

Identifying the foundational knowledge – Early Years

By Maria Craster

As we've discussed previously, the EYFS works as a cumulative curriculum, so lots of the foundational knowledge that I wanted children to achieve during this scheme of work was a continuation of their Prime and Specific areas of development. Oral re-telling of stories is a key part of the Reception Year; it increases vocabulary and awareness of story structure, as well as their self-confidence, listening and attention. Research has taught us that before you can write something, you have to be able to say it, which is why this series of lessons is an effective tool for early writing, alongside a strong phonics scheme. However, in addition to these cumulative skills which develop across the year, each unit also has its own specific foundational knowledge. In the case of 'The Leopard's Drum,' this was related to the geography and traditions of Ghana, as well as native animals.

The EYFS curriculum surrounding this aspect of the curriculum simply states, "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" (Development Matters). This leaves a lot of scope for the practitioner to identify which places and discussion points to cover. This was a topic that I had not taught before, so I started by doing some research myself and thinking of the key facts and misconceptions around it that I wanted pupils to know.

The concept of location is quite a difficult one to grasp when aged four and five years old, and I wanted my students to have a real grasp of where Ghana was and understand that it was another country. This meant that we first needed to establish some more tangible knowledge based on where they live and where our school is and then if any of them have family and friends who live abroad. This concept is one that will be revisited many times, so it is important that it is explained clearly to avoid misconceptions. We looked at modes of transport and explored how one might travel to Ghana and how long it would take in order to give them some context. Our whole school approach to oral re-telling is to use BSL signs and so the key vocabulary and appropriate signs formed part of the foundational knowledge.

The foundational knowledge also linked to other areas of the curriculum. Here we used inspiration from the theme to expand their knowledge particularly in Express Arts and Design. Children were introduced to Ghanaian artwork, in particular the use of patterns, which we then used to create our own designs exploring using different media for a purpose and embellishing our creations to improve them. This development of ideas was the next step in embedding Characteristics of Effective Learning for many pupils.