

Institution: University of Oxford		
Unit of Assessment: 23 - Education		
Title of case study: Transforming Early Education Policy and Practice		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2000-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Professor Kathy Sylva	Professor of Educational Psychology	1997 – 2015 (Honorary Research Fellow, Oct 2015 – ongoing)
Professor Pam Sammons Professor Edward Melhuish	Professor of Education Professor of Human Development	2009 – ongoing 2013 – ongoing
Professor Iram Siraj	Professor of Child Development and Education	2018 – ongoing
Period when the claimed impact occurred: August 2013 – 31 July 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>The research of Melhuish, Siraj, Sylva and Sammons has shaped Early Years policy, provision, practice and research for two decades in the UK and beyond. Two major longitudinal studies demonstrated the long-term benefits of early education, identified effective pedagogy, and shed light on the power of the home learning environment. The research provided the evidence to underpin UK government initiatives such as the provision of free early childhood education to millions of 2-4 year olds, encouraging and supporting home learning, and professional development interventions based on quality scales developed by the researchers. Internationally, governments and early education providers in Australia, Norway, Japan, and Hong Kong have used the tools and findings from the research to improve the early education provision of tens of thousands of children.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Key staff from the University of Oxford's Department of Education have been leaders of the Effective Preschool, Primary and Secondary Education study (EPPSE 1997-2016, known as EPPE until 2007) since its inception. EPPSE, and the follow-up Study of Early Education and Development (SEED 2012-present), on which Professor Melhuish is the academic lead, demonstrate the long-term impact of Early Childhood Education (ECE) and the early Home Learning Environment (HLE) on educational and social development. Four strands of findings have led to impact:</p> <p>Strand A - Effectiveness of ECE in improving children's outcomes, age 2-4. The innovative longitudinal EPPSE study was the largest in Europe, following the developmental trajectories of more than 3,000 children in England, to investigate the effects of different types of ECE on children's outcomes at school entry (R1) and follow up across different phases to the end of schooling (R3, R5). EPPSE showed that children who attended preschool education made a stronger start to school, that they continued to make accelerated progress throughout primary education, and that they showed academic advantage (compared to children without ECE) at the end of compulsory schooling along with social-behavioural benefits. It also revealed advantages of starting at age two.</p> <p>Strand B – Home Learning Environment (HLE) influences on children's development Through interviews with over 3000 parents, EPPSE identified daily activities in the home that best supported later progress. EPPSE devised a new measure of the 'early years HLE' that measured specific strategies that predicted subsequent progress in school according to baseline measures (R4). HLE scores were more accurate predictors of children's progress than standard</p>		

socio-economic status (SES) or income measures and had additional effects when SES and income controlled and long term HLE effects on outcomes were identified (R5).

Strand C - Effects of ECE quality on children's developmental outcomes (short and long term)

EPPSE demonstrated that high-quality provision of ECE, including intentional teaching and planned support for social-emotional development, had lasting effects on children's outcomes up to the end of compulsory schooling and that those effects had measurable financial returns (R3). Subsequent research also showed positive effects of high-quality provision of ECE on children's outcomes in Australia (R2) and that high-quality ECE produced better outcomes for disadvantaged children (R5).

Strand D - Improving the ECE workforce: the use of research tools as the evidence-base for successful Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

Further research indicates the Oxford-designed Early Childhood Environment Rating-Scale Extension (ECERS E) (R1) and Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Well-being (SSTEW) (R2, R6) scales have predictive validity for better outcomes. These are now being used across the UK and internationally in research studies and pre/schools to improve practice. Using these research-based observational tools, practitioners were able to identify effective practice in their own centres and thereby improve the quality of their teaching and children's developmental outcomes (R2, R6). These tools developed initially to measure quality in EPPSE (ECERS-E) and its follow-up study SEED (SSTEW) are used successfully as the core of programmes for CPD.

The EPPE and EPPSE projects have between them received over GBP8,000,000 in funding from the Department of Education and its predecessors over the past 20 years, and additional funding has been provided by the Sutton Trust.

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

(R1) Sylva, K., Siraj, I., Taggart, B., Sammons, P., Melhuish, E., Elliot, K. and Totsika, V. (2006), 'Capturing Quality In Early Childhood Through Environmental Rating Scales', in *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, Volume 21, Issue 1, 1st Quarter 2006, Pages 76-92. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2006.01.003> [output type: D]

(R2) Siraj, Howard, Neilsen-Hewett, Melhuish, Kingston, de Rosnay, Duursma & Luu (2018) *Fostering Effective Early Learning (FEEL) study*, Final report - NSW Department of Education, Australia. <https://bit.ly/2PB6DfC> [output type: N]

(R3) Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P., Siraj, I., Taggart, B., Smees, R., Toth, K., Welcomme, W. & Hollingworth, K. (2014). 'Students' educational and developmental outcomes at age 16'. *Effective Pre-school, Primary and Secondary Education (EPPSE 3-16)*. Department for Education. <https://bit.ly/2MUNyUG> [output type: N]

