

## Impact case study (REF3)

<b>Institution:</b> Birkbeck College, University of London
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 4: Psychology, psychiatry and neuroscience
<b>Title of case study:</b> Early years' experience and social mobility: Research evidence promoting policy changes to young children's education and home learning environments
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2 April 2001 to 31 December 2015
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 1 August 2013 to 31 July 2020
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Melhuish is a world-leading expert in early childhood education, who was awarded an OBE for services to social sciences (2016). His large-scale longitudinal research (1997-2014) on the critical role of early experiences for educational outcomes underpinned the Childcare Act (2016), which massively extended free entitlement to preschool education in the UK. It directly influenced an investment of GBP13.5 million by the Department for Education (DfE) aimed at improving home learning environments to support children's educational development (2018). Melhuish's work for the European Commission (EC) and OECD also influenced international policy on preschool provision, particularly in Canada and Australia.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Melhuish's research into the effectiveness of early years' educational provision started in 1997 when he was Principal Investigator of the longitudinal Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) project. It was run continuously until 2014 through the Effective Pre-school, Primary &amp; Secondary Education (EPPSE) project, which followed the same cohort of more than 3,000 children from the age of 3 through preschool, primary and secondary education. EPPE and EPPSE were funded by the Department for Education, and were conducted by Birkbeck, the Institute of Education (IOE) and the University of Oxford. In this case study, both are referred to as 'the project'.</p> <p>The project used retrospective data for the cohort going back to birth, and monitored social and educational development until the children entered school (age 5) and then again at key points at ages 6,7,10,11,14 and 16. It focused on the enduring influence of preschool education on educational, developmental and social outcomes for children. Findings demonstrated that the quality of <i>preschool education</i> and of the <i>home learning environment</i> (HLE) both strongly affected children's long-term attainment, bringing particular benefits for disadvantaged children across the UK. <b>These findings led to major changes in UK and international policy on preschool education and the HLE since August 2013.</b> This case study focuses on impacts that were underpinned by findings from the project that were published between 2004 and 2015.</p> <p>Melhuish's research revealed strong and systematic effects of high-quality preschool education:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preschool has a positive long-term impact on children's attainment, progress and social-behavioural development [1,2,3].</li> <li>• At the age of school entry, attending preschool improves children's outcomes, with specific benefits resulting from an early start before age 3 [1,2].</li> <li>• Attending preschool specifically benefitted the later attainment of children from lower socioeconomic groups, and this effect was stronger when the preschool was of high quality [1,4]</li> <li>• While pre-school cannot eliminate the adverse effects of disadvantage it can ameliorate these, acting as a 'protective' factor for disadvantaged children [1,2].</li> </ul>

In addition, Melhuish's research into long term effects of the HLE demonstrated its importance for children's development and attainments (summarised in [6]):

- The HLE experienced by children during pre-school and early years shapes attainment at age 16 [5].
- A positive parenting experience and HLE for young children helps promote better long-term social and educational outcomes at age 11 [6].
- The HLE is more strongly associated with children's intellectual and social development than parental education or occupation: HLE is a more important factor for educational outcomes than parental socio-economic status [2,6].

The key finding from Melhuish's research on the HLE is that socially disadvantaged parents with few qualifications can improve their child's progress and enhance the benefits of subsequent school education, by engaging in simple daily activities to stretch the child's mind. As described below, this result has been especially influential in shaping new policy approaches towards increasing social mobility.

Melhuish's standing as world-leading expert in early years' education experience and outcomes have led him to lead further research projects for the UK Department for Education and the EU.

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

#### Government reports

1. Sammons, P., Toth, K., Sylva, K., **Melhuish, E.**, Siraj, I. & Taggart, B. (2015). Pre-school and early home learning effects on A-level outcomes: Effective Pre-School, Primary & Secondary Education Project (EPPSE). *Research Report, Department for Education*.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pre-school-and-early-home-learning-effects-on-a-level-outcome>

2. Sylva, K., **Melhuish, E.**, Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I., & Taggart, B. (2004). The Effective Provision of Pre-school Education: Final Report. *London: DfES Sure Start Publications & The Institute of Education*.

<https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10005309/>

#### Peer-reviewed articles

3. **Melhuish, E.C.**, Sylva, K., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I., Taggart, B., Phan, M. & Malin, A. (2008). Preschool influences on mathematics achievement. *Science*, 321, 1161-1162. <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/321/5893/1161>

4. Sylva, K., **Melhuish, E.**, Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I., & Taggart, B. (2011). Pre-school quality and educational outcomes at age 11: Low quality has little benefit. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 9, 109–24.

