Nursery home visits: Rhetoric and realities
Sue Greenfield
Journal of Early Childhood Research 2012 10: 100 originally published online 30 August 2011
DOI: 10.1177/1476718X11407983

The online version of this article can be found at:
http://ecr.sagepub.com/content/10/1/100

Published by:
http://www.sagepublications.com

Additional services and information for Journal of Early Childhood Research can be found at:

Email Alerts: http://ecr.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts

Subscriptions: http://ecr.sagepub.com/subscriptions

Reprints: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav

Permissions: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav

Citations: http://ecr.sagepub.com/content/10/1/100.refs.html

>> Version of Record - Feb 15, 2012

OnlineFirst Version of Record - Aug 30, 2011

What is This?
Nursery home visits: Rhetoric and realities

Sue Greenfield
Roehampton University, UK

Abstract
The importance of home-school relationships between parents and practitioners in early childhood settings is widely accepted. This article discusses the effects of the level of involvement and the nature of practitioner-parent relationships in early years settings in England on the basis of a two part study that examined parents’ experience of home visits conducted before the children begin nursery. The first part of the study, a questionnaire survey of 52 teachers/practitioners from different nurseries in the south-east of England, established that 81 percent of these nurseries conduct a home visit before children began nursery. The second part of the study, based on one-to-one semi-structured interviews with eight early years practitioners and five parents, highlighted the tensions that seem to exist between them with regard to these visits. The main themes identified are: power, training and time. As a result of these findings, this article proposes that the nature of practitioner-parent relationships is determined by: 1) the training received by teachers and practitioners to work with parents; and 2) teachers’ and practitioners’ reflection on their practice.

Keywords
early years practitioner, home visit, nursery, parent partnership, training

Introduction
One of the statutory requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage in England (DfES, 2007) is that teachers and practitioners should work with ‘parents as partners’. The reasons for this are suggested by Desforges and Abouchar (2003), who highlight the fact that parent involvement levels are directly related to pupil achievement, so that when parents are highly involved in their child’s education, their child’s level of achievement tends to be higher. From a health perspective, home visits have been seen as beneficial in the early years for midwives, health visitors, portage workers but most recently as interventionist measures, for example, Olds (2006) but these will not be discussed in this article.

Home visiting of pre-school children by teachers and early years practitioners before children take their place at nursery is seen as being beneficial both for children and for their parents as a way
of beginning a relationship between staff and parents, both in the UK (DfES, 2007) and elsewhere, for example, US (Sweet and Applebaum, 2004), China and Finland (Laverick, 2008). Home visits are recommended in England as current practice, and are being carried out by nursery practitioners in areas of the UK.

**Background to home visiting**

The first home visits were carried out by Margaret McMillan in 1919, and her ideas were revolutionary at this time. She attempted to involve parents in their children’s education, to bring about a change in their circumstances by educating them along with the children.

I am glad to think that many of them look upon us as their friends – they bring us their troubles, show us their letters . . . I am quite sure that it is only by the personal touch that they can be helped and influenced. So we visit the homes as often as we can. (McMillan, cited in Bradburn, 1976: 155)

The home visits were carried out to provide a ‘personal touch’, and teachers were advised to consider themselves guests in the homes of parents, even though they saw themselves as the ones with all the knowledge who needed to ‘educate’ the parents for their own good. McMillan was visiting homes at a time when the UK government and local Medical Officers of Health instigated the infant welfare movement (Fildes, 1998), as a result of concern about the high infant mortality rate. The Medical Officers of Health required data to be gathered for their annual reports, and the data were gathered by Lady Sanitary Inspectors and Lady Visitors (both voluntary and professional). These ‘Ladies’ were later to be known as Health Visitors, and their voluntary role disappeared.