(R4) Melhuish, E. C., Phan, M. B., Sylva, K., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I., & Taggart, B. (2008), 'Effects of the home learning environment and preschool center experience upon literacy and numeracy development in early primary school', *Journal of Social Issues*, 64(1), 95-114. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.2008.00550.x> [output type: D]

(R5) Sammons, P., Toth, K., & Sylva, K. (2018), 'The drivers of academic success for 'bright' but disadvantaged students: A longitudinal study of AS and A-level outcomes in England'. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 57, 31-41. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2017.10.004> [output type: D]

(R6) Howard, S., Siraj, I., Melhuish, E., Kingston, D., Neilsen-Hewett, C., de Rosnay, M., Duursma, E. & Luu, B. (2018) 'Measuring interactional quality in pre-school settings: introduction and validation of the Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Wellbeing (SSTEW) scale', *Early Child Development and Care*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2018.1511549> [output type: D]

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

The pathways to impact, which were embedded into the design of the underpinning research, occurred through the creation of evidence-based training for practitioners centred on the research findings/methods, collaborative research with practitioners, participation in government policy working groups in all UK countries, and advice to governments in high- and low-income countries.

Early Childhood Education (ECE) and free part-time education for 2 year olds.

In September 2013 the Department for Education (DfE) launched a GBP534,000,000 funding programme to extend free part-time early education places to 2-year-olds in disadvantaged families. This extended its 2004 initiative offering universal free part-time education for every child over the age of three. The Director of Evidence at the Early Intervention Foundation stated that EPPSE research '*directly influenced the government's introduction of the 2-year-old offer for disadvantaged families*' (E1). In particular, the DfE consultation paper regarding the proposed changes cited EPPSE findings that '*high quality early education can have a profound impact on social mobility*', and the SEED study, stating that '*given the lower starting point among disadvantaged children, and reduced likelihood to take up childcare, early education is particularly important for this group*' (E2). A DfE review of the pilot noted that '*The detailed policy ...was strongly influenced by research evidence*' including EPPE (E3). From 2014 this covered the 40% most disadvantaged families in the UK, over 400,000 children a year. In 2018, the then Minister for Children & Families stated that since its introduction nearly 750,000 2-year olds had benefited from the entitlement to 15 hours of free early education a week (E4). As well as its direct influence on ECE policy, the research has shaped research projects undertaken by the government-funded Early Intervention Foundation, thereby influencing local and national policy and practice through that body's engagement with the DfE and the Local Government Association (E1).

The Home Learning Environment (HLE)

The Home Learning Environment is the physical home and the interactions in and around the home which implicitly and explicitly support a child's learning (E5). HLE initiatives by government and charities have been based on EPPSE evidence (R4). Action for Children, a charity aimed at helping vulnerable children, published a 2016 report highlighting the importance of the early home environment to improving life chances (E6). As part of their *Fair by Five* campaign, this report called on government to make child development a national priority by 2020 and used EPPSE research to spearhead this campaign. The campaign was successful, in that the DfE allocated GBP13,500,000 to support HLE in 2018, and the research findings have directly influenced the DfE's focus on home learning (E7). The Secretary of State for Education, quoted in Parliament's in-house magazine, said that high-quality early years education was '*a core priority for his department*', with specific emphasis on the Home Learning Environment (E8). Consequently, the DfE funded The National Children's Bureau, The National Literacy Trust, Peebles, and the Foundation Years Trust to deliver a range of projects to support the HLE, particularly in disadvantaged areas of the UK. This consortium published guidance for schools, nurseries, local authorities and public health partners, (E9) which cited EPPSE and SEED research and shared examples of best practice taken from areas of relative disadvantage in Bradford, Leicester, Hastings and Rother, the Wirral Peninsula, Oxfordshire, Bognor Regis and Knowsley.

In 2018, the DfE and the National Literacy Trust extensively cited EPPSE research when announcing the government's behaviour change model to improve the HLE. This new policy consisted of a range of programmes to enhance the life chances of children from disadvantaged backgrounds including a national three-year *Hungry Little Minds* campaign, based on the same research findings, which provides online tools for parents to enhance literary and language learning at home (E5).

The Social Mobility Commission similarly utilised EPPSE findings on the impact of the HLE on children's outcomes when recommending that government and local authorities [drive] uptake of

the early education offer for disadvantaged two-year-olds,' to [ensure] that all parenting support programmes are evidence based and [to experiment] with ways to offer effective advice to more parents' (E10). EPPSE evidence directly led to the recommendation in a House of Commons Education Committee report, 'Tackling disadvantage in the early years' that the government 'commission research on interventions that will support parents in providing a strong home learning environment for their children.' The Education Committee report has been influential on the government's wider early years social mobility programme, with the government's response to the committee report referring to over GBP100,000,000 of investment in this area and also citing SEED findings on the importance of the HLE, stating 'The evidence is clear...HLE is the single biggest influence on a child's vocabulary at age three' (E11, p.6).

