

The structure of our business is somewhat unusual in the nursery sector: we have four separate nurseries and, within these, each room of children is run as a mini-nursery, headed up by a team leader. Catherine House, the business owner, and two senior team leaders manage the nurseries centrally, while



Quality-of-teaching course in the woods

Award-winning training

a separate support team allows the nursery teams to focus on the children and their families. All team leaders belong to the senior management team and support each other in their roles.

So, at Springlands, knowledgeable, experienced practitioners stay working with the children alongside other staff, instead of being promoted to an office. We continue to nurture young children, provide for their learning and development, and work with parents on a daily basis. We believe that, by working as teams within the Springlands team, creating this team spirit, we can achieve the extraordinary. In this capacity, we (the team leaders) wrote this article together as part of our professional development...

Building a legacy

Our vision is 'to build a legacy that positively enhances the lives of others'. In 2002, having always been committed to investing in our people, Springlands Training & Assessment Centre was formed. This brought us autonomy in the delivery of formal qualifications and allowed us to



NMT asked Catherine House, whose nursery won the NMT Nursery Training and Development Award 2012, what makes their training so different and how this has benefited the staff and the children in their care

retain valuable skills, create new career opportunities and recruit the best people for our nursery teams. Regular babysitting courses and the delivery of CACHE qualifications to secondary school pupils ensures we have a steady pool of future employees that we already know well.

Each of us is responsible for every aspect of the Springlands experience within our designated areas. We have high expectations, and we maintain high standards through continual evaluation of how and what we deliver to our team, families, children and community.

As a training establishment, we do everything for a reason and need to unpick these reasons, before we pass information and skills on to others. So, nursery training and development is a tool for maintaining quality levels through understanding. Using a variety of embedded systems, team members are encouraged to grow

professionally and follow their interests. A middle management level within our hierarchy fosters specific interests of aspiring staff; and the SENCO role is a good example of this.

Our internal customers

Good customer care at Springlands goes beyond what is conventional to include our colleagues, our internal customers. The responsibility for developing our team members rests with the team leaders, who have a tool-kit to assist and support us with induction, and facilitate the setting of competencies at stages throughout everyone's career.

Whatever our role, qualifications or status, everybody has the same generic job description. This communicates our values and ethos as a company and demonstrates what they are in practice. Developing others is a high priority for us: everybody is charged with the responsibility to pass on their



Rosie at the training centre

knowledge and aid others in their job roles. So, everybody is involved in making it happen, thus ensuring our children gain fully from those who care for them. Furthermore, this process ensures everyone's personal satisfaction is enhanced. Staff turnover is low.

Children gravitate towards those who meet their needs. Passionate practitioners put their heart and soul into what they do, and those are exactly the people we try to employ and keep. We recognise levels 2 and 3, degrees and EYPs, but also appreciate and value people as people, respecting their individuality, and we have invested time in understanding each other.

Multiple intelligences

Recognising what someone is good at can be a challenge, particularly if that person has baggage from school and doesn't know what they are good at themselves. So, we use Howard Gardner's nine types of intelligence¹ to help everyone recognise the talents within our team and value them by engaging these abilities. So, after compiling this article, we will consult 'word smart' people at Springlands to check it out. As we do with children's schemas, we anticipate individuals will flourish through continuous professional development (CPD), while working in their areas of 'smartness' where possible.

As everybody is involved in training, we encourage everybody to understand learning styles (similarly when working with the children). We have found, interestingly, that there are only a few auditory learners amongst us compared with those who learn visually or kinaesthetically. So, in the fast pace of our settings, giving verbal instructions is likely to be less successful than showing photographs, charts and codes of practice or demonstrating how things are to be achieved. Initially, there were cries of "We don't have time," but investing in these principles saves lots of aggravation, misunderstanding and time, bringing benefits for the children faster.

How we do it

Using some techniques from neuro-linguistic programming (NLP), when

handling scenarios, we agree that 'it is the communicator's fault when the desired outcome is not achieved'. So, we had to find a way of avoiding the stress and frustrations of believing all was well, only to discover the task was not achieved or misinterpreted.

Then, we discovered DiSC², a personality-profiling tool, which helps us understand our colleagues' personalities and associated communication styles. Adopting this fascinating approach has increased harmony, aided achievement of goals and boosted confidence. Promoting better working relationships motivates everyone and helps senior staff become more effective as managers of our teams.

Our ethos of CPD for everybody at every level is disseminated through an ongoing appraisal system, where a range of small activities are carried out each quarter and throughout the year. Catherine instigates one of the regular staff questionnaires (regarding individual views, needs and requests) and a team task-focused activity based on a recent theme. Often, these link in with a quality-of-teaching session, where we all come together across each nursery. This is formal training on a topic, generally curriculum driven, where we have identified room for improvement.

Alternatively, to help us understand our teams, we may use an exercise based on an aspect from *Five Dysfunctions of a Team*³ (Patrick M. Lencioni). As team leaders, we use two tools as benchmarks, developed by Professor Janet Moyles. The first is *Essex Effective Pedagogy Evaluation Scheme* (EEPES)⁴, where individuals compare their practice with the criteria. The practitioner finds examples and these are discussed and graded with their team leader. The senior management team uses *Effective Leadership and Management in the Early Years*⁵ in a similar way to evaluate their management and



Martyn coaching Stephanie in hand washing

leadership skills.

Additionally, we draw up professional development goals with everyone after evaluating the previous quarter's goals. Two aspects of their work are chosen: one to support the team and the second for themselves. Lastly, the team leader completes a team analysis on strengths and weaknesses of the team, which helps us identify how individuals can be aligned with their strengths to support each other's learning.

All these factors enable us as a team both to deliver consistently and to benefit from formal training on offer in a way that suits each individual member of staff. This, in turn, enables us to deliver the best care and access to the curriculum to our children that we can. ■

- 1 For details of Howard Gardner's nine types of intelligence, visit <http://en.wikiversity.org>
- 2 For more details of DISC assessment, a personality assessment tool based on the DISC personality theory of psychologist William Marston, visit <http://en.wikipedia.org>
- 3 *Five Dysfunctions of a Team: a leadership fable*, Patrick M. Lencioni. Pub Jossey-Bass
- 4 Research by Moyles & Musgrove, 2003
- 5 Pub as a book by Open University Press.

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