Part of the role of a contemporary health visitor is to visit families at home. This role was first recognized in the 1946 National Health Service Act, which stated that:

It shall be the duty of every local health authority to make provision in their area for the visiting of persons in their homes by visitors, to be called ‘health visitors’ for the purpose of giving advice to the care of young children, persons suffering from illness and expectant or nursing mothers and as to the measures necessary to prevent the spread of infection. (Roberts, 1960: 23)

Again the role was seen as one of ‘giving advice’ to those who are perceived to have little knowledge, so that the implicit relationship was one of the knowing professional giving instructions to those who know little. It was not until the 1960s that it was again suggested that parents’ ideas should be considered, and ‘mothers had the right to enter school when they pleased’ (Tizard et al., 1981: 30).

In the 1980s home visiting schemes were begun which were for educational purposes such as introducing reading schemes (Tizard et al., 1981), or parts of special needs programmes (Pugh, 1981). Other studies, such as those carried out by Aplin and Pugh (1983) and McCail (1981), discuss the benefits of home visiting in order to provide a link between home and school. The visits typically continued for weeks or months, so that a relationship between teachers and parents was gradually built up (Bastiani, 1987; Jowett et al., 1991). Their success highlighted the importance of home visits as a means of improving relationships with parents, but it is important to emphasize that these differ significantly from those individual visits that early years practitioners are now encouraged to carry out before children begin nursery. The home visitors were provided with specific training to take part in home visiting schemes, many of which had clearly stated outcomes such as learning to read.
**Background to the present studies**

In their study, Tizard and Hughes (1984) found that teachers were nervous of home visiting, fearing they would be seen as ‘interfering busy-bodies’; yet during their home visiting project they did not generally receive a hostile reception. This could have been because they were not attempting to instruct parents or claim any superiority of knowledge, but were there as researchers. Whalley (1997, 2001) also highlights home visiting as a means of gaining some understanding of the child’s home environment, seeing this information as something positive that could be used when the child begins nursery. Indeed staff at the Pen Green Centre receive training to carry out home visits (Whalley, 1997, 2001) and PEAL (Parents, Early Years and Learning) includes training for home visits in its very successful training of early years practitioners to involve parents (PEAL, accessed 1 December 2010).

Home visits have been seen as providing parents, who may have had negative experiences of school, with a chance to see teachers on their own territory, where they may feel more relaxed (Edgington, 1998; Robson and Smedley, 1996; Wolfendale, 1989). Home visits aim to allow parents and teachers and practitioners to get to know each other in familiar surroundings, whilst providing children with an opportunity to meet their teacher or key person. Robson and Smedley (1996) suggest that ‘children will often refer to such visits even months after’, though it is unclear what proportion of children retain this memory.

Though this is not the case in all areas of the UK, the guidelines of the county (local region of the UK) in which the present studies were conducted stress the importance of a home visit by all nursery practitioners before the children start nursery so as to aid their transition from home to nursery. Practitioners may not feel confident about making the visits, and it would not be surprising if they are not always as successful as they might be. It is not easy to knock on the door of a stranger, and even more difficult to begin to form a working relationship with that person. However, early years staff in this county are expected to do this: some do it very effectively, but others may not, and this could have a detrimental influence on the relationship between home and school. Teachers have little training to work with parents and at present there is no stipulated training for carrying out home visits.

My own experience as a health visitor included academic study, and then visits with experienced colleagues to homes and families from diverse backgrounds and cultures, before I was expected to organize and make visits myself. My first solo visit was still a daunting prospect, as it was hard to predict the kind of reception that would be given to a total stranger who hoped to be invited into the home. I gained insight that I was able to use later in my career, when working with parents as head of a nursery, and it began my interest in the home visits that are carried out before children begin nursery. These issues prompted me to undertake this study which was designed to find out the views of nursery staff and parents about home visits.

