

# CONTINUOUS PROVISION THE SKILLS

Enhancing children's knowledge through skill-based learning





# CONTINUOUS PROVISION THE SKILLS

Enhancing children's knowledge through skill-based learning



Featherstone  
An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

50 Bedford Square	1385 Broadway
London	New York
WC1B 3DP	NY 10018
UK	USA

[www.bloomsbury.com](http://www.bloomsbury.com)

Bloomsbury is a registered trademark of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

First published 2015

© Alistair Bryce-Clegg, 2015

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means – graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping or information storage or retrieval systems – without the prior permission in writing from the publishers.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data  
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN (print): 978-1-4729-0952-7  
ISBN (ePDF): 978-1-4729-2173-4

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data  
A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

This book is produced using paper that is made from wood grown in managed, sustainable forests. It is natural, renewable and recyclable. The logging and manufacturing processes conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

To view more of our titles please visit [www.bloomsbury.com](http://www.bloomsbury.com)



# Contents

.....

INTRODUCTION	4
<b>CHAPTER 1</b> AN ENVIRONMENT BASED ON ASSESSMENT	7
<b>CHAPTER 2</b> TYPES OF PROVISION	11
<b>CHAPTER 3</b> PLANNING FOR CONTINUOUS PROVISION	17
<b>CHAPTER 4</b> LEVELLING SKILLS AND EXPERIENCES	45
<b>CHAPTER 5</b> COGNITIVE SKILL DEVELOPMENT	49
<b>CHAPTER 6</b> ENGAGEMENT THROUGH THE ENVIRONMENT	52
<b>CHAPTER 7</b> AN ENVIRONMENT FOR THINKING SKILLS	55
<b>CHAPTER 8</b> PROVOCATIONS FOR LEARNING IN CONTINUOUS PROVISION	59
<b>CHAPTER 9</b> LABELLING AND DRESSING FOR INTEREST	64
<b>CHAPTER 10</b> CHALLENGE IN CONTINUOUS PROVISION	66

# Introduction

Continuous provision. Two simple words that can end up causing a great deal of confusion!

As I outlined in my first book on this subject, *'Continuous Provision in the Early Years,'* my definition of continuous provision is not 'the provision that is continually out'. It is far more rich and complex than that. If you just put random resources out within your environment you are relying on a great deal of luck when it comes to children's engagement and attainment. I firmly believe that continuous provision should continue the *provision for learning* in the absence of an adult. What I mean by this is that the areas of provision you create should be dictated by need, linked to assessment and broadly levelled so that there is challenge and support in all areas for *all* children.

I know from my experience of working with a variety of settings that children do not naturally challenge themselves in a play space unless they find the play interesting and engaging. They are more likely to return to 'familiar' play, where they can rehearse familiar low level skills that make them feel secure and confident. Of course, secure and confident is exactly how we want our children to feel – we just need to ensure that there is planned scope for challenge and skill development in the spaces we create, so that we can build on the children's knowledge and feelings of well-being and confidence and scaffold their learning to move it forwards.



Later in this book I will explore the idea that within areas of learning there are 'pure' skills and experiences that children can only learn in a specific area, and there are 'facilitative' skills and experiences that are not always directly related to the area that the child is working in, but where the area acts as a springboard for learning. It is important for us as practitioners to ensure that we are aware of the sort of learning that our areas of provision promote, and also how we are targeting specific skill development within those spaces.

The other essential element to really good continuous provision is a measure of ambiguity and open-ended experience. Children need to have the freedom to interpret the environment we create in their own way. If the resources that we set out and the areas we set up are very prescriptive and too adult-led, then we are not giving children the opportunity to explore or apply their creativity. We are telling them where they need to be, what they need to do and how they need to do it. Little wonder many of them disengage! We want children to be 'explorers' in our provision, to use their own interest, curiosity and creativity to interpret, use and apply what they see around them in ways that are individual to their own needs and experiences. That is when the fun really starts!



## Outdoor provision

These same principles apply to your outdoor continuous provision. First, you need to look to your assessment and see which areas of skill development are priorities for your children. Next, look at your outdoor space and see if those areas are explicitly represented. Also consider where there might be opportunities to enhance other areas with more discreet resources to consolidate or expand the skills on which you are focusing. The mantra that I always repeat when I am thinking about planning for quality outdoor provision is:

*What makes this activity 'outdoor play' and not just indoor play taken outside?*

If, for example, you take your building bricks out on to a mat on a sunny day, that is not outdoor play. It is playing with indoor resources, outside. If you have a water tray outdoors that is filled with the same equipment that you would have indoors, then that equally is not outdoor water play – it is your indoor water tray taken outside. There are, of course, occasions when you might want to develop 'indoor skills' but the children you are targeting want to be outside. So, rather than pull them in from their area of engagement you would take those resources out. What you are doing here is 'targeted' provision, where you are planning to take indoor skills outside for engagement. It is a conscious decision and does not happen by chance. The resources that you have on offer will have been provided for a reason. In lots of outdoor play experiences there will be elements of indoor resourcing. These often act as a familiar 'bridge' which allows children to initially access familiar equipment that will lead them into other types of skill development.

Setting up good continuous provision outdoors can be tricky to start with, but you will make the job easier if you make sure that you:

- **Start with assessment to identify need.**
- **Reflect the need identified in the provision you offer.**
- **Link 'bridging skills' to indoor provision.**
- **Be clear and explicit about why you have put indoor provision (such as your water tray) outside.**
- **Be clear and explicit about how you are planning for the development of outdoor skills.**
- **Enhance your explicit outdoor provision with indoor provision (for example, mark making, reading, mathematics) for added engagement and basic skill development.**

Take the time to work with your team to really ensure that everyone has an understanding of skill development in children and how effective use of both the indoor and outdoor environments can have a significant impact on their attainment.



## Planning for continuous provision

Of course, adults have a powerful role in supporting and scaffolding children's learning as well as taking the time to stand back and observe exactly what children are articulating through their play. It is this essential information that will enable practitioners to plan effectively and to link the provision that they create directly to the needs of their cohort. Alongside that scaffolding and observation, they will also have the opportunity to teach children whilst they are playing rather than pull children away from play so they can be taught. It is important that all adults are 'present' with children during periods of play and continuous provision and not stuck behind a table delivering an activity. If an adult can constantly move through their setting then they can ensure that they are supporting play as well as observing children and maintaining engagement and challenge.



For continuous provision to be really effective, settings need a planning system that promotes high level attainment by capitalising on children's high level engagement. Rather than pulling children out of the provision, the adult needs to go into it. This can be a huge shift in practice for some practitioners, but it is one that is well worth making. Regardless of how good you are or how exciting your activity seems to you, there will be children who are far more motivated by doing other things. You need to seek out their area of motivation and capitalise on it.



One of the great joys about working in early years education is the opportunity to build a child's imagination, language and ability to think creatively. As a practitioner you will be able to promote all of these skills through the activities that you plan and the direct teaching opportunities that you create. But we should also ensure that we are giving children lots of open-ended experiences in their continuous provision that allow them to discover, experiment and explore within the environment around them both inside and out.

Regular assessments of children's life experience, language, talk and thinking skills should be used to help you to enhance your provision with open-ended resources that will give children the opportunity to play, explore and discover for themselves, as well as help your teaching to have impact on promoting and enhancing essential skills.

