

All about...

UW: The World

Has the slimlined Understanding the World impacted on teaching and learning? And what can we do to ensure we inspire children's interests and consolidate their knowledge? In the second of a two-part series, *Lena Engel* considers the aspect The World

PHOTOGRAPHS AT ACORN DAY NURSERY, BY TONY HARDACRE



Cutting the number of goals under the revised Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) from 69 to 17 was largely welcomed across the sector. The reduction, it was hoped, would allow practitioners more time to focus on how children learn and on improving ways to promote that learning. But the cut, coupled with the focus on ensuring that children are 'school ready', meant that the breadth of each area of learning was also reduced. This begs some important questions: has the slimlining of Knowledge and

Understanding of the World, which became Understanding the World', reduced the scope of how and what we teach children? And how should practitioners be approaching the aspect The World? (For part 1, focused on People and Communities, visit www.nurseryworld.co.uk.)

Under the revised EYFS statutory framework, Understanding the World 'involves guiding children to make sense of their physical world and their community through opportunities to explore, observe and find out about people, places, technology and the environment.'

Children should be encouraged to observe and investigate objects, materials and living things

Within that the second aspect is 'The World: children know about similarities and differences in relation to places, objects, materials and living things. They talk about the features of their own immediate environment and how environments might vary from one another. They make observations of animals and plants and explain why some things occur, and talk about changes.'

APPROACH

The World is an overarching goal that introduces a wide set of ideas and opportunities for practitioners. ➤

The themes

1. To encourage children to observe, investigate and recognise the features of objects, materials and living things in familiar environments – thereby to understand the difference between man-made and natural materials and environments.

2. To teach children to identify, make sense of and talk about similarities and differences in the places they live in and visit.

3. To investigate and talk about the effect of nature on the life cycle of animals and plants.

This aspect of learning strongly challenges practitioners to stimulate children's curiosity and thirst for knowledge and embraces in all ways the Characteristics of Effective Learning that are intended to promote the best outcomes for children's development of knowledge and skills.

FOR REFLECTION

These are some questions that the all-embracing goal presents.

- Is there sufficient emphasis placed on the broad range of experiences children need in relation to investigating the differences and similarities of their man-made and natural world? Practitioners could interpret the range to be narrow or extensive depending on their personal knowledge, aptitude and interest in science and research.
- Is there enough encouragement and support for practitioners to challenge children's growing understanding of geography and to support their opportunities to learn about where they live, where they visit and how they travel from one place to another?
- Do children have regular opportunities to observe variations

in the seasons and the effect of the elements on nature? Are they encouraged to observe and talk about the weather and its impact on their lives and feelings?

- Are there sufficient experiences offered to children to encourage them to be curious about creatures that inhabit their world? Do they learn coherent facts that help them make sense of what they observe?
- Are there challenges to increase children's vocabulary to describe what they observe and to speculate about cause and effect in the pursuit of knowledge? Do children learn to develop research skills and to categorise, label and represent their experiences? Are they facilitated through the organisation of the learning environment and the resources to make connections between what they know and what they investigate?

FIRST THEME

Children know about similarities and differences in relation to places, objects, materials and living things.

This theme presupposes that practitioners provide a challenging programme of activities that enable children to make comparisons about the features of different places.

It assumes that children's attention is drawn to examine the objects in their environment and that they become familiar with how they are made and used.

It also encompasses the need for practitioners to introduce children to animals and plants and explain to them how they grow and what they need to sustain life.



Practitioners are challenged to stimulate children's thirst for knowledge

Possible topics to promote this theme

To facilitate this theme, consider the following topics and challenge the organisation of the environment for learning.

- To stimulate children's growth and development, ensure that you create spaces that children can identify with and access independently. The use of labelling in the classroom and creating zones that remind children where they are helps them make sense of their immediate surroundings and promotes opportunities to navigate from one area to another.
- Giving children daily responsibilities for classrooms and teaching them to use tools, such as cloths for wiping tables and dustpans and brushes for





sweeping sand, enables them to take ownership of spaces, and to learn how regular chores are required to maintain them.

