

## IMPROVING COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGE SKILLS THROUGH OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

*by:*

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The ability to effectively communicate is an essential life skill in the 21st century. This ability is at the heart of social interaction which is an important component of various stages of life. It is important to have good communication and language skills as it helps an individual to engage in social activities and thrive. On the opposite side, learners with poor communication skills will have struggles in learning, achieving, making friends and interacting with society (Bercow Review, 2008). Communication is vital in teaching and learning since it is included in planning, organizing, coordinating, controlling and motivating learners to be involved in the learning process and independent learning (Ezechil, 2002).

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Learning communication and language skills are not limited to the four corners of the classroom. Learners at different levels benefit from having appropriate and extended activities outside the classroom. The outdoor environment provides good opportunities for learners to develop their communication and language skills. Outdoor learning encompasses a wide range of educational activities in various settings. Examples include outdoor adventure education, field trips, field studies, nature studies, outdoor play, heritage education, agricultural education, environmental education, and experiential education (Rickinson et al, 2004). Language teachers may use these outdoor activities to develop the communication and language skills of the learners.

In using outdoor learning in communication and language classes, there should be planning and programming of the curriculum. This can make classes be offered in different environments with appropriate learning opportunities such as rural or city

farms, parks and gardens, nature centers, urban spaces, museums, wilderness areas, and government offices. These environments may improve learner's skills for sharing their knowledge, expressing their feelings and making their own decisions independently, which make them more successful in school and their personal lives. Additionally, anti-social behaviors may decrease and cooperation, solidarity, agreement and conflict solving skills are improved (Burdette & Whitaker, 2005).

The Sociocultural Theory of Vygotsky (1978) is relevant in studying the environment's significance for language development. Language mediates learner's experiences and their internal and external thinking (Vygotsky, 1986). Outdoor environments provide learners with educational opportunities to acquire authentic experiences that contribute to their meaning making. Verbal expressions that cannot be experienced indoors such as at home or school can be experienced outdoors. The constantly changing environment, like shifting season and weather, expands learners' range of experiences which can stimulate their language use. (Anggard, 2012).

Outdoor environments can be used by teachers in teaching communication and language. This pedagogy offers powerful tools for creating communication and language environments. Learners' motivation and understanding increases when learning takes place outdoors. Providing students appropriate outdoor activities also offer opportunities to explore, investigate and reflect, which are critical in acquiring rich and varied language (Szczepanski (2007). Learning in an outdoor environment that gives limitless opportunities for metacognitive conversations in which language is continuously challenged (Jarman, 2008).

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