

DEVELOPING COMMUNICATION SKILLS OF CHILDREN THROUGH ACTIVITIES IN ERA AT PRIMARY LEVEL IN KEY STAGE ONE

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Each and every individual needs to possess the basic skills of science in order to live in the present complex world. For that it is essential to provide opportunities at the early stage of education. The primary cycle of education has been divided into three key stages, namely; key stage one-grade I and grade II, key stage two-grade III and IV and key stage three-grade V. The purpose of this study was to provide children at key stage one with opportunities to develop communication skills - one of the basic science skills - by planning hands-on science activities through the subject Environment Related Activities (ERA.)

The study was conducted in three phases. Three schools in Kegalle district were selected for the sample considering availability, accessibility and adaptability. In the first phase thirteen classrooms were observed when teaching ERA lessons to understand the existing situation in teaching learning process. All the lessons were tape recorded and detailed field notes were prepared. Interviews were selected with randomly selected teachers including those observed to make clarifications of weaknesses identified in classroom observation. A questionnaire was administered to primary teachers to understand the difficulties in planning and presenting activities to develop communication skills. Data obtained from different sources were analyzed using triangulation. It was found out that 85% of teachers were incapable of organizing their lessons with activities to provide children with variety of opportunities to develop communication skills. They were not capable enough to get the active involvement of children. During the second phase of the study activities were planned for each theme to provide children with numerous opportunities to develop their skills related to communication. The planning stage was done with lengthy discussions with teachers in order to get the clear understanding of the activities. These planned activities were tried out in five classrooms in three selected schools in the third phases of the study. Necessary improvements of the activities were made with the help of feedback obtained from teachers.

Children were very active in discussing with group members, presenting group findings to the rest of the class, and recording through variety of media. They were so curious to observe the outcomes of the activities and to record what they observed. Teachers' responses indicated that children were enthusiastic in learning science through such activities and they were so inquisitive to find out things by themselves. Therefore it is recommended to organize continuous collaborative work with primary teachers to strengthen the capabilities of planning lessons with activities in order to provide children with early experiences needed for developing communication skills.

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