



Pen Green Centre
for children and their families

FOLLOWING FASCINATIONS ACROSS HOME AND NURSERY

Using the Pen Green Loop to Support the Home Learning Environment

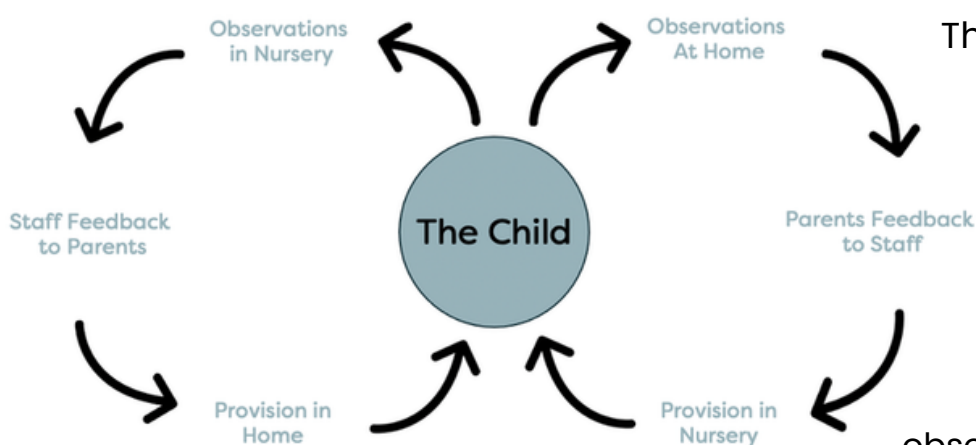
At Pen Green, we have long recognised that children's learning does not happen in isolation. Children move between home, nursery and their wider community, carrying with them ideas, experiences, relationships and fascinations.

To truly understand children's development and learning, we need to understand what matters to them across all these contexts.

This understanding sits at the heart of **the Pen Green Loop**, a model of knowledge sharing between families and professionals that has been central to our work for many years.



KNOWLEDGE SHARING BETWEEN FAMILIES AND PROFESSIONALS



The Pen Green Loop is built on the principle that children benefit when there is a reciprocal exchange of information between home and the early years setting.

When families share observations from home and educators share observations from the setting, children experience greater continuity in their learning and a more consistent approach to supporting their development.

THE PEN GREEN LOOP



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The loop becomes a dynamic process in which all the important adults in a child's life give one another feedback about what appears to be significant to the child, what they are learning, and how they are making sense of their world. At Pen Green, we recognise that both families and professionals bring valuable but different knowledge about children.

Early years educators have expertise in child development, pedagogy and learning. They draw on child development theories and professional knowledge developed through research, training and experience.

Parents and carers, however, hold something equally important. They develop personal theories about their child through everyday interactions, observations and relationships. They understand their child's motivations, interests, routines, personality and experiences in ways that no professional can.

NEITHER SOURCE OF KNOWLEDGE IS SUFFICIENT ON ITS OWN.

It is through the interaction between these different ways of knowing children that a much deeper understanding emerges. When educators and families share observations, ask questions and reflect together, they can begin to build a richer picture of children's learning, development and wellbeing.

It is worth emphasising that it is only through the combination of both types of knowledge that a broad and accurate understanding of a child's developmental progress can be achieved.

The Pen Green Loop therefore goes beyond information sharing. It is a process of co-constructing understanding around the child, ensuring that the important adults in their life are working together to support their learning.



THE HOME LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AND CHILDREN'S FASCINATIONS.

ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL WAYS OF USING THE PEN GREEN LOOP IS TO FOLLOW CHILDREN'S FASCINATIONS ACROSS DIFFERENT CONTEXTS.

Often, what begins as a fleeting interest at home can reveal itself as something much more significant when educators are made aware of it. Equally, interests observed in nursery can be extended and deepened through everyday experiences with family members.



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By sharing observations and reflecting together, educators and families can identify what is truly important to children and create opportunities for learning that feel meaningful, connected and relevant.

The following example of Eli's fascination with magnets demonstrates how the Pen Green Loop can strengthen the Home Learning Environment and support deeper learning through genuine partnership between home and nursery.

Case Study: Eli and the Magnets

OBSERVATION AT HOME

Eli's family noticed a growing fascination with magnets.

Using a small toy with a magnetic belly, Eli began exploring the world around him, testing whether different objects would attract his "frog buddy". During walks through the local community, he investigated lamp posts, railings, trolley bays and signs, eagerly discovering what would and would not stick.

As he explored, Eli began asking questions about materials and developed theories about what objects were made from.



His parent shared: "Eli has loved experimenting with where his frog buddy sticks and has started to get really good at guessing what things are made out of. If it doesn't stick, Eli tries to guess what it is made out of if not metal."

This observation highlighted much more than an interest in magnets. Eli was beginning to classify materials, make predictions and test hypotheses about the world around him. The observation was shared with nursery staff through the Pen Green Loop.

