A tool to record and support the early development of children including those with special educational needs or disabilities

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Early intervention is key for children with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND), and therefore early assessment is crucial. Information from parents about children's current ability and their developmental history can make valid and useful contributions to developmental assessments. Parental input is also important in early education for children with and without SEND. In England, recent changes to statutory guidance for early education highlight partnership working with parents, progress checks and continuous observation. The *Early Years Developmental Journal* (*EYDJ*), an Early Support tool primarily aimed at families, aims to support early identification and assessment for children with SEND and early education for all children. The article describes Early Support to provide a backdrop and then outlines the purpose, structure and rigorous development process of the *EYDJ*. Use of the *EYDJ* to support parents, early years education practitioners, health visitors, developmental assessments and the forthcoming English special educational needs (SEN) reforms is also described.

Key words: special needs, disability, early childhood, early education, early intervention.

Introduction

The *Early Support Developmental Journals* are a series of resources intended to help families of children with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) and the practitioners working with them to observe, record and celebrate progress, and to identify areas where extra help may be needed.

In this article we outline the rigorous research, development and evaluation processes that contributed to one such developmental journal, the *Early Years Developmental Journal* (*EYDJ*), which was developed by the authors for Early Support. To provide a contextual backdrop, we outline research concerning the need for early identification, assessment and intervention for children with SEND. We also set out the current political and educational context within England, particularly focusing on partnership working between practitioners and parents and the need for progress checks at two years of age. A brief history of Early Support will be provided, followed by a summary of existing evaluations of Early Support and the developmental journals. The *EYDJ* will then be explained in detail, along with its development process, and we will outline how it can be used in practice and how it can help practitioners to meet the principles of good early assessment.

Early assessment and SEND

There are approximately two million children and young people with SEND in England (DfE, 2011). Early assessment is fundamental for these children because it paves the way for early intervention; a principle reflected in the current policy reforms in England. Early intervention can help change negative developmental trajectories and prevent secondary difficulties arising (Goswami, 2008; Guralnick, 2005).

In a report prepared for the UK government, Allen (2011) discusses early intervention, which is defined as the general approaches and specific programmes aimed at helping children aged 0–3 to develop strong social and emotional foundations and equipping older children with the skills of good parenting for the future. The stated benefits of early intervention include better educational attainment, prevention of anti-social behaviour and cost-saving. The specific recommendations in this report include regular childhood assessment between

birth and 5 years focusing on social and emotional development, consistent and timely help in the early years rather than at school entry and a joined-up approach between health and education to provide integrated information.

It is clear there is a need for early assessment in order to identify children's strengths and weaknesses and intervene accordingly. So the question then arises of how best to assess children's ability. In a recent article, Bellman *et al.* (2013) outlined four main domains of development: gross and fine motor skills; speech and language; social and personal and activities of daily living; and performance and cognition. Importantly, they also highlight that skill acquisition tends to occur in a relatively constant sequence from child to child, although the rate of development may differ even in typical development. Indeed, empirical studies have observed a wide range of variability regarding when early milestones are reached, particularly in the domain of language and communication (Fenson *et al.* 1994).

Advice on assessment principles for clinicians advocates information-gathering from a variety of sources (Bellman *et al.*, 2013; Bolton 2001). Bellman *et al.* (2013) emphasise the importance of parental views and observation of the child in the clinic, at home and in nursery. When taking a history of a child's development, information from parents along with evidence such as video recordings and their personal child health record (PCHR or 'red book'; Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, 2009) are highlighted as helpful resources.

Continuous observation and monitoring is important for understanding development, especially for those children with SEND. If children's developmental level is considered solely at a single point in time then this may provide an unreliable picture of their abilities, for many different reasons: they may be having an 'off day', they may prefer to do a different activity or they may be ill or tired. Rather, assessment should be seen as a dynamic process and utilise multiple methods, sessions and environments (Oates, 2013b; Romanczyk *et al.*, 2005). Therefore having an ongoing record of development can help provide a more holistic picture of a child. In the early years, children often spend much of their time with their family, placing parents and other caregivers in a unique position to record small but significant steps of progress on a fairly regular basis. If a child is receiving support or intervention, this may be one way in which families can be involved with and supplement the work of the practitioner.