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1476718X10387900>

5. Sammons, P., Toth, K., Sylva, K., **Melhuish, E.**, Siraj, I. & Taggart, B. (2015). The long-term role of the home learning environment in shaping students' academic attainment in secondary school. *Journal of Children's Services* 10(3), 189-201.

<http://doi.org/10.1108/JCS-02-2015-0007>

#### Book Chapter

6. **Melhuish, E.** (2010). 'Why children, parents and home learning are important'. In K. Sylva, E. Melhuish, P. Sammons, I. Siraj-Blatchford and B. Taggart (Eds), *Early Childhood Matters: Evidence from the Effective Preschool and Primary Education project*. London: Routledge. (Chapter available on request).

### Details of External Research Grants (EPPE/EPPSE)

- (a) **Melhuish, E.** Sylva K., Sammons P. (Oxford University) & Siraj-Blatchford I. & Taggart, B. (Institute of Education). Effective Pre-school Primary & Secondary Education. DfES, UK Government, GBP2,200,000. 2007- 2012.
- (b) **Melhuish, E.**, Sylva, K., Sammons, P. (Oxford University) & Siraj-Blatchford I., & Taggart, B. (Institute of Education). Transition from Primary to Secondary School. DfES, UK Government, GBP161,000, 2007- 2009.
- (c) **Melhuish, E.**, Sylva, K., Sammons, P. (Oxford University) & Siraj-Blatchford I., & Taggart, B. (Institute of Education). Effective Pre-school, Primary and Secondary Education 3-16 (EPPSE 3-16), DfES, UK Government. GBP1,600,000. 2010 – 2013.

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

Facilitating social mobility has been a central aspiration of UK governments for many years. In 2017, the Social Mobility Commission produced a report about the state of social mobility in the UK for parliament [A]. Citing Melhuish's research on effective pre-school, primary and secondary education, this report identified two key areas for policy intervention and investment to improve the life chances of disadvantaged children: (i) The provision of high-quality care for preschool children; (ii) Improving the home learning environment to boost literacy and social development. In both areas, large-scale policy initiatives were launched during the assessment period, which were directly informed by Melhuish's research findings from the project.

#### Preschool Education

Melhuish's research demonstrating sustained long-term impacts of pre-school education on attainment [1-4] played a central role in motivating the UK Childcare Bill. This bill provided the legal basis to implement the 'Extended Entitlement' to an additional 15 hours of free childcare for three- and four-year olds from working families, and for some two-year olds. This effectively doubled prior legal provisions from 15 to 30 hours per week of free childcare. During the passage of this bill in 2015, Melhuish's findings from the project were cited as supportive evidence in the Select Committee Report on Affordable Childcare, the reading of the Childcare Bill in the House of Lords, the Childcare Bill policy statement, and in the written evidence submitted to the Public Bill Committee [B].

The Extended Entitlement had an immediate impact on UK childcare provision. For example, Government analyses for 2018 show that 339,974 three- and four-year olds were in a 30-hours pre-school education place, as compared to 202,783 in 2017 [C], representing an increase of 68% within the first year of the bill's implementation. For 2019, a further substantial increase was reported (378,774 children, an increase of 11% on the previous year [C]).

#### Home Learning Environment (HLE)

Melhuish's EPPSE research demonstrated the critical role of the HLE for improving outcomes for all children, and especially those from a disadvantaged background, showing that the HLE was more important for social and intellectual development than social class [2,5,6]. Responding to the 2017 Social Mobility Commission report [A], the Department of Education (DfE) developed a National Plan for improving social mobility through education [D] that was guided by Melhuish's findings on the importance of the HLE. This National Plan was published in December 2017, and directly led in April 2018 to new DfE funding to support the HLE [E]. GBP5million was awarded to the Education Endowment Foundation to fund projects supporting parents in developing their children's literacy and language skills at home. An additional GBP8.5million was awarded to the Local Government Association for supporting disadvantaged families to improve early language and literacy development [E]. These projects include partnerships in the North and North East of England with schools, nurseries and parents. In March 2018, the DfE funded The National Children's Bureau, The National Literacy Trust, Peebles and the Foundation Years Trust to deliver projects to support the HLE, particularly in disadvantaged areas. This consortium

published a report 'Home Matters' [F] to share the approaches taken in areas of relative disadvantage in Bradford, Leicester, Hastings, the Wirral, Oxfordshire, Bognor Regis and Knowsley. Based on Melhuish's work, this report also provides evidence-based guidance for parents, teachers, and practitioners to improve the HLE. In 2018, new HLE review and a guidance document was published by the DfE and National Literacy Trust (which directly cites Melhuish and names him as a consultant) and by the Scottish Government (responsibility for education is devolved), again strongly drawing on Melhuish's research [G]. One key recommendation was for Education Scotland to take further steps to improve practical applications of the HLE framework, which led to the development of a new toolkit for educational practitioners to facilitate engagement with parents and families [G].

