



by Margaret Morris

# 'Life in Lockdown' Series 11

## 'Turning learning inside out'

**O**N 17 May in my article 'Fit for the Future' I wrote about the concerns shared by many of us in education that the 'new normal' our youngsters were going to face upon their return to school was going to be very different from the normal that any of us would wish for them.

Other schools in other countries are opening up their schools in plenty of time for the rest of us to learn from their approaches and their mistakes. I have seen many pictures and videos of children being welcomed back into a very different learning environment from the one they left behind. And also, as I expected, I have read numerous reports stating how well children are adapting to the new regulations (such as walking and working in strictly marked out spaces). Most schools so far seem to be saying that their 'return to school plan' is working pretty well. I'm not surprised as children are good at adapting and most are pretty good at doing what they are told.

Yes, children will adjust to their new learning environment but that doesn't make it right.

Does it really have to be this way? For Escola Global this is a compromise too far, we cannot abandon our unique values by allowing COVID-19 to dictate how our children live and learn in school.

We are not alone in taking a stand against this. Yes, all schools will be required to have a plan in place ready for children to return in September but how can we ensure our plan is based upon making things better?

I think the very first thing that needs to be done is for schools to avoid taking the easy route. None of us should begin

by going into school to start working out how many desks you can have in each room and where you will stick brightly coloured tape on the floor to keep children away from each other. The first thing we need to do is consider how to turn these challenges into opportunities. The key for us at Escola Global is to seamlessly blend indoor and outdoor learning.

Every day I am seeing reports and links to helpful resources in newspapers and on social media to help us explore opportunities to use both the inside and outside for learning. Another good source of support for us is coming from a parent who is a doctor. He reminds us that education outdoors is highly beneficial for children. He has told us that 'in the context of the COVID-19 infection, teaching activities carried out outdoors play an enormous role in the prevention of contagion as the risks of spending a considerable time in closed, poorly ventilated spaces are becoming increasingly clear'.

The National Association for Nature in Education has designed a protocol 'Taking Teaching and Learning out of the Classroom' which will help us consider which lessons could take place outdoors and to then plan accordingly. They suggest we 'convert outdoor spaces and the outdoors into allies in the educational process'.

The benefit from learning outdoors has always been there but giving this area the attention it has always deserved has never been so important.

However it isn't that simple. Optimising learning outside is not just a matter of taking the same lessons or using the same approaches outside. It needs to be valued, and planned for. Outdoor learning is distinctive and staff should work to-



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gether to agree how they will take learning safely and effectively beyond the classroom. It requires a shift in thinking and definitely requires careful planning. Yes, it is about adapting 'the outside' and adding this learning zone to the total amount of 'classroom' space available but is also about adapting timetables and routines. In Mallorca we also need to respect the seasons and the heat of the mid-day sun. We need also to remember that it does rain!

From what I have seen, many schools are adapting to the 'new normal' on the understanding that there will be compromises, at least in the short term, they are 'making do'.

In our situation we are seeing this as an opportunity to 'make things better', we are doing this because it is the right thing to do. As always we have some more learning and discovery to do.

Whatever the final regulations state, I am sure that many families will prefer their children to be working outside for at least part of the day.

We believe our new normal will be even better than the old one. We will be *enhancing provision.*

For us this is an opportunity to 'seize the day'.

Wishing you health and happiness.

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