

Recognising the powerful learning that is going on in the home; collaborating with parents as co-educators

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Pen Green Centre

A Nursery School with comprehensive and inclusive provision for children and families

"Schools [and ECEC settings] are not sanctuaries that are set apart from the turmoil of everyday life. They are embroiled in the world around them in every way.

A vibrant school can nourish an entire community by becoming a source of hope and creative energy.

I've seen whole neighbourhoods thrive through the enlivening presence of a great school. Poor schools can drain the optimism from all the students and families who depend on it by diminishing their opportunities for growth and development."

Sir Ken Robinson



Integrated centres for children and families – a global ‘project’

Schools and ECEC settings working collaboratively with parents and the wider community have the capacity to transform children’s life chances.

“If there is no explicit emancipatory or empowering vision guiding the project from the onset, it will prove difficult to realise any emancipatory effects.”

Boog, 2003



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Pen Green Centre for Children and Families

A place for learning through dialogue with others

- Early years education 0-5 years
- Extended hours, extended year provision to support children and families
- 100% of families with 0-5 children with special rights (Additional needs, SEND) contacted, supported and offered access to inclusive education with care
- Family support services and integrated health services
- Focus for voluntary work and community regeneration
- Adult community education for Corby families
- Training and support for all local early years practitioners
- Research and Development
- Leadership Professional Development
- Early Years Teaching Centre/Teaching School

The three key concepts that underpin work at Pen Green:

- **Advocacy** - parents and early years educators speaking on behalf of, and interceding on behalf of children
- **Agency** - children, parents, staff believing they can change situations and determine the outcomes of events. Agency reflects self esteem and self confidence. A child (or adult) high in agency will readily become involved in challenging problems and will be appropriately assertive interacting with peers
- **Activism** - parents and ECEC educators co-producing services and participating in the transformation of public services

Research, Training and Development Base

Parents and practitioners as partners in research at Pen Green

Research projects 1997-2017

- Parents involvement in their children's learning
- Children's emotional well-being and resilience
- Ghosts in the Nursery: Issues of adult attachment
- Applying the adult attachment interview in a community nursery
- Children's Communication 0-3: Parents as language tutors
- Co-constructing differentiated pedagogical approaches
- Co-constructing a baby nest provision to support family life in the 21st century
- Children as philosophers
- Leadership in children's centres
- Policy transfer: integrated centres for children and families (UK, Germany, New Zealand, Australia)
- Peer Peer observations
- Emotional Roots of Learning
- Pedagogical strategies when engaging children with SEND

Practitioner Research approaches at Pen Green

- Where the ethics of the encounter with co workers, parents and children are paramount
- Where all ECE workers are encouraged to see themselves as researchers of their own practice
- Where there is a commitment to developing new research methodologies that support 'research from the underside'
- Where people's answers are believed and acted upon
- Where research both informs and leads to improvement in practice
- Where participation in the research process can be emancipatory for participants
- Where the critical questions are generated by users and providers of the service

Reflexive Professionalism

- Exploring dissensus
- Valuing the 'other'
- Co-constructing knowledge with children, parents and colleagues
- Always acting with a focus on change

Jan Peeters 2008, Michael Vandebroek 2009



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Research Approach

- A visit to the nursery, using video cameras for both participant and researcher. The visit involves a friend of the participant who also attended nursery
- Engaging the participant in at least two visits/ methods of engagement
- Meeting with the child's key worker; the important adult who would have home visited the family, contained the child's anxiety in nursery, extended and supported the child's learning in nursery, and collaborated with the important adults in their lives
- Viewing of archive video, photographs, and Celebration of Achievement Portfolios documenting the child's time at nursery
- Interview with parent or groups of parents.



