Identified features of professional practice

- The diversity, complexity, responsibilities and multiple demands of the role.
- Leadership, management and organisational skills.
- Acting as a conduit for information.
- Knowledge of the setting, children and families.
- Professional knowledge base.
- Providing support and reassurance.
- Being accountable for implementation of policy and procedures.
- Availability, accessibility and visibility.
- Trust.

“The parents look to you and see that you are somebody who is at the forefront of the nursery and that you’re setting an example for the staff.”

Linda Miller is Professor Emeritus of Early Years at the Open University and was Head of Awards in Early Years until August 2008.

Carrie Cable is a Senior Lecturer in Education in the Faculty of Education and Language Studies at the Open University. She was involved in developing courses within the Foundation Degree in Early Years.

Gill Goodliff is a Lecturer in Early Years at the Open University and involved in the development and presentation of the practice-based courses within the Foundation Degree in Early Years.

Find out more about this project and the Practice-based Professional Learning CETL at our web site: www.open.ac.uk/pbpl/

The Open University is incorporated by Royal Charter (RC 000391), an exempt charity in England & Wales and a charity registered in Scotland (SC 038302).
What does it mean to act professionally? Can we identify features of professional practice?

Our aim
This study is part of a wider project involving researchers in Early Years from six countries: Finland, Sweden, Australia, Germany, New Zealand, and England.

The project was inspired by, and draws on the methodology developed by Gillen et al., (2007). These researchers filmed ‘A Day in the Life’ of two and a half year old girls in five countries with the aim of exploring constructions of early childhood in different contexts.

We wanted to explore:
- What it means to act professionally.
- What being a ‘professional’ in the early years means in England.

A working day
Julie, a nursery manager in a private day nursery in England, agreed to take part in our study. We filmed Julie throughout her working day.

“... they’re [parents] leaving their children with you every day and trusting that you’re going to look after them in an appropriate way and that you’re going to follow all the guidelines ...”

Julie is 26 and has worked in day nurseries for seven years. As a senior practitioner Julie has extensive management and leadership duties in addition to meeting parents and supporting children’s learning. She has a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ, Level 3) and is working towards a Foundation Degree in Early Years at the Open University.

The day nursery where Julie works is in a residential area in a small market town and is privately owned. Full day care is offered alongside part time ‘education’ for three to five year olds.

We filmed Julie throughout a busy working day. The data

Office administration and management tasks
- Finance meeting with the Director
- Meeting with a key worker to discuss settling in a new child
- Meetings with both a preschool teacher about curriculum planning, and senior staff about training and staff rotas
- Meeting with a parent

Interacting with children, including: story time, indoor and outdoor play and learning experiences, lunch time, preparing for minibus travel

provides evidence of her organisational skills and abilities and of her empathy, sensitivity and respect for teachers, parents and children. The quotes shown here are taken from the transcripts of the film and interviews with Julie.

“... I do see myself as a professional. I think that other people see me as a professional. I think that, in the nursery set up, what makes me a professional is the fact that I come in to do my job to the best of my abilities and I go home every day knowing that I’ve put in 110 percent into that day and I’ve done as much as I can do I think the responses I get from other people make me feel that they have trust in me and they’ve got confidence in me.”