

<b>Institution: University of Oxford</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: 25 - Education</b>
<b>Title of case study: Shaping Early Years Education Policy and Practice</b>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>The large-scale, longitudinal research on early years education, in particular the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education study, led from Oxford by Sylva and Sammons, has shaped the design, funding and implementation of policy at local, national, and international levels, and has contributed to major shifts in public discourse, and changes in early years practice over the past 15 years. The wide-ranging policy changes shaped by this research have transformed the landscape of early years education, and include: 15 hours/week of free early years education for 3-4 year olds; free early years places for disadvantaged 2 year olds (Two Year Old Offer); the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Curriculum; and major funding (the Graduate Leader Fund) to upgrade the qualifications of preschool staff.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>Early years education research at Oxford is based around the Families, Effective Learning, and Literacy research group (FELL), founded in 1997 by Professor Kathy Sylva, who continues to lead its policy and practice-oriented work on early childhood education, families and parenting, effective learning, and educational policy. Professor Pam Sammons joined the group in 2009, bringing strength in the fields of educational effectiveness and educational leadership, consolidating the longitudinal research of the group, and extending it through primary education. Other current FELL members include: Dr Maria Evangelou (lecturer; employed by Oxford since 2000), Dr Lars Malmberg (lecturer; employed by Oxford since 2002), Sandra Mathers (researcher; since 2002), Dr James Hall (researcher; since 2010), and Dr Arjette Karemaker, Fiona Roberts and Jenny Goff (research officers; employed by Oxford since 2009, 2004 and 2007 respectively).</p> <p>FELL research has two strands: 1) the ‘early intervention’ strand from developmental psychology (led by Sylva) <b>[Section 3: R1-2]</b>; and 2) the ‘effectiveness’ strand from education (led by Sammons) <b>[R3]</b>. Psychology offers a strong empirical basis centering on the mechanisms through which the child’s development is shaped by family and pre-school, especially regarding the child’s intellect and emotions. Educational effectiveness research uses large scale, longitudinal designs to investigate institutional effects (including school and classroom/teacher processes) on children’s educational outcomes. FELL uses quantitative and mixed-method approaches to research, featuring longitudinal studies and experimental interventions. Sylva and colleagues developed several research tools, including the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale – Extended (ECERS-E), a research tool now widely used in early years education research and practice <b>[R4]</b>.</p> <p>Central to the work of FELL, and combining the two strands of research, is the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) research programme (re-named, in 2007, as EPPSE - Effective Pre-school, Primary and Secondary Education 3-16). EPPE is Europe’s largest longitudinal study focused exclusively on the effectiveness of early years education for children’s attainment, progress and development through primary and secondary school <b>[R1-4]</b>. The programme has been led, since its inception, by Sylva, with Sammons leading the quantitative analyses. Data collection and management and the qualitative studies have been led from the Institute of Education, University of London. Since 1997, the programme has tracked 3000 children (and their families and teachers) from entry to preschool (age 3) to the end of compulsory schooling (age 16).</p> <p>Insights from the work of FELL that have led to the impacts described in section 4 centre on the benefits of early education for children’s future success. In particular, the research has identified and documented the features of effective pedagogy and curriculum <b>[R1-2, R5]</b>, the role of staff qualifications <b>[R6]</b>, and the features of educational environments that shape children’s cognitive and socio-behavioural development as assessed at ages 3, 5, 6, 7, 11, 14 and 16 <b>[R1-4]</b>. The research has also highlighted the benefits of early education for two year olds, and the vital role of ‘pedagogical quality’ as a precursor to successful learning at primary and secondary school, especially for disadvantaged children <b>[R1-3]</b>. It has shown how high quality pre-school experience and an academically effective primary school can ameliorate the adverse impact of experiencing early multiple disadvantage on children’s later educational outcomes <b>[R1-3, R7]</b>.</p>
<p><b>3. References to the research</b></p> <p><b>[R1]</b> Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I., &amp; Taggart, B. (Eds.) (2010) <i>Early Childhood Matters: Evidence from the EPPE Project</i>. Oxford: Routledge.</p>

