



## **Supporting children's learning in the early years**

*Information and sharing*

### **Rosemary Hill**

Here's Doctor Linda Miller, Lecturer in Childhood Studies at the Open University.

### **Linda Miller**

You'll hear three parents giving their perspective, on how they share information about their children's learning and development, with practitioners in the different settings that their children attend. Julie McVeigh is the mother of four year old Katie, who's in her first year at Wall Hall nursery school, in Aldenham Hertfordshire. She describes how her initial contact with the nursery, helped Katie to make a good start.

### **Julie McVeigh**

She does have a slight glue ear problem, this caused her to be quite frustrated, and not always mix socially very well. I was able to share this with his teachers at Wall Hall, and this enabled Katie to settle in extremely quickly, and because they understood the problem, it was really eradicated within the first week of attending the nursery.

### **Linda Miller**

She goes on to talk about how much she valued the home visit, which took place before Katie joined the nursery.

### **Julie McVeigh**

During the home visit the Headteacher discussed lots of things with me. What I did like, she actually spent quite a lot of time with Katie on her own, playing games, drawing, asking her about colours, getting a real feel from the child, as regards what she enjoyed doing. I think from this, she was able to gain an insight into the way Katie's mind worked.

### **Linda Miller**

Julie also explains how the nursery invited her to contribute information, about Katie's learning and development.

### **Julie McVeigh**

I think I filled in initially forms about the playgroups she may have attended beforehand, did she have brothers and sisters, that sort of thing, and again once we'd had this home visit, the Headteacher was able to prepare a summary of the visit, and how she felt Katie had reacted to her visit etc, etc, so that gave us a great insight. In the very early stages during one of my visits, on the rota, we sat down, this summary was placed into her diary, we were able to discuss her first few days here, was I happy with what she'd written, and basically was she settling in well. This was all very much open for discussion, and I was very happy that they really did have Katie right.

### **Linda Miller**

Julie was able to go into the nursery at any time, whenever she had concerns about Katie, she also received regular information about Katie's progress.

### **Julie McVeigh**

Through the diaries, which are kept on the child, which include photographs, discussion about the particular schemes that your child works under, how they learn. This enables myself as a parent to find out more about her progress, and in particular way, how she is learning, what she enjoys doing here, and what's she's gaining from that.

**Linda Miller**

Julie really values the two way process of sharing, and giving information between the home and nursery.

**Julie McVeigh**

I think just because it creates a greater depth of understanding your child, rather than being perhaps frustrated with them. I think as a parent you benefit, and the child obviously benefits too.

**Linda Miller**

Jan Blyth's son Thomas, attends Castleton playgroup in Newport, Wales. Because Thomas experiences communication difficulties, Jan realised that sharing information with practitioners in the playgroup was going to be essential to his learning and well being.

**Jan Blyth**

When Thomas first started Castleton playgroup, it was obvious that I would need to share quite a lot of information with them because of his special needs. We did this in many ways. There were some forms to fill in for his general health, any allergies and things like that, about his GP and contact numbers for his therapist and things like that. But we also had general chats with the playgroup leader, and her asking me was there anything that I knew that she needed to know about him. We had a visit so that she could see how he was, and how she might be able to cope with him. Basically we shared absolutely everything I suppose in how he was. His dislikes about what drinks he likes and what he didn't like. Jane took a great deal of time to find out information on the child, and what went on at home.

**Linda Miller**

Jan goes on to explain how important it is to share information with everyone involved in his learning and development.

**Jan Blyth**

I'd shared all the information that I knew, the speech therapist had been to see, see them, and gave them some work to do with him. I had copies of this as well at home. They knew what I was doing with him at home; I knew what they were doing with him in playgroup. It was hard for him to learn, but they were very patient with him. And they'd let him know if he'd learnt new words, I'd like them know if he knew a new sign. He still had quite a lot of difficulties and, they would communicate with me, mostly on a day to day basis, how they got on with him that day, with the help of the speech therapist. They put a little booklet together, so that she could see over a number of weeks how things were progressing. I had access to that at all times, so they kept quite a good record of how Thomas was doing and what Thomas was doing and what he couldn't do, and what he was finding out. And he did slowly but surely improve and, by the time he was in his second year at playgroup, before he was pre-school, he'd come a long, long way.

