

The smiling face behind online learning

Walking into a kindergarten classroom a year ago is different from what you would see today in 2020. Where in the past a room would be filled with chairs and decorative walls, today it looks like a computer with only the student's face visible on the screen. The same can be said with Annie Diaz's classroom or as her students know her, Ms. Annie.

Annie is the embodiment of what you think of when you see a kindergarten teacher. She is kind, exciting and caring. Annie captures the attention of everyone she speaks to with the passion behind her words. Becoming a kindergarten teacher was not always on her mind. She realized her passion of teaching while volunteering at her daughter's school.

"The students quickly took a like to me; they were eager to always listen to what I explained and learn from me. That brought me as much joy as I received from them. The parents and faculty encouraged me, and I made up my mind and haven't stopped yet."

Annie continues to teach kindergarten at the private institution, United Methodist Church, during the coronavirus. Annie's class size previously had a limit of 12 students in compliance to the Florida Department of Children and Families. This year she only has five students in her class. While her class size decreased, for better or for worse, she gained multiple assistants as parents sit in during class.

"I have parents actually sitting next to students, or nearby," Annie said. "I do have to remind them not to assist in any way when it comes time for spelling test, evaluations or independent work."

Cristal Lopez, who has a 2-year-old daughter, expresses her dislike and concern for having school taught online at this age.

"She was enrolled in a preschool prep course at a local school but we uninvolved her when schools shut down," she said, "I don't agree with this age having to be online for learning."

Annie continues to use her cheerful and positive attitude despite her class size and with the multiple challenges brought by remote learning.

"The connection between student and teacher is very different through virtual so I have tried different things to try and minimize the distance."

She has even transformed a room in her house to resemble a classroom setting, giving students the impression of physically being in a classroom.

"I had to improvise and rearrange; I had to create and get creative with what I could fit in the room."

Although logging into class may differ from walking into a classroom where the smell of crayons fills the air, students are still able to learn in a positive environment. Annie's passion for teaching is expressed through her continued efforts of connecting with students and creating a school environment. Ms. Annie is making the best of these times while we wait for a time when all students and staff can safely return to class.