RESPONDING IN NURSERY

Recognising the depth of Eli's interest, educators planned opportunities for him and his peers to explore magnets further.

Children were offered large magnets alongside a range of metal and non-metal objects. Adults introduced new vocabulary such as:

ATTRACT REPEL METAL FORCE

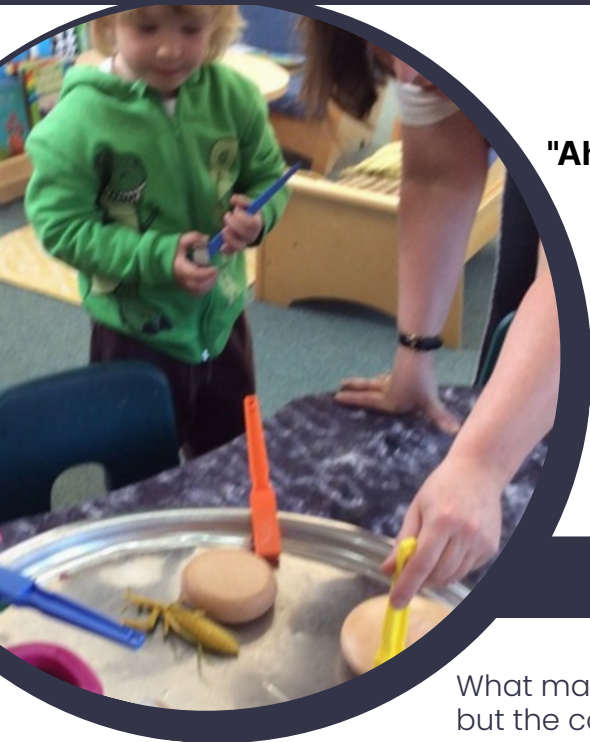
Eli immediately engaged with the experience, spending extended periods investigating how magnets behaved.

educators observed high levels of involvement as he experimented, tested ideas and revisited previous experiences from home.



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During his exploration, Eli commented:

"Ah these magnets are not going together. It's pushing away!"

This became an opportunity for shared thinking as adults encouraged him to rotate the magnets and observe what happened when the poles changed position.

Together, they investigated spoons, keys, cars, blocks and fabrics, discussing predictions and outcomes throughout the session.

EXTENDING LEARNING THROUGH THE LOOP

What made this experience particularly powerful was not the activity itself but the connection between home and nursery.

The initial observation from home enabled educators to recognise the significance of Eli's fascination and respond meaningfully. Nursery experiences then deepened his understanding and introduced new language and concepts that could be revisited at home.

The learning travelled in both directions:

Home observation → Nursery response → Shared reflection → Further learning opportunities at home and nursery

THIS IS THE ESSENCE OF THE PEN GREEN LOOP.

Rather than treating home and nursery as separate worlds, the loop creates a continuous conversation around the child's learning.

WHAT WAS ELI LEARNING?

Through his exploration of magnets, Eli was developing:

Communication and Language

- Learning and using new scientific vocabulary.
- Explaining observations and ideas.
- Engaging in conversations about cause and effect.

Understanding the World

- Exploring materials and their properties.
- Testing theories and making predictions.
- Investigating how things work.

Characteristics of Effective Learning

- Showing curiosity and motivation.
- Maintaining concentration over extended periods.
- Having a go and testing ideas.
- Revisiting and refining thinking.

Personal, Social and Emotional Development

- Building confidence as a learner.
- Experiencing the satisfaction of discovery.
- Sharing ideas and collaborating with others.



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REFLECTIONS FOR PRACTICE

Eli's story reminds us that powerful learning often begins with something small: a toy, a question, a walk to the shops or a moment of curiosity.

AS EDUCATORS, OUR ROLE IS NOT ALWAYS TO INTRODUCE NEW INTERESTS BUT TO NOTICE THE ONES THAT CHILDREN ALREADY HAVE AND WORK ALONGSIDE FAMILIES TO NURTURE THEM.

The Pen Green Loop provides a framework for doing this. By valuing observations from home, responding thoughtfully in nursery and maintaining an ongoing dialogue with families, we can create learning experiences that are meaningful, connected and deeply engaging.

Eli's story reminds us that children's fascinations often emerge across different contexts and over time. When educators and families share observations and interpretations of these interests, they create richer opportunities for learning, deeper understanding of children's thinking and more meaningful continuity between home and nursery

REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

- How do you currently gather observations from home?
- How are family observations influencing your provision?
- What systems do you have in place to share learning back with parents?
- How might you strengthen the connections between children's experiences at home and in your setting?

The Home Learning Environment is strongest when educators and families become partners in noticing, understanding and extending children's fascinations.



THE PEN GREEN LOOP OFFERS ONE WAY OF MAKING THIS PARTNERSHIP VISIBLE.

