



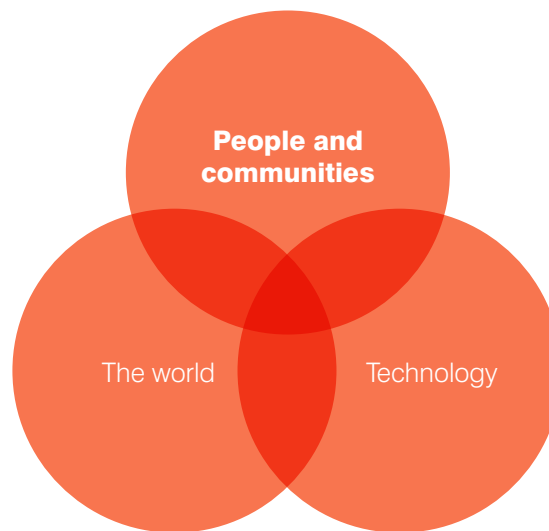
# Understanding the World: People and communities

## Introduction

Understanding the World (UW) is one of the **four specific areas** of learning in the EYFS framework.

It 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.

In the EYFS framework, **Understanding the World** is made up of three aspects:



## Prime and specific areas of learning

- The **three prime areas** of the EYFS are Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSED), Physical Development (PD) AND Communication and Language (CL).
- The **four specific areas** are Literacy (L), Mathematics (M), Understanding the World (UW) and Expressive Arts and Design (EAD).
- The **three prime areas** should be the focus for practitioners working with the youngest children as these form the basis for successful learning and progress in the **four specific areas**.
- As children become older, the emphasis will shift towards a more equal focus on **all areas of learning** as children's confidence and abilities increase.

## Helping young children's to learn about people and communities

Understanding the World covers most aspects the area of learning and development which was called 'Knowledge and Understanding of the World' in the original EYFS framework.

People and Communities covers the previous aspects 'Time', 'Place' and 'Communities'.

It encourages children to talk about past and present events in their own lives and the lives of family members.

Children learn about similarities and differences between themselves and others, and between families, communities and traditions.

Practitioners should make effective use of the outdoors, including the local neighbourhood.

## **Progress in UW: People and communities**

### **Under threes**

*'Practitioners working with the youngest children should focus on the prime areas, but also recognise that the foundations of all areas of learning are laid from birth.'*

[Tickell Review of the EYFS, 2011]

### **Early Learning Goal for People and communities**

*'Children talk about past and present events in their own lives and in the lives of family members. They know that other children don't always enjoy the same things, and are sensitive to this. They know about similarities and differences between themselves and others, and among families, communities and traditions.'*

[Statement from Draft EYFS Framework, 2011]

## What quality looks like in practice

*The following three scenarios show how a large daycare nursery on the south coast of England builds on the children's experiences of their families and the community in which they live to develop their understanding of people and communities.*

### Under twos

The practitioners in the nursery are very familiar with the local environment of the nursery and recognise the importance of babies and toddlers staying connected with their home environment when they attend the nursery. They work hard to get to know individual family members, to understand the cultures and backgrounds of each of the children, and to discover what routines, interests and experiences the family members share with the children when they are at home.

In order to create links with the children's families and home environments, the babies' key workers make family books using photographs provided by the children's families and carers. These books are shared with the babies at different times of the day to reinforce their sense of belonging to a family. The practitioners in the toddler rooms build on the children's family books by extending the pictures to include wider family members, friends and pets to share with the children.

From the outset, children who attend the nursery are taken for walks in the local environment – to the park, to the beach, to the local shops, or simply around the nearby streets. This gives the practitioners the opportunity to talk to the children about their local area and to point out things of interest to them. The youngest children in the nursery enjoy a regular visit to the local library to join in with storytelling sessions and to start to develop an appreciation of books.

### Two- to three-year-olds

In keeping with the ethos of the nursery, the practitioners organise the routines and practices to emphasise that the nursery is, in itself, a community for the children and their families. Despite the large number of children attending the nursery, the practitioners succeed in maintaining a family atmosphere where individuals – their likes, needs and differences – are respected.

