A day in the life

An exploration of a practitioner’s and researchers’ perceptions of what professional practice means in an English context

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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.

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

“...I do see myself as a professional. I think that other people see me as a professional. I think the responses I get from other people make me feel that they have trust in me...”

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. We observed her involved in:
- Office administration and management tasks.
- Interacting with children, including: story time, indoor and outdoor play and learning experiences, lunch time, preparing for minibus travel.
- Meetings with both a preschool teacher about curriculum planning, and senior staff about training and staff rotas.
- Meeting with a parent.
- Meeting to discuss settling in a new child.
- Finance meeting with the Director.

“...they’re 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...”

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.

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