**Rationale for and design of the studies**

It is clear that home visiting of pre-school children is considered beneficial both to children and to their parents. There is some research evidence about ongoing schemes of visiting where visits are made regularly over a period of time (e.g. Hannon and Nutbrown, 1997), but there is very little empirical evidence to support the beneficial effects of a single home visit to a child before entry to nursery, nor of any appropriate training for early years staff who carry out these visits. The home visit is often the first contact a practitioner may have with a child and his or her family and is a unique opportunity to lay the foundations for partnership with parents, yet staff may not have received adequate training to enable them to utilize this opportunity.
This is a small exploratory study in two parts. Part 1 was designed to pursue these issues by using a questionnaire survey to gain some basic information about the extent and nature of home visiting. Part 2 followed this up by conducting in-depth interviews with a small sample nursery practitioners (2a) and several parents (2b). Part 2a aimed to gain more in-depth information about the staff who carry out home visits and included questions about reasons for visiting, safety aspects and perceived benefits for both practitioners and parents. Part 2b aimed to investigate parents’ views of home visits to find out whether they understood the reasons for the visits and if their views were similar to those of the staff. The study also aimed to discover how much both parents and children remembered of the visits and whether they considered the visits beneficial.

Ethical issues relating to informed consent (Cohen et al., 2007) were considered. All research participants were assured both verbally and in writing, of confidentiality in reporting. The demands and potential benefits of the study were explained verbally and accepted by participants.

Part 1: Questionnaire survey

Participants and method

A single-page questionnaire survey was devised and sent to staff at all the maintained nurseries ($N = 60$) in a county in southeast England. The questionnaire was designed to fulfil three specific purposes:

- To find out whether home visiting was standard practice:
- To determine which members of staff carried out the visits:
- To find out how many members of staff went on each visit.

It consisted of four closed questions eliciting information about when and where the visits took place, who was visited, and which members of staff carried out the visits.

Results of questionnaires

A total of 52 questionnaires was returned, providing a response rate of 86 percent. Eighty-one percent of those who responded did carry out home visits. Sixty-nine percent of the nurseries visited all the children who would attend their nurseries and 12 percent visited only some of the children. Some of the respondents gave reasons for this with explanations such as: ‘other children are visited within their pre-school setting’ and ‘all parents are offered a home visit’. Only four percent of the nurseries demonstrated an element of choice about whether parents would be visited. Staff carried out the visits alone in only one percent of the nurseries. The remainder visited in pairs, with one of the pair being a qualified teacher who was a member of the nursery staff. Other members of staff who may accompany them included nursery nurses, teaching assistants, special needs assistants or the child’s key person.

Part 2a: Teacher interviews

Participants and method

One-to-one semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight early years practitioners from different nursery settings, who carried out home visits to children before they started nursery school.
An interview schedule was drawn up and a time limit of one hour was set for each interview. The interview schedule was designed to gain in-depth information about the home visits and the reasons for carrying out these visits. All the practitioners interviewed had carried out home visits before the children started nursery, and five of these practitioners had recently carried out their first visits, and so it was hoped that they would have a clear recollection of these visits. The interviews were transcribed and themes were identified in the transcripts. The quotes used were selected from these themes and are representative of the comments made by the participants.

**Results**

The first two questions asked for information about practitioners’ qualifications and their home visiting experience.

All those interviewed visited in pairs and cited safety as the main reason for doing so. Two of these practitioners had visited alone in previous settings. One very experienced teacher said: ‘When I had a nursery in B . . . I visited on my own. We didn’t think of it as being a worry’ and another when asked if she visited on her own said:

> Well yeah … I did but not now. I think … well, I said to my colleague in my other school ‘you shouldn’t go on your own, you know,’ and she said ‘no’ so now I’m not doing it on my own. Safety is a big worry.

The second reason for visiting in pairs concerns the way the staff organized their time in the home and was given by three of those interviewed. One practitioner summed it up thus:

> . . . we see our visit priority as twofold: one is to get to know the child and the other gives the opportunity for the adult to talk to parents.

A third reason for visiting in pairs was given by two of those interviewed who were worried that there should be another member of staff present in case parents later queried something that had been said on the visit:

> That’s why I said from the beginning we’d always go in twos . . . the fact that you’ve got someone there to back up that you said this and you didn’t say that. Touch wood so far we haven’t had someone who said: ‘you said this and this’ but you do have to be enormously careful about what has been said.

