

The importance of continuous provision in the early years

Most early years practitioners recognise continuous provision as the resources they offer children as part of an enabling environment, or the resources that are safe for children to explore independently. It is both these things, but it is important to remember that continuous provision is not just provision that is continually accessible; it is also a selection of resources that continue children's learning in the absence of an adult.

Why is continuous provision important?

As practitioners, it's essential to fully understand both what continuous provision is and how it helps support children's development. Crucially, effective continuous provision should provide children with the opportunity to demonstrate all three characteristics of effective teaching and learning identified by the [EYFS](#). For example, in the construction area, children may independently investigate how high they can build a tower by using wooden blocks. Trying to arrange the blocks in different ways or testing if they can add any other construction materials to their tower to make it more sturdy demonstrates aspects of both playing and exploring.

Continuous provision also enables children to return to their explorations and consolidate their learning, over the course of a day or a more extended period. When children do this, they can explore what happens to things as they change over time, and make changes to explore new ideas.

Continuous provision also allows children to make choices and initiate play without interaction with an adult.

What does effective continuous provision look like?

Continuous provision transcends all areas of learning. When preparing your resources for continuous provision, you could try the following:

- Make sure that each area you set up for continuous provision has the necessary resources to encourage children to play and explore in a variety of ways.
- Offer a range of high-quality resources that will act as a good starting point for the children's explorations.
- Use open-ended questioning to engage the children in conversations and prompt their creative thinking.
- Give children time to revisit what they did yesterday, last week, or even a few weeks ago.

What is the adult's role in continuous provision?

Even with continuous provision, the practitioner's role is crucial. It's important that you not only provide a high-quality environment but also support your children's ability to interact with the resources. When children engage with continuous provision, you can take the opportunity to make careful observations. This is especially important, as your observations should then determine how the environment is enhanced at a later stage. Creating a well-oiled environment also means that practitioners need to establish rules, boundaries and behavioural expectations. Once children are clear about the rules and what's expected, they will then be able to carry out their explorations with an increased sense of confidence. If children do not know their boundaries, then they will often return to 'familiar' play, which is less challenging.

One of the most enjoyable things a practitioner can do is play alongside the children. This helps to model language and ideas and will strengthen your relationship with the children you teach. It also gives you opportunity to ask questions and make suggestions, extending the children's learning even further.

What should a practitioner look for in their observations?

Observing children within the areas of continuous provision is a crucial part of the practitioner's role. Through observations, you will be able to identify typical behaviours, interests and patterns of children's learning and development, which will have an impact on what you plan next.

[Take a look at our pupil-tracking booklet here.](#)

How should I plan for continuous provision?

I'm not a massive fan of extensive and time-consuming planning for continuous provision. For the most part, your continuous provision will stay the same, only to be **enhanced** as children's learning progresses. I have always found it more useful to display a list of the resources that should be in each area of learning, which can be checked and replenished by an adult working in the setting. However, some schools do require teachers to show their planning for continuous provision, and, of course, if needed, you'll probably have to do it. You can also use task cards to suggest specific challenges that the children can complete alongside their free play.

Resourcing

If we want children to be creative, curious, and to pursue their interests, then we must make our environments appealing and plentiful. Children will disengage if resources are old,

broken, or incomplete. And why wouldn't they? So would we. It's always worth setting aside or requesting a reasonably generous budget to renew resources at the start of a financial year. I have always found it useful to send a list of things needed to parents and carers in the hope that some items will be donated or sourced from local businesses. The provided resource list outlines some of the basic resources needed to set out each area of learning.

Finally

Once you have your continuous provision sorted, then you are in a perfect place to move on to [enhancing it](#).

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