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Towards the transformation of practice in early childhood education: the effective provision of pre-school education (EPPE) project

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The introduction of the Foundation Stage and its associated legislation has constituted a radical innovation that is transforming early childhood education. In this paper we show how the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) research programme continues to contribute towards achieving these improvements in practice. In focusing upon the EPPE programme's influence upon *pedagogic practice* in particular, the paper draws predominantly upon the research findings and recommendations associated with our qualitative case studies. This work was first published in the *Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years* (REPEY) report in 2002, and in the *EPPE Technical Paper 10* in 2003. Practitioners respond positively to research when it is focused on specific teaching and learning contexts and practices. The EPPE project therefore applied Environment Rating Scales to identify the quality of educational provision, and used multilevel analysis to isolate the independent variables of most significance in explaining variations in the progress and development of young children during their time in pre-school. The multi-level analysis identified 'good' and 'excellent' centres, based on measurable child outcomes. Twelve of these centres were selected for in-depth qualitative case study enquiries that both extended and triangulated the quantitative analysis. This paper shows how the qualitative findings, as well as some of the data that they have been drawn from, have subsequently been applied to provide the practical guidance and exemplar resources needed in the development and improvement of early years educational practice.

Keywords: early years; foundation stage; transformation of practice; impact; pedagogy

Background

The Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) study was initially funded following several years of intense Government lobbying for better recognition of the long-term benefits of early childhood education. In fact a convincing account of the genesis of the EPPE research project might trace it back to a memorandum introducing the 1989 publication of the *House of Commons Education Select Committee on Educational Provision for the Under-Fives* (HMSO, 1989). In that document, the Secretary of State for Education and Science (at that time Kenneth Baker) announced the setting up a Committee of Inquiry to investigate the quality and content of the educational experiences available to under-fives. The report of Angela Rumbold's Inquiry into the Educational Experiences Offered to Three-and-Four-Year-Olds: *Starting with Quality* (DES, 1990) followed, along with the

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independent *StartRight* report published in 1994 (Ball, 1994). The EPPE study was first funded by the DES at the end of 1997, and in 1998 the (New Labour) Government embarked upon a sustained programme of early childhood educational development through its Early Excellence Centre (EEC) programme. By February 2001, a Green Paper, *Building on Success*, announced the expansion of this programme, and by the autumn of 2003 there were already 107 Early Excellence Centres. The publication of the first EPPE research findings provided the first robust evidence that the provision of high quality early childhood education made a significant difference to the learning outcomes of young children generally (Sammons, Sylva, Melhuish, Taggart & Elliot, 2002, 2003). The publication of this early evidence coincided with a report on the success of the EECs pilot programme (Bertram et al., 2002), and both strongly informed the launch of a major new Children's Centre programme in the 2003 Green Paper *Every Child Matters* (HM Treasury, 2003). This has now been further elaborated in the Government's 10-year strategy (HM Treasury, 2004) which aims to have 3500 Children's Centres in place by 2010 serving all of the most disadvantaged communities.

Alongside these developments, EPPE provided evidence drawn from in-depth case study analysis of 14 'good to excellent' pre-schools settings (Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva, Taggart, Sammons & Melhuish, 2003). This analysis was in turn supported by an in-depth analysis of the specific pedagogies that were employed in each of the case study settings (Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva, Muttock, Gilden & Bell, 2002). The EPPE study has continued to employ this 'longitudinal multilevel, sequential, explanatory and mixed method approach' (Siraj-Blatchford, Sammons, Sylva, Melhuish & Taggart, 2006), and has continued to report on the children's progress through primary school and now into their secondary education. While the EPPE findings have therefore had an influence on policies and practices beyond the pre-school sector, we restrict our attention here to the impacts of the research on pre-school practice alone.

The overall aims of the EPPE project were to identify:

- (1) What is the impact of pre-school on children's intellectual and social/behavioural development?
- (2) Are some pre-schools more effective than others in promoting children's development?
- (3) What are the characteristics of an effective pre-school setting?
- (4) What is the impact of the home and childcare history on children's development?
- (5) Do the effects of pre-school continue through Key Stage 1 (ages 6 and 7 years)?

The major findings of EPPE

The EPPE study provided the first robust evidence of the positive effects of pre-school education in the UK, showing that high quality pre-school education could help to alleviate the effects of social disadvantage and could provide children with a better start to school (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford & Taggart, 2004; Melhuish et al., 2006). These findings have had a considerable impact on Government policy, where it is now recognised that investment in good quality

pre-school provision provides an effective means of reducing social exclusion and may help to break cycles of disadvantage.

The beneficial effects of pre-school experience (compared to none) were found to remain evident throughout Key Stage 1 (Sylva et al., 2004)¹. While good quality provision was found across all types of early years settings, with greater variation within than between settings, higher overall quality was found in settings integrating care and education and in nursery schools. Disadvantaged children were found to benefit significantly from good quality pre-school experiences, especially where they were with a mixture of children from different social backgrounds. Yet, on average, disadvantaged children attended pre-school for shorter periods than those from more advantaged groups (around 4–6 months less).

For all children, the quality of the home learning environment (HLE) was found to have a stronger net effect on intellectual and social development than the net effect of other important influences, including (notably) parental occupation, education or income. Only a modest correlation was found between either family Social Economic Status (SES) or mother's highest qualification level and HLE. What parents do to support their children's learning was therefore found to be more important than who parents are.