Gathering information from parents

Early intervention specialists and early years practitioners highlight the importance of involving parents in early childhood assessments (Brink, 2002; McCollum, 2002; Whiteley *et al*., 2005). Involving parents can help validate if, when and how often skills are demonstrated and thus can provide a unique perspective on the assessment process. This also has practical uses for local or national screening projects (Luinge *et al*. 2006) and for researchers studying cognitive development, as it is more efficient and economical than assessing children in person (Saudino *et al*., 1998).

If parental reporting is to be useful for practitioners, then it is important to know whether it is reliable and valid. Fenson *et al*. (1994) highlighted that parents may often assume their child's understanding, and thus overestimate their receptive language level. However other studies, which are summarised below, have found positive relationships between parent judgements and psychometric and clinical assessments.

Saudino *et al*. (1998) developed a parent-based measure to assess the cognitive abilities of 2-year-olds. The measure had a parent-report section which involved questions such as 'can your child put a simple piece, such as a square or animal, into the correct piece on a puzzle board?'. A second section involved parent-delivered assessments such as block building, copying drawings and copying actions. The measure was significantly correlated with the Mental Scale of the Bayley Scales of Infant Development (r=.52), an extensively used psychometric test for infant development.

Tervo (2005) reported a study in which 180 parents of children assessed at a neurodevelopmental clinic were surveyed about their child's difficulties. The most common concerns were language and speech, followed by motor difficulties, a pattern that has also been reported in other studies (Chung *et al*., 2011). Parental reporting of language difficulties predicted developmental status, i.e. whether children were considered to have a developmental delay or not. However, it appears that concerns about language may not actually signify specific language difficulties; Chung *et al*. (2011) found that parents of children with cognitive delays were more likely to express their concerns about language development. This highlights the need for a trained professional to interpret the concerns of parents.

Early years education

Given the importance of the early years to lifelong skills, abilities and progress, the nature of early education is important for all children. In England, 96% of 3–4-year-olds attend some form of early education (DfE, 2012a) and the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is the statutory framework that early years providers must follow. In a report on the EYFS in 2011, Dame Clare Tickell made a number of recommendations; particularly relevant here are her recommendations to increase partnership working with parents, involving them more fully in their child's learning, and introducing a progress check when children are 2 years old. The principles behind these recommendations and their subsequent application in practice are also relevant to contexts outside England.

In the revised EYFS produced in 2012 after the Tickell report, the importance of involving parents in their child's learning is highlighted (DfE, 2012b). This principle is corroborated by findings from research studies; in a report from the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) project, Sylva *et al.* (2004) found that the best early years settings had good communication links with parents. This included practitioners and parents sharing information with each other and parents being involved in decision-making about their child's education.

In 2012, a two-year progress check was introduced in the EYFS. The aim of this is to provide parents with a short summary of children's development in the areas of personal, social and emotional development, communication and language and physical development. In the EYFS, emphasis is also placed on ongoing assessment based on observations. In 2015, a single integrated review will be implemented in England incorporating the EYFS progress check and the two-year check currently carried out by health visitors as part of the Healthy Child Programme (DfE/DoH, 2011). There is also currently an assessment point for children at the end of the EYFS, i.e. the school year in which they turn five years of age. The EYFS profile summarises and describes children's attainment and, in line with good assessment practice outlined above, it should reflect ongoing observation and discussions with parents. It is pertinent to note here that in 2012, 68% of pupils without SEN achieved a 'good' level of development on the EYFS profile, but for children with SEN this figure was much lower, at 23% (DfE, 2012c).