Observed characteristics of participants

<p>Children (while in nursery)</p>	Cohort 1	Cohort 2
	26 children participating	31 children participating
	Feeling able to challenge appropriately and make good choices	Struggling with self regulation
	Mastery oriented and self motivated	Sometimes experienced by others as a 'bully' or a challenge; demonstrating low self esteem
	Engaging positively in school from the start	Having difficulty with transitions
	Able to critique self and others	Responding negatively to critique
	Persistence in face of obstacles and seeking out challenging tasks	Avoid challenges, underestimates own capability
	Good understanding of boundaries in difference places	Consistently pushing boundaries



Observed characteristics of participants

	Cohort 1	Cohort 2
Parents	Parents actively engaged in their children's learning and development through study groups, sharing information about learning at home, knowledge sharing sessions	Parents use Centre as a base for themselves, using family room many hours a week for support Child's quotation: "the Family Room - my mum's den"
	Parents take on role of mediator/broker/advocate, especially during transitions	Parents slowly engaging with community education
	Parents were often involved in the nursery and/or school system as parent helpers, train as Learning Support Assistants, school administrators etc.	Parents volunteer in the setting and become paid support workers, e.g. crèche, after school club etc.



Findings: emergent themes in each cohort

Cohort 1	Cohort 2
Importance of the family worker to parent and to child	The children needed the family worker hugely for emotional containment on transition into school settings
Children with a strong voice/ able to advocate for others confidently move into school setting	The children's perception was that they needed to have understood boundaries better on transition to school
Belonging and connectedness to nursery as a site for community engagement over time and using nursery as a stepping stone into the education system	Strong sense of belonging and connectedness. Many families still involved with the centre ten plus years later
Strong sense of self-worth and self-efficacy	Memory of being liked by staff at nursery but not any longer
Following their own interests, valuing freedom to choose	Memory of being seen as 'smart' at nursery but not any longer
Responding to highly personalised curriculum content when learning at nursery which built on their home learning	Responding to highly personalised curriculum content when learning at nursery built on home learning
Emotional and embodied learning using all senses	Emotional and embodied learning using all senses
Parents strong as advocates/ brokers/mediators with high aspirations for their children	Parents very committed to supporting their children but struggling to engage with the primary school system

Emerging Critical Concerns

- Children who experience the transition from nursery to school as traumatic

Issues – participation, power, trust

- Parents who find it hard to mediate on behalf of their children

Issues – multiple social, economic and psychological challenges



Developing shared advocacy and a shared narrative

(ECEC setting and home)

'In childhood most autobiographical narratives are co-constructed with others, usually the parents or siblings ... the parent and child work together to gather the pieces of the story, order them sequentially, give them a coherence as a story, and then evaluate the story by establishing its emotional highpoints and values... A new body of research views the co-construction between parent and child as a form of regulation having much in common with other forms of regulation' (Stern, 1998)



Encouraging children to be all that they can be

“...our image of the child is rich in potential, strong, powerful, competent and, most of all, connected to adults and other children.”

Loris Malaguzzi

- Not a deficit, reductionist, narrow, exclusively skills based, linear approach
- Recognising children with SEND as children with Special Rights

Our image of the child feisty children, children with a sense of 'chuffed-ness'

- The ability to understand and control their own emotions, with the capacity to self regulate
- The ability to get their emotional needs met
- The ability to adapt to new situations
- The ability to take critical a stand
- The ability to make choices
- The ability to integrate different experiences into a common understanding - mental flexibility
- The ability to articulate their own position and take on board the perspectives of others and communicate effectively
- The ability to take initiative and to be self assertive



