

Institution: Institute of Education
Unit of Assessment: 25
Title of case study: The Effective Pre-School, Primary and Secondary Education (EPPSE) project: A better start for children
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

EPPSE is a Government-funded, high profile, longitudinal study with a multi-disciplinary design and numerous outputs, almost unprecedented in the UK in terms of its scale and scope. It has become a seminal study of the influence of early education on children's later development. Findings have been used in the UK and internationally for:

- national policy and spending – the expansion of pre-school provision and supporting families, especially the disadvantaged;
- curriculum design – National Curriculum and early childhood education guidelines;
- service delivery – audits of the quality of pre-school;
- professional practice – enhancing practitioners' understanding of 'effective' pedagogy;
- social equity – national and international programmes concerning social justice.

The two Principal Investigators at the IOE have taken lead roles in all of the above.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)
--

Programme: The team – IOE: Professor Iram Siraj-Blatchford, Brenda Taggart (PIs) and the analyses team. University of Oxford: Professor Kathy Sylva, (IOE 1990-1996), Professor Pam Sammons (IOE 1993-2005) and Professor Edward Melhuish (Birkbeck).

Context: EPPSE was funded in 1997 following concerns about children's 'school readiness' at age 5 and what influences their subsequent progress and development. EPPSE represents a major investment in research by the Department for Education (DfE). Initially begun as a study of pre-schooling it has, through large extensions and sub-studies, morphed into a major and broader programme of research. In addition to studying pre-school, schools and families, EPPSE has examined effective pedagogical practices, phase transitions, the impact of multiple disadvantage and how children 'succeed against these odds'.

Methodology: EPPSE is an innovative, large-scale mixed-method programme of research. Researchers monitored more than 3,000 children from age three to their post-16 destinations, exploring what influences their academic and social-behavioural development. Performance, attitudinal and administrative data plus a vast amount of information from parents/carers, pre-school workers and teachers were used to create individual child trajectories. Multilevel analysis was used to isolate the independent variables significant in explaining variations in outcomes, adopting an 'educational effectiveness' methodology that sees children nested in families and schools. Intensive case studies/classroom observations and interviews were used to unpack 'effective' practices in primary and pre-schools.

Key findings:

Pre-school: The first robust evidence in the UK of the positive and enduring (till age 14) benefits of high quality pre-school that can ameliorate some effects of social disadvantage. EPPSE identified the relationships between structural (e.g. staff qualifications) and process (e.g. adult/child interactions) characteristics that make a difference to child outcomes. Using the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Extension (ECERS-E, see reference **R6**), an observation scale developed by EPPSE, and case study information, the research described high quality and highlighted specific practices prevalent in effective settings.

Child and family factors: The first UK study to compare the influence of different background characteristics on children's development. Findings highlighted the importance of the early years home learning environment separate from other family factors such as mother's qualifications, social class etc., all of which play an important part in a child's success. It has uniquely studied children who 'succeed against the odds' (**R1**), and the role of children's peers, families, schools and the wider community in tackling disadvantage and under-achievement. Children who

Impact case study (REF3b)

succeeded against the odds had families that ‘actively cultivated’ their children and teachers who were sensitive in providing additional support when needed.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- R1: Siraj-Blatchford, I. (2010) Learning in the home and at school: How working class children “succeed against the odds”, *British Educational Research Journal*, 36(3) 428-463.
- R2: Siraj-Blatchford, I. (2008) Understanding the relationship between curriculum, pedagogy and progression in learning in early childhood, *Hong Kong Journal of Early Childhood Education*, 7(2) 6-13.
- R3: Siraj-Blatchford, I., Taggart, B., Sylva, K., Sammons, P. and Melhuish, E. (2008) Towards the transformation of practice in early childhood education: The effective provision of pre-school education (EPPE) project, in *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 38(1), 23–36.
- R4: Taggart, B., Siraj-Blatchford, I., Sylva, K., Melhuish, E. and Sammons, P. (2008) Influencing policy and practice through research on Early Childhood Education, *International Journal of Early Childhood Education*, 14(2), 7-21.
- R5: Sylva, K., Siraj-Blatchford, I. and Taggart, B. (2011 Fourth Edition) *ECERS-E The Four Curricular Subscales Extension to the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-R)*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Main grants: 1997–2003, EPPE 3-7 (£1,756,795); 1997–2008, EPPE 3-11 (£2,731,620); 2008 – 2011 EPPSE 3-14 (£2,121,083) and 2011–2014 EPPSE 16+ (£1,505,807). Grantholders: Siraj-Blatchford and Taggart (IOE), Sylva and Sammons (Oxford), Melhuish (Birkbeck).

Indicators of quality:

IQ1: (R1) was Winner, *BERJ* Article of the Year 2010.