## Impact case study (REF3b)

- [R2] Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford I. & Taggart, B. (2008) *The EPPE Project: Final Report - A Longitudinal Study, 1997-2004*. London: Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). An earlier report was published in 2004.
- [R3] Sammons, P., Anders, Y., Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Siraj-Blatchford, I., Taggart, B., & Barreau, S. (2008) Children's cognitive attainment and progress in English primary schools during Key Stage 2: investigating the potential continuing influences of pre-school education. *Zeitschrift für Erziehungswissenschaft* [Special Issue 11/2008], 179-198.
- [R4] Sylva, K., Siraj-Blatchford, I., & Taggart, B. (2011) *ECERS-E Four curricular sub-scales*. 4th edition. New York: Teachers' College Press.
- [R5] Evangelou, M., Sylva, K., Wild, M., Glenny, G., & Kyriacou, M. (2009) *Early Years Learning and Development: Literature Review*. Nottingham: DCSF Publications. DCSF RR 176.
- [R6] Mathers, S., Ranns, H., Karemaker, A., Moody, A., Sylva, K., Graham, J. & Siraj-Blatchford, I. (2011) *National Evaluation of the Graduate Leader Fund: Research Report 144*. London: DfE.
- [R7] Smith, R., Purdon, S., Mathers, S., Sylva, K., et al (2009) *Early Education Pilot for Two Year Old Children Evaluation*. DCSF Research Report RR134.

**Research funding:** FELL's early years education research has been supported by over £17 million external funding since 1997, incl. £13.5 million from the Department for Education (DfE) and the Department of Health (DH), £3 million from charitable foundations, and the rest from international bodies. FELL has generated a high volume of peer-reviewed publications. Selected grants include: Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P. & Siraj-Blatchford, I. *Effective provision of pre-school education* (EPPE), Department for Education and Employment, 1996-2001 (£1,756,875) Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I., & Taggart, B. *Effective Pre-school, Primary and Secondary Education 3-14 (EPPSE 3-14)*, DCSF/ESRC (TLRP Project), 2007-2011 (£2,121,083), followed by *Effective Pre-school, Primary and Secondary Education 3-16 (EPPSE 3-16)*, DCSF/ESRC (TLRP Project), 2010-2013 (£1,585,807 approx. to Oxford).

#### 4. Details of the impact

Since its inception, EPPE, led by Sylva and Sammons, has involved collaboration with policymakers and users in research design and application. It has maintained a strong media profile and a frequently accessed website (e.g. 10,696 page loads from 4,180 unique visits during the month of Jan 2013). In addition, FELL researchers have engaged in activities aimed at facilitating impact, such as giving evidence to parliamentary inquiries and government consultations, delivering invited speeches to policy events, and taking on consultancy and advisory roles, including contribution to government spending reviews and policy evaluations (e.g. Sylva was a specialist adviser to the House of Commons Select Committee on Education, 2000-10, and a member of the expert panels of the Good Childhood Review, 2008 and the Tickell Review on the Early Years Foundation Stage, EYFS, 2011; Sammons and Sylva are leading the evaluation of the impact and delivery of services in children's centres in England; see also [R6-7]). They have also produced and refined instruments that have shaped the way early years pedagogical quality is measured, and have facilitated their use by Local Authorities (LAs), practitioners, and public bodies. For example, the observational research tool developed by Sylva et al, ECERS-E [R4], is widely used by practitioners, training providers and Local Authorities in the UK and internationally. These activities have led to wide-ranging contributions to specific policy initiatives, to professional development in early years education, and to shifts in policy discourse about early years. The weight given to FELL research in reviews, such as Tickell (2011, EYFS), Field (2010, inequalities in children's development), Bew (2011, national assessment) and Allan (2010, early interventions), shows the sustained relevance of this research to early years policy. Specific initiatives, since 2008, that illustrate this wide and lasting picture of impact include:

##### Free early years education provision

The longitudinal research, in particular the finding that pre-school is associated with cognitive and social behavioural benefits up to age 11 [R1-3], influenced the policy decision in 2010 (enabled by the Education Act 2011) to extend free early years education to 15 hours per week for 3-4 year olds. This led to take up by 1.2 million children (DfE figures, 2011). The National Audit Office (NAO) notes that "*in determining the expected benefits from changing and expanding the entitlement, the Department has set out its own analysis of the likely educational and monetised benefits, drawing on the findings of longitudinal research [EPPE]*"; the EPPE findings underpinning the DfE's decisions are described at length on p.13 of the NAO report [C1].

