



Greenhall Nursery

Understanding the World



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Understanding the World

Understanding the world is a specific area of learning in the EYFS. It is divided into three aspects:

1. People and communities
2. The world
3. Technology

Although learning for young children is very much concerned with the integration of areas of learning and is often centred around a theme, nevertheless it is important within this area of learning that planning focuses on the individual components during the planning stage in order to ensure that -

- a) skills specific
 - b) knowledge specific
 - c) language specific
- elements of each aspect are addressed.

As the children attending the nursery present with a very wide range of physical, learning and language abilities they will obviously access learning experiences and activities in very different ways - planning will therefore need to take account of individual learning needs. Some children will be operating on a sensory level only and will only have made an initial beginning in becoming aware of the world around them. Other children will have no or limited language and will therefore find it difficult to communicate ideas and ask questions, other children will have restricted physical abilities both fine and gross motor and may be reliant on assistance or observation only if they are to gain from learning experiences and activities. Some children will have a combination of all of these areas of limitation and the teacher's skill will be in providing activities that offer learning experiences for all of the children.

People and communities

This aspect of the Understanding the World curriculum can be further dissected into three distinct topics: ourselves, others, customs and celebrations. It is important to note for that those working within the birth-20 months developmental stage, understanding people and communities lies in early attachments with parents, carers and other familiar adults.

Learning about ourselves

Learning about ourselves is necessary before we can widen our scope to learn about others. Children should have regular access to stories about themselves and their families, particularly using pictures where appropriate with labels reinforcing who is in the picture. Children should have a sense of their own immediate family and relations. This can be demonstrated in a variety of ways. For the youngest learner, it may be that they cry when mum leaves them. For another child it may be that their facial expression changes when they see a picture of mum, dad or a sibling. Other, more able, children will be able to talk about their family with or without the prompting of pictures.

When learning about 'ourselves' children should be encouraged to identify features that make them unique. This could be something as simple as their name- is there a child with the same name in nursery? What colour are their eyes? Their hair? Do they have a distinguishing feature? Learning about their distinguishing features may not always be formal. For example, sitting in front of a mirror at lunch time leads to the child recognising the features of their own face, which they can then find a photograph of in a different situation and time.

Children should be encouraged to remember and talk about significant events in their past such as holidays, birthdays, special days out. This requires some knowledge of the passage of time, which can be a difficult concept for young children to appreciate. However, it can be encouraged by

1. the development of an increasing vocabulary connected with time.
2. the ability to sequence e.g. using stories, days of the week, months and pictures, events through a typical school day.
3. the development of a sense of period e.g. during granny's life.
4. the ability to understand change and continuity.

Within the classroom and daily routine there are many opportunities to discuss sequencing and the passage of time. This should be planned on a regular basis as well as using opportunities which present themselves incidentally during conversation with individuals or groups.

Children need to be introduced to the names of the days of the week and those linked to the time vocabulary of today, yesterday and tomorrow. For those

at the earlier stages of development, they may do this during the morning circle routine, with each day having a particular colour and smell associated with it.

Learning about others

The beginning of learning about others lies within having a curiosity about other people. This could begin as simply watching what other children and staff are doing, and then gradually moving themselves closer to further investigate, and to interact, perhaps asking questions about what they are doing, asking to join in etc. Through these interactions children begin to develop friendships and have their own set of friends. Thought needs to be given to how those children with no independent mobility can demonstrate learning in this area. Careful planning of opportunities for those with visual impairments is also required.

When observing others children also begin to develop an understanding of similarities and differences between themselves and others- the things that connect and distinguish them. This can be a difficult concept for those with additional problems such as Visual Impairment and as such teachers need to take into consideration in their planning how these children will develop their skills in this area.

Learning about others' occupations and ways of life is an important part in gaining knowledge of others. Opportunities to study the topic 'people who help us' can be a very useful tool in encouraging children to ask questions about others and what they do.

Customs and celebrations

Opportunities should be given for pretend play and role play centred around events in the children's own home. These could be, for example, a sleep over, granny visiting for tea, helping with the cleaning or a tea party for friends.

Celebrating each child's birthday in the class by having a cake, singing happy birthday and opening a present is an important part of children learning to recognise special times and events in their own lives and lives of others. By having first-hand experience they are then able to transfer this to recognise when it is somebody else's birthday. Other important events may be holidays, trips to see family or events such as weddings. Children should, when appropriate, be encouraged to talk about these events, perhaps bringing in pictures to share with the class. Parents / carers are encouraged to send in 'wow' clouds to share children's news and experiences with the setting.

