

Gravesham Early Years Specialist
Teaching & Learning Service



Continuous Provision

Continuous provision refers to resources and learning areas that are always available. It is designed to support the development of key skills and knowledge in a variety of different areas. Continuous provision encourages children to learn in the absence of an adult. Continuous provision is not just a provision that should be accessible, it is also all about what resources have been added to the areas of continuous provision that will allow the continue of learning in the absence of a practitioner.



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Continuous Provision
Interest Area: INVESTIGATION/SCIENTIFIC ENQUIRY
Science activities are intrinsic to many other areas of learning such as through stories, sand, water, construction, cooking and music, both inside and outside.
Science areas should contain interactive displays and be attractive and well laid out, where children are encouraged to investigate, observe and inquire through first-hand experience.

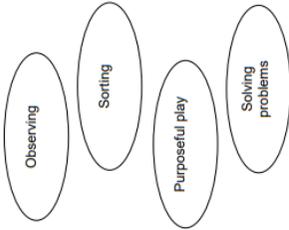
- Equipment**
- small world
 - coloured acetate
 - string
 - construction toys
 - hand lenses
 - tripod magnifier
 - midi spectre
 - lockers
 - sand timers and stop watch
 - thermometers
 - magnets and mirrors
 - colour paddles
 - torch
 - non-fiction and fiction books
 - plastic aquaria for fish, frog spawn, insects, snails, worms and plants
 - variety of containers, dishes, etc. for holding/displaying objects
 - feely bag or box
 - collections of stones, fossils, shells, bark, bones, corks, leathers, wood, seed heads, toys, springs, etc. (carefully stored)
 - plants showing a variety of colours, textures, shapes, fragrance, flowers and fruit
 - bulbs, seeds, and sprouting seeds
 - digital microscope

Adult Role
• Commenting on child's play while playing alongside
• Model vocabulary and encourage the children to discuss their thinking
• Ask open-ended questions to stimulate discussion
• Model investigative skills and language e.g. commenting while exploring new materials/resources
• Model the use of books and ICT to find out about something
• Scribe children's thoughts and ideas
• Make observations of the children's learning and interests and use these to plan further experiences.

- Activities**
- counting
 - solving problems
 - formulating hypotheses
 - designing and making artefacts
 - asking questions
 - recording
 - developing mathematical language and manipulative skills and sensory experiences
 - estimating
 - comparing
 - measuring
 - timing
 - planning
 - building
 - testing
 - observing
 - sorting

Vocabulary

- A wide-ranging vocabulary should develop, depending on the activity and materials used together with appropriate adult support.
- Children should be encouraged to ask questions, solve problems, design solutions and artefacts, investigate alternative strategies, co-operate, discuss and try out new ideas without fear of being wrong.



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 the characteristics of effective teaching and learning. 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 sturdier, 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 interact with the children more, and not just make formal observations, which is a key aspect of the new early years reforms. This is especially important, as your experience 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 behaviour 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 to **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 the opportunity to ask open 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 still 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.

How should you plan for continuous provision?

The continuous provision should be linked to the needs and interests of the children in your class. It needs to provide familiar areas for them to explore, so, for the most part, your continuous provision will stay the same, only to be enhanced as children's learning progresses.

Rather than carrying out time-consuming and extensive planning for the continuous provision, 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.

Progress in Continuous Provision

Effective continuous provision will develop over time. Children develop and learn at such a pace and the provision and enhancements will need to keep up with this. Playdough can be a staple of any classroom, however It shouldn't be in the class all the time. Introduce other media such as plasticine as this requires more finger strength to manipulate and colours can be combined to create more advanced sculptures. Once secure with plasticine, next introduce clay and with the build up of skills throughout the year, children will be in a position to handle it with more confidence and create more purposeful and higher quality outcomes. Consider what progression may look like in other areas of the classroom, the role play corner or math's area for example. Adding in mark making opportunities or resources from other areas can be a highly effective way to link skills and knowledge and develop the play further.