

Understanding the World (UW) – Specific Area

Understanding the world involves guiding children to make sense of their physical world and their community. The frequency and range of children's personal experiences increases their knowledge and sense of the world around them – from visiting parks, libraries and museums to meeting important members of society such as police officers, nurses and firefighters. In addition, listening to a broad selection of stories, non-fiction, rhymes and poems will foster their understanding of our culturally, socially, technologically and ecologically diverse world. As well as building important knowledge, this extends their familiarity with words that support understanding across domains. Enriching and widening children's vocabulary will support later reading comprehension.

Aim

We aim to enable the children to develop the knowledge, skills and understanding they need to make sense of the world through the following aspects:

Past and Present / People, Culture and Communities / The Natural World

Objectives

- To provide the children with first-hand experiences that encourages observation, exploration, prediction, problem solving, critical thinking, decision making and discussion.
- To provide a range of indoor and outdoor activities which stimulate children's curiosity and interests.
- To provide opportunities for children to become aware of the similarities and differences between themselves and other people and to understand that all people deserve to be treated with respect.
- To provide support in helping children communicate and record their observations and predictions orally and in other ways (e.g. drawings or models).

Operating Policy

The curriculum will be implemented in order that the children have opportunity for practical investigation with a wide range of equipment and tools, in structured free-play, individual, group and adult-directed situations.

The children will be encouraged to question, hypothesise, predict and observe, and to form opinions based upon their experiences.

Programme of Work

The programme of work will take the form of a mixture of child initiated and general activities. The children will be able to explore properties or materials and tools in an open-ended manner. Parental and community links will be developed to further support learning.

We aim that children at the expected level of development will reach the following goals through activities we provide.

Past and Present

- Talk about the lives of people around them and their roles in society
- Know some similarities and differences between things in the past and now, drawing on their experiences and what has been read in class
- Understand the past through settings, characters and events encountered in books read in class and storytelling.

People, Culture and Communities

- Describe their immediate environment using knowledge from observation, discussion, stories, non-fiction texts and maps
- Know some similarities and differences between different religious and cultural communities in this country, drawing on their experiences and what has been read in class
- Explain some similarities and differences between life in this country and life in other countries, drawing on knowledge from stories, non-fiction texts and when appropriate maps

The Natural World

- Explore the natural world around them, making observation and drawing pictures of animal and plants
- Know some similarities and differences between the natural world around them and contrasting environments, drawing on their experiences and what has been read in class
- Understand some important processes and changes in the natural world around them, including the seasons and changing states of matter.

The programme of work will aim to include some or all of the following types of activity:

Exploration and Investigation

- Observation of objects, materials and living things with and without aids such as magnifying glasses, binoculars and microscopes.
- Pictures and collages of natural scenes including animals, plants and trees.
- Observation of animals and plants both inside and outside the setting.
- Free-play with objects and materials that have different purposes and work in different ways (torch, egg whisk, construction toys).
- Individual and group discussions about a range of topics.
- Keeping daily weather charts.
- Structured sand play giving the children opportunities to observe and predict outcomes.
- Structured water play giving the children opportunities to observe and predict outcomes.
- Visits.
- Discussion of the children's findings, allowing them to ask questions and speculate on reasons.

Designing and Making Skills

- Using a wide range of materials and tools to make objects relating to topics, experiences and visits.
- 'Junk' modelling.
- Collage.
- Simple measuring activities.
- The use of construction toys to make models and vehicles.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

- Discussion about different technological items e.g. telephones, televisions.
- Role play using technological items e.g. telephone discussion between a doctor and a patient.
- Use of programmable toys.
- Provide opportunities for children to investigate how things work by safely taking apart and reassembling technological items.
- Observation of and discussion about ICT in the environment (e.g. bar-code scanners in supermarkets, traffic lights, mobile phones, TV aerials and satellite TV dishes).
- Use of computer programs.

Sense of Time

- Oral history – discussion about the personal experiences of staff, parents and grandparents when they were children.
- Storytelling based on family history.
- Stories relating to events in the past.
- Discussion and role play about special events such as weddings, births and festivals.
- Discussions about daily routines.
- Observation of changes over time (e.g. the Seasons).
- Investigation of items from the past and comparison with present day equivalents e.g. a modern washing machine and Victorian washing equipment.
- 'Guess who is who' game based on pictures of the children as young babies.
- Long term growing projects (e.g. sunflowers from seeds).

Sense of Place

- Discussion about different types of homes.
- Visits to locations within the local environment.
- Observation and exploration of school and school grounds.
- Individual and group discussions following visits.
- Provision of play maps and models to enable children to create their own environment.
- Recording of visits through drawing, painting and modelling.
- Discussions and stories that involve journeys.

Cultures and Beliefs

- Stories relating to life in other parts of the country and in other parts of the world.
- Discussion and role play about special events in children's lives such as weddings, births and festivals.
- Making and eating food from different cultures.

- Listening to music from different cultures.
- Looking at books, which show different dress, customs, language and beliefs.
- Visits to places of worship.
- Finger painting, gloop, food play etc.

Planning, recording and assessment

Individual targets and activity planning occurs on a daily, weekly or half termly basis. The weekly plans and activity planning sheets used by the setting are laid out to identify each of the areas of learning. This ensures that Understanding the World is considered each day.

Staff are able to observe the children and records of such observations can be made on the children's personal profile sheets or on activity record sheets.

Samples of the children's work which relate to Understanding the World are kept in the child's individual folder as appropriate.

Assessment is carried out through a mixture of informal observation, interaction with the child, the use of the information on record sheets and discussion during regular staff meetings. The information gathered during the assessment process is then used for future planning of resources for each child, to ensure we are following their interests and giving them enough opportunities for self initiated activities.

However assessment should not entail prolonged breaks from interaction with children, nor require excessive paperwork. When assessing whether an individual child is at the expected level of development, staff draw on their knowledge of the child and their own expert professional judgement and should not be required to prove this through a collection of physical evidence.

Information gained through recording, assessment and professional judgement will be shared with parents, other school staff and outside agencies as appropriate to address any learning and development needs.

Resources

It should be remembered that Understanding the world embraces all areas of learning and therefore all resource lists need to be referred to.
Resources lists are located in the Resources file.

Documentation

It is available to any person who wishes to read it and pass a comment. The policy is to review and amend the above as and when appropriate, minimum period two years.

Reviewed: January 2024.