IQ2: Philippa Cordingley, chief executive of the Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education (CUREE)¹ said of EPPSE in the IOE’s 2012 research brochure: “The quality of the work is outstanding, and really interesting and useful for teachers. There’s something completely compelling about the mix of types of data, the rigour in the analysis, the commitment to researching over the long haul and the clarity of focus on the young people’s learning and development and the work of those who support them.”

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Dates of impact: Impacts between 2008 and 2013 extend the reputation and influence earned in earlier phases of the study. A high point is the extension of free pre-school provision to all three- and four-year-olds in 2010.

Principal beneficiaries: Children aged 2-5 through universally delivered and targeted pre-school provision (for children needing extra help – some 20% of the child population, i.e. about 130,000 youngsters a year); practitioners in early years settings; local and national policy-makers in the UK and abroad.

Reach and significance: EPPSE changed thinking and practice relating to pre-school entitlement, pedagogy, curriculum and teacher education. Citations by international NGOs such as UNICEF and UNESCO attest to its global reach. The project improved the prospects of generations of children by highlighting the home and educational factors that make a difference to child outcomes, especially for disadvantaged children. EPPSE can therefore point to high levels of instrumental impact² (influencing policy and/or practice), conceptual impact (enhancing general understanding and informing debate) and capacity building, as evidenced below.

Instrumental impact: Policy: EPPSE has influenced many major policy decisions affecting young children (R4). Since 2008 it has been referred to in seven Parliamentary debates or supporting evidence, six DfE Research Strategies, five National Childcare Strategies, 19 major Policy Reviews and four UNESCO/UNICEF reports. The researchers have advised Ministers and civil servants including those from the National Audit Office (NAO), HM Treasury (HMT) and Department for Education (DfE), and Parliamentary select committees. Findings have been used

¹ CUREE helps practitioners access and use research in their everyday practice.

² Using Evidence: How Research can Inform Public Services (Nutley, S., Walter, I., Davis, H. 2007)

Impact case study (REF3b)

by local authorities across the UK and all four UK national governments. EPPSE reports are consistently in the top 10 downloads on the DfE publications website.

Pre-school: EPPSE findings have underpinned all HM Treasury Comprehensive Spending Reviews and National Childcare Strategies since 2000. The most significant impact has been derived from reporting the benefits of high quality pre-school, which led to free provision for all 3 and 4-year-olds, starting in 2010.

- The NAO (2012, p 13, **S1**) used EPPSE to justify increasing investment in early years.
- The Government's *More Great Childcare* cites EPPSE findings on 'what works' in raising quality (2013, p 15, **S2**) in the context of a £5 billion-a-year expenditure in early education through 525,000 additional childcare places, cumulatively benefitting 1.1 million children since 2004, in addition to 2,599 new Children's Centres, 1,279 new Neighbourhood Nurseries (realised in 2010), tax credits and employer supported childcare. The document sets out a new 10-year childcare plan and uses the EPPSE evidence as a building block.
- EPPSE evidence underpins the decision in 2010 to extend free entitlement to the poorest 40% (some 260,000) of two-year-olds in 2014 (**S3**).

Social justice, Success Against the Odds and the Home Learning Environment: Many recent major policy reviews on poverty and life chances (e.g. Field, **S4** and Allen, **S5**) have used EPPSE evidence to promote policies to improve the prospects of disadvantaged children through early interventions. Field quotes the now epigrammatic EPPSE finding that "What parents do is more important than who parents are". The Government cites EPPSE evidence (**R1**) in its response (**S7** p 62) to these reviews.

Instrumental impact: Practice: EPPSE findings have been used extensively to support developments in initial teacher and practitioner training, especially in maths and literacy. Edexcel in its A2 Psychology textbook (2009) uses EPPSE to demonstrate how research is applied to the real world. The most significant impact has been on the early years curriculum, pedagogy and the development of the workforce.

Pre-school quality: EPPSE clearly identifies aspects of pre-school quality that relate to child outcomes leading to profound impacts on practice. The ECERS-E scale, developed by EPPSE PIs at the IOE (**R5**), is used for quality assurance by approximately 70 English LAs, evidenced by the National ECERS network. Field's 2010 Government-commissioned report (**S4**) on child poverty recommends its national implementation and the NAO (2012, p 32, **S1**) reported the scales were the third most useful measure used by LAs to assess quality, with 92% of LAs finding it very or fairly useful. ECERS-E is also used by countless pre-schools for self-assessment and CPD. More than 1,000 UK teachers have been trained in its use. Practitioner forums discuss the scale's utility and sales have exceeded 25,000 copies since 2008. It has been translated into many languages. Advisers to the US Government (Snow and Van Hemel) explored the use of the ECERS-E in their 2008 report: *Early Childhood Assessment: Why, What, and How?*