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The research [R1-2, R7] was used by the government as evidence for the investment of £380m per year to roll out the provision of targeted early education places for disadvantaged two year olds to cover 20% of this group (136,000 children) from September 2013, rising to 40% (260,000 children) from 2014. The DCSF Report [R7] was also used to guide discussion around criteria of quality for eligible providers; two of the 24 questions on which the government consulted prior to introducing the initiative, including those on quality criteria, referenced the research [C2]. The DfE/DH evidence pack [C3] supporting the policy statement about early years education (2011) draws extensively on FELL research in its summary of evidence that “*underpins the government’s vision set out in the overall families in the foundation years policy statement*”, including the free entitlement. For example, publications based on the research [R2, R7] are “key evidence sources” [C3, p.17] cited as underpinning Government’s decision to “offer two year olds from disadvantaged backgrounds the free entitlement to 15 hours early education” [C3, p.9] and entitle 3-4 year olds to 15 hours of free early education a week [C3 p. 41]. The 2011 impact assessment document for the 2 year-old offer repeatedly cites EPPE and [R7] as core sources of research evidence in setting out the rationale for this policy initiative [C4], and identifies benefits such as increased take up of high-quality early education at 3 and 4 years of age and improved cognitive skills among children, leading to lifetime economic benefits. A further impact assessment document used evidence from [R7] to analyse the changes to secondary legislation required for the roll-out of the programme to 40% of disadvantaged two year olds from 2014. The explanatory memorandum accompanying the resulting ‘Regulations for Local Authorities’ states that the policy change is “rooted” in evidence from EPPE [C5, para 7.3] and cites [R2].

The Flying Start programme in Wales was also explicitly linked to EPPE. The 2009-10 Flying Start guidance states that EPPE findings led to two policy decisions: to “provide part-time places for children between the ages of 2 and 3 years”, and to have staff in Flying Start settings “be proactive in helping parents to support their children’s development and learning at home” [C6, para 4 & 52].

#### **The Early Years Foundation Stage Framework**

The EYFS Framework, which came into force in 2008 (based on the Children’s Act, 2006), used EPPE findings, including the insight that “guided play” helps improve children’s literacy and numeracy skills. As stated in the DfE impact assessment documents, “*the EYFS was introduced in response to evidence collected through the EPPE project which showed that access to good quality childcare provision has a lasting positive effect on children’s long-term outcomes*” [C7, p.5].

In 2009, Evangelou was appointed by the DCSF, in view of a governmental review of the EYFS in 2010, to lead a review of the research literature on the development of children, carried out by a team from Oxford University and Oxford Brookes University. The DCSF circulated the resulting report [R5], with a request to share it widely among key stakeholders (including the National Day Nurseries Association, the National Childminding Association, the Pre-school Learning Alliance, the Daycare Trust, 4Children, and the National Children’s Bureau), and featured it in its information sheet to LAs (Dec. 2009). At the DCSF/DfE’s invitation, Evangelou and Sylva presented and discussed findings from the report [R5] with the National Strategies Early Years and the Communication, Language & Literacy Development teams (2010) and with the National Strategies Early Years regional advisers (2011).

The report [R5] underpinned the work of the Tickell Review of the EYFS [C8]. The study was used throughout the Review process; for example, at the interim stakeholder conference of the Review (Dec. 2011) it was part of the core evidence given to the participants as underpinning the Review. The Tickell report [C8] references the study [R5] repeatedly, as well as EPPE research [R2]. It also acknowledges the contribution of Sylva, who was appointed in 2010 to the expert panel of the Tickell Review, a role in which she drew on insights from FELL research [C8].

The evidence base from EPPE and other FELL research continues to underpin the 2012 EYFS framework. The DfE/DH evidence pack for early years policy [C3] cites [R5] as evidence underpinning the 2012 EYFS framework. EPPE findings are also cited at length as evidence of the importance of parental involvement, and of strategies promoting it; of high-quality early education settings, in particular for children from disadvantaged backgrounds; and of the role of play during the foundation stage [C3, pp. 26-27, 34-36, 41].