**Linda Miller**

Information was shared with Thomas's key worker on a regular basis.

**Jan Blyth**

Thomas actually had a one-to-one person with him, which I could see her in the morning or, at lunchtime when I picked him up to discuss anything about what had happened during that day. If anything had happened that they thought was relevant, they would always speak to me anyway. If anything had happened at home, I would always communicate on. Be it good or bad, sometimes it was absolutely excellent, you know he'd said a new word, or he understood something that I'd said, and they were the same also. They were excellent in keeping records for me. I had availability to those at all times, if I wanted to, they would speak to me twice a day.

**Linda Miller**

There were also more formal opportunities for sharing and recording information about Thomas's progress.

**Jan Blyth**

At playgroup they have a contact book, where if they need to tell you something, or you need to tell them something, it's possible to do so. The pre-school year is when they do a lot of assessment on the children, with stuff from school, where they'll go into Reception, but that is openly available for you to see whenever you go to visit. They have mornings, where you can go and spend the morning with your child in playgroup. Jane is always willing to talk to you. You don't actually get a formal report at the end of their time in playgroup, but there is information there for you to get written down in black and white if you do so wish.

**Linda Miller**

Deirdre Keenan describes her daughter Eimear's experience of joining the first class, Primary 1, in New Row School in Northern Ireland. She also has an older child in the school. Deirdre explains how they nursery school had passed on information about Eimear to the Primary school.

**Deirdre Keenan**

She had gone to nursery school locally, and they had sent a very full profile for my daughter which was, for me fairly invaluable, because they got to know her very well. So the information that came from there was also very helpful.

**Linda Miller**

Both Deirdre and her husband shared information about Eimear, with the Primary 1 teacher, particularly about her social development.

**Deirdre Keenan**

Any question the teacher wanted to ask me about my child, she did so. And I suppose particularly what they were trying to find out, was a bit about the nature of the child, or her personality and, which to me, was quite a new thing, but also very helpful for her. My husband came with me on one particular day, because he felt it was important, he wanted to talk a bit about how she is socially as a child, and he felt that that was quite important. And we talked quite a bit to the teacher about that. We didn't hand over written information as such, but we talked a bit about how she relates within our family home, how she relates to other children, and things that makes her upset, and things that she likes and, also that we felt that she was fairly well established in educational terms, and I suppose we wanted to know that she would be encouraged in whatever way possible and, we were both very satisfied that she would be.

**Linda Miller**

This sharing of information continued as Eimear settled into school. Deirdre explains the importance of both formal and informal opportunities for doing this.

**Deirdre Keenan**

I would have ongoing contact with the school as a parent, and I've always done this. I mean I would always call the school and speak to the teachers, if there's anything that I was ever concerned about. I feel that is important, that you should have that relationship with a teacher, particularly for very young children who need that sort of emotional support. There's a number of opportunities to do so in this school. It's done so formally through an autumn meeting here, where there's a parent teacher interview, and you get unlimited opportunity to ask whatever questions, get whatever information you need about the child. We also had a great meeting about the whole Primary 1 curriculum between parents and teachers, and those that are helping with the curriculum. I think it's very important for children to see their parents in school, because of the society we live in, very few children have the opportunity to do that and, I think some parents are not, maybe as comfortable as others about doing that, and maybe they just need some more encouragement, I think it's very important.

**Linda Miller**

Deirdre clearly values the opportunities she has to share information about Eimear progress. She goes on to suggest some ways in which both parents and practitioners could build on this process.

**Deirdre Keenan**

I do think it would have been helpful, probably for the school to have a clear picture of what they wanted to find out about your child. I mean in terms of their personality profile or their social profile, I think that would have been helpful. They do want information about their medical background and about, next of kin and so on, but I think it will be good for them to seek out more details, because as a parent you're offering information that you think is useful, but you may not be always given the information that is needed. And sometimes parents don't give information that is relevant. Maybe schools should be more proactive about, asking questions about home background and things.

**Linda Miller**

We hope that this has encouraged you to think about parents' perspectives on both giving and receiving information about their children's learning and development, and has encouraged you to reflect upon how you manage this process in your own setting.