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Motivating primary children to learn science

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The education reforms introduced in 1997 were considered to focus on the child to improve the status of living by strengthening the skills and behaviours that mould the child to be a useful citizen. Such a child should be up-to-date in knowledge and information with the ability to discover, select, retain, process and apply information. During the childhood, students are very curious about their surrounding. Teacher as the key person in the primary classroom should be responsible for arousing motivation of the child to learn science in the surrounding. The primary stage of education has been divided into three key stages: Key stage 1- Grades 1 and 2, Key stage 11- Grades 3 and 4, Key stage 111 - Grade 5. Key stage II was selected for this study. Environment Related Activities (ERA) is a highly integrated subject of science, social studies, aesthetics, health and nutrition. The aim of this study was to develop science related activities to build up motivation in children at key stage two through the subject ERA.

The study was conducted in three phases. In the first phase, eight classrooms of three schools in the Gampaha district were observed to get an understanding of the practices of teaching science related lessons in ERA. Students' notes and artifacts were collected. All the lessons were tape recorded and detailed field notes were made. It was revealed that most teachers did not possess clear knowledge of science to teach science related lessons and the existing activities were not organised to motivate students to learn science. In the second phase, 25 activities were prepared for five units. Developed activities were tried out in six classrooms in the three schools in the third phase. Detailed fieldnotes were made along with informal interviews with children and teachers. Analysis of data revealed that children not only love to do the activities and ask for more and more activities, but are also able to say what they learned from activities. The involvement in doing activities made children motivated to learn science and to develop science process skills. There were changes in teachers in planning lessons considering children's interest and assessing them in different ways. It is recommended to provide teachers with short-term training to update their knowledge and professional skills as teachers.

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