- To stimulate investigation, create a science area where children can observe interesting objects, where they can look up detailed information in research books or extend their understanding through the use of electronic tablets. Make tools such as magnifying glasses, scales and sample boxes accessible to support scientific enquiry.
- A well-organised curriculum has to encompass regular growing of plants indoors and outdoors, depending on the seasons. Practitioners should create a garden area where children dig and plant, as well as a separate natural area where they can examine the creatures that live in soil, under rotting logs and decaying leaves.
- Regular opportunities to work in the garden encourage children to develop improved fine and gross motor skills, for example by digging with spades, raking leaves, firming the soil and picking up mini-beasts with their fingers. Using the garden in all weathers ensures that children feel the wind and rain on their faces and learn to be aware of the effect of physical exertion on their heart and lungs.
- Use stories to inspire children to be inquisitive about wild and domestic animals, to learn what they are called, where they live and how they transform from one stage of growth to the next.

Use stories to inspire children to be inquisitive about wild and domestic animals

SECOND THEME

They talk about the features of their own immediate environment and how environments might vary from one another.

Possible topics to promote this theme

- Support children to talk about the homes they inhabit and how they are built. A topic on our homes will help them compare the differences between flats and houses, the materials they are built with and the people who have the skills to build and maintain them. Provide an area where children can be creative and build models from recycled materials and construction equipment.
- A topic on the nature of our homes, the way they are serviced by water and heating to maintain healthy living conditions, will also enable children to understand how humans have developed a whole range of technologies through the ages that affect the way we live.
- A topic comparing human homes to animal homes is also a way of helping children to understand how humans, animals and insects protect themselves against natural elements, such as rain, wind and the sun.
- Using traditional stories such as Goldilocks and the Three Bears or The Three Little Pigs to promote activities and discussion will help children relate to their own experiences of their homes and understand how they keep themselves safe.
- Creating an 'estate agent' in the classroom will enable children to become more aware of the layout of the rooms in a home, and the details of what each space contains. Supporting children to take photos of their homes and to describe and draw where they live will extend their vocabulary and their observation skills.
- When you talk with children about their homes or their immediate environment in nursery, make sure that you help them represent through drawing the shapes of the rooms they describe, the location of the objects placed in them and the positioning of the doors and windows. It is important to draw children's attention to the placing of familiar objects so that they gain special awareness and the

EYFS BEST PRACTICE

mathematical language to describe what they see.

- Encouraging children to talk about their experiences of holidays or visits to friends or relatives will also enable them to compare their everyday surroundings with the less familiar destinations they have visited.
- Setting up a 'travel agent' will help children think about travelling and share their ideas and knowledge about journeying from one location to another and the transport systems that they have used.

THIRD THEME

They make observations of animals and plants and explain why some things occur, and talk about changes.

Possible topics to promote this theme

- Topics on the life cycle of animals offer real opportunities for practitioners to inspire children to observe live examples such as caterpillars becoming butterflies, frogspawn changing into tadpoles and frogs, or eggs hatching into chicks or ducklings. Good preparation, supported with a range of stories and props, should be used to stimulate children's interest and allow them to question why things happen and how each

event connects in some way to the next, in a chain of consequences. This is how to scaffold knowledge.

- The collection of all sorts of specimens that children can examine and talk about will expand their knowledge as long as they are supported by the expertise of adults and by a good range of research books. If practitioners do not know the answer to children's questions, then the response should always be something like, 'Let's look it up and both learn something new'.
- A wide selection of collections can be examined, categorised and carefully labelled. For example, children learn to distinguish between clams, oysters, winkles, mussels and razor shells, if those have been presented for investigation. Using the correct names to identify the variety of shell, and associating them with the original animals that lived in them, is crucial to developing comprehensive knowledge.
- Children also enjoy reflecting about changes in their own families, and talking about the transitions that they have experienced. Topics can include bringing in photographs of the children as babies and discussing their growth and development.