Four practitioners emphasized the fact that home visits helped families to feel that the school was more approachable so they were able to talk to staff when their children started nursery. Two mentioned home school partnership:

> It sets the tone for us actually valuing the parents, the whole partnership thing.

All the teachers interviewed said the visits were beneficial. They described the advantages of being able ‘to see the children in their home environment’. Some stated at length that they were not wanting ‘to pry’ and others that they told parents: ‘we’re not coming to see if you’ve done the washing up’. There was a general uneasiness that parents felt teachers were home visiting to do just that. One stated:

> We’ve got written in our policy about not making judgements but you keep a mental note of it but you don’t record it anywhere.
Four practitioners described the advantages in knowing where the children lived, such as ‘a high-rise block or a trailer’, as it indicated available play space both inside and out. All those interviewed said the visits allowed them to compare behaviour at school with that of home:

Sometimes you begin to get a picture if this is a shy child or they’re very outgoing, just how they cope with people they don’t know. The chances are if they are very very shy on their home territory and hiding behind the sofa you know this is a child that may take longer to settle.

Six of the eight staff interviewed spoke of anxiety when they first started home visiting:

I was very, very nervous. I was the teacher; I’d never done it before. I was in an area I didn’t know but luckily I had a very experienced nursery nurse who had done it before and she showed me the ropes.

Two practitioners mentioned being surprised that parents had been ‘hoovering all morning’ and many parents think ‘it’s like someone’s coming to look at my house’. One practitioner stressed that she had not considered the visits from the parents’ points of view at all. Three claimed to have felt surprise about the homes that were visited:

I hadn’t realized how different it is for some people. It wasn’t just that some of the houses weren’t clean but everything about it … the smell, the whole thing … it was a shock to me.

They mentioned the questionnaires used suggesting they used them as props to alleviate their anxiety:

It helps to have the questions to ask at first because people start talking then.

In preparation for their visits, five practitioners used structured questionnaires that changed little from year to year: these questionnaires asked for information about the child. Three of the practitioners mentioned questions about allergies and emergency contact numbers. Three of the practitioners used semi-structured questionnaires. There were some standard questions such as whether the child had allergies and emergency contact numbers but there was an opportunity for flexibility. Their questionnaires were ‘evolving all the time’, and one stated that there was no list of questions; she asked questions such as:

is there anything you want to know, anything you want to talk to us about?

Time was the most significant problem for all those interviewed. All carried out visits at the beginning of the autumn term when the nursery was closed for two weeks longer than the rest of the school. The nursery practitioners visited all the children who were about to begin nursery, which could be as many as sixty visits in two weeks. Two of the practitioners in the study suggested that it was difficult to remember relevant details when so much was being done in a short time.

Finally, three of those interviewed, mentioned that children settled better when they started school because they had met the staff. The visits:

made parents think teachers are actually normal people!

c) Four practitioners stated that their visits had changed very little; they asked the same questions as they had when they started visiting, while three of those questioned said they were not as anxious as they had been when they began visiting:
The main thing is, we’re much more relaxed about it and I think it helps them [the parents] to be relaxed about it. I think it’s that we just got better at it; we’ve got more confident.

One of the teachers stressed her need to reflect on practice:

The main thing is being clear about why you’re going and not think you’re going to dig deep into family life. If you come away having established … well you can’t call it a relationship ’cos relationships aren’t built up that quickly but that home link; that is huge and is huge for the children.

All eight teachers stated that training for home visiting would have alleviated their anxiety when they began visiting and one made suggestions:

I think about making sure people aren’t making assumptions, making sure people have a chance to think through why they are going and what information would be useful . . . getting people so they think for themselves why am I doing this?

**Study 2b: Parent interviews**

**Participants and method**

Five parents, all of whom were mothers who had received home visits before their children started nursery, were interviewed in their own homes using a semi-structured interview schedule (see Appendix 2b). These parents were all volunteers from the same nursery. This was the only nursery that was happy for me to interview any of the parents who volunteered. Though there could be many disadvantages in interviewing parents from the same setting, especially if they volunteered rather than being chosen at random, this was done for reasons of time and convenience. Some of the practitioners in the other nurseries offered to find ‘suitable’ parents to participate in this study, but these offers were not pursued as it was decided that they may have chosen mothers who related particularly well to them, which may have biased the results. The interviews took place in the parents’ own homes.