One of the four guiding principles of the EYFS is that 'children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates' (DfE, 2012b, p. 3), and this includes

children with SEND. Where practitioners think a child has SEND, they should help families access relevant services and support. For a child with a diagnosed SEND or significant emerging concerns, a plan to support future learning and development should also be developed as part of the two-year check.

Producing information for families

Mitchell and Sloper (2002) argue that families of children with disabilities have unmet needs for information and discuss the optimum way of addressing this. From conducting focus groups with families, they suggest that information should:

- Be delivered both in written form and as verbal advice;
- Be delivered to families with the support of a key worker;
- Be targeted at key points, e.g. diagnosis, transition into schooling;
- Provide comprehensive and up-to-date information from a range of professionals and about a range of different services;
- Provide everyday advice and explanations.

Mitchell and Sloper (2002) concluded that information provision should have a three-strand approach including concise directories of local services and support, a range of detailed booklets and key working support. These principles are also advocated by Davies and Hall (2005), who highlight that parents' sense of control and empowerment can be aided by treating them as equal partners and respecting their knowledge and desire to gather more information, whilst acknowledging the difficulties they may face.

Young *et al*. (2005) report the evaluation of an information resource by National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) for Early Support during the development process. Focus groups with families highlighted the importance of using written information in the context of intervention from practitioners to help parents apply and use the information they receive. Some issues depended on personal preferences – for example, some parents wanted information focusing on technical and practical aspects whereas others wanted acknowledgement of the emotions they may experience, with a middle-ground approach perhaps being the compromise. There was also an issue surrounding the realism of the resources; parents wanted common controversial or debated issues to be included and case studies focusing on realistic rather than ideal practice.

Early Support

At the time of writing, there are major reforms underway in SEND policy in England. These draft reforms have an emphasis on placing children and families at the centre of the system, integrating education, health and social care and improving early identification and intervention (DfE, 2013a). Early Support is a way of working that aims to improve delivery of services for children and young people with SEND and is a core delivery partner for these policy revisions.

Early Support enables services to better co-ordinate their activity and provides families with a single point of contact and continuity through key working. Early Support has also produced a range of resources and delivers training to enable an approach that empowers families, supports multidisciplinary and integrated working and promotes family-centred service delivery.

At the centre of Early Support is a key working approach that aims to ensure that the provision of services meets the individual requirements and aspirations of a child or young person and their family. Key working can be fulfilled by a wide range of practitioners, from health, education, social care, the community or the voluntary sector, or by parents or young people themselves. This means it becomes a way of working rather than an additional service. The main functions of key working are:

- Providing emotional and practical support to the child or young person and family;
- Being a single point of regular and consistent contact, and co-ordinating services and practitioners around the child or young person and family;
- Supporting a single planning and joint assessment process;
- Providing information and advice and facilitating support.

Early Support was originally targeted at the 0–3 age range, and was subsequently extended to five years and since to adulthood. In the most recent phase of Early Support, priority has been placed on capacity building via key working training, embedding the approach across all regions of England and extending the resources through to school-leaving age.

In 2006, Early Support was evaluated (Young *et al.*, 2006, 2008). At this point, Early Support was only aimed at the 0–3 age range, and offered fewer resources than at present. Although Early Support has expanded since this evaluation, the

approach and underlying principles remain the same; therefore the results can inform our current view of Early Support. The evaluation concluded that Early Support was considered successful by parents and professionals; it was judged to have positive effects on multiagency working and service provision, the well-being of families and ensuring appropriate support for children. However, it was noted that the presence of Early Support varied greatly in different areas, with the nature and availability of support and resources differing.

The results of the evaluation align with studies showing that generally the provision of family-centred practices is linked with a decrease in stress and an increase in well-being and empowerment among parents of children with disabilities (Canary, 2008). Indeed, Nachshen and Minnes (2005) found that family-centred services, along with a network of social support, are critical to a sense of empowerment for families of children both with and without developmental disabilities.

