

# CONTINUOUS PROVISION IN THE EARLY YEARS

How to plan provision to make a positive impact on children's learning





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# What is continuous provision?

As early years Foundation Stage (EYFS) practitioners a great many of us are about to get bashed over the head with a big stick called 'school readiness'! I have already encountered numerous settings (schools in particular) where this phrase is being interpreted as a green light to go back to formality and get the tables back out of the store cupboard.

There is often a large gap between the quality practice that is taking place in EYFS and the knowledge of the person who is making judgments about impact and attainment and that is because often, they are not sure what it is they are looking at. A more formal approach to teaching makes it easier to make those judgments.

In the past, headteachers have said to me that they can see how the children are learning when they are with an adult, but when they are playing in the environment they find it had to see evidence of attainment taking place. When it comes to how a lot of us use our continuous provision, then I think they have a valid point.

## Understanding continuous provision

Mainly, I think continuous provision is greatly misunderstood. Once we get the definition of what continuous provision should be right, then quality and attainment will follow.

Continuous provision is not just the resources that you have out all of the time. The purpose of continuous provision is:

“ To continue the provision for learning in the absence of an adult. ”



In any area where you organise a range of resources and a group of children there will be potential to develop those children's skills in personal interaction and exploration, but unless those resources have been carefully selected to meet the development needs of those specific children, then the learning potential is limited and greatly left to chance.

If you think about what you know about children, when they get the chance to 'choose' what to do they tend to pick things that they like and can do. This is just basic human nature. I have yet to meet an EYFS child who will make the conscious decision to walk into an area of continuous provision and actively challenge themselves. How many times have you commented that the same boys are in the construction/building area doing the same sorts of models and that a group of girls are back at the writing table drawing and colouring?

What we also do in early years settings is mistake compliance with engagement and attainment. You will get lots of children who are very happy to stay in an area of the provision for sustained periods of time. They will comply to the agreed behaviour code and will often be prolific in their output. But if we look at what they have produced and then ask ourselves if it shows challenge and learning, or just low level consolidation of a skill that they already had, then we are far more likely to see that it is the latter.

Where this is the case, we are not continuing the provision for learning we are 'holding' children until an adult gets to them and boosts their attainment with their input. If you think about how long some of our children spend in this level of provision without adult input then this has huge implications for potential lack of attainment.

So, if your continuous provision is just a selection of resources linked to a general area of development, then when a child is playing there their opportunities for learning are limited. Because as well as providing opportunities for exploration and discovery, your continuous provision has to be linked to your assessment of your current cohort. If it going to be available all of the time and children are going to access it with limited adult input, it has to be structured around their developmental needs and dressed to reflect their interests.



# Setting up continuous provision

Consider these questions about your basic continuous provision:

- Could you stand in front of each and every area of continuous provision in your setting and tell me how what is in that area is directly linked to your observation and assessment of your children?
- Can you show me the assessment and link it to specific resources?
- Does the size of your area of continuous provision reflect the needs of your cohort? If you have children who need to develop language and talk skills, have you significantly increased the size of those areas?
- Have you levelled your continuous provision, linked to assessment so that you can show which resources have been placed in there linked to the development of high, middle and low achievers in that area?
- If we were standing in front of your mark making area could you show me how you had set that space up to reflect the mark making development of your current cohort?
- Have you got resources in place that are specifically aimed at each stage of their mark making development?

Most importantly, consider if you have 'dressed' specific resources to appeal to the group of children that you are targeting. So, if you have a group of girls with developed fine motor skills who are interested in playing princesses and a group of boys who are more gross motor skilled and interested in adventure play, you could create two boxes of resources one that contains lots of things that challenge and develop fine motor skills and another that challenges and develops more gross motor. However, if you just put these two boxes in your mark making area then the target group of children might, perhaps, maybe come in and pick up the correct resource, or maybe not!

So, you need to 'dress' the fine motor resources and the box in a princess theme and the gross motor resources and box in an adventure theme. One of the gross motor target boys is then more likely to come into the mark making area in the first place because of the resources provided. Once he's in there he is more likely to put his hands in the adventure box than the princess one and he is therefore significantly more likely to be accessing a resource that has been specifically chosen to help his development.

Of course, you cannot guarantee that this will happen every time, but what you can do is say with confidence that you have maximised the potential for attainment in continuous provision and minimised the risk of failure. Now when anyone asks you if you can quantify attainment outside of focused teaching, the job just got a whole lot easier and as a practitioner, you can be secure in the knowledge that your continuous provision is really continuing the provision for learning and isn't just a collection of nice resources.

There is so much that you can do to ensure that your environment has a huge role to play in impacting on attainment that this short example only begins to scrape the surface but hopefully it has got you thinking!