

KS1 Nature

KS1 Science

The need to change the
way we teach



Li/bette's
Resources

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The logo for 'Li/bette's Resources' features the name in a red, cursive font. A stylized illustration of a quill pen is positioned behind the text, with its tip pointing towards the letter 'i' in 'Li/bette's'. The word 'Resources' is written in a similar cursive font below the first line.

Is something wrong with the way KS1 Science is taught?

Yes! For we have raised several generations of adults who do not have any sense of the interconnectedness of themselves and the natural world. This has led to an abuse of our world, to the detriment of all living things, including ourselves. Look around you and you will find plenty of evidence that something is wrong.

*KS1 should be a time for
developing curiosity, intrigue and
excitement, as children look, wonder,
ask and explore.*

For the most part, the KS1 Science curriculum is learning about the world around us: living things and natural materials. This should provide children with the bedrock of understanding that can be built upon in future years. It should not only seek to educate, but mainly to fill with awe, wonder and a love of the natural world - not just for the sake of knowing something, but as a necessary ingredient for living life to the full. Mere 'education' will breed disinterested adults, while the former will breed adults who love the natural world and want to care for it.

KS1 is too early to focus on raising mini scientists, but needs to focus on producing responsible adults, who know the art and necessity of observing nature and making careful observations about cause and effect, who aim to work with nature, not against it, not merely satisfying their own personal agendas.

KS1 children learn best through doing: touching, moving around and experiencing first hand. Learning Maths and English is enough time spent sitting down. After those lessons are completed, it is time for the young

child to be set free - to be stimulated to find out about the exciting world around - through story, song, creative activities, physical activities and by going out into the world to see what there is to find and learn about - obviously with an enthusiastic teacher who is ready to listen to the children and lead them on in their understanding - who has at his/her fingertips the ability to make the most of any learning opportunity that arises.

KS1 children do not learn about plants or animals from a worksheet.

This form of study may be appropriate in later years, but it is meaningless to a KS1 child unless s/he has first hand experience of the thing being studied. There may be the few - and there always will be, who learn something that lasts from this method, but our aim as teachers should not be to just educate 'the few', but 'the mass'.

In fact - desk work as a vehicle for teaching science in KS1, with its contrived 'experiments' and the teaching of 'scientific skills' as teachers desperately try and prove that they have covered the necessary programme of study, is about as effective as a plastic surgeon: changing the exterior to make it look supposedly beautiful, while leaving the inner life totally unchanged. We all know (or should) that how we are on the inside will shape our face on the outside and no amount of plastic surgery can change our hearts. In the same way, externally, children can be taught to do amazing things to impress inspectors, but internally, the subject has become stone dead in the hearts of the children - they learn to hate it rather than to love it.

If a lesson, on say flowers, is made odious to the children through artificial lessons, then flowers will become odious to children.

Ask the RSPB or the British Wildlife Trust how many children are interested in nature. Judging by the quality of their publications I guess they must be struggling, as they teach about comic strip animal characters that bear little resemblance to real life, in a desperate attempt to attract youngsters.

Sometimes the very young are caught - but their interest soon fades away as technological attractions take their attention.

Why do children love technology rather than the natural world?

Because children consider nature irrelevant. Nobody has taken the time to teach them to love it, to take them outside and learn to look and to revel in the feeling of pleasure of being one with nature.

Why has science gone wrong in KS1?

We have focused so hard on teaching 'science' that we have forgotten what our science is supposed to teach us. More so, our 'science' has become a threat to our world. We now consider ourselves so far advanced, that we think we are superior to nature. Because we are so ignorant about the natural world, we do not even know that there are natural rules that cannot be broken. Modern man breaks the rules with impunity, upsetting the fine balance that exists in nature, and wonders why nature goes wrong.

Further still, had we have studied nature and learnt the rules, we would know that breaking the rules leads to death and destruction. We are only just beginning to find out from first hand experience the destruction that is caused by tampering with the natural world for our own end.

We have tried to use science to rise above the natural world and prove our superiority, and are only just realising our folly, but I'm not sure we quite realise the extent of the damage to our minds, bodies and souls.

What can we do?

There are no quick, easy fixes. We all need to do some serious learning - but not in artificial settings. We need to stand outside our front doors and learn to listen, look and feel. We need to learn from the beasts and herbs of the field. We need to be humbled from our false, lofty, superior position as rulers of the universe and become learners from the natural world. We need to learn to fall back in line with nature, and realise that we cannot separate ourselves from it, without our doing so leading to death and destruction.

KS1 teachers are in a privileged position

Day after day, we KS1 teachers have the wonderful opportunity to influence the next generation. How can we do that? By turning our teaching around. By learning to learn with our pupils. By learning, that in KS1, our aim must not be to teach science by targets, but to teach children to listen to the science that is around them: to help them tune in to this wonderful world in which we live and feel a part of it, rather than detached from it: to learn from the birds, the flowers and trees and animals. We will learn to love, we will learn to respect, we will learn the rules and use them to good effect in our own lives and, slowly, we will halt the destruction. This will not merely educate the brain, but will bring health to the body, mind and soul, for we are a part of it and must not forget so.

This means, starting with what is there to be studied, rather than working out how to teach a target and planning a lesson around it. Go out and look for the insects, birds, flowers, trees and wild animals, and study them where they are. Young children must start with what is familiar to them, having concrete experiences. Teaching KS1 children about animals in other countries when they have little idea what is in their playground is just not good early years practice. It fulfils no purpose. There is time enough for that later.

There is a growing movement that at least recognises the benefits of time outside for children's well-being: Forest Schools are a welcome addition to the curriculum. But they are not enough, as mean while the science lesson undercuts what is learned outside with dreary artificial lessons. It's time we made regular, first-hand experiences of nature our Science Programme of Study. Don't worry - the children's' observational, questioning and recording skills will be far better for it, and they will really engage with the subject.

Will you begin today?

Few will. Few actually truly care about the problem enough to change the things that really matter, or are prepared to search for real answers, for all of the hype. The hype will soon pass, and our children will grow up. What legacy will you pass to the next generation?: children impoverished for their disconnected to life, or children enriched by the world around them? The choice is ours to make.

Each precious child you educate is valuable. Each one that you can teach to love nature will be an arrow in the shaft. They wont all become scientists, but aim that they will all love nature and do nothing to put them off..

Start by becoming enthused yourself. Your enjoyment, excitement and pleasure will be infectious. We have nothing to lose, and everything to gain and maybe, you yourself will begin to change as well as you study the great matters of the universe.

We hope that you will find the growing collection of materials on our website, helpful for this incredible work. Most are free and if not free, very low priced. It is our mission to give you the best resources, which reflect the beauty of the world around, to inspire the next generation to love nature.

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