#### **Developing early years professionalism**

The £305 million Graduate Leader Fund (GLF) was established to train and support early years

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professionals for leadership roles (2007-11). Insights from FELL research about children's improved outcomes in graduate-led pre-school provision contributed to the development of the GLF, its precursor, the Transformation Fund (£250 million, 2006-07), and successor (LAs support via the Early Intervention Fund, since 2011). In 2011, a team led by Mathers was commissioned by the DfE to evaluate the GLF. Their report [R6] was used as evidence for continued investment by Government in graduate leadership for early years [C10]. An article in the October 2011 issue of Early Years Update, written by a Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) official, also highlighted the importance of investing in the workforce as a direct result of the findings of the GLF evaluation. On receipt of the final report, CWDC produced an action plan based on its key findings, which were included in the handbook and induction process for providers of the Early Years Professional Status programme (Jan 2012).

The 2012 Nutbrown Review, commissioned by the DfE, made recommendations for a more professional, Level 3 qualified early years workforce, and for high quality early years leadership. The recommendations stem from a strong argument, based explicitly on EPPE findings, for the importance of high quality early years settings to children's development. The Review report cited a research basis that came largely from EPPE and FELL [C9, p. 14]. The Government's case for policy change, outlined in its response to the Nutbrown Review and in 2013 proposals for early years education, rests on evidence from [R6] and EPPE [C10, p. 12, 15, Appendix].

### A practical and discursive shift in early years policy

The impacts described are a recent selection of a much bigger picture spanning three decades of rigorous research and engagement, shaping policy and practice and transforming policy discourse. In 2008, the Children's Minister referred to Prof Sylva (OBE, 2008, for services to children and families) as "*tremendously influential in shaping government policy in early years education*". Since 1997, "*the main source of analyses of the impact of pre-school provision on child development in the UK is the EPPE Project*" (HM Treasury, 2004, p.65), with "*significant impact on policy development in early years*" (DfES, 2006, p.20). In the recent words of a former senior civil servant, "*anyone who has worked in Britain over the last ten years in the field of early education and care will, whether they know it or not, have been influenced by the EPPE Project. Indeed, many people currently employed in early years services owe the fact of their employment, at least in part, to the findings from this remarkable research... The landscape of early years education and care has been transformed in the last ten years. The research eloquently described in [R1] played a major role in that transformation, and has lessons for us in the next ten years*" [C11].

### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

[C1] National Audit Office (2012) *DfE: Delivering the free entitlement to education for 3-4 year olds*. Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General, HC 1789. London: Stationery Office.

[C2] DfE (2011) *Supporting Families in the Foundation Years: Proposed changes to the entitlement to free early education and childcare sufficiency*. Consultation, 11 Nov. (copy on file)

[C3] DfE & DH (2011) *Families in the Foundation Years Evidence Pack*. London: Crown Copyright. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/families-in-the-foundation-years-evidence-pack>.

[C4] DfE (2011) *Disadvantaged Two Year Olds' Entitlement to Early Education: Options for extended eligibility*. Impact Assessment, 2/08/2011. (copy on file).

[C5] *Explanatory Memorandum to The LA (Duty To Secure Early Years Provision Free Of Charge) Regulations 2012*. [http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2012/2488/pdfs/ukxiem\\_20122488\\_en.pdf](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2012/2488/pdfs/ukxiem_20122488_en.pdf)

[C6] Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills, Wales (2010) *Flying Start guidance 2009-10*. <http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/5333/3/100225flyingstartannexben.pdf> (para 4, 52).

[C7] DfE (2011) *Impact Assessment Annex A: EYFS Review - Learning and development & assessment recommendations*. 18 May 2011 (copy on file)

[C8] Tickell, C. (2011) *The Early Years: Foundations for life, health and learning*. Review Report. <http://www.education.gov.uk/tickellreview>.

[C9] Nutbrown, C. (2012) *Foundations for Quality. The independent review of early education and childcare qualifications*. Final Report. <http://www.education.gov.uk/nutbrownreview>

[C10] DfE (2013) *More Great Childcare - Raising quality and giving parents more choice*. [www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/More%20Great%20Childcare%20v2.pdf](http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/More%20Great%20Childcare%20v2.pdf).

[C11] Eistenstadt, N. (2010) Book Review of *Early Childhood Matters* (Sylva et al, 2010). In: *Children and Society*, 24(5), 427-28.