

KS1 Nature

KS1 Science

Making Science Relevant



Li/bette's
Resources

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Making Science Relevant in KS1

The most favoured way of teaching science in KS1 is to decide on a topic, look for the knowledge that is required by the National Curriculum, make a list of aims and objectives for the lesson and then present the lesson to the pupils, with accompanying books and worksheets and maybe photos, videos and the odd real-life specimen. Often the subject matter is not one with which the children are familiar. It might in some cases, introduce them to life in other countries.

'Today we are going to learn about (for example) the parts of a flower', the teacher may say.

The children will then be shown the pictures (or real plant if fortunate) and then maybe given a diagram of a flowering plant to label. For many, they will have to write the lesson objective at the top of the paper before they begin, as if that in some way helps.

The trouble with this is that for most of these children, the lesson will be meaningless. It may tick a box: yes, the teacher has covered the curriculum, and maybe the children will have been involved in some 'scientific' behaviours. But I can assure you, that your breath could have been spared, as few will remember anything they have learned much beyond a week, if that - and nor would many adults fare any better.

It doesn't matter if it's the life-cycle of a butterfly, or the life of a fox - for taught as such in a science 'lesson', it is unlikely to be remembered for long.

Why is it so difficult to remember?

Maybe it's because we don't think it matters that we remember. After all - we can enjoy looking at wild flowers without knowing their names - regardless of whether we had a lesson about them at school - perhaps more so.

Contrast this with our response when a real life story is told to us. Maybe it's the caretaker who has discovered some mice nesting, or a gardener telling of the inner secrets of the soil. These are different - they have relevance to us and we listen - attentively.

When those that are working with nature the whole time, talk of their experiences - be it gardener, fisherman, nature reserve warden or farmer - we listen because they have seen, and they know, and have faced the tremendous importance to man's life of knowing how to deal with certain facts of nature. **We all respond best to first hand observations, for it is then that we take ownership of the subject.**

"The fairest thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion that stands at the cradle of true art and true science. He who does not know it and can no longer wonder, no longer feel amazement, is as good as dead, a snuffed-out candle."

- Albert Einstein

The child wants to see

And so the secret is to make science so relevant that the child feels part of what is being studied. But how?

Can we learn the story of a conker in a half hour's lesson? To gain even a bit of this knowledge would mean a whole year of sitting watching.

Can the most vivid description, illustrated with beautiful photos, tell what someone else has seen, equal in value to a quarter of an hour spent by a child, hidden from view, actually watching a bird, or a rabbit?

Unless children grow a plant for themselves, does it matter if they are told that aphides and caterpillars suck the juices and devour the leaves? But when a child owns a plant for him/herself, then it is a matter of great importance as to how to deal with these enemies.

Therefore, as much as is possible, science in KS1, that is concerned with living things, should be undertaken as much as is practicably possible, outside - so giving children their own first-hand experiences.

These experiences will mostly take into account the passing of the seasons. Maybe it will be frequent visits to a tree in the playground or locality of the school, to see how the tree changes from one season to the next - delighting in examining the blossom, and then the new leaf buds.

Maybe it will be pond dipping. Anything that provides the child with his/her own story to tell. Alongside this will be the encouraging of independent study out of school. Not through the giving of homework - but by the giving of ideas of things to look for as they walk home from school or play outside.

Teachers do not have time to study to become naturalists. They need a list of possible things to look out for month by month. **Nature**, our magazine has been designed to do just that. It seeks to equip teachers with short activities, relevant to the season, that they can do with their classes. It tells of things to look for and explains what is happening. The articles can be read to the children either before, as a consolidation exercise, or after practical work outdoors as a stimulus for discovery.