

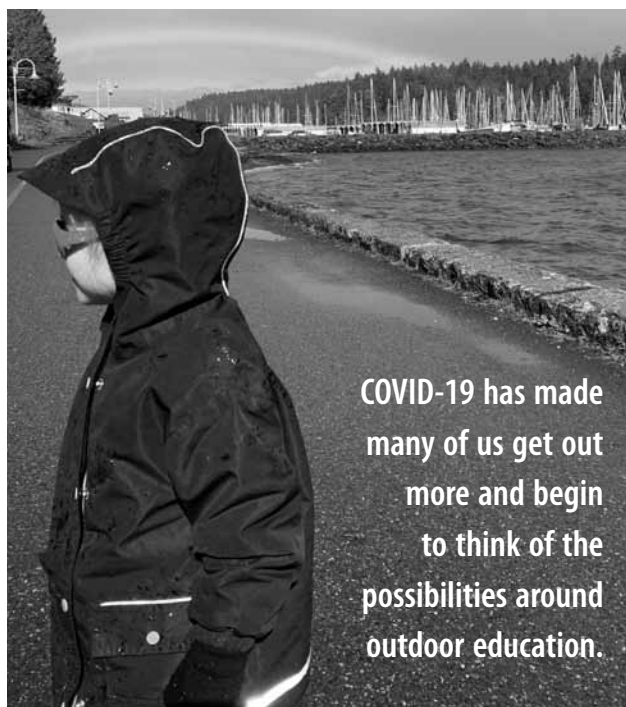
# The Pandemic and Outdoor Play

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**A**t all times, early childhood educators reflect on what is best for children and advocate on their behalf. This is especially true now during the pandemic, as I observe my colleagues worry about the well-being of all children. What are the daily realities for children, families, and educators in BC? How might global issues be observed and translated throughout our daily lives in our local contexts? I am trying to unpack these concepts through my own beliefs and practice as a future educator.

I love being outdoors, and COVID-19 has made many of us get out more and begin to think of the possibilities around outdoor education. In the fall of 2020, my classmate Lacey Holmes and I had the opportunity to explore Hemer Park, just outside of Nanaimo, to consider what it might entail to be in the forest with toddlers. Using structures from the Early Learning Framework (Government of BC, 2019) we asked ourselves, what is the role of the educator and what are the children capable of in the forest? (p. 93).

The pandemic is creating more conversations and research that could help make outdoor education a reality in licensed child care settings. The Outdoor Early Learning Association of BC, in partnership with Peter Wall Institute, University of British Columbia, and other sponsors, put on a series of webinars in the fall of 2020 called “Advancing Early Childhood Education Outdoors Now” (2020, September 24). The first webinar had multiple speakers advocating for outdoor education for young children. They were mostly educators, but they also had an epidemiologist on the panel of speakers, who further confirmed what the Public Health Guidance for Childcare Settings (BC Centre for Disease Control) states. She said that with the data collected so far, children are not spreading COVID-19 in the same way they spread influenza, which they do quite effectively. She also explained that it is the adults who are the spreaders, infecting themselves mostly. When I heard this, it made me wonder if it is the adults (educators) who really need to change. What might happen if adults stepped back a little and let the children be, let them play outside more, and helped facilitate that experience by providing time,



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space, and materials? The Early Learning Framework emphasizes the importance of time, space and place, and materials and how they can open many different possibilities for experimentation and meaningful interactions (Government of BC, 2019, p. 22–23).

Galvin et al. write, “Pedagogy requires us to confront and question predetermined curricula and to invent pedagogies that are a continuum of experiences related to our lives and not diluted by techniques that normalize practices” (Galvin et al., 2020, p. 2). With that in mind, going back to “normal” (pre-COVID times) or viewing outdoor education as a short-term solution or fad may not be possible, which I find encouraging. As advocates for the well-being of all children, let us confront without judgement and question without looking for straight answers.

COVID has urged us to shift our thinking to re-imagine what is possible in education and in the daily lives of our children, families, and communities. An optimist would say this is a great way to have children outside more, and

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