

# LOCKDOWN

## SECTION: 6 PAGE EXTRA



by Margaret Morris

## 'Life in Lockdown' Series 8

### Fit for the Future



**L**AST week I said "for me it was becoming clearer than ever that, given the opportunity, our children can become the 'change-makers' and young leaders we need" as we establish ourselves in the 'new normal'.

So what 'opportunities' do they need to be given?

By now the majority of us believe we should be preparing for our youngsters to return to school, though I guess all of us have different views and concerns about when and how this should happen.

The main question is how can we creatively organise groups of lively, curious and enthusiastic youngsters in a safe and healthy learning environment?

Like me you have probably seen disturbing photos and videos of classrooms divided by red tape, children wearing masks, frequently using hand sanitiser and working individually at a desk. In some cases they are only allowed to mix with a small group of classmates at a safe distance throughout the day.

Just like in everything else to do with this wretched pandemic, the reality is that numerous 'experimental' approaches will be taken in different countries. They will all be trying to work out how to manage students of all ages in confined spaces for extended periods of time.

There was an interesting article in *The Guardian* (10.5.20) 'Scotland eyes outdoor learning as model for re-opening schools'. This article was about how using outdoor space could optimise physical distancing'.

One of the things that makes our

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school special is our great location.

What a happy coincidence that planning how to use our outdoor space better was a key priority for us before lockdown halted our actions! The work we were doing with parents in our 'Outdoor Learning' Action Group was leading us back to focus on our environment. We had also decided to enhance our provision for outdoor learning by commissioning our first 'Tor Shell', a large, open tent with a very special covered wooden frame that looks a little like a tortoise shell.

And now? We believe that in these uncertain times schools could be enhancing opportunities for 'outdoor learning' as this may well provide a solution to the 'new normal' arrangements demanded by COVID-19.

Think about it, for the time being, spending more time outdoors will reduce the risk of infection and is a really healthy option.

Like all schools in Majorca we are waiting for confirmation of the regulations regarding re-opening schools that will be required by Conselleria. However, with the benefit of our flexible outside learning space, we are hoping to be well placed to manage the new requirements.

So what conditions optimise learning? Well, we value holistic and project-based learning and try to ensure that school is a happy and enriching learning environment.

I was talking with a parent Madi about this earlier this week and this is what she said:

"We took an opportunity to move to London because we thought it would be full of opportunity. The kids went to a good school but all their spontaneity was repressed. The vitality and motivation we were used to seeing in them was gone. They kept talking about Majorca and to them Escola Global was their home. We all missed the outdoors and the energy a lot, it's paradise and the kids were full of joy and talked about projects. What's the point of just being focused on academics if the human aspect is missing? We didn't want to have to choose holistic or academic, we want a school that can do both. The children want to learn and they are curious. We felt so connected to the school that we moved back!"

So these are some of the things that Madi feels can optimise learning and I agree.

So where does that leave us? One thing is for sure, when schools finally re-open everything will be different. What was familiar with, and was perhaps tolerated in the pre-COVID-19 days just won't cut it now. Educating children in rows with teacher standing at the front bestowing their 'wisdom' to the class was fine in Victorian times, it was passable in the mid twentieth century but do we hon-

estly believe that it is fit for purpose now?

It's the same question with a 'content driven' education. Some of us remember the time of *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Numerous leather bound volumes of books that held all our current knowledge (but only for the year/month/day they were printed). As time went by these expensive volumes became a complete waste of money as knowledge was moving so fast. And now, where do our youngsters go for information ... the Internet of course!

At our school we know we don't have all the answers all the time and sometimes console ourselves that all we have are the right questions! However, we are 'seekers' on a constant journey to the future! And if we are 'seekers' we need to learn more about how we can make schools better places to 'inspire compassionate learners and change-makers' and make our world fitter for the future.

I believe that, in the light of what is happening in our world we need to have a re-think and ask this fundamental question 'what is the purpose of education?'

Let's ask this question of each other and of our schools. I'd love to hear some responses.

If you are interested in exploring this question further, listen to the three episodes of *'The Learning Revolution'* series on BBC Radio 4 and we can come back to this in a couple of weeks.

Next week we will be hearing the fascinating story of 'Tor Shells' from my colleague Pol Taylor.

Margaret Morris is School Adviser at Escola Global