Also, learning about customs of people of different ethnicities such as Diwali, chinese tea ceremony, church attendance can enhance children's learning in this area. Special events should be planned throughout the year to celebrate the diversity of culture that we benefit from in Britain.

Sources of experience within people and communities

1. Meeting nursery visitors and visiting people at work

- work of nursery visitors - doctor, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech therapists, workmen, parents, secretary, groundsmen, police, firemen etc.
- shop assistants, park gardeners, vicar, firemen, police etc.

2. Role play exploring roles of people in the community

- medical roles
- caring roles
- shopkeepers etc.
- bus drivers/taxi drivers
- vicar
- policemen/firemen

3. Opportunity to take part in activities centred around annual events

- Valentine's day
- Pancake day
- Easter
- Christmas
- Diwali
- Ramadan etc

The World

This aspect of Understanding the World can be dissected into three areas: observation, exploration and experimentation. It is important to note that those children with Visual Impairments will find it difficult to learn through observation and so alternative provision should be made to ensure learning can take place.

Observation

The way that a child exhibits learning in the early stages of their life is through reacting to various things. For example, a young child may track a visually stimulating puppet or toy, or smile at a recognisable play thing. They will then look for an object that they themselves have dropped. They may begin to look for objects for example, looking towards a shelf where toys are kept. As they develop and grow and gain in skills, they may try and find a toy that has been hidden (for a child with no independent mobility this may begin by lifting up a scarf to find a teddy underneath).

A more developed child may remember where objects belong, and go and find them when needed e.g. when asked to get a paintbrush, or will tidy toys up into the correct places. Children with mobility problems may need careful facilitation as they may know where the object belongs but are unable to get there independently. This should be taken into account when assessing children's skills in this area.

Children should be given plenty of opportunities to observe aspects of their environment, both inside the nursery and out. Children of a later developmental stage should be encouraged to comment and ask questions about aspects of the world familiar to them, and to talk about things they have observed e.g. the plants in the vegetable garden have grown. They may notice detailed features of objects in their environment, for example that there are holes in the leaves in the minibeast garden. Adults should then use related language to question the children and develop their knowledge about which minibeast may have eaten them. We use the mud kitchen and vegetable garden to develop the children's understanding of the world around them – as they help to water plants and watch them grow, they learn about how the world can change over time. We have also used 'Living Eggs' (eggs supplied in an incubator that hatch onsite) to support the development of this concept.

As with all learning for young children the experiences offered need to be of interest and relevance to the children and build on previous experiences. Children with physical and learning difficulties can be limited in their experience of the world around them because of the difficulty of physically exploring - they might have moved little from their home environment but equally might have had a wide experience of hospitals and clinics. 'Bobby Bear', a travelling bear that goes home with the children on an alternating basis (with a diary to fill in) is a great way for the children to share their experiences at home with their peers.

As children move, or are taken, around the school they need to begin to relate people, events and activities to certain areas of the school. Visiting different parts of the school and meeting people helps children to begin to develop an awareness of their surroundings, observing and identifying local features. Experience of observation of the external area of the school will give experience of seasonal weather changes and their effect on people and living things.

Children need to learn to observe as opposed to just looking, using magnifying glasses where appropriate. They need to explore the indoor and outdoor environment, looking under stones, digging in the ground, growing things, observing changes of weather and seasonal changes, explore the effect of sun and shade.

Ideas for Observation

1. Observe and discuss items on the investigation table such as shells, growing seeds, rocks, stones, mini beasts, fruit and vegetables.
2. Place easels outside in fine weather close to an interesting object.
3. Give children clipboards with paper and crayons. Focus on one aspect of the outdoor - e.g. a tree.
4. Give children the opportunity to record by using movement as well as chalks, crayons, paint and modelling e.g. a plant growing.
5. Give children time to observe closely and discuss objects.

Encourage children to make patterns in sand with gravel, shells and stones

Exploration

Children should be given a wide variety of resources in order to develop their skills in this area. Adults should model activities for the children, giving children the opportunities to observe and question and then to explore objects themselves. Craft activities also help children explore, for example combining different materials to explore what happens. Providing children with similar but different sets of objects can also help foster exploration e.g. giving children a mixture of duplo and stickle bricks- they are both building blocks, but you must combine just duplo bricks to make a structure.