Developmental journals: a brief history

In 2004, Early Support produced the first developmental journal: the *Monitoring Protocol for Deaf Babies and Children* (Early Support 2004). In 2006, two further journals were published: the *Developmental Journal for Babies and Children with Visual Impairment* (Early Support 2006b) and the *Developmental Journal for Babies and Children with Down Syndrome* (Early Support 2006a).

In 2008, the generic *Developmental Journal* was produced (Early Support 2008). This was designed to address the needs of children with a wide range of difficulties, rather than continuing to produce further condition-specific journals. The generic *Developmental Journal* was linked to *EYFS Development Matters* (a non-statutory guidance document for early years education; DCSF, 2008) and categorised development into the same areas of learning and development, which were: personal, social and emotional development; communication, language and literacy; problem-solving, reasoning and numeracy; knowledge and understanding of the world; physical development; and creative development. In total, 25,000 hard copies of the *Journal* were distributed, in the form of a free ringbinder. Although parents were envisaged as the primary users, the *Journal* was also used by practitioners in early years settings. The generic *Developmental Journal* was also used as the basis for a computerised national assessment, monitoring and record-keeping system in the Hungarian Biztos Kezdet (Sure Start) programme, linked with adoption of the EYFS as the framework for the programme curriculum.

The main body of each developmental journal is a series of milestones sequenced into Developmental Steps. These milestones are behaviours or skills that parents or practitioners can observe in children, and they are designed to represent small but significant steps in development. Each milestone also has the space for parents to note development within that particular skill – for example, when it is 'emerging', 'developing' and 'achieved'. The Developmental Steps are accompanied by descriptions of development and space for parents to make notes, record special events and write questions for practitioners.

In an evaluation of the *Developmental Journal for Babies and Children with Visual Impairment*, Jennings (2008) reported a number of benefits for parents and practitioners. The key positive aspects for parents included an improved understanding of developmental milestones, greater awareness of progress, better understanding of their child's needs, the inclusion of ideas for activities and being able to use the *Journal* as a source of evidence with practitioners. The key benefits according to practitioners were improved parental confidence and knowledge, enabling partnership-working with parents, promoting a holistic view of the child and aiding planning. Jennings concluded that the *Journal* boosted the knowledge and confidence of parents and provided a focus for working in partnership.

An evaluation of the Early Support resources in 2013 was conducted through an electronic survey, which was completed by 127 individuals and 8 groups; 68 professionals and 51 parents/carers were among the respondents. As this was a survey covering all of Early Support's resources, the developmental journals were not focused on in detail and were treated as a group, rather than the individual titles. Of the survey respondents, 65 had used a developmental journal and 50 respondents stated they would recommend the Journals. Website analytics showed the landing page for the Developmental Journals on Early Support's website had been accessed 16,356 times. These results suggest widespread awareness of, and access to, the developmental journals and a high level of satisfaction.

Early Years Developmental Journal

As part of the most recent phase of Early Support, the generic *Developmental Journal* was revised and the *Early Years Developmental Journal* (*EYDJ*; Oates and Mengoni, 2013) can now be downloaded free of charge as a pdf document

from Early Support's website. The *EYDJ* aims to meet the principles of good information sources for parents outlined by Mitchell and Sloper (2002) when delivered in the context of Early Support. The *EYDJ* is best used in conjunction with a practitioner who can offer advice and explain how to use the *Journal* most effectively. The *EYDJ* provides accessible information and guidance about different aspects of a child's development in the context of their everyday life – for example, going to nursery or transitioning into school.

The *EYDJ* consists of milestones categorised into four Areas of Development, sequenced into 14 Developmental Steps:

- Personal, social and emotional;
- Communication;
- Physical;
- Thinking.

The first three areas map onto the prime areas of the revised EYFS (DfE, 2012b); the area of Thinking was added to represent cognitive development. The areas of development also correspond to those listed in the draft SEN Code of Practice (DfE, 2013a) which accompanies the Children and Families Bill and the four main domains outlined for assessment in Bellman *et al*. (2013).

