

Screen time

Many nurseries are finding that filming staff with children and playing the footage to them and their colleagues helps to improve practice. *Annette Rawstrone* speaks to some of them

Many educational theorists advocate a practitioner gaining a detailed knowledge of children through observation. But it's not just the children who are used to being filmed during their routine nursery day at the Pen Green Centre in Corby, Northamptonshire. Practitioners are too. Video, says joint head of centre Tracy Gallagher, is 'part of the culture' and not only used for supporting observations of children but also as a professional development experience with staff filming each other and reflecting on their pedagogical practice together.

'The beauty of a video is that you can watch it over and over again,' says Ms Gallagher. 'A video can be slowed down frame by frame to see the subtleties of movement and body language.'

At Pen Green, staff film each other at least once a term in a process known as peer-peer review. The practitioner being filmed is able to request:

- which colleague they want to film them
- which child or children they will be filmed with
- when the filming will take place.

The practitioner is filmed for approximately five minutes – 'You'd be amazed how much interesting material can be gathered in such a short time,' says Ms Gallagher. The video gives a vignette of pedagogical practice that can be viewed before a team meeting session, when the staff member watches it with colleagues.

Initially, if staff are not confident, this can be done in pairs or in threes, but as they become more familiar with the process it is usually done in larger groups. Sessions take about half an hour and they discuss the video, reflect on the pedagogical practice, and the practitioner receives feedback from their colleagues.



At Pen Green, 'peer-peer reviews' involve staff filming each other and watching back in groups

Dialogue can include exploring what the relationship is with the child, the practitioner's body language and what strategies they are using to engage children.

AVOID EMBARRASSMENT

Ms Gallagher acknowledges that watching yourself on screen can be an awkward experience so she advises giving practitioners the time to get used to filming themselves and watching it back before starting the process. But she finds that staff soon embrace it. 'Everyone, me included,

'A video can be slowed down frame by frame to see the subtleties of movement and body language'

can watch a film of themselves and question "Why did I wear that top, do I really sound like that or look like that?" We have to allow for that process and it's why we allow workers complete autonomy of when and where we film. They can also say to stop filming if they feel it's not appropriate, such as if the child were to suddenly vomit. But they can also ask a colleague to grab a camera or iPad and film if they want to capture a specific moment,' she explains.

'Once they get over the initial embarrassment, it works well ►



Kinder Haven, which uses video for staff development (see Case Study)

because they are doing it in a very safe environment with a colleague they work with every day and trust. Also, it's not going to go on to a big screen but is shared confidentially.'

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Peer-peer review at Pen Green is strictly used as a professional development process and gives colleagues the opportunity to give feedback on their strengths. 'At first practitioners will often choose children they know well and have a deep understanding of their interests. It's very affirming to hear comments about your wonderful facial expression or the body language used. There is the risk that it could become complacent and affirming, but we find that's not

the case,' says Ms Gallagher. 'As staff get used to the model they become deeply reflective of their practice and challenge themselves, such as videoing when they have a ratio of 1:4 with two-year-olds. We have many challenging discussions about how to make yourself available to all children simultaneously. Video is useful for watching subtle interactions that are non-verbal, a simple turn of a shoulder or reaching out a hand.'

Ms Gallagher acknowledges that video does have limits, and should be used to support, rather than replace, other forms of training.

Kelly Garofalo, manager of Dodington Green Nursery in Birmingham, has recently started using videos as a training tool, enabling her staff team to look in more detail



RESOURCES

- An iPad or simple camcorder, www.amazon.co.uk
- The VideoPix app (0.99p) enables you to record a film and watch it back. You can also select still images if you want to use them for documentation of development and learning. Available on the App Store, <http://apple.co/2mYrR7B>
- The Keynote app (£9.99) is useful if you want to use the still images taken from the video to produce an observation or documentation for display, children's records, etc. Available on the App Store, <http://apple.co/1lEH5sl>

at their interactions with parents and their environment. 'We are always looking at ways to be reflective that don't cost a fortune, and this is an inexpensive way of having staff training,' she says. 'We tend to hold training in the evenings when we've already worked an eight-hour shift, so having something visual to focus on gets staff more engaged.'

Ms Garofalo emphasises that they would never single out an individual practitioner, and if there was anything negative to address it would be done in a one-to-one meeting. 'We're not out to look at negatives but focus on our practice as a whole and see where we're doing well, as well as areas where we can improve,' she says. 'Watching the videos created deep reflection and positive discussions. We want to be an Outstanding setting and this is one way that we can work towards achieving that.'

It's not just staff whose practice can benefit from viewing videos of themselves; Fiona Bland, early years adviser at NDNA, suggests managers could also record their own training delivery or meetings in order to reflect on how well they did and what they could improve on. 'Using video in this way helps you to see what your delivery is like from a learner's point of view,' she says.

ISSUES TO CONSIDER

Data protection

Ms Bland recommends considering data protection issues before starting to use videos as a training tool. Points to consider are:

- Who will see the film.
- How long it will be kept for before being destroyed.
- Gaining permission before filming from all parties.
- Being clear about how the footage will be used and its purpose.

Ethics

Tracy Gallagher, joint head of centre at Pen Green, also emphasises keeping ethics at the forefront when using videos. 'We always explain to parents what we want to use videos of their children for, and honour it if they say no to any aspect. Above all, it's about the children in our care and that cannot be compromised. We won't keep filming because it's a good piece of video but a child is distressed. The children need to have a high-quality experience. Also, the staff need to be in control rather than it being a process that is "done to" them.' ■

KINDER HAVEN, WEST YORKSHIRE

'We opened our first nursery 14 years ago and installed CCTV from the beginning,' says Kinder Haven owner and manager Danielle Dixon. 'We soon realised that, as well as being positive for parent partnership, viewing the footage was a good way of identifying training needs and a tool for reflection and highlighting good practice. We now use videos of staff regularly to help with observations and staff appraisals and occasionally in management or team meetings. While it doesn't replace training courses, it enhances structured training.'

'The staff are used to being filmed during their

work because the CCTV is constantly monitoring the play environments and we also have small video cameras that we can use non-invasively. During inductions we explain that we record practice in order to reflect on it and it's clearly embodied in our policies and procedures. Videoing staff at work can help to identify their strengths and weaknesses and also show how children are engaging with the environment – if few children are going into the role-play area, we'll then look at how it can be made more engaging.

'It's also good for staff to directly see their own practice and be able to visualise

what we're discussing. If we feel it necessary to isolate an incident, we'll discuss it confidentially during a staff appraisal and give time for questions. We'll always give constructive criticism and enable staff to talk about what they would do better and link their practice to policy and procedures.

'Often staff are more focused on their observations of children rather than their own actions and it's wonderful to be able to highlight what they are subconsciously doing, such as actively engaging onlooking children and bringing them into the activity. It can be empowering and give staff a boost.'