Loose parts are used in the indoor and outdoor learning environments to promote exploration and creativity. The children can move, carry, combine, redesign, line up, take apart and put back together these items, as they wish to do so.

Role play also provides an opportunity for children to develop their exploration skills- for example, playing hairdressers encourages children to explore which objects are used for what purpose i.e. we use a hairbrush not a sponge to comb our hair. Small world models such as train tracks, farm sets and car garages develop exploration skills and adults should be on hand to answer

children's questions and develop their thinking e.g. why can't the big car go in the garage, or the lion live on the farm?

By exploring a wide variety of objects and activities children begin to ask questions and develop their own ideas and thinking about why things happen and how things work.

Experimentation

Children should be provided with opportunities to explore objects using all of the senses, and different techniques e.g. hitting, shaking, banging, mouthing. Children should be allowed to explore in any way they see fit, particularly when they are at an earlier developmental stage. Mouthing should not be discouraged unless it is a danger to the child e.g. a small toy. Staff should be aware that this is a relevant and important developmental stage and should provide appropriate toys and follow correct health and safety guidelines after they have been used.

Role play again provides important opportunities in this area- children at the correct developmental stage should be able to match up objects that go together e.g. a teapot and its lid.

Formal and informal opportunities to observe, explore and experiment in the vegetable garden should be given for all children. This resource can develop their understanding of growth, decay and changes over time. For example, what happens if we do not water the cress seeds? How big has the beanstalk grown? What happened to the seed potatoes we planted? Children can experiment in a wide variety of ways using the vegetable garden as a basis.

Sources of experience within 'the world'

1. Exploring artefacts

- look together at commercially available toys that can be taken apart and fitted together
- explore construction equipment that can be taken apart and fitted together in many different ways. Include a variety of moving parts such as cogs, wheels and hinges
- provide a range of real objects that are safe for children to look inside to observe working parts e.g. alarm clock with ringing bell

2. Exploring materials

Range of materials to provide experience of a range of properties including texture, hardness, pliability and colour.

3. Using all five senses

Encourage children to use more than one sense when they observe a lemon. Can be seen, touched, smelled and tasted.

Touch

Investigation tables can feature a range of surfaces e.g. soft cotton wool, hard wood, furry fabric, rough bark and smooth velvet. Use touch to identify objects in a bag or box. Use touch when considering natural things such as buds, leaves, shells and petals.

Taste and Smell

Use food activities to give an opportunity for tasting and smelling. Fruit and vegetables offer a wider variety of scents and tastes. Sample of foods which smell differently (e.g. coffee and chocolate) in containers - smell and identify, smell and taste different food flavours, make milkshakes, jelly and yoghurt.

Hearing

Listen to sounds made by a variety of objects and animals. Shake objects (e.g. seed pods) scrape a variety of surfaces (e.g. pine cone). Make shakers out of containers, such as yoghurt pots and margarine tubs. Use shells, gravel, paper clips, bits of plastic and wood inside them to make the sound. Cover the pots with clear acetate film so children can see the objects making the sounds. Listen to loud sounds and soft sounds. Make different sounds with voices, hands. Explore a range of musical instruments, go on a listening walk - try to identify sounds heard. Play 'Guess the Sound'. Listen to commercial CD's of sounds. Clicker bears 'sounds around' game is useful, as are games such as swichit farm.

Sight

Look closely at objects - describe colours, shapes, pattern. Point out details like parts of a flower. Play 'Guess the Object' by feel. Use magnifying glasses and viewers for close observation.

4. Investigation tables

These are a focal point for exploring, observing and experimenting, they give children a chance to handle and use objects. They may have a specific theme e.g. 'rocks' or 'toys that move'. Select relevant books or posters for the table as well as objects from different parts of the nursery. Utilise magnifying glasses and viewing boxes when appropriate - also measuring items such as balances and string. Draw and make models of items on the table.

5. Environment

- care of
- soil, rocks etc.
- mini-beasts
- effect of weather
- plants, flowers, trees

6. Water provides opportunities to explore scientific areas such as floating, sinking, reflection and refraction.

7. The sand tray can provide opportunities to make discoveries about evaporation and absorption. A range of materials (e.g. rice, pasta, sawdust) can be used to examine texture, pattern, similarities and differences.