What children need from all the important adults in their lives

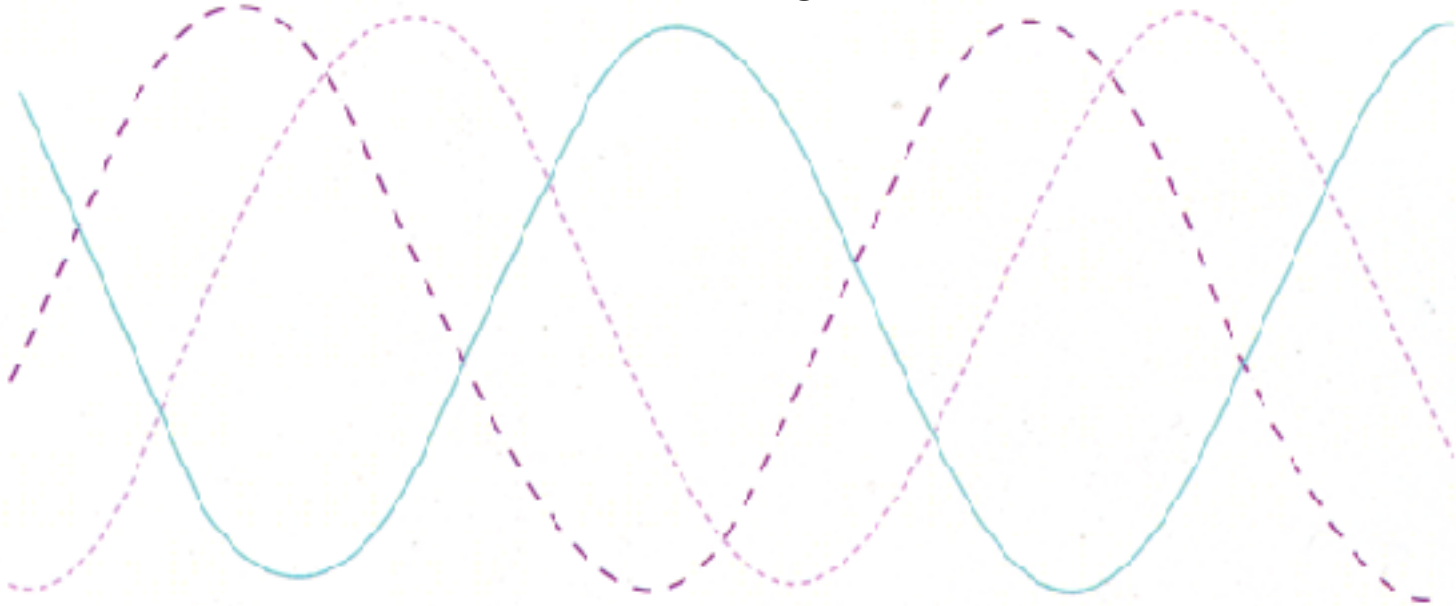
- Adults who can contain their emotional needs
- Adults who are able to raise self-esteem
- Adults who can help them to gain more control over their lives
- Adults who encourage them to be self-directing
- Adults who encourage them to push boundaries
- Adults who encourage them to feel they have the power to change things
- Adults who promote learning as a lifelong experience
- Adults who are actively engaged in their own learning and development
- Adults who know how to get their own emotional needs met
- Adults who are not afraid of bodily warmth, cuddling and of making those relationships with children
- Adults who want to work in an equal and active partnership

Building the nursery/home collaboration

We know that young children achieve more and are happier when early years educators work together with parents and share ideas about how to support and extend children's learning (**Athey, 1990; Meade 1995**)

Co-education

Parents are involved in supporting their own child's learning and development 24/7 - this needs to be recognised and home learning and nursery learning needs to be shared



Parents engage in adult community education

Parents get involved in devising or delivering services for other parents



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Parents/carers and ECEC staff becoming powerful advocates

“Nothing gets under a parents skin more quickly and more permanently than the illumination of his or her own children’s behaviour. The effects of participation can be profound.”

(Athey, 1990, p66)