The 14 Developmental Steps represent typical development between birth and 5 years, therefore for children with SEND the *EYDJ* may be applicable beyond the age of 5 years. Each Step represents a period of time in development during which most typically developing children master the milestones listed. Development tends to occur in a relatively consistent sequential manner (Bellman *et al*., 2013) even in children with SEND, although the speed of development may differ and there may be differences in skill level across the four areas of development. The steps cover relatively narrow age ranges in the early stages, which get broader with age – for example, Step 1 covers the birth to 3 months age range whereas Step 10 covers the 24–31 months age range (Mengoni and Oates, 2013). This represents the variability seen in development.

In order to show an up-to-date summary of children's development, the *EYDJ* contains a Developmental Profile that shows which step the child is currently working at for each Area of Development. The *EYDJ* also incorporates a chart of key indicators. This highlights one milestone for each Area of Development in each Developmental Step as particularly important for development. This results in an abbreviated table of items, which can help parents and practitioners select an

appropriate starting point for their child. Both the Key Indicators and the Developmental Profile can make the *Journal* feel more manageable and less daunting, which was an issue highlighted by parents and practitioners with regard to the *Developmental Journal for Babies and Children with Visual Impairment* (Jennings, 2008).

Accompanying each Developmental Step and the milestones are accessible narrative descriptions of developmental processes. These also include guidance for each Area of Development about ways to support children's development, as this is an aspect both parents and practitioners rate as particularly useful in the developmental journals (Jennings, 2008).

A key concept behind the *EYDJ* is that parents feel ownership of it. For each step, there are pages for parents to include extra information about special achievements and events and to note down any questions they have.

Development of the EYDJ

A key factor driving the development of the *EYDJ* was the change to the EYFS in 2012, which included new areas of development and learning. Therefore, as a starting point the items from the generic *Developmental Journal* were reassigned to the four new Areas of Development, which correspond to the EYFS' three prime areas of learning and development and include the additional area of Thinking. The items from the generic *Journal*'s areas of personal, social and emotional development; communication; language and literacy; and physical development were mostly placed in the corresponding area in the *EYDJ*. The remaining three areas of problem-solving, reasoning and numeracy, knowledge and understanding of the world and creative development were reassigned, mostly placed under Thinking or, if this was not applicable, omitted from the *EYDJ*.

Given that the majority of items in the *EYDJ* are based on the generic *Developmental Journal*, it is relevant to outline how the generic *Journal* was constructed. A range of developmental assessment instruments were consulted, including Bayley Scales of Infant Development (Bayley, 2006), Denver Developmental Screening Test (Frankenburg and Dodds, 1968), the Griffiths Scales (Griffiths, 1967), Ages and Stages Questionnaires 2nd edition (ASQ; Bricker and Squires,

1999) and the EYFS Development Matters framework (DCSF, 2008). From this analysis, milestones were devised and placed in the appropriate Developmental Step.

When constructing the *EYDJ*, the Bayley scales were re-consulted and other sources were also used; these included the popular and well-respected book *From Birth to Five Years* by Mary Sheridan (2008), the Developmental Rainbow (Mahoney and Perales, 1996), the NHS (n.d.) online timeline 'From Birth to Five', the third edition of the ASQ (Squires and Bricker, 2009) and the information about development in the revised EYFS Development Matters, specifically the 'A Unique Child' section (Early Education, 2012). Where a milestone appeared in both the *EYDJ* and the source(s), it was ensured that this was under the same age period. Where this was difficult to reconcile, specific sources such as relevant academic papers were checked. This process was followed to ensure that the information provided in the *EYDJ* was reliable and valid, and that practitioners and parents could have full confidence in it.

Practitioners, parents and academics also contributed to the development of the generic *Developmental Journal* and the *EYDJ*. It was considered important to have a range of views on the *Journal* and to have the input of end users. This, along with building on important research and practice in the field, helps the *EYDJ* to bridge the gap between research and practice and provides practitioners with access to reliable information, principles highlighted in Allen's (2011) report on early intervention.