In addition to paying attention to the cultural and ethnic diversity of the children, the nursery endeavours to represent the town in which it is located. The practitioners provide open-ended resources for the children to use which respect the seaside nature of the locality; a full sized fishing boat is a feature of the outdoor area; the décor of the nursery is calm and welcoming with beautiful images and photographs of the local area on display- some of them created by the older children.

Families from several different cultures and countries send their children to the nursery. Often the children visit family members who are living in different parts of the world. The nursery has a 'holiday bear' which families are encouraged to take away with them when they go on holiday so that their children can report back to their friends about what they, and the holiday bear, have seen and done. Many of the families take photographs, send emails or postcards or keep a diary which can be shared back in the nursery. In this way, the children in the nursery become interested from an early age in how different families and cultures live on a daily basis.

Many of the children do not travel abroad so the holiday bear often goes away for a weekend to visit grandparents, has a city break, goes on special day trips, or simply has a sleepover with different children. This means that all children have the opportunity to talk about their different ways of life and traditions.

### Four- to five-year-olds

Usually by this age the older children are very familiar with everyone and everything which makes up the nursery community, and they have a developing understanding of the lives and traditions of the families of their friends in the nursery. The practitioners now aim to extend their understanding of the people and places in their local community and beyond both by taking the children on visits further afield and by inviting visitors into the nursery to talk to the children about their occupations and their ways of life.

Careful planning and preparation are the keys to the success of the excursion organised by the practitioners for children of all ages. The nursery policy on visits and outings is shared with parents and carers to ensure that the

children, practitioners and parents all have a shared understanding of what is expected of them in order to make exploring the wider outdoor environment safe and enjoyable. For staff, this involves careful thought about the purpose of the visit and a detailed consideration of safety issues. Parents and carers need to prepare the children by ensuring that they are appropriately dressed for the experience and are enthusiastic about the prospect of being out of doors. The children need to be aware of the importance of following instructions and behaving in a sensible manner. Time spent on developing a shared consensus leads to very successful outcomes after exploring the wider environment of the nursery.

The practitioners are able to build on the children's interests by the visits they arrange, as well as helping them to learn more about people and places. Visits to a garden centre, a garage, the local takeaway, a watchmaker's shop, the local church, gallery and museum have all provided a wealth of stimulation for the children's curiosity about the world. The natural world is explored on a weekly basis by the older children who attend Forest School sessions in an area of woodland which the nursery owners have leased.

Alongside the visits made by the children, the practitioners invite a range of people in to the nursery to talk about their jobs, their hobbies, or special events. Sometimes the visitors are family members, but very often they are not. Planning for visitors also involves a lot of preparation if everyone is going to get the most out of the visitor's presence. Guidelines for the visitors about what to expect, whilst not always predictable with small children, will often give them more confidence in talking to the children, answering their questions and bringing in things which will interest them. The practitioners also spend time talking to any visitors before they visit the nursery so that everyone knows what to expect. Receiving visitors helps children to learn to listen, to treat the visitors with respect, and to gain knowledge about other people and how they live – essential for young citizens.

## How to help young children learn about people and communities

Use these reflective questions to think about how you might support young children in learning about people and communities.

### Under twos

- Do all practitioners recognise the importance of babies and toddlers staying connected with their home environments when they attend our setting?
- How well do we know individual children's family members?
- Could we do more to discover the routines, interests and experiences which the children encounter at home?
- Have we considered making family books to create links with the children's families and home environments?
- What other things could we try to make sure that children's sense of belonging to a family is reinforced?
- Do we regularly take babies and toddlers for walks in their local environment local environment to help encourage children's interest in it?
- Are we aware of the things which interest individual children in their immediate environment?
- How often do we take the children to the local library to join community activities such as storytelling?

