



Motivation

Do you want to create a motivating environment? asks Linda Baston-Pitt. Then, think hard about how you can work harmoniously together learning in the workflow

new knowledge from experience or question current practice and change what we do, we need different types of learning opportunities.

Learning in the workflow

For that to happen, there needs to be a culture of continuous learning embedded into the way things get done. How we can learn in the busy flow of everyday work is the subject of much debate, but there is a growing consensus that workplace learning is more than individual training events or single courses. It is now considered essential to have support and processes that help 'embedding, extracting and sharing learning as part of the workflow'.

Research suggests that 80 per cent of what a person learns on a face-to-face training course is lost within six weeks if nothing happens afterwards, as outlined in Ebbinghaus's forgetting curve theory (*Memory: A Contribution to Experimental Psychology*, Hermann Ebbinghaus, New York: Dover, 1964).

It's not just about debriefing after training - we need mechanisms to share our knowledge and to have professional conversations on a daily basis. There's only so much formal theory or knowledge to access - the rest is trying things out, learning on the job, asking questions, feeling like you are back to the beginning again, but sticking at it. It can be frustrating, scary, inspiring and ultimately life-changing and we should not underestimate how tough it is. If it were easy, we would all be natural lifelong learners.

We all want to be seen as competent at our job. So, asking people to 'learn from failure' and to question what they do is not a small thing to ask. But we can help our staff by normalising and celebrating the messiness of it and by trusting that, where there is collaboration, there is learning. Learning arises

There is a wealth of talent, skills and resource within our sector that in my experience is not always tapped into. We are also in an era where many settings are just managing to survive. If we want to build sustainable, thriving early years organisations driven by highly motivated people within a constantly changing landscape, we must be adept at learning.

Leaders and managers have a responsibility to actively encourage their staff to learn, to remove barriers and to create learning opportunities in the workplace, because we know this improves performance and definitely impacts on the quality of the setting.

'A person can grow only as much as his horizon allows.' John Powell

Surprisingly, some managers I speak to believe that if staff are qualified and appear motivated, they should be able to work out

what's expected of them and manage their own development. However, research suggests that it doesn't work that way. Studies by Albert Bernstein and Sydney Rosen (*Work and Family Life*, March 2011) found that only one person in five is a good observational learner. That means that a large proportion of any staff team needs some teaching and direction.

All leaders need to be vigilant in ensuring the environments where we work are primed to reinforce the behaviours we are looking to encourage: if equipment is tatty and broken, signs on walls are ripped or badly written, no one greets parents with a smile or a hello, it is reflected not only in staff attitudes and behaviours, but can also lead to poor standards and quality of care.

When it comes to staff training, it is tempting to focus on 'filling the gap'. But when we want to generate

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through learning



LEFT: Oliver Pimley with team leader, Katherine Pearson, learning in the workflow

- extends the range and type of learning opportunities available
- encourages collaborative and collective learning.

Encouraging a culture of development requires us to look at what is happening at every level of the organisation. For us at the Old School House, it was more about small mindset shifts: focusing on strengths not deficits; reframing challenges as opportunities to learn; being confident enough to ask questions. Ultimately, it's about claiming back some control over how we work together, how we create the space, time and conditions in our day-to-day work life that supports growth and collaborative inquiry.

Adopting a developmental mindset was a gentle process of remodelling attitudes and behaviours. Once these small changes were made, the positive impacts began to ripple through the organisation, as we discovered when we implemented a formal mentoring programme.

Your mentoring programme

Recognising how everyone thrived on pedagogical conversations during formal training as EYEs and EYTs, we wanted to build a framework to ensure that this carried on. Our chosen route was to build on, and develop, our existing mentoring programme by creating an accredited mentoring course for the whole staff team. This way we could show how we valued the growth and development of everyone and, at the same time, create a specialist training and career opportunity. It was a huge success - an inspiring and empowering process that helped the team to discover new perspectives and meaning in their work. ➤

from the messiness of the workplace – where staff can use their creativity and collaborate to meet everyday challenges.