In partnership with the National Portage Association, there was a national consultation on the generic *Developmental Journal* in December 2007. This consisted of a feedback form being distributed to practitioners, who were asked for their views and the views of the families they worked with. Practitioners were mostly but not exclusively Portage practitioners: for example, a vision impairment specialist also replied. Two practitioners replied on behalf of themselves and five practitioners replied on behalf of their service. Views of 28 families were also received, both from the parents directly and through their Portage practitioners. The consultation was extensive across geographical locations, age of child, diagnosis, severity of condition and family socioeconomic status. The replies were largely very positive. All comments were analysed and compiled into action points which were taken forward into the final version of the Journal. Some representative quotes include:

If I think back over the last 18 months with my son, if the Journal had been available in this time I feel that it would also have helped me to understand not only his actual developmental needs at each stage, but it would have provided a benchmark of his development against his peer group and shown me whether the gap was narrowing or widening and importantly, at which stage. (Family with a child with a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder)

Small developments may seem insignificant to anyone else but are really important to you as the parent. It is a positive record of where and when something happened especially if it is something you have been working on for a long time. (Mother of a child with Down's syndrome)

It would be good to see and look back on the developments of their child and will help with making attainable goals without 'pushing' the child too far. (Portage home visitor)

It will help by promoting partnership working with families and all agencies . . . supporting target-setting . . . promoting and acknowledging parental skills and expertise . . . linking EYFS to home-based working . . . celebrating success and progress. (Portage practitioner in consultation with six families)

Once a draft of the *EYDJ* had been produced, it was circulated widely for feedback. As the primary purpose of the revision of the generic *Developmental Journal* was to incorporate changes to the EYFS, the recipients of this consultation were primarily professionals who worked in the early years as practitioners or academics or in the charity sector. Consultation with colleagues and families was encouraged. Feedback was compiled and suggestions for improvements were incorporated into the final version. As can be seen from the quotes below, generally the changes were welcomed:

Having the four key indicators [one for each area of development] is great – it allows practitioners to focus [on] these areas. (Local authority early intervention team)

This will be very helpful to many who are looking for material to complement Development Matters – to both share with parents and help make judgements together about development, especially where concerns are emerging. (Charity sector professional)

[The] four areas of learning are very clear to understand, intuitive and nicely pared down for simplicity. (Academic)

Using the EYDJ *in practice*

The *EYDJ* was designed to support a key working approach and promote partnership working by valuing what everyone knows about the child, including families, the child or young person themselves and the different practitioners involved. Children and young people with SEND often receive support from a number of different services – for example, Portage, speech and language therapy and physiotherapy. The *EYDJ* is particularly useful because it encourages everyone involved with a child to use the same language and provides one set of information that can be shared and used by the team around the child. Using the *Journal* with a practitioner means that families can ask questions and get advice; studies with family focus groups have shown that receiving information in context with the support of a practitioner is the ideal practice (Mitchell and Sloper, 2002; Young *et al*., 2005).

The *EYDJ* can provide a rich source of information when a practitioner meets a family for the first time. The Developmental Profile depicts a child's overall progress at a glance and looking through the Developmental Steps gives a detailed account of children's development and their current level of ability. The Key Indicator chart may also be useful, as this is an abridged version of the items within the *Journal* and can provide information as to whether children have reached key developmental milestones. For these reasons, the *Journal* is useful for review meetings with practitioners to help explain children's progress. Practitioners may also be able to contribute observations about the child that can be added into the *Journal*.

The *EYDJ* was developed with reference to the EYFS Development Matters and the PCHR, both tools commonly used by practitioners working with young children in England. The milestones that correspond to the EYFS Development Matters are indicated with an icon in the *Journal*, as are milestones that map onto the PCHR. The milestones corresponding to the EYFS Development Matters also map on to Early Years Outcomes, non-statutory guidance for practitioners and OFSTED inspectors that aims to inform understanding of early child development (DfE, 2013b). Early Support has also produced useful information about using the

EYDJ with the EYFS, Early Years Outcomes, the PCHR and other tools (Mengoni and Oates, 2013), and this will be summarised here.

