after a year and a half of the pandemic, she doesn't remember much about the daycare center, but, at first, she became very anxious and needed to leave the house. Several times she picked up her backpack, went to the door, and repeated, "Go out, go out, go out," so we would take her out.

When online classes started, at first, she was very excited to see her friends on the screen, but after a few months, she no longer liked the classes; they bored her and she needed interaction. Also, she stopped seeing a lot of her friends because many didn't enroll the following year. Fortunately, she made a good friend during the pandemic and she still has him. We visit the park when the pandemic stoplight is green. When she misses him, she asks to have a videocall with Pablo.

Jennifer (nine years old)

It was very hard for me to be at home during the pandemic; I missed my friends and my teacher a lot, because I lost touch with them. I think I haven't learned much in the online classes, compared to before the pandemic. To get promoted to the next grade, I have to turn in lots of homework and sometimes I don't have an Internet connection. That's when it's hard to turn my homework in on time. But now I'm excited and happy to be going back to school.
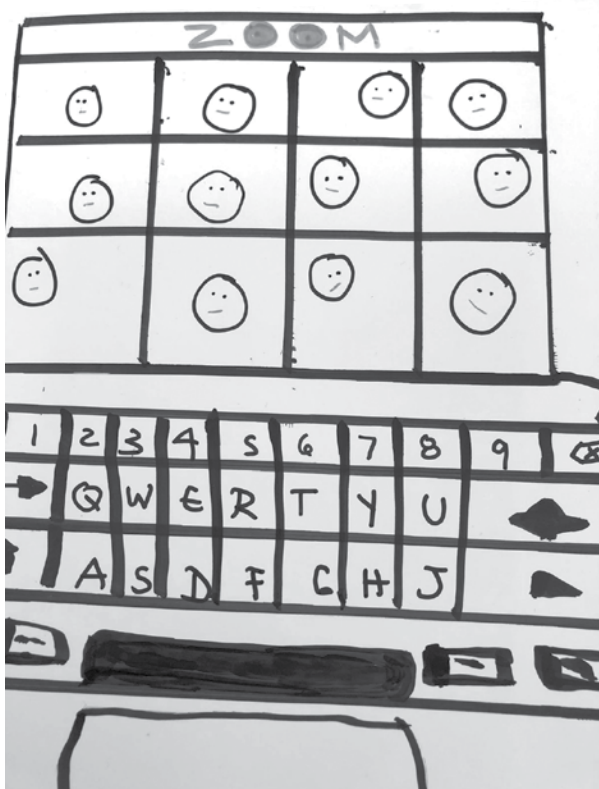
Aitana (twelve years old)

I spent half the school year in my other school, and the way they arranged online education was very different from how they did it in the school I changed to, because there they had been doing it longer and they had more experience. It didn't seem difficult to go to a new school because they welcomed me with open arms. But the quality of my work dropped a bit because I couldn't concentrate very well. Getting up every day and going on line wasn't hard for me. On the contrary, it was more relaxed than having to get up earlier to get to school on time.

Also, even though I was the new kid, I was able to make friends because the teachers encouraged it. I made a friend called Begoña, and then she introduced me to her friends, even though, sure, I really missed having direct contact with them. It's just not the same on a screen or on the phone.

Camilo (eleven years old)

Well, what I was doing was to do some things I used to do, like, for example, martial arts or gardening, germinating plants, real exotic stuff. Swordplay also interests me a lot and so, that's how I passed the time. Everything was really horrible. I heard all about it on a Chinese news program —I also learned Mandarin— and I'd tell my parents. But they said it was all fake news; I knew it was going to get to Mexico, but my parents didn't pay any attention to me. Finally, the virus did come here and it was real; it was devastating. That was my experience.

Pablo (eleven years old)

My experience in the pandemic hasn't been very good because the first year we were shut up here and not much happened. Online classes were a little confusing, a little difficult, and I had to learn to use everything really fast, like Gmail, Classroom, and Zoom. The second year, my grandpa died of COVID and, well, we just kept on doing the same thing. So, let's just say my experience during the pandemic hasn't been very good.

David (21 years old)

I'm a first-year, undergrad med student at the UNAM. Even I don't know how the COVID-19 pandemic changed me so much. I'm a completely different person.

Before the pandemic, I was studying at the School of Dentistry at this same university and my life was very active: school, my family, friends, and everything that goes with all that. University City was my favorite place, where I experienced sunsets, dawns, rain, laughter, tears, and an endless number of stories. The pandemic changed the life I was leading overnight, and with it, it took away lots of things, among them my school life and, of course, my mental health, just like what happened to many other people.

The pandemic helped me understand that I didn't want to continue studying dentistry. And now, here was another challenge: taking the tests to enter the School of Medicine. So, with coursework, study guides, videos, and thousands of pieces of paper, I prepared for that test. I failed it twice by just a few questions. That made my mental health even worse, since I felt defeated. And not having contact with the outside world, without seeing my friends, sometimes not even going out to get some sun, and the news announcing every day the mounting deaths and contagion just made me feel worse.

I thought of giving up, but I didn't. So, I studied hard again, even though I was afraid of failing, and the weeks went by until I got my test results back on July 16 [of last year]: I had been admitted to the School of Medicine with one of the highest grades: 118 out of 120.

I've just started the school year in my new school. My training as a doctor is beginning amidst one of the world's most dire health situations, and I think that's something I'll always remember. Obviously, not everything began as I had expected, since we're still taking classes on line. The workload is huge; there are some really tiring days when it's overwhelming to spend so much time in front of the computer. There's no socialization, and of course, the nostalgia for some day being able to return to the university is still there, since it's not the same to look at a computer monitor as it is to look out a window and see the whole campus outside.

I wouldn't say the pandemic has been the worst thing that's ever happened in my life, because I've changed, and, above all, learned to value everything I have. **VM**