**Results**

*Family characteristics.* The number of children in each family ranged between one and four children and all of the children in this study were the youngest in the family. All the families received a home visit in September prior to their children starting nursery.

Two of the five parents were clear about the reasons for the visits. They suggested that the staff came:

- to introduce themselves to us and basically tell us how the school works.

There was an opportunity to:

- get on a personal level with the teachers straight away.

Another parent thought that the visit was:

- kind of to introduce themselves, kind of to see you in your home environment.
while two of the parents expressed concern about the reasons for the visits. They ‘felt a bit dubious’ and wondered if the purpose was ‘to be nosey’. They suggested the visits were to look at the home environment.

All the parents remembered that two members of staff had visited. Three of the parents were pleased their children had been able to interact with staff, and had felt reassured that their children would be happier settling in. Two of the parents stated that they ‘saw no purpose in the visit’, one describing her memory of the visit as ‘a waste of time’.

Three of the five parents cited benefits from the home visits, one saying she would recommend a home visit, whilst the remaining two considered there were no benefits at all from the visits. One described waiting all morning as no time had been given for the visit and another parent suggested that an interview at school would have been preferable.

Three parents stated that they were not surprised to be offered a home visit and that nothing unexpected happened during the visit. One parent discussed surprise about the visit, suggesting ‘they’re coming viewing to see what you’re like’ and this made her uncomfortable. She thought staff were looking at her behaviour rather than visiting her son.

Three of the parents stated that they would recommend home visits to others, two said they would not make recommendations, and one emphasized the lack of choice about the visit:

Personally I would have liked the choice. I felt you had no option. If you wanted your child to go to that school that was what happened. That was the way it was.

**Perceived views of children.** Two of the parents said that their children still remembered the home visit, and one parent was unsure about her child’s memories of the visit. He never spoke about it at home. Two of the parents claimed that their children had no memories of the visits and one recalled that her daughter had no memory of the visit but even after a reminder.

Three of the parents considered that their children had benefited from meeting their teachers in familiar surroundings before going to nursery:

He had seen his teachers, he was familiar and he knew who his teachers were.

Two of the parents stated that their children had not benefited at all from the home visit. One suggested that her son saw no connection between the visit and the school.

**General discussion**

This small-scale study has used quantitative methods (i.e. a questionnaire) and qualitative methods (i.e. semi-structured interviews) to explore the home visits made to children before they begin nursery. It is important to note that the five parents all came from the same setting but the practitioners were from different settings. The results cannot be generalized because the samples of parents and practitioners is small but there are some interesting findings that are worthy of discussion. The quantitative data show that these visits are standard practice in early childhood settings in this particular area. The main themes arising from the parent and teacher interviews were power, training and time. These themes were identified during data analysis as they arose in the interviews with all of the participants.

**Power and powerlessness**

The practitioners’ power in their relationship with parents is implicit rather than openly stated so this should not be overemphasized and yet there is evidence of the practitioners’ influence over the
parents’. Teachers have a ‘capacity to shape . . . to construct and to normalize’ (Dahlberg et al., 2007), the parents so that they feel obliged to do what they are asked to do. There was no choice about the time of the visits or whether a visit should take place at all. In some settings there were policies to compel parents to agree to a home visit otherwise their child would be unable to attend the setting. The only way that parents could get out of the visit was by being out of the house at the time of the appointment. This demonstrates the power of the practitioners as they assumed that parents would conform, providing a clear example of the teachers’ ‘built in command’ (Vincent and Tomlinson, 1997).

