

## **PLANTING A SEED**

“Since the beginning of knowledge must be with the senses, (see, touch, hear, taste and smell) the beginnings of teaching should be made dealing with actual things...” Johann Amos Comenius (1592 – 1670)

Learning in the out-of-doors is not a recent invention but it is one that has been neglected by teachers due to perceived pressures placed on them by the educational system. Taking children out and doing lessons in the school playground has often been perceived as an extra-mural activity, an added burden or bizarre notion. Having met many teachers, on training programmes, many of them have expressed a fear and lack the skills of being able to control a group of learners’ out-of-doors despite an abundance of teaching tools just waiting to be used as we will discover, as seeds are planted, with each monthly article.

We will attempt to dispel fears, provide some thoughts on outdoor education and offer some basic activities that will inspire and from this inspiration you will gain the confidence and creativity to explore other ideas to make teaching real, meaningful and fun for all.

One of the ways in which the teacher will maintain control is to be fully prepared – as well prepared as you would be for a lesson inside the classroom. There will also be the times when things present themselves which have not been prepared for. Every opportunity (distraction if you would like to call it that) and should not be ignored. These are teachable moments and may be seen as gifts to be drawn upon for profound learning that can take place.

There is a strong emphasis for teachers to go back to basics and for learners to be proficient in reading, writing and arithmetic (3R’s) thus laying a sound foundation for further learning. The outdoors provides a wealth of opportunities for the 3R’s. There is no need to put learning into a strait-jacket but to rather allow learning to be exciting and creative. We have discovered that when teachers are encouraged to think out-of-the-box everyone, learners and teachers, gain so much from the world around them. The teacher will gain confidence and the learners will look forward to their next lesson outdoors.

Start with simple things and other ideas will flourish and take seed. Take planting seeds for example. How do seeds grow, what do they need for healthy growth, what are the different parts of a plant, what do the roots look like, why does a plant need roots, do all leaves look the same do all flowers look the same, what colours are the flowers, how many petals do they have, what are the different part of a flower, what insects or animals visit the plant and soon learning will be having an valuable effect.

Through experience we have discovered that children will learn how to observe accurately and from this learn how to express their observations. They will develop a curiosity to keep learning and knowing – which is natural to everyone. Before long many ideas will emerge which can be directly linked to the curriculum. It will be real; it will be fun and best of all it will be remembered by the child.

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