Effects of quality on children's development

EPPSE research (R3) has since extended to have an impact in policy development across Europe. In 2014, the European Commission published their 'Proposal for Key Principles of a Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care' that cites EPPSE publications multiple times. This document informed European-wide strategy as part of Horizon 2020 about the importance of ECE in addressing child poverty and preventing early school leaving, which were two of the 'headline targets of the EU2020 Strategy' (E12).

Evidence-based CPD

EPPSE and SEED research findings have been disseminated around the world, and according to a Professor of Early Childhood and Family Policy at Columbia University, 'EPPSE's findings have transformed the global discussion on quality in young children's learning experiences' (E13d). In particular, the use and development of two quality rating scales provides strong findings of the impact of evidence-based high-quality practice on child development (R1, R2, R3, R5). The ECERS-E (R1) and SSTEW (R2, R6) scales are now being used extensively across the UK in research studies and pre/schools to improve practice, and the testimonials from Australia, Norway and Japan are just a few examples of their impact on hundreds of pre-schools and tens of thousands of children and staff internationally [E13].

Early education providers in many countries have adopted practices found effective in EPPSE/SEED. In Australia the largest provider of pre-school education, Goodstart Early Learning, has purchased 850 copies of EPPSE/SEED's quality rating scales to support quality practitioner practice as part of a 'program of practice uplift' for over 16,700 educators and 75,600 children across 660 centres (E13a), and EPPSE's findings 'have led to the development of free high-quality preschool for... all three-year-olds in Victoria, Australia.' (E13d). In Norway, EPPSE 'has inspired both research and practice' including multiple research projects at the University of Stavanger and the municipality of Stavanger's introduction of SSTEW training to 123 kindergartens, improving ECE quality for over 7,000 children (E13b). The University of Tokyo has translated EPPSE research, including the SSTEW scale, for publication in Japanese and 'the essence and ideas' of their CPD provision for over 6,000 ECE practitioners across Japan was 'derived from SSTEW' (E13c). The University of Hong Kong has also made extensive use of the research and rating scales provided by EPPSE in shaping their ECE research and 'data-informed policy' recommendations across the Asia-Pacific region, including the Singapore Kindergarden Impact Project and the Free Quality Kindergarden Education Policy in Hong Kong (E13e).

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

E1. Testimonial letter from Director of Evidence, The Early Intervention Foundation and former senior analyst, DfE

E2. Department for Education (2017, page 5). *Eligibility for the free early years entitlement for two-year-olds under Universal Credit*: <https://bit.ly/3bpoy1b>

And subsequent response:
<https://bit.ly/3qmO5N3>

E3. Maisey, R., Speight, S. Marsh, V. & Philo, D. (2013). *The Early Education Pilot for Two Year Old Children: Age Five Follow-up*. DFE- RR225. London: DfE.
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/221778/DFE-RR225.pdf

E4. Nadim Zahawi MP (2018), Correspondence to Education Select Committee,
<http://bit.ly/ZahawiEducationCommittee>

E5. HM Government & National Literacy Trust (2018, pages 6-9), *Improving the home learning environment: A behaviour change approach*.
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/756020/Improving the home learning environment.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/756020/Improving_the_home_learning_environment.pdf)

E6. Action for Children (2016), *Success Starts At Home*,
<https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/media/6870/success-starts-at-home.pdf>

E7. *The Independent*, April 2018, 'Parents to receive advice on teaching nursery rhymes in bid to close disadvantaged children's word gap',
<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/parents-education-nursery-rhymes-preschool-social-mobility-word-gap-alphabet-a8329396.html>

E8. Damian Hinds MP, 'Children's literacy and narrowing the early years gap should be a national mission', *The House*, 30 September 2018.
<https://www.politicshome.com/thehouse/article/childrens-literacy-and-narrowing-the-early-years-gap-should-be-a-national-mission>

E9. National Children's Bureau (2018), *Home Matters: Making the most of the home learning environment*, https://www.ncb.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/attachment/HLE_doc.pdf

E10. Social Mobility Commission (2017, pages 18-37), *State of the Nation 2017: Social Mobility in Great Britain*. London: Crown Copyright.
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/662744/State of the Nation 2017 - Social Mobility in Great Britain.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/662744/State_of_the_Nation_2017_-_Social_Mobility_in_Great_Britain.pdf)

E11. House of Commons Education Committee (2019, pages 27-28), *Tackling Disadvantage in the Early Years*, Ninth Report on Session 2017-2019.
<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmeduc/1006/1006.pdf>
Government response: <http://bit.ly/HoCTacklingDisadvantageResponse>

E12. European Commission (2014, page 10), *Proposal for key principles of a Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care*, https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/education/experts-groups/2011-2013/ecec/ecec-quality-framework_en.pdf

E13. Testimonials regarding the international reach of EPPSE's research impact from (a) Goodstart Early Learning, Australia; (b) University of Stavanger; (c) University of Tokyo; (d) Columbia University; (e) University of Hong Kong