

Do it yourself

How can settings realistically put together a long-term, in-depth programme of CPD and not break the bank? Pen Green shows how it can be done. By **Annette Rawstrone**

The importance of continuing professional development (CPD) has always been acknowledged within the early years sector, but never more so than now.

Ofsted inspectors, under the new Education Inspection Framework, now gather evidence of the effectiveness of a setting's CPD and the impact that it has on children's well-being, learning and development. The revised Early Years Foundation Stage framework also puts great onus on leaders to provide high-quality CPD.

It is not enough to simply ensure staff have their statutory training up to date and have a record of any further CPD undertaken, whether that is participating in workshops, reading relevant publications or having professional discussions with peers. Inspectors want to know about a setting's approach to CPD and hear staff talking knowledgeably about the CPD that they have done – why they did it, how it has developed their knowledge and practice and the impact it has had on children's well-being, learning and development.

To achieve these aims, leaders need a CPD strategy. CPD should be carefully planned so as to ensure it brings real change. For that, it is advisable to take on board research into what constitutes effective CPD, such as the Fostering Effective Early Learning (FEEL) Study, led by Iram Siraj, professor of child development and education at the University of Oxford, and the Professional Learning in Early Years Education (PLEYE) review, led by Sue Rogers (see further information). Both found that CPD must:

- have a specific goal
- link theory to practical elements
- involve active learning
- be long-term (around 20 hours over two terms)
- be evidence-based.



In the real world, however, where time and budgets are tight, how can settings successfully achieve quality CPD programmes? At Pen Green Children's Centre in Corby, Northamptonshire, CPD is regarded not as a programme to be designed, but as a process. The multi-disciplinary hub offers early years education through a nursery school, day nursery and other early years provision, and has a nationally recognised research base and teaching school.

Felicity Dewsbery, deputy head at Pen Green and leader of its research, training and development base, says it aims to nurture practitioners to think deeply about children's learning and development through continuous reflection on practice.

Specific goals

'There is not a one-size-fits-all for CPD,' Ms Dewsbery says. 'When planning CPD, leaders need to start by doing a critical analysis of their

Pen Green believes training should be specific to settings and practitioners

setting in order to identify what their CPD is, what their needs are and then how do they put that training in. Rather than off-the-shelf training, it needs to be specific to the setting and practitioner.'

At Pen Green, CPD needs are identified through:

Supervision Ms Dewsbery regards supervision as 'about creating a space where two people can come together and reflect on practice'. Supervision sessions are held every six weeks and can be used as a time to identify areas where there may be gaps in practice or discuss what they are curious and interested in and want to investigate further. 'For example, it may become apparent when a team meets that someone may not understand schemas, so in their supervision it could be discussed that they could do some research around schema theory and do a project on schemas. CPD should be organic,' she says.

Observation – both peer-to- ➤

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peer and of children. 'Practitioners need to feel secure in what they know and how children learn and develop, and reflect on their own experiences,' says Ms Dewsbery. One way to encourage this is to video practitioners and simulate peer observation with them and other staff. What did they do well? How could they respond better? Where is more knowledge needed?

She suggests, 'The aim is to facilitate a dialogue about what is done in your particular setting – research what is best practice and then discuss how this can best be integrated into your setting.'

Linking theory to practice

Rather than concentrate on a wide topic for CPD, such as PSED, Ms Dewsbery suggests focusing on a particular child in the setting and their PSED needs, so it is not 'cold' training or research and the practitioner can envisage what is needed in practice. Theory that comes from independent background reading on a specific subject, relevant workshops or training is then naturally linked to practice. 'It is important that they have a child in mind or an example of practice so they can reconstruct that or deconstruct it alongside reading and theory,' Ms Dewsbery explains.

Sadly, many people who enter childcare feel undervalued by the education system and can be fearful of the idea of CPD. At Pen Green, practitioners are regarded as a 'community of researchers'. 'Leaders should be facilitating practitioners to be researchers and demonstrating how it is important for them to be reflective of their practice all of the time,' says Ms Dewsbery. 'They should be constantly reflecting on the children and how they interact with them. I want them to be interested and curious.'

Jo Benford, assistant head at Pen Green and lead on the early years initial teacher training programme, says it is important to create an environment where practitioners are encouraged to do their own research, reflect on what is happening in the setting and question it. CPD then becomes a part of the culture of the setting. 'They need to know they can have an opinion and that their opinion matters, rather than waiting to be told what to do and the right way to do it,' she says.



Active learning

By researching a subject, practitioners learn how to be more reflective of how they are supporting and extending children's learning and development. They can gain a fuller understanding of what best practice should look like and use that to introduce new ideas.

Ms Benford suggests 'buddying' a practitioner with someone who has a deeper knowledge of the particular theory or area. They can then watch the children together, discuss what they see and link it to the theory they have researched. A buddy can model effective practice and offer feedback. 'Practitioners need to be having that open dialogue and discussion around curiosity and interest along with the application of theory to practice – these are the things that shift practice,' she says.

Also, collaborating on a particular area of CPD with another interested practitioner can help both of them to retain the knowledge and implement sustained change. In order to support active learning, it is good to have a team who are specialists in different areas; then staff learn from each other – while children benefit from a wider pool of expertise.

Long term

Focusing on a particular area of CPD for around 20 contact hours or more over two terms, to achieve 'deep and sustainable change,' can sound like a daunting prospect.

Ms Dewsbery says if practitioners become researchers in their practice then they are working together and supporting each other on how to improve. Building in time each day for reflection, professional dialogue and challenge, reading, research and focused discussion can soon add up to 20 hours of CPD.

Training should be undertaken with a specific child's needs or example of practice in mind

FURTHER INFORMATION

- <https://www.pengreen.org>
- The Fostering Effective Early Learning (FEEL) Study, <https://ro.uow.edu.au/sspapers/4286>
- For more on ITERS and ECERS, see: www.ersi.info
- Education Endowment Foundation's Early Years Toolkit <https://bit.ly/375Lfpb>
- Early Intervention Foundation: Teaching, pedagogy and practice in early years childcare: An evidence review <https://bit.ly/2K97z8j>

Evidence-based

It can be difficult to select training that is evidence-based, but leaders should support practitioners to check out websites, books that trainers have written or seek recommendations to be reassured they have a thorough understanding of the subject. Remember, also, that just because an approach has worked in one setting does not mean it is right for your children.

'A lot of the evidence comes from within and the work that you do because you have identified the need in your setting,' cautions Ms Benford. 'Often evidence-based is regarded as tried and tested, but the reality is that what we need at Pen Green may be very different from what a setting needs down the road, so how can one size fit all?'

What is most important, adds Ms Dewsbery, is providing the evidence that the CPD implemented in your setting has made a difference to the children. At Pen Green they use theory such as 'schema involvement and well-being' to monitor the impact of their practice. The Early Intervention Foundation and the Education Endowment Foundation both list evidence-tested interventions, and you can use environmental scales such as ITERS and ECERS (see further information).

'As long as a setting can justify and qualify what difference that training or piece of research has made on their practice, then they have got the evidence base there,' Ms Dewsbery says. 'It is the output from whatever it is that they have identified. Practitioners should look at the impact of that practice and what it is that makes a difference to that child and potentially other children in the setting.' ■