8. Comparing and classifying

Describing and representing objects encourages children to become aware of their features and attributes - this in turn helps them to compare objects and recognise their similarities and differences. Matching and comparing objects helps children to identify features and make links.

Technology

This aspect of Understanding the World can be dissected into three areas: interest, acquisition of skills, computer skills. The beginnings of technological understanding lie in younger children exploring and making sense of objects and how they behave. Children at a later developmental stage begin to use machines such as radios, CD players and televisions and can be introduced to the computer.

Interest

Children should be given a wide range of opportunities to observe a variety of objects with various mechanical aspects to them. Children should show interest in toys with knobs or pulleys, by first observing adults playing with them and modelling how they work. They should be given opportunities to anticipate sounds and actions that may occur. For example, if an adult is using a wind up jack in the box, the first time it may take the child by surprise. However, on subsequent turns it would be expected that they show signs of anticipation such as getting excited, or through their facial features.

Children should also be encouraged to show interest in real objects such as cameras, mobile phones and ipads / ipods. This can be fostered by showing the child the photo that you have taken, or modelling how to use a paint game on the ipad.

Acquisition of skills

Giving children access to a wide variety of mechanical toys will increase the acquisition of basic technological skills. The easiest way to begin children on this journey is to provide simple cause and effect toys that use flat bed switches to operate them. When the switch is pressed, the cow makes a noise, when it is released the noise stops. Following from the basic skills children will learn to turn knobs and pulleys, to turn the key on a wind up car, and to demonstrate how certain toys work. The sensory room is an invaluable resource for developing their skills as so many variables can be changed. This includes the type of switch that is used for individual children, and the setting on the switch (e.g. momentary, where it stops when the switch is released, or latched where the bubble tube comes on on the first press of the switch, and goes off on the second press of the switch).

It should be noted that due to their physical difficulties some children will find certain levers / knobs / pulleys difficult to operate. However, this does not mean that they do not have the technological skills to do it, they just lack the physical skills.

Computer skills / iPad skills

Children should be given regular access to a computer / iPad, including the interactive whiteboard. Using hardware to access the computer must be thought out carefully for each individual child. For example, do they need a small mouse, a rollerball or joystick mouse? Can they access a regular keyboard or do they need IntelliKeys, sticky keys activating or an on-screen keyboard?

Using a switch or touch screen computer will aid in the skill acquisition and ability to use simple cause and effect programs on the computer such as SwitchIt Farm or Bob the Builder. Using the computer to answer some of the children's questions as a matter of course also develops their understanding of computers and they will know that information can be retrieved from computers.

A wide variety of games and apps should be available to children no matter what stage of development they are at- the iPad can provide some excellent cause and effect sensory apps.

For those children who have greater difficulties in accessing technology due to their physical difficulties, an i-gaze can be used. This uses eye movements to access technology and can be used to access similar activities as provided on a computer or iPad.

Sources of experience within technology

1. wind up toys
2. musical keyboards
3. switch toys
4. sensory room
5. interactive whiteboard
6. touch screen computer
7. lift the flap toys
8. books with sound modules
9. torches
10. CD player, iPod, iPad
11. camera, mobile phones
12. computer switch games
13. metal detectors
14. play phones
15. walkie talkies

Safeguarding children

Where potentially hazardous tools, such as scissors, are available, staff will supervise the children's use of these. Tools, equipment and materials will be introduced to the children as appropriate for their individual development. Staff will support the children in the safe use and handling of such tools and equipment.

Assessment, recording & reporting

Children's progress is recorded on session evaluations and used to inform future planning. Annotated photographs and observations are kept in the children's individual learning journeys. Reference is made to the aspect of Understanding the World as well as the child's age and stage.

Children's skills related to Understanding the World are assessed using the EYFS and B-Squared EYFS assessment tool on entry to provide a baseline and then each term. This is reported to the Headteacher and data is analysed with regards to progress made at the end of each academic year although information is gathered on trends at the end of each term.

At the end of their reception year, children are assessed against the Early Learning Goals in line with National Regulations.

Monitoring Effectiveness

The coordinator for Understanding the World at Greenhall is Natalie Hart. She will monitor the effectiveness of the policy together with the link Governor, Rod Goldthorpe. They will then report back to the Headteacher and Curriculum Committee.

Equal Opportunities

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Equal Opportunities policy.

Policy reviewed and approved: April 2018

Review due: March 2020

Signed: (Headteacher) Date:

Signed: (Chair of Governors) Date: