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| <p>Institution: Birmingham City University</p> |
| <p>Unit of Assessment: 25 – Education</p> |
| <p>Title of case study: Early Years Education</p> |
| <p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>A corpus of research developed over twenty years brings together experience and expertise of staff, students and researchers at Birmingham City University in the Early Years (EY) cluster. This has had effects on practice in contexts in which national and international EY policy, leadership and pedagogy are developed and produced, enacted and contested. It has affected specific areas of learning and development, e.g. mathematics, including thinking skills, creativity, information and communications technology.</p> <p>Research that was policy, programme and issue-focused has stimulated discussion and action, locally, nationally and internationally, for instance in Europe, Central and South-east Asia and Australia.</p> |
| <p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Research over the previous RAE period has continued to have an impact up until the present. Impacts are derived from an approach that is collaborative and participative, focuses on issues of concern to stakeholders, is grounded in an analytical account of the state of current public knowledge and of interest to other researchers and practitioners, as a result of gathering and analysing relevant and trustworthy evidence.</p> <p>CRE's approach to EY research can be characterised by an ESRC study (2005-2006) investigating EY leadership that has contributed to the REF corpus (Aubrey <i>et al.</i>, 2013). Professionals and researchers pool knowledge and research questions before joint implementation and dissemination. User groups become first and primary beneficiaries. A case-study approach using twelve sites and multiple methods (survey, interview and video vignettes) documented realities of leading EY settings. Different leadership roles emerged and different working styles associated with training and qualifications. Fundamental was moment-by-moment thinking and decision-making, creating a tacit knowledge or 'practical intelligence' not part of a formal knowledge-base. Two subsequent studies, sponsored by Creative Partnerships, Arts Council, England and British Educational and Communications Technology Agency [Becta] (both Aubrey and Dahl, 2013) utilised the same model. The former demonstrated the benefits in terms of teaching and learning of artists working with teachers in EY classrooms, generated networks and led to new ways of working. The latter made policy recommendations on the use of new technologies in the EY Foundation Stage to Becta as a government agency. Stakeholders reviewed evidence on collaborative partnerships between artists and teachers and the impact on children's creative responses in one and the use of new technologies in the other. Both identified and explored relationships between current EY curriculum guidelines, children's access to and possibilities of developing more creative and active pedagogies.</p> <p>CRE's EY research addressed key questions related to policy, process and outcome related to UNICEF's family education programme in Uzbekistan, based on both quantitative and qualitative approaches, specifically targeting reported behavioural change brought about at household level. Impact data were compared with baseline data on major indicators of health and nutrition, early learning, family relations and child protection. This informed future programme directions for 2010-2015. Later, Aubrey (2012) used post-colonial theory as a tool to uncover the complexity and multiplicity of historical and cultural forces at play, with local Islamic and Uzbek traditions overlaid with Soviet early learning and development methods that collided with Western notions of 'developmentally-appropriate practice' of donors.</p> <p>Another significant piece of work was the Esmée Fairbairn funded thinking-skills-in-mathematics project (Aubrey <i>et al.</i>, 2012) that used a BCU practitioner conference as a springboard and was stimulated by previous international investigations of early numeracy (Aunio <i>et al.</i>, 2008). Applying number knowledge in real-world problem-solving had most stable predictive value. A case-study approach used multiple methods (interview, observation and assessment) to investigate two thinking-skills programmes in schools in England and Wales over 2009-2012. Conditions</p> |

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supporting change and sustainability included: national policy; high-quality professional development and a whole-school approach; with coaching, systematic observation and feedback (Aubrey et al., 2012). A visiting Chinese scholar benefited from placement with Aubrey to learn about thinking skills programmes and these were subsequently developed and influenced pedagogic practice of teaching and learning in Mainland China.

Meanwhile, a review of UK EY policy structures, inputs, processes and outcomes to prevent early school-leaving has been prepared for the European Commission. A first and second interim report from member states have been submitted and will contribute to recommendations for actions at European and national level to improve effectiveness of ECEC services.

A nascent well-being and landscape study using the model with BCU Education and Art and Design staff, students and nature-reserve officers is now considering how adults might mediate, build upon or transfer children's experience and/or appreciation of the natural environment.

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

Aubrey, C. and Dahl, D. (2013) Creative Partnerships: Image and Text, *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 9, August, p. 1-15 (ISSN.

Aubrey, C., Godfrey and R. Harris, A. (2013) How do they manage? An investigation of Early Childhood Leadership. *Educational Management, Administration and Leadership*, 21, (1), 5-29. (ISSN 1741-1432).

Aubrey, C., Ghent, K. and Kanira, E. (2012) Enhancing Thinking Skills in Early Childhood. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 20, (4), 332-348. (ISSN 0966-9760).

Aubrey, C. and Durmaz, D (2012) Policy to practice in reception class mathematics. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 20, (1), 59-77. (ISBN 0966-9760).

Aunio, P., Aubrey, C., Godfrey, R., Yuejuan, P. and Liu, Y. (2008) Children's early numeracy in Mainland China, England and Finland, *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 16, (3), 203-221. (ISSN 0966-9760). (Now selected to appear in academic work entitled *Early Childhood Education I*. Siraj-Blatchford and A. Mayo, (Eds.) London: Sage, October, 2011)

Aubrey, C. (2012) Early childhood care and education in Uzbekistan. In T. Papatheodorou (Ed.) *Debates on Early Childhood Policies and Practices: Global Snapshots of Pedagogical Thinking and Encounters*. London: Routledge. ISBN: 978-0-415-69100-0 (HB); 978-0-0415-69101-7 (PB); 978-0-203-15795-4 (ebook).

Recent Grants which have contributed to the approach to impact adopted by the EY cluster include:

- European Commission, DG Education and Culture (2012) Study on the Effectiveness of Early Childhood Education and Care in Preventing Early School Leaving (with PI, Public Policy and Management Institute), Lithuania, €2,300.
- Esmée Fairbairn Foundation (2010-2013) Cognition in Mathematics. £86,700
- United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF (2010) Evaluation of a Family Education Programme in Uzbekistan. \$18,235.
- British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (BECTA) (2008) Review on the Evidence of ICT in the Early Years Foundation Stage. £20,000
- Creative Partnerships/Arts Council England (2008) Early Years Practitioners as Researchers. £4,200; Working with Artists in Children's Centres (2006-2008) £15,000.

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

As noted above, impact was derived from the participatory approach adopted, in which education stakeholders, as main beneficiaries were centrally involved in questions asked, design and implementation, study interpretation and dissemination. The impact case study thus brings together findings of trustworthy studies on a significant topic of concern to those most affected, then disseminated through user-friendly reports and conferences and local networks, as well as fully peer-reviewed papers. The aim has been to inform critical thinking of stakeholders, stimulate discussion and worthwhile education action, to offer a new perspective, locally, nationally and

internationally. In accordance with the CRE's approach to impact, *policy-makers* have been impacted upon directly. As have *leaders* and *teaching and learning*. This has been achieved by building on major beneficiaries of professional organisations, education professionals and students, locally, nationally and internationally.

The intention has been to increase critical understanding of the interplay between policy and practice within political, ideological and educational contexts that are complex, situated and interactive; and to contribute new conceptualisations and understandings.

The work for UNICEF aimed to provide reliable, accurate and comprehensive quantitative and qualitative data on the impact, achievements and constraints of a family education programme (2005-2009) to assist the Government of Uzbekistan and generated relevant recommendations for further programme directions (for 2010-2015) at national, regional and community level. Upscaling the project from regional to national level, ensured that key informants were major beneficiaries, in this case, government ministers, regional, district and local officials but primarily by empowering families and communities with knowledge and skills to ensure that they thrived.

'... Provision of reliable, accurate and comprehensive data on the working of UNICEF's Family Education Project (FEP) for the Government of Uzbekistan with broad aim of family empowerment and increasing families' knowledge of child-rearing practices through community volunteers' [Advisor for UNICEF]. At a subsequent British Academy-sponsored conference it provided an inspirational example for practitioners contemplating their own policy-to-practice interface at a time of economic decline that challenged upgrading of existing EY provision, (Aubrey, 2012).

Impact has been enhanced by an explicit strategy to engage major beneficiaries from the start and throughout the research process. The ESRC-funded EY leadership project has had a continuing impact that served as a model for projects undertaken in the REF period. Development of training materials formed the basis for uptake by a wider group of professionals, disseminated through local and national conferences held by British Association for Early Childhood Education (2008) and EY Workforce Group (2009).

The research has informed and continues to inform iterations of the NPQICL programme (National College for Teaching and Leadership, 2008, 2010, 2013-in progress). The textbook (Aubrey, 2011) is a key text nationally used by NPQICL participants and is still one of the few leadership textbooks where the children's centre leaders voice is central. The book is also widely used to support leadership research at Master's level.

An invited keynote at a professional Round Table conference was hosted by Universities of Griffith, Deakin and Melbourne (2009) to *'...contribute concepts relevant to multi-agency leadership to local multi-agency teams ... interrogate their practice ... inform implementation strategies to promote health.'* [conference organiser and chief investigator on project with colleagues from Griffith University] and professional seminars were organised by international educational organisations Learning Capital and Kinderland in Singapore. *'...Influences policy debate, increases practitioners' and leaders' ... critical understanding... encourages practitioners to continue professional development and upgrade skills through accreditation'* CEO, KLC Singapore].

Invitations to write for professional electronic networks, e.g. the EYP Forum (2009) and the Children's Centre Leader Reader (2012) followed. A single-authored textbook for professionals and NPQICL students is already in its second edition (Aubrey, 2011). Related chapters in nationally-popular EY textbooks also run to further editions (Pugh and Duffy, 2013; Maynard and Thomas, 2014). Most recently, a request was received from the DfE (2013) to comment on EY leadership for the Nutbrown Report (2012) [electronic communication available].

The regional conference that launched the thinking-skills-in-mathematics project (Aubrey *et al.*, 2012) involved one of the original programme designers and distributors to secure an interest in participation by English and Welsh schools. Research questions generated allowed advisers, head teachers, co-ordinators and class teachers to explore, analyse and reflect upon their own professional practice and indeed one head teacher later incorporated findings in an inspection submission. Dissemination of findings at local, national and European practitioner conferences in 2011 raised awareness and a dedicated website to the project has been established. An invitation to write a chapter on EY policy-to-practice mathematics in an influential Australian text has been negotiated in 2013 and participation as distinguished academic in a recent EY policy and practice debate served to increase students' critical understanding of interplay between policy and practice and create a teaching resource that will influence future student groups. A visiting Chinese scholar working with the team on the thinking skills project also applied our model: *'the pedagogical*

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approaching (involving group discussion and problem-solving, critical evaluation of responses and forming independent judgements) was found suitable for Chinese classrooms and developed in Shandong Province [Visiting Scholar, Shandong Broadcast & TV University].

Strategies and questions underpinning the studies that explored the evidence on the use of ICT in the EY and creative partnerships between artists and EY teachers were negotiated with sponsors in advance. Data to be gathered and analysed and dissemination formats were agreed in advance, for the former, a practitioner website and the latter, local teacher workshops, creative networks established and exemplar creative installations constructed.

Meanwhile, at national and European level providing evidence and supporting work of the Commission has contributed to *'developing new data and analysing relevant policies across Europe, providing recommendations for actions to improve effectiveness ECEC services and contribute to comprehensive approach to tackling underachievement'* [PI, European Commission project].

A new project is being planned to capture multi-vocal perspectives of a multi-disciplinary and cross-departmental team of BCU staff and students on an outdoor environment together with nature research officers. In line with the Trust's remit to work towards connected spaces: bigger and better and more joined people, the goal will be towards creating 'connected communities' of researchers, reserve staff, students and children concerned.

In summary, the overall aim has been to inform critical thinking of stakeholders, stimulate discussion and worthwhile education action, and to offer a new perspective, locally and nationally that, over time, has also had an impact internationally, as demonstrated.

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

1. Corroborating Statement, Former UK Government lead adviser for behaviour and attendance in schools. Member of an international team of trainers for UNICEF and the Council of Europe to help countries implement different aspects of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (impact statement on UNICEF project)
2. Corroborating Statement, Conference organiser and chief investigator on project with colleagues from Research Centre for Clinical and Community and Practice Innovation, Griffith University, Queensland (impact statement on multi-agency leadership).
3. Corroborating Statement, CEO, KLC School of Education, Singapore (impact statement on policy, leadership and practice).
4. Corroborating Statement, Visiting scholar, Shandong Broadcast & TV University.
5. Corroborating Statement, PI at Public Policy and Management Institute, Vilnius, Lithuania (impact statement on ECC project).