Dear Friends and Colleagues:

I am writing today about the children of this pandemic. After a lifetime of working among the young, I feel compelled to address the concerns that are being expressed by so many of my peers about the deficits the children will demonstrate when they finally return to school. My goodness, what a disconcerting thing to be concerned about in the face of a pandemic which is affecting millions of people around the country and the world. It speaks to one of my biggest fears for the children when they return. In our determination to “catch them up,” I fear that we will lose who they are and what they have learned during this unprecedented era. What on earth are we trying to catch them up on? The models no longer apply, the benchmarks are no longer valid, the trend analyses have been interrupted. We must not forget that those arbitrary measures were established by people, not ordained by God. We can make those invalid measures as obsolete as a crank up telephone! They simply do not apply.

When the children return to school, they will have returned with a new history that we will need to help them identify and make sense of. When the children return to school, we will need to listen to them. Let their stories be told. They have endured a year that has no parallel in modern times. There is no assessment that applies to who they are or what they have learned. Remember, their brains did not go into hibernation during this year. Their brains may not have been focused on traditional school material, but they did not stop either. Their brains may have been focused on where their next meal is coming from, or how to care for a younger sibling, or how to deal with missing grandma, or how it feels to have to surrender a beloved pet, or how to deal with death. Our job is to welcome them back and help them write that history.

I sincerely plead with my colleagues, to surrender the artificial constructs that measure achievement and greet the children where they are, not where we think they “should be.” Greet them with art supplies and writing materials, and music and dance and so many other avenues to help them express what has happened to them in their lives during this horrific year. Greet them with stories and books that will help them make sense of an upside-down world. They missed you. They did not miss the test prep. They did not miss the worksheets. They did not miss the reading groups. They did not miss the homework. They missed you.

Resist the pressure from whatever ‘powers that be’ who are in a hurry to “fix” kids and make up for the “lost” time. The time was not lost, it was invested in surviving an historic period of time in their lives—in our lives. The children do not need to be fixed. They are not broken. They need to be heard. They need be given as many tools as we can provide to nurture resilience and help them adjust to a post pandemic world.

Being a teacher is an essential connection between what is and what can be. Please, let what can be demonstrate that our children have so much to share about the world they live in and in helping them make sense of what, for all of us has been unimaginable. This will help them– and us– achieve a lot more than can be measured by any assessment tool ever devised. Peace to all who work with the children!”

Teresa Thayer Snyder Ph.D.