Practitioners were unaware that they made assumptions before they visited some areas but they talked about ‘rough areas’ and ‘the estate’ at the same time as they tried to reassure parents they were not coming ‘to pry’. The arrival of teachers carrying clipboards holding structured questionnaires and wanting to find out information certainly creates an image of officialdom. One teacher’s comments make this clear:

It’s really more of a shock to the parents. A lot of them think you’re going to inspect their house and that’s not what we’re going to do. I think as long as you have a friendly approach and tell them: we’re not here to inspect the house.

Surely even if the intention is not to inspect the house, those visiting would leave each house with some first and lasting impressions especially when these differed from the practitioners’ own experiences. The statement quoted earlier about teachers ‘keeping a mental note’ is reminiscent of the findings of Tizard et al. (1981) that teachers were anxious not to be seen as ‘interfering busybodies’.

One parent likened waiting for the practitioner’s visit to ‘waiting for the gas man’ indicating that she certainly did not have ‘the mutual respect that is vital in a partnership’ (Keyes, 2002). The parents in this case are obliged to be passive (Phillips and Bredekamp, 1998) and even though the practitioners do not always realize it, they hold all the power before the visit has even begun. The fact that there was very little explanation of reasons for these visits appeared to increase the powerless felt by the parents who were unclear about why the visits were taking place, some practitioners again were aware of this but unsure how to approach the problem. Mutual trust, which is vital (Keyes, 2002), may not exist here and parents’ views provided similar images to those of the mothers visited by Health Visitors seen to be ‘supporting and policing mothers’ (Cowley et al., 2004).

Two of the parents were happy with the visits and praised the practitioners. These could be the ‘good parents’ (Vincent, 1996) who formed relationships easily with the professionals because they have similar backgrounds to the professionals. They were happy with the visits and formed good relationships with their practitioners.

Training

Teachers and practitioners receive very little training to work with parents. The Standards for the award of Qualified Teacher Status (TTA, 2003) state that individuals awarded teacher status must demonstrate that:

They can communicate sensitively and effectively with parents and carers, recognizing their roles in pupils’ learning, and their rights responsibilities and interests in this. (p. 8)

Opportunities for interacting with parents ‘may arise’ and there ‘may be’ an opportunity to make a home visit. If working with parents is so important, it should presumably be given higher priority in training. Much has been written about the need for nursery teachers to receive ‘initial and in-service
training which equips them to work sensitively and effectively with adults as well as children’ (Edgington, 1998). The training of other Early Years practitioners also includes little training to work with parents though some settings such as Pen Green provides training for all practitioners. The PEAL (Parents and Early Learning) project provides training for early years practitioners to work with parents and this includes home visiting. Training is essential for teachers and early years practitioners and a process by which some of the concerns I have raised can potentially be addressed. Home school relationships are improving in some nursery settings and are very successful in others such as Pen Green in the UK (Whalley, 2001), where parents are requesting more and more home visits.

Some of the parents in this study highlight those visits that are not successful, and all the teachers admitted that they had been very anxious about the visits. Teachers have tended to treat parents as a homogenous group when parents have different needs and come from diverse backgrounds with different values (Brooker, 2002; Crozier, 1999; Vincent, 1996). More insight is needed about the ways in which visits are carried out; the data that are collected; and about teachers’ own stereotypical beliefs and values, if all visits are to be more successful in improving home school relationships. Training would allow time for this reflection, which may make a difference. As one practitioner in the study demonstrates:

I remember thinking I was more judgemental than I thought. I thought I was very easygoing and I had made assumptions that I thought was true but were not actually true and not helpful at all.

After some years of visiting, the aforementioned practitioner had been able to reflect on the visits and change the way she worked. She is no longer using a structured questionnaire or clipboard but allows the parents to promote their own agenda for the visits. She has been delighted by the change in the responses of the parents. All the teachers interviewed suggested that additional training would help them to reflect on the ways they conducted their visits.