Effective early years curriculum and pedagogy: The EPPSE case studies of 'effective' pre-schools have had an extensive impact on practice. Findings underpinned the original Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS, 2008) and its revision in 2012 (**R2, R3**). Tickell's independent review of the EYFS (**S7**) discussed the role of the family and references EPPSE: "Good quality early years provision has the next largest impact on children's development by the age of 5. The evidence strongly shows that this is particularly important for disadvantaged children... this good practice must continue". When the Government announced the expansion of Teach First into the early years EPPSE was the only research cited in the press release. Many practices identified by EPPSE are now taken for granted as 'best practice' in the UK and abroad. The term 'sustained shared thinking' (SST), identified in the EPPSE case studies, is now part of the everyday language of early pedagogy. An Amazon search in June, 2013 reveals 179 books containing the phrase (up from 21 in 2008), including National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) revision guides, training materials for EY practitioners, EYFS guidance and advanced textbooks. Materials to support SST have been developed by organisations such as Early Education, Montessori, *TES* online and the British Association for Early Childhood Education.

Improving the workforce: Findings about staff qualifications and quality have been used extensively to improve the quality of the workforce. HMT cites EPPSE evidence in justifying the £125m Transformation Fund that sought to "ensure that all full daycare settings are led by a graduate qualified early years professional ... and there will be a single qualification framework and greater opportunities for existing workers to increase their skills". The independent Nutbrown review (2012

Impact case study (REF3b)

S8) on qualifications made extensive reference to EPPSE to justify changes to the current qualification framework. Evidence from EPPSE was also used in 2013 by the Deputy Prime Minister and early years organisations to counter Ministerial proposals to alter adult-child ratios in early childhood provision. EPPSE has also influenced CPD. EPPSE has the most downloaded research web pages on the IOE website, the DFE has produced five 'Research Bites' on EPPSE circulated to primary schools in England, and CUREE's evidence-informed information for teachers also cites EPPSE.

Conceptual impact: EPPSE has raised the nation's awareness and understanding of the importance of early years education. The research has regular press coverage in national and professional journals and the broadcast media, and its findings form an essential part of the debate about home (**S9**) and pre-school effects.

International impact: The international reach is exemplified in UNESCO (2008): *The contribution of early childhood education to a sustainable society* (**S10**), Australia's first national Early Years Learning Framework (2009 **S11**) and Brazil's national guidelines for early years education published in 2006 which led to national reforms from 2008 onwards (**S12**). The IOE's PIs are in demand globally as experts on early childhood; they have advised Ministers, practitioners and academics in many countries including Australia, Eire, South Korea, China and Brazil.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact³ (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- S1: National Audit Office (2012), *Delivering the free entitlement to education for three- and four-year-olds*. <http://www.nao.org.uk/report/delivering-the-free-entitlement-to-education-for-three-and-four-year-olds/>
- S2: Department for Education (2013). *More great childcare: Raising quality and giving parents more choice*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/more-great-childcare-raising-quality-and-giving-parents-more-choice>
- S3: DFE/DH (2012) Equity impact assessment: Early Education Entitlement for 2 year olds. <https://www.education.gov.uk/consultations/downloadableDocs/Equalities%20impact%20assessment%20two%20year%20old%20entitlement.pdf>
- S4: Field, F. (2010) *The Foundation Years: Preventing poor children becoming poor adults: Independent Review on Poverty and Life Chances* <http://www.frankfield.com/campaigns/poverty-and-life-changes.aspx>
- S5: Allen, G. (2011) *Early intervention: The next steps: Independent report to Her Majesty's Government*. <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/early-intervention-next-steps.pdf>
- S6: DFE (2011) Supporting Families in the Foundation Years <http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/earlylearningandchildcare/early/a00192398/supporting-families-in-the-foundation-years>
- S7: Dame Clare Tickell, (2011) *The Early Years: Foundations for life, health and learning: Independent Report on the Early Years Foundation Stage to Her Majesty's Government* http://www3.hants.gov.uk/the_tickell_review_the_early_years_-_foundations_for_life_health_and_learning.pdf
- S8: Nutbrown, C. (2012). *Foundations for Quality: The independent review of early education and childcare qualifications: Final Report*. <http://www.education.gov.uk/nutbrownreview>
- S9: Wheeler, H. and Connor, J. (2010) *Parents, Early Years and Learning* London: National Children's Bureau. http://peal.org.uk/media/1575/Activities_bookletV3_LoRes.pdf
- S10: UNESCO (2008): *The contribution of early childhood education to a sustainable society*. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001593/159355E.pdf>
- S11: Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations for the Council of Australian Governments (2009), *Belonging, Being & Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* http://files.acecqa.gov.au/files/National-Quality-Framework-Resources-Kit/belonging_being_and_becoming_the_early_years_learning_framework_for_australia.pdf
- S12: Brasil. Ministério Da Educação. Parâmetros Nacionais de Qualidade para a Educação Infantil. Brasília, MEC/SEB, 2006. <http://portal.mec.gov.br/seb/arquivos/pdf/Educinf/eduinfparqualvol1.pdf>

³ All web links accessed 17/10/13