Look for ways of creating a 'smorgasbord' of everyday learning opportunities that are integrated into daily practice. Make it fun, interactive and engaging and you'll find everyone wants to be involved.

'Children want the same things we want. To laugh, to be challenged, to be entertained, and delighted.' Dr. Seuss

Encouraging learning in the workplace

Here are some ways we can give employees the time and resources to incorporate learning into their work:

- step back and allow staff to engage with one another
- encourage staff to regularly collaborate and share knowledge

- host regular lunch-and-learn events with visiting speakers who share knowledge
- provide access to learning resources in key areas – e-learning can be particularly useful for quick reference
- reframe mistakes by modelling learning from failure - show staff that mistakes are essential for learning
- regularly develop collaborative projects and share the results of past projects
- develop a mentoring programme.

Re-modelling attitudes

We need to boldly go where we've never gone before by climbing out of the training box. We need to be more innovative in order to create a new approach to learning that:

- removes barriers to learning
- creates a network of support for staff

► Our aims were to:

- create learning in the workflow that supported the team and existing processes, such as inductions, supervisions, appraisals, with the goal of embedding, extracting and sharing learning as part of the workflow
- find ways of making the best use of the knowledge, skills and understanding within our team and creating a workplace that actively encourages leadership while supporting people's continuous learning and development.

From the outset, it was important that the team realised that we were not starting from scratch. So, our first step was to recognise all the mentoring behaviours that were already happening and to celebrate them. For example, when you are having one-to-one conversations, you might be mentoring; when you are observing practice and feeding back or assessing, you are mentoring.

Our goal was to make sure that any learning was continually shared. Mentoring enabled this to happen – and became a vehicle to share any research, any knowledge, no matter what training a person already has. It provided a space for individuals to ask questions, reflect and build knowledge and skills with their peers and colleagues.

Combine this with a strengths-based approach - where you tap the existing strengths of your staff and enable them to share these with colleagues - and everyone gains. If learning is shared and strengths are used, then, even if the person leaves, the learning is retained as a legacy to the rest of the team.

“Training as a mentor highlighted to me just how important I can be as a role model. It made me really think about my practice – I feel that I am now much more reflective and open to others in terms of really explaining in detail why we do things in a particular way.” Lauren, team leader, OSH

The magic of mentoring

Five tried and tested reasons why early years mentoring works:



OSH nursery manager, Lisa Weston (left) with Effie Filippou, team leader at Street Farm Day Nursery, Bury St Edmunds

1 A mentor helps you to think deeply, reflect and problem-solve

This is about asking questions and stimulating pedagogical conversations. The mentor holds a mirror up to the mentee, which helps them develop self-awareness.

2 A mentor helps you to serve the best interests of children and families

Mentors use their own experience of what works best, but they don't tell their mentee what to do - they nurture, helping the mentee to apply their knowledge and come up with their own solutions.

3 A mentor observes you as you interact with children and shows you how to apply your training to help young children learn

A mentor observes you as you interact with children and shows you how to apply your training to help young children learn. By observing the mentee in practice, the mentor is able to give immediate and relevant feedback in the flow of work. Minor mistakes can be reframed as opportunities to learn. This continues the foundation

training of early years educators and establishes an expectation of peer observation and feedback.

4 A mentor uses his or her own experience to help you make sense of yours

The mentoring relationship is reciprocal. The magic happens when mentor and mentee apply their shared sustained thinking to the ordinary events of the day, asking simple questions such as “How can we make transitions for children in nursery smoother and turn them into opportunities for learning?”.

5 A mentor enables you to look ahead and take control of your development and career

Mentoring is an inspiring and empowering process that helps people to discover new perspectives and meaning in their work. It is enormously rewarding and also a great step ahead for your career. When it comes to finding the next team leaders, managers or physical activity and nutrition co-ordinators, mentors can also inform succession planning, because they will be spotting who is ready to take on a new role – so new career paths start to open up. ■

- Linda Baston-Pitt is the director / founder of The Old School House Nursery and EduVivre Training. EduVivre is launching an accredited mentoring programme in late November.

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