**Time**

Time, or the lack of it, was an issue raised by seven of the teachers interviewed. Time constraints put a considerable strain on teachers endeavouring to make a relationship with parents and child in as little as 10 minutes, and at most 45 minutes. The visits were described in the following ways: ‘emotionally draining’, ‘tiring’, ‘emotional energy’, ‘you come back shattered’. Time constraints can only add to the stress involved. It is unlikely that teachers will have a ‘willingness to listen to families and capitalize on their strengths’ (Sheppard, 2002) if they are permanently aware that time is so limited. Practitioners need time to reflect on their visits so that the information can be assimilated. They also need time to share important facts with other nursery workers. The reason for the visit could be lost if teachers are unable to make use of the information. Three teachers explained that time had been spent collecting information that was never used and was locked away and forgotten soon after being given. One teacher in the study described ‘feeling a bit like a door to door salesman’ when she first started visiting, going from house to house collecting information on a questionnaire in very little time. If she felt this way it is hardly surprising that some parents have similar views.

**Conclusion**

Care must be taken not to over-interpret the findings presented here, as this is a small-scale exploratory study. Many nurseries and primary schools carry out these visits, and they are included in the Early Years Foundation Stage Guidelines (DfES, 2007). A lot more work is necessary to find out if these findings might be replicated in other areas of England, let alone in other countries, and to investigate whether time and money are well spent.
Positive parent–school relationships are considered to be essential (Desforges with Abouchar, 2003) and a good relationship cannot flourish between these two when stereotypical views persist. Wolfendale (1989) wrote that:

Parents are not a homogeneous group or a collective force and it would behove professionals and practitioners to acknowledge the trite but not acted upon observation as to just how much parents represent all facets of society. (p. 5)

These results are interesting and might suggest that there has been little change in over 20 years in the way practitioners and parents work together. This is disquieting on a number of grounds. First, home–school links have been shown to be so important: and second, there is a discrepancy between what the Early Years Foundation Stage Guidelines intends, and what actually happens. Parent partnership and home visits are written into these guidelines but this does not mean they are a reality. Home visits do not take place in all areas of the UK but all practitioners work with parents. The issue of training to work with parents is very important, not only for those who work in maintained nurseries but also for practitioners working in daycare and children’s centres. It would be worth investigating with a bigger sample so these issues could be explored further. This should be the beginning and not the end of the matter.

Appendix 1: Home Visiting Questionnaire
Name and address of nursery …………………………………………….
……………………………………………………………………………..
Date………………………..
Number of children in nursery …………

1. Are home visits carried out before children begin nursery? (please circle correct answer)
   YES
   NO

2. Which children receive these visits?
   ALL
   SOME
   NONE

3. Do staff make the visits:
   ALONE
   IN PAIRS

4. Which members of staff carry out the visits?
   NURSERY LEADER/ MANAGER
   CHILD’S KEY PERSON
   NURSERY NURSE
   OTHER (Please state)

Appendix 2a: Teacher interview schedule
1. What is your job title?
2. Have you been working in this setting for long?
   Prompt: qualifications?
   Specific early years training?
3. Can we talk about your home visits?
   Prompt: Can you tell me about the reasons for your visits?
   When do you carry out these visits?

4. How do you feel these visits have benefited the families?

5. How do you feel the visits have benefited you?

6. Can you tell me about anything that isn’t working too well?
   Prompt: Problems
   Can you expand?

7. Think back to the first visits you made. How did you feel?
   (Prompt: confident
   concerned)

8. What do you remember most?
   (Prompt: cultural differences
   housing conditions
   welcome
   threat to personal safety)

9. Can you tell me of any ways you prepared for home visiting before you visited?

10. Would you change anything now?

11. Have you any advice to give to someone who is about to carry out his/her first home visit?

Appendix 2b: Parent/carer interview schedule

1. How many children do you have?

2. What are their ages?

3. When did you receive a home visit from your child’s nursery?

4. Why do you think the teacher visited you and your child at home?

5. What do you remember most about the visit?

6. What do you think your child remembers most about the visit?

7. What benefits did the visit have for you?

8. What benefits did the visit have for your child?

9. Can you tell me anything that was unexpected about the visit?

10. Can you tell me anything you would recommend to others about home visits?

11. Can you tell me anything you did not like about the home visit?
References