Oates (2013a) outlines how the *EYDJ* can be used to supplement the PCHR and benefit health professionals. The *EYDJ* has clear links to the PCHR marked on specific items, but also goes beyond the PCHR and provides further information about child development which is relevant for children with and without SEND. For health visitors, this can support the two-year health check and where there is concern, the *EYDJ* can be used as a tool to examine this further in collaboration with families and other professionals.

In the EYFS there is great emphasis and importance placed on working in partnership with parents. Indeed, each child's key person is expected to support parents in fostering their child's development and to help them seek additional support where appropriate. This way of working is similar to that taken by Early Support, which guided the development of the *EYDJ*. More generally, key working is an important way of working and the provision of key working for families of children with SEN as good practice is included in the draft SEN Code of Practice.

As described above, the practice of continuous observation and gathering information from parents is recommended in early years settings, when conducting the two-year EYFS progress check and more widely. Oates (2013b) highlights that using the *EYDJ* to track progress helps practitioners to consider a child's ability in different areas of development, their needs and their previous developmental trajectory as part of a continuous process of supporting development, rather than at a single snapshot in time. Guidance on conducting the two-year check published by the National Children's Bureau (2012) recommends Early Support materials when working with a child with SEND, and specifically highlights the use of the *EYDJ*.

The Department for Education and the Department of Health in England commissioned a report into the problem of information-sharing between and within different early years services (Gross, 2013). The report highlights that information exchange between staff working in early years settings, health services and children centres prevents duplication, is more efficient and helps practitioners provide the right type of support at the right time. The parents interviewed for this report were positive about the concept of a parent-held record to help with partnership working and information sharing. Importantly, parents emphasised

that they needed a dynamic, continuously updated resource and stated a preference for Early Support Developmental Journals over other resources and processes for this reason. The report cites the use of Early Support resources and methods, including the developmental journals, as examples of good practice. Indeed, a recommendation from this report is that the PCHR should include a parent-held record of children's development and support they may have received. As a parent-held tool that links with both the PCHR and EYFS, the *EYDJ* is uniquely placed to do this.

The overview narrative sections about the different steps within the *Journal*, along with the detailed description of development provided by the milestones, provide a useful source of information about how children develop. One of the recommendations from the EPPE project is that early years staff should have thorough knowledge and understanding of child development (Sylva *et al*., 2004). Using the *EYDJ* can help early years settings meet this aim, as well as providing parents with useful information.

When children enter formal schooling, the National Curriculum is the statutory framework in all maintained primary and secondary schools. For children and young people who are working below level 1 of the National Curriculum, P scales are used to assess and track progress. For children with SEND who may be working at P scales in one or more subject, the *EYDJ* may be useful as the Developmental Steps have been mapped across to P scales (Mengoni and Oates, 2013). Use of the *Journal* to observe and record children's development provides complementary information that can contribute to assessment and target-setting using P scales in both mainstream and special schools.

Summary

In this article, we have presented the *EYDJ* and outlined the evidence-based rationale behind such a resource in terms of encouraging parental input into developmental assessments, fostering links between parents and practitioners, enabling keyworking, supporting early years practitioners and promoting parental empowerment and knowledge. A logical consequence from more valid and holistic assessments, higher quality early years support and more informed and confident parents is a better outcome for children.

As part of Early Support, the Developmental Journals' original grounding was in the domain of childhood disability, and indeed the *EYDJ* remains a powerful and

useful tool for children with SEND and embodies many of the principles in the current SEND reforms in England. As the *EYDJ* is based on the sequence of development in typical development, it is also highly applicable to children without SEND. Coupled with the alignment to the revised EYFS, this resource is of great use to parents of babies, toddlers and pre-school children, early years practitioners and health professionals. In particular, it is a tool that can be used to support the current two-year checks in education and health, along with the upcoming single integrated review.

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