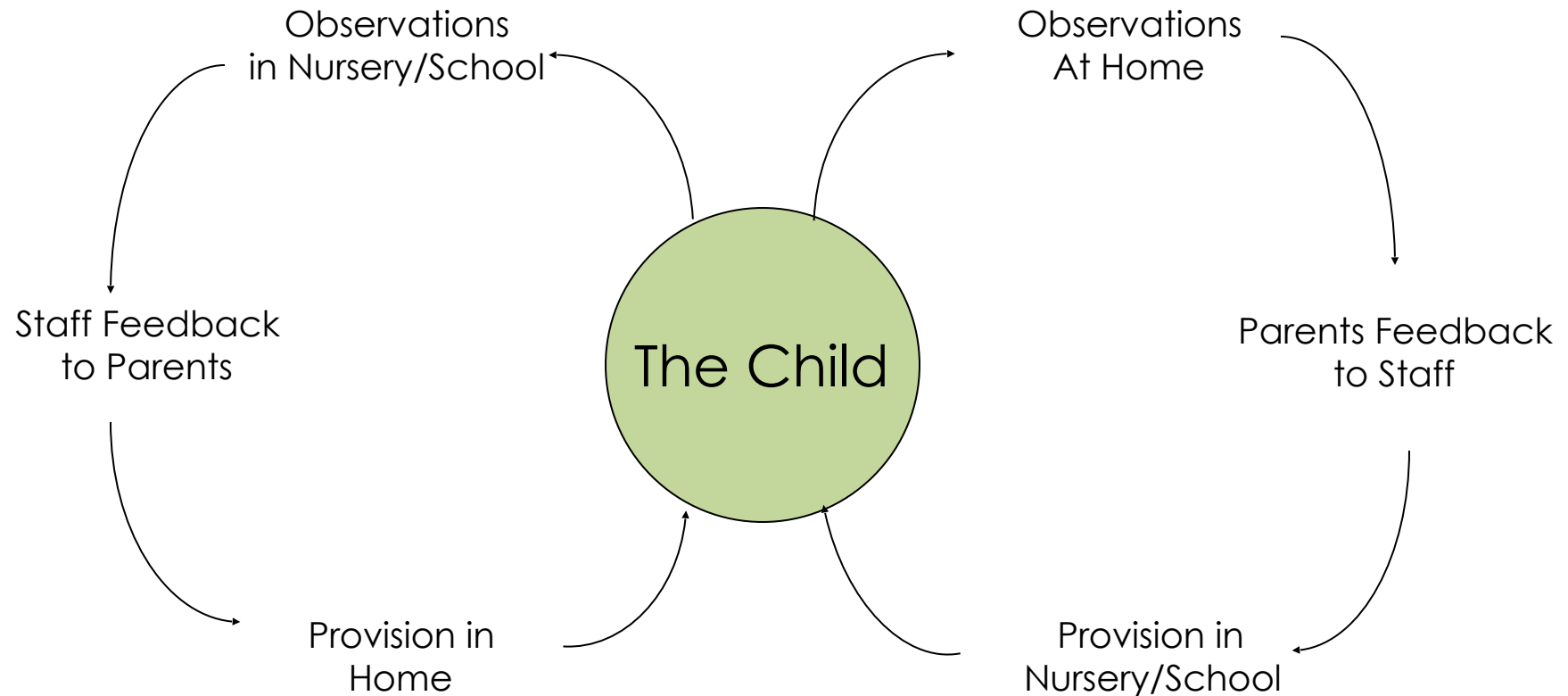
Sharing Knowledge with Parents: Staff as cultural brokers/mediators

“The roles of professional experience and parents’ everyday experience are seen as complementary but equally important. The former constitutes a ‘public’ (and generalised) form of ‘theory’ about child development, whilst the latter represents a ‘personal theory’ about the development of a particular child. An interaction between the two theories or ways of explaining a child’s actions may produce an enriched understanding as a basis for both to act in relation to the child. Only through the combination of both types of information could a broad and accurate picture be built up of a child’s developmental progress.”

(Easen et al, 1992)

