



Continuous Provision

The Literacy Shed approach to Continuous Provision.

All practitioners acknowledge that Continuous Provision is more than the resources you set out for the children to access. When planned for and utilised properly, continuous provision gives children the opportunity to be active, independent learners. At Literacy Shed we believe that your continuous provision should evolve with the interests of the child and the theme or topic your adult-led learning is currently focused on.

With this in mind, we felt it would be useful to explain our approach to continuous provision planning, hopefully helping to clarify what the different planning documents are and how they are intended to be used.

So, what is Continuous Provision?

We know practitioners are likely to already have a strong understanding of what continuous provision is but felt we would explain our thinking to ensure our approach is the same.

Continuous Provision is the areas in your classroom / learning environment and the resources that are in those areas for children to access freely. These resources tend to remain constant for most of the year. They should be safe for children to explore independently and laid out in an inviting manner which encourages active engagement. The provision should allow children creativity in the way they approach it and should be adaptable so planning can allow for their interests and next steps in learning.

A well organised provision allows children to be independent choice makers, to be active learners and to take control of the direction their learning is travelling in.

Continuous Provision takes time, thought, commitment and good, well thought out planning.

How do I plan for Continuous Provision?

The planning is an aspect people can struggle with. Literacy Shed has created Area plans for each aspect of continuous provision, which should create a strong start point for your learning environment but don't forget – observations of children in your setting are essential.

The Area Plans we have created are a start point for your evolving environment. Areas should also reflect children's interests, some of which can be planned for as similar interests arise fairly frequently – such as dinosaurs, pets, snow etc. Literacy Shed will be adding to the Early Years Package by creating planners to support such interests, helping the practitioner to prepare for these reoccurring aspects.

However, it is vital you and your team observe the children in your environment, note their interests and are aware of which areas become most popular (and why) and which areas are used less often.

How often should continuous provision change?

Generally, people say three times a year (termly), but this again depends on your setting and your approach. Changes to your setting should be based on your observations and group interests. If an area isn't working move things round, get the children involved with planning – their knowledge and enthusiasm may surprise you!

Aspects of strong Continuous Provision.

Now we share an understanding of what continuous provision is, we can look at how to ensure your provision remains a strong enhancement of learning. Starting with you and your team!

The Role of the Adult

Continuous Provision is not about sitting back and letting the children 'just play.' Whilst children are accessing continuous provision, the adults become facilitators for learning rather than 'teachers.' The adults should approach the learning (or play) by helping them to enhance their interests and engagements. My team often approached play-based learning by asking the child or children 'can I play?' Children rarely (but do occasionally) say 'no!'

This then creates opportunities to scaffold children's learning whilst they are engaged in something that holds their interest. By asking if you can join their play, children often continue to engage rather than sloping off slowly once the well-intentioned adult has sat down!

A vital role of the adult is to enhance vocabulary through play. All the Literacy Shed area planners and theme-based planners have clear vocabulary sections on them to support the adult with this essential aspect.

What to include.

No environment 'must' have certain areas of learning. A quick search online will generate several suggested areas, but your environment must be planned with your space and children in mind.

Literacy Shed has created a range of Continuous Provision Planners for you to dip into, but these are not a list of essential areas or an exhaustive planner of ideas. They are intended to be a start point to help establish quality areas of learning.

Equally, don't keep an area in your classroom because you think you should. If it isn't working change it. This is where your assessment and observation are essential. If children don't want to engage with an area, the problem is the area not the group. Again, why not ask children how an area could be improved or what they would like as a new addition?

Concrete Learning Experiences

A challenge for continuous provision and early years practitioners is that children often engage with what is familiar to them. Alistair Bryce-Clegg has written great articles on this aspect.

Children being engaged and happy is positive, but challenge is essential. Low-level, repetitive engagement will only allow for limited progress.

In response to this, the Literacy Shed Area Planners list the concrete learning experiences we expect children to access in each area and we have clarified the 'Pure' and 'Facilitative' aspects of learning. The Pure aspects are those which are either unique or predominate to the area. Facilitative are those which are enhanced within the area and across other areas too. This allows the adult to ensure a range of learning experiences take place rather than the child / children repeating the same ones.



Time

Continuous Provision really is about allowing the children time to take ownership of the direction of their learning. They should be given time to explore familiar concepts but to also apply known skills to new ideas and activities.

To give children this time, you need to ensure the structure of your day does not create a 'start-stop' approach to their learning. Quality blocks of time are essential for exploring ideas and concepts fully.

Really consider every time you pull a child away from their independent learning, is it essential? Small changes such as self-serve snack areas, rather than fixed time snacks, create further opportunities for independence and prolonged engagement in areas of learning.

Safety

As with all aspects of learning, education and child development, continuous provision also has boundaries and expectations. Risk assessment is essential. It is vital practitioners demonstrate care and quality in their learning environment to encourage children to do the same. If resources are broken - repair or replace. A smaller number of quality resources is much better than masses of equipment which is in a questionable state of repair.

The team will also need clear expectations with regards to behaviour. New areas of learning can create excitement. Consider which aspects of behaviour are acceptable in your setting, ensure children understand what they are and why. Clear expectations of behaviour, of children and of adults create a strong learning environment where all can thrive – this could be an aspect you want to work on as a team. What behaviours do you allow and encourage and how do you handle those behaviours that don't meet expectations?

Challenge

Challenge through continuous provision rather than adult-led activities can be difficult.

A strong start point for challenge is the Role of the Adult. Ask open-ended questions, use the vocabulary on the planners, introduce children to new ideas and equipment. Consider what your observation and assessment tells you about your environment and your children – what interests do the children have? Which areas are creating strong learning? Which areas need a revamp?