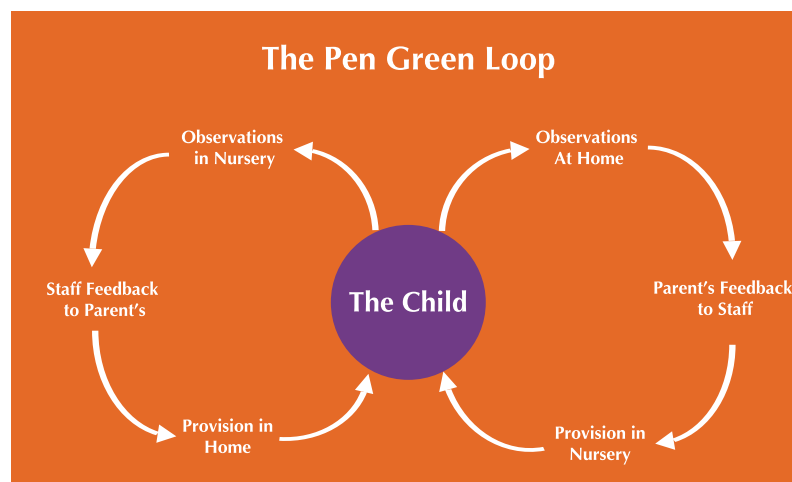


Sharing observations with parents: The Pen Green Loop

All parents at the **Pen Green Centre for Under Fives, Northamptonshire** are encouraged and supported to feel confident about their involvement in their child's learning.

The Pen Green Loop is a model developed to maximise the dialogue between parents and nursery staff about learning. It provides for a continuous two-way flow of information from nursery to home and from home to nursery.



The loop shows the child at the centre. Parents are asked to share observations of their children at home, regularly. These can be communicated verbally or via a written diary, photographs or video clips.

These observations are fed into family worker and team planning, so that future activities can be based on an individual child's interests and patterns of behaviour and thereby enhance learning. Observations made at the nursery are shared with parents regularly, which in turn can affect provision at home. Parents and practitioners

Can you adapt this approach for your setting?

Ask parents to give you regular information on what their child says, asks, does, what story they liked, and what songs they like to sing.

Give parents a journal to make notes of observations – but first consider how you will make time to share it.

Give parents pads of sticky notes for them to jot down observations – then place the written notes on a board or in a file at the entrance.

Make more time for regular verbal exchanges of information with parents – say something about a child's interests, skills or learning as they enter or leave the setting.

Lend out digital and video cameras for parents to record their observations.

Take video shots of the children in the nursery to send home – especially to working parents with whom you have less contact.

Think of ways to share information with parents for whom English is a second language.

work in partnership to extend the children's learning in a meaningful and enjoyable way.

Parents are offered a wide range of opportunities to become more involved. They are invited to attend sessions in which staff share their knowledge and theories of child development. Parents can continue to attend regular study sessions to discuss their child's ongoing development. These sessions are provided at various times of the day to suit working and family patterns.

The key concepts they focus on are: well being (Laevers, 1997), the importance of emotional well-being and the impact this has on learning; involvement (Laevers, 1997), how to recognise learning when children are deeply involved; schemas (Athey, 1990), for use in recognising and planning for repeated patterns of behaviour; and pedagogic strategies (Pen Green, 1997), how to interact sensitively and effectively with children.

Videos of children playing at nursery are shown to parents and these give a shared focus and stimulus for discussion. Parents are strongly drawn to these videos as they are interested in watching their own child, and in talking about their learning and the interesting things that they do. Showing the videos at evening meetings has been particularly effective in attracting fathers, who are invited through personal invitations to discuss their own child.

Nursery staff create opportunities for parents to initiate and sustain an ongoing, open dialogue. Parents needing more support are offered one-to-one discussions. Entry to nursery each day is staggered to allow more time to converse. See 'Time to Talk'.

Pen Green's own evaluation found that, on average, during the three-year Parental Involvement Project, 84 per cent of parents sustained involvement in their child's learning. Most parents report a greater understanding of how everyday experiences have learning potential. Most say that they have changed the way they respond to their child and the way they select books and toys.

Pen Green offers training and accreditation with Leicester University; and a quality assurance scheme on their approach to involving parents in their children's learning. Parents can also obtain accreditation for their work in the study groups through the Open College Network.

You can find out more from the website: www.pengreen.org

Whalley, M (2001) *Involving Parents in their Children's Learning*. London: Paul Chapman.

Athey, C (1990) *Extending Thought in Young Children: A parent-teacher partnership*. London: Paul Chapman.

Laevers, F (1997) *A Process-oriented Child Monitoring System for Young Children*. Belgium: Leuven University.

Whalley, M and Arnold, C (1997) 'Parental Involvement in Education', *Summary of Research Findings*. London: Teacher Training Agency.

(Whalley, M (2001)