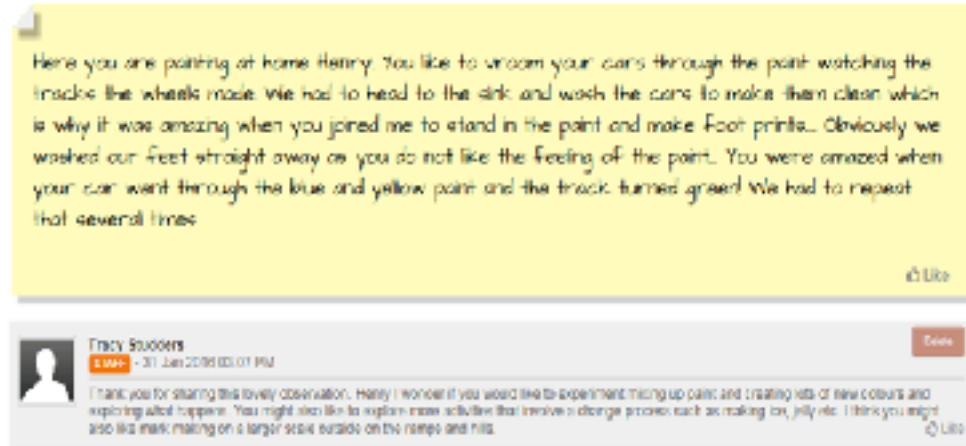
A knowledge sharing approach

The Pen Green Double Loop



Engaging parents in knowledge sharing

- Companions in their children's learning
- Home visiting
- Daily chats
- Family group meetings
- Parent interviews
- Parents of Pen Green meetings
- PICL groups/Growing Together groups
- Home/Nursery Tapestry exchange



Developing a shared understanding of key child development concepts and a shared language

Well Being (Laevers)

Involvement (Laevers)

Schemas (Athey)

Adult Pedagogic Strategies

(Whalley and Arnold; Lawrence and Gallagher)

Containment (Bion)

Holding (Winnicott)

Attachment (Bowlby)

Pen Green parents and staff share observations, share documentation, share reflections and dialogue deeply

- Filming the children at home and in the ECEC setting
- Keeping journals
- Sharing video footage electronically
- Attending study groups in the morning, afternoon or evening
- Making links to the public child development theory and parents' and staff's theories about particular children
- Making portfolios about children's interests and critical concerns

What difference does it make?

- Support for children and parents is offered during all critical transitions
- Staff, parents and children have increasingly meaningful conversations that support the children's development
- Parents and workers become more aspirational
- Staff and parents develop their advocacy skills
- Parents develop strong relationships with their child's educator at nursery and subsequently their child's teacher at school
- Study groups are embedded in early childhood settings and local schools
- Parents undertake adult education and professional development and fully participate in shaping the service

Turning the curve on parental engagement and parental involvement in ECEC's and schools

- A whole community strategic approach to parent involvement needs to be embedded in all ECEC settings and primary schools teaching and learning strategies
- Professionals will need to challenge their own practice and traditional ways of working if they are to develop an equal and active partnership with parents
- A 'whole system' approach means that all professionals within the multidisciplinary team need to engage with the notion that parents are the solution – not the problem
- Professionals will need to challenge their own practice and traditional ways of working

“Othering”



**Equal and active
partnerships**

ECEC settings and schools engage effectively with parents:

- When staff are well qualified, have opportunities for reflection and dialogue and have a strong theoretical base
- When staff are well supported, in provision that is well resourced and securely funded
- When staff adopt an 'equal and active' approach
- When staff have cultural humility
- When staff are capable of cultural brokerage and mediation
- When staff think systemically



Future Practice 1

“In the Pen Green paradigm, involvement begins and ends with an aspiration to equality. There is no pretence, nor any passing the buck. Staff are the experts on children in general; carers are the experts on the particular child. Their pooling of knowledge makes the chance of engendering progress for the child so much more likely. Carer’s perspectives are respected and needed.”

(Fletcher, 2014)



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Future Practice 2

Building on the original research project

Pedagogic Strategies developed in collaboration with parents

1. The adult watches and listens to what the child is doing before intervening.
2. **The adult knows about the child's family experiences and links what they have done previously to what they are doing now.**
3. The adult shows the child they are interested by their facial expression, by being physically close to them, by mirroring the child's facial expressions and verbal intonation, therefore empathizing with the child's expression of emotions.
4. **The adult encourages the child to make choices and decisions and to take appropriate risks.**
5. The adult encourages the child to go beyond what the adult knows about and is open to learning new things alongside the child.
6. **The adult is aware of the impact of his or her own attitudes and beliefs and how these might affect the child's learning.**
7. The adult plays and learns alongside the child. The adult is committed to their own learning and encourages the child's curiosity.
8. **The adult checks out the child's meaning and gives the child time to respond or to question.**
9. The adult offers language to support the child's actions and offers new information to the child.
10. **The adult acknowledges both the child's feelings and the child's competence and capability.**



Future practice 3

All ECEC's and primary schools engaging effectively with parents - so that children grow up with a strong sense of agency and are resilient despite adversity



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