### International impact

Melhuish's research on preschool education has also shaped international guidelines and strategies, influencing policy around early childhood education and care globally. His research findings are cited in policy documents on early childhood education and care published by the European Commission and the OECD [H], which provide information and guidance for funding and reform of early education provision policies in member countries. In Canada, the Ontario government published a strategy paper on transforming early years education in 2016, citing Melhuish's findings, and pledged to provide 100,000 new child care spaces over the next five years from 2017 onwards [I]. By March 2019, Ontario had increased its licensed places by 40,000 and was therefore on target to meet its pledge. [I] In Australia, Melhuish's work directly contributed to policy initiatives, being cited prominently in major Australian campaigns and think tank reports [J] which promoted increased public investment in early childhood education. In Victoria, Melhuish's findings from EPPSE were heavily cited in a 2017 independent review of early childcare provision, which prompted a major investment in early years education (AUD202.1million) by the Victorian government [K].

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

[A] Social Mobility Commission (2017) Social mobility in Great Britain: fifth state of the nation report. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/state-of-the-nation-2017>

[B] House of Lords (2015) Select Committee Report on Affordable Childcare; Outline of House of Lords debates that referred to Melhuish's research and contributed to the Childcare Bill (derived from Hansard) including the House of Lords reading of the Childcare Bill on 16 June 2015 (Volume 762, Column 1102); The Childcare Bill Policy Statement (2015) which directly cites EPPSE; The Public Bill Committee on the Childcare Bill cites Melhuish's findings from EPPE and EPPSE in the written evidence submitted.

[C] House of Commons Education Committee, Tackling Disadvantage in the Early Years Ninth Report on Session 2017-2019. Department for Education (2018) 30 hours free childcare, England, summer term 2018 (Experimental Statistics). Document provided with website link. Department for Education (2019) 30 hours free childcare, England, summer term 2019 (Experimental Statistics). Document provided with website links.

[D] Department for Education (2017) Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential: A plan for improving social mobility through education.

[E] Screenshots of three online articles (by the Education Endowment Foundation and UK Government) outlining the GBP5 million and GBP8.5 million provided by the UK Government to improve the home learning environment. Document includes website links.

[F] National Children's Bureau (2018) Home matters: making the most of the home learning environment. (Section co-authored by Melhuish on p.5-6.)

[G] Department for Education & The National Literacy Trust (2018) Improving the Home Learning Environment: A Behaviour Change Approach;  
Education Scotland (2018) Review of Learning at Home;  
Screenshots of the toolkit for practitioners Engaging Parents and Families, developed by Education Scotland. Document includes website links.

[H] European Union (2014) Proposal for key principles of a Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care: Report of the Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care under the auspices of the European Commission;  
OECD (2015), Starting Strong IV: Monitoring Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care, OECD Publishing, Paris;  
OECD (2017), Starting Strong 2017: Key OECD Indicators on Early Childhood Education and Care, OECD, Publishing, Paris;  
OECD (2017), Starting Strong V: Transitions from Early Childhood Education and Care to Primary Education, OECD Publishing, Paris.

[I] Ministry for Education, Ontario (2016) Building a Better Future. This outlines the Ontario Government's plans to provide 100,000 new child care places over the next five years. It cites Melhuish/EPPSE. The pledge can also be read in summary online:

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/quality-child-care-more-families>;

Ministry of Education. Ontario. (2019) Early Years and Childcare Annual Report 2019

This report shows the increase in licensed childcare places after the government's pledge in 2016 to increase places by 100,000 over the next five years. Page 11 shows an increase of 40,000 places between the year 2016-2017 to the year ending 31 March 2019.

[J] Early Childhood Australia (2016). Early Learning: Everyone Benefits. State of early learning in Australia report, 2016. Canberra.

[K] Pascoe, S. & Brennan, D. (2017) Lifting our Game: Report of the review to achieve educational excellence in Australian schools through early childhood intervention;  
State of Victoria (2017) Early Childhood Reform Plan. This shows the government's investment in early years education, influenced by Pascoe & Brennan (2017).