### Two- to three-year-olds

- Do all members of staff recognise the value of the notion of the early years setting as a community of children and adults?
- How well do we succeed in maintaining a family atmosphere where individuals' likes, needs, and differences are respected.
- Are all members of staff excellent role models in showing respect for individuals and their differences at all times?
- Is our early years setting an established part of the local community which reflects the local area?
- Could we do more to engage with the local community?
- Do we use techniques, such as a 'holiday bear', to engage with families and encourage children to share their culture, routines and traditions?
- How well do we make sure that we are inclusive, including all families in the life of our setting, not just those who are eager to be involved?
- Are there times during the day when siblings of different ages can be together?

### Four- to five-year-olds

- Are all practitioners familiar with the local environment of our setting, recognising its potential for fostering children's knowledge and understanding of people and communities?
- How well do we extend children's learning by encouraging visits and visitors?
- Do we have clear policies on arranging visits and inviting visitors to our setting?
- How well do we work in partnership with parents to ensure that staff, children and parents are all familiar with the requirements for a developing understanding of different cultures, beliefs and traditions by the children in our setting?
- Do we enlist the help of the children's family members to support this area of learning and development?
- How well do the children understand the importance of following instructions and behaving in an appropriate manner when out on visits in the local environment, or when speaking, and listening, to visitors?
- Could we improve the range of resources which we provide, to ensure that they reflect the cultural differences of different sections of the local community?
- In communities which are not culturally diverse, how do we make sure that children have a developing understanding of cultures other than their own?

## Ideas for parents

Understanding the World: People and communities focuses on children having an understanding of themselves, their families and their local community. They begin to understand the similarities and differences between themselves and others, and among families, communities, and traditions.

### Helping your child to learn about people and communities

There are lots of easy ways you can help your child to learn more about people and communities.

You could use the ideas below as starting points to help you do this.

#### **Under twos**

- It is very important that your child knows that you are supportive of the early years setting which they attend, so try to make as much time as possible at the handover periods at the beginning and end of the day to develop a positive relationship with the staff of the setting.
- Showing an interest in, and talk about, what happens in the early years setting which your child attends (even with babies) will help to make a connection between your child's home and nursery environments.
- Talk to your child about family members and close friends – what they look like, where they live, and what they do.
- Make a photo album of your family and friends especially for your child to look at and handle.
- When you take your child out on walks, talk to her about the features of your local environment you see – the shops, the green spaces, the natural world, the different types of cafés, churches, and community buildings such as hospitals and libraries.
- Be positive about differences between people and families and help your child to accept differences between people.
- Look at picture books which show different types of environment from the one you live in – talk about cities, towns, villages, the countryside, or the seaside.

#### **Two- to three-year-olds**

- Help your child to recall the names of their friends and the adults in their early years setting and listen carefully when they talk to you about what they have been doing during the day.
- Tell stories about family members and special events in your family life, both in the present and past.
- Help your child to remember special occasions in their lives, talking about what happened in the past.
- Talk to your child about the work you do and the jobs of different family members and friends to help them understand what people do in their local community.
- Choose books and games for your child which illustrate people and communities from different cultures, ethnicities and traditions.
- Young children often show a natural curiosity when they see someone who is different from them; help them to respect differences in others in terms of race, disability, and culture.
- Take as many opportunities as possible to give your child experience of different communities – on holiday, on day trips, using Skype to communicate with family members and friends who live elsewhere, or by looking at DVDs, the internet and books.

#### **Four- to five-year-olds**

- Whenever possible, take your child on visits to broaden their understanding of people and communities – a stream walk, a visit to the library, a bus ride into a town or city, or a visit to a local museum or gallery are all free or low cost outings.
- When you walk past religious buildings in your area, take the opportunity to talk to your child about different faiths and traditions.
- Help your child to recognise the similarities between people and families of different cultures and your own experiences, as well as recognising differences.
- Children of this age group are often very interested in the jobs of people who work in their local community; help them to know more about the jobs of policemen and women, the fire service, medical staff, farmers, and shop keepers for example.

- Make sure that your child is aware that jobs are done by both men and women – talk about female fire fighters, male nurses, female doctors or male childcare staff.
- Read books and watch DVDs and television programmes with your child which illustrate different family setups, people of different cultures and traditions, and life in different types of community and places in the world.
- Encourage your child to share a record – in photographs or verbally – of special events in your family with the children and staff of the early years setting they attend.