A well-organised curriculum encompasses regular growing of plants indoors and outdoors



CASE STUDY: SCHOLLES VILLAGE PRIMARY SCHOOL, KIRKLEES

Scholes Village Primary School's new 'learning home', a small-scale replica of a house, gives Foundation Stage children a chance to learn about the home environment through pretend play.

The aim of property developer David Wilson Homes, which constructed the mini house, was to make it as lifelike as possible. The company achieved an authentic look by constructing

the 'learning home' in the same way and with the same materials it uses for its full-sized houses.

The foundations of the home are made from concrete and the walls from concrete blocks, mortar and bricks. The windows are double glazed (only the bottom ones open) and the roof tiled. Flowerbeds surround the house, which has two doors – a small front door and larger side

door for disabled access and staff.

Inside, there is a dining area with a table and a quiet area. Units are to be fitted in to use as a kitchen area or storage.

BEYOND EXPECTATIONS

The idea for the home – which was opened to coincide with the school's 50th anniversary – came about after a parent, whose husband

works for David Wilson Homes, came forward to offer her support to enhance the nursery and Reception classes' outdoor area.

The school's Foundation Stage co-ordinator Jennifer Firth says, 'The "learning home" was beyond our expectations, as we were initially thinking of a wooden





MORE INFORMATION

'All about... UW: People and Communities' by Lena Engel is at www.nurseryworld.co.uk/nursery-world/feature/1144857/eyfs-practice-about-uw-people-communities and in *Nursery World* 16-29 June 2014

INSPIRING PARENTS

Parents have an exceedingly important role to play in supporting their children's growing abilities to be inquisitive and to learn about the natural and man-made world.

Practitioners need to empower parents to realise that children are born curious and that they should make considerable effort to pick up on their interests to initiate meaningful conversations.

There are museums, libraries, art galleries and parks, as well as places and buildings of great architectural value, in every town. It is up to parents to make time for their children and to encourage them to be enthusiastic about these sorts of places, as well as promote good understanding of living plants and animals that they see and care for on a daily basis.

Families are the most significant influence on children's experience of life, so practitioners need to spark awareness of the importance of scientific discovery and observation so that children are sure to have the best start in life.

CONCLUSIONS

Practitioners must have good knowledge and commitment to deliver this area of learning successfully. They need to make sure that children are continuously stimulated to think about their world and to learn correct facts that enable them to observe, categorise and label the objects and living things that they observe.

Children need to be engaged in learning at home and at nursery so that their brains are challenged in a balanced way by their parents and carers and so that they develop confidence through the expectations that are set for them.

Children who have their curiosity stimulated and challenged will become observant and enjoy investigating nature and wildlife. They will thrive in an atmosphere that promotes questioning and using language to communicate their ideas and experience of the world.

An environment that cherishes children and values independence is critical to the development of thinking and scaffolding knowledge. This area of the early years curriculum offers practitioners so many options and opportunities. It is crucial that the most is made of the early learning goals so that children are well prepared for life, as well as the years to come for them in education. ■

structure or something similar in the playground to provide shelter for the nursery and Reception classes.

'The children were involved in the whole building process as much as possible, including planting flowers in the grounds of the home.'

Ms Firth says they plan to use the home to raise the progress and attainment of the school's Foundation Stage children.



'Some of our children have low personal, social and language skills. Engaging in role play will help develop their vocabulary and encourage co-operative working.'

'We want to embed the "learning home" as a house in the first instance. In the future, we intend to use it for different role-play scenarios, including a café, stable, shop, information centre, hotel, bus station and car sales office to support nursery and Reception topics.'

To give the rest of the school the opportunity to use the new resource, older children will be able to submit proposals outlining how they want to use the 'learning home' to the Reception class children. They will then decide which ideas to give the go-ahead.

Children who have their curiosity challenged will become observant