

LANGUAGE, THE FOUNDATION OF ALL LEARNING

“I teach because I would be forever young in spirit and mind” Thomas J. Rillo.

Why, do you ask, should one use the outdoors to teach language? Reading, writing, spelling, vocabulary and conversation are the foundation of all learning. Where better to get excited about these essentials of learning but in the outdoors!

It is not only the subjects of science that can be taught outdoors. If environmental education is truly an interdisciplinary approach to more effective and efficient teaching then language is certainly part of this approach. Educators are turning more and more to the outdoor classroom and real-life experiences found there to instil and encourage learners’ interest in language and provide them with first-hand experiences to encourage good authors. The outdoors provides a wealth of opportunities for exploration and investigation. How else would a learner know what a daffodil thinks of spring?

The outdoors inspires creativity and opens the mind to perceiving and understanding the world differently. We find new words to express ourselves with greater clarity, develop our listening and observation skills and help us to organise and present information. As a learner progresses in language skills he/she also develops intellectual, emotional and social capacities as language activities inspire us to communicate better, influence the emotions and develop skills for all areas of learning. Language is also a cultural window through which we can understand our own and others’ values and is an outlet for our feelings and the means for their expression.

Experiences with nature provide strong stimuli for creativity. There will be something of interest even for the most reluctant of learners.

Here are some ideas for a Language Hike:

- Making signs for interpretive trails and producing a trail guide
- Writing and telling of a personal experience in the outdoors
- Learning new words obtained from nature
- Listen to natural sounds and recording them schematically or with words
- Reporting on a chosen area
- Describe a storm
- Write tall stories
- Write poems, dramatisations and skits

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