As previously suggested, as an extension of the EPPE case studies, a project was developed to identify the pedagogic models and practices being applied by the most effective settings and to find out how these were realised in practice (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). The EPPE multi-level analysis was able to control for the influence of the family and child characteristics and establish the 'effectiveness' of each of the 141 early years settings in its sample. This enabled the research team to identify settings that had a range of 'good' (above 68% confidence level), to 'excellent' (95% confidence level) impact in one or more areas of *cognitive*, or *social/behavioural* outcomes. The sample included the full range of pre-school providers; one Playgroup, one Local Authority day care setting, three Private day nurseries, two nursery schools run by the local education authority (LEA), three nursery classes attached to primary schools, two Early Excellence Centres/Combined Centres, and two reception classes. In order to identify the pedagogical practices that were being employed to achieve the learning outcomes identified, documentary analysis of inspection reports, policy statements etc., systematic and naturalistic observations of children and staff, staff and parent interviews, and focus group discussions were carried out in each settings (see Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2003).

The case study findings

Given the 'dialectical' nature (Green & Caracelli, 1997) of the mixed-method analysis that was carried out in the EPPE study it is important to recognise that the findings reported in REPEY (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2003) and in the Case Study Technical Report (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2004) cannot be attributed to the EPPE case studies alone. Detailed accounts of the analytical procedures that were followed may be found in Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva (2004), and in Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2007).

To summarise these findings, children were found to make better all round progress in settings where:

- The staff used *open-ended questioning* and encouraged '*sustained shared thinking*';

- *Differentiated learning opportunities* are provided to meet the needs of individuals and groups e.g. bilingual, special needs, girls/boys etc.
- A balance was achieved between *staff supported* freely chosen play, and *staff led* small group activities;
- Settings viewed *educational* and *social development* as *complementary*;
- The staff had a good understanding of *appropriate pedagogical content*;
- The staff supported children in being assertive while at the same time *rationalising* and *talking through* their conflicts;
- There was *strong parental involvement*, especially in terms of shared educational aims;
- A *trained teacher* acted as *manager* and a good proportion of the staff were (graduate, teacher) qualified;
- There was *strong leadership* and relatively *little staff turnover*.

What do we know about research impact?

Brown (2005) suggests that the whole idea that research findings might be transferred in any simple process from researchers to teachers through ‘cascade, linear, or centre-periphery models’, has now been discredited as ‘naïve, simplistic and ineffective’ (p. 1). The term ‘research impact’ was defined by a National Educational Research Forum (NERF) sub-group as the ‘influence or effect that educational research has on its audiences’ (NERF, 2000). As Kanefsky argued in his 2001 Conference paper (later to be adopted in the TLRP ‘Communication and Impact Plan’²): to achieve impact, researchers must do more than merely disseminate their evidence; it must be transformed and communicated to the right people:

...transforming research knowledge into worthwhile and new approaches and useful products, artefacts, teaching materials, improved policies, improved practice, new research approaches and techniques. (p.4)

Galton (2000) has argued that practitioners value research when it is focused on specific teaching and learning contexts and practices but few educational research interventions in the past have led to sustained change. Galton goes on to say that teaching and learning research products therefore need to be anchored in concrete teaching contexts. Ratcliffe et al. (2005) found that research evidence was only used in the classroom when a professional culture had been developed that encouraged both an engagement with research, and changes to practice. They also found that there was a need to translate their research outputs into practical actions and embody them in tangible resources, such as teaching materials. As Black and William (1998) put it:

Teachers will not take up attractive sounding ideas, albeit based on extensive research, if these are presented as general principles which leave entirely to them the task of translating them into everyday practice – their classroom lives are too busy and too fragile for this to be possible for all but an outstanding few. What they need is a variety of living examples of implementation, by teachers with whom they can identify and from whom they can both derive conviction and confidence that they can do better, and see concrete examples of what doing better means in practice (p. 3).

A recent research review conducted by *Research in Practice* (‘A report on literature on leading EIP’, 2003), a collaboration between the Dartington Hall Trust, the

Association of Directors of Children's Services, The University of Sheffield and a network of participating agencies across the UK identified five distinct roles involved in the implementation of research evidence in practice:

- (1) Elected Members (Percy-Smith, 2002)
- (2) Operational Managers (Buxton, James & Harding, 1998)
- (3) Facilitators (Kitson, Harvey & McCormack, 1998)
- (4) Opinion Leaders and Early Adopters (Kitson et al., 1998)
- (5) Issue Champions and Change Agents (Hughes, McNeish, Newman, Roberts, & Sachdev, 2000; Nutley & Davies, 2000)

Research in Practice is committed to promote evidence-informed practice, and the literature review has been followed up by the production of an *Action Pack* by a group of senior managers (Hodson & Cooke, 2005) which has been distributed to the 100 agencies in the *Research in Practice* network (including 22 local authorities in Wales) for piloting.

How EPPE has reached and influenced each of the groups identified in the *Research in Practice* (2003) report will be addressed in the following section, referencing key documents as evidence of impact.

EPPE dissemination and impact activities

Elected members

While the Cabinet Office Performance and Innovation Unit (2000) has argued that the division of labour between political and managerial leaders should be clearly recognised, and that public sector officials should be given as much freedom as possible to provide leadership within the bounds of broad policy objectives, the report cites two situations where 'constraint' on public sector leaders is justified: where there is legitimate public concern about variations in services (a so called 'post code lottery'), and where there is established evidence that one approach is the best means of achieving certain ends (Cabinet Office, Performance and Innovation Unit, 2000, p. 31). Arguably both of these situations apply strongly to early childhood education contexts where the quality of provisions have historically been very varied, and the authority of the EPPE evidence is so strong. In fact, we are aware of a number of significant elected members in both houses of parliament, and in local government, that have been instrumental in promoting a greater awareness of EPPE findings, and in the implementation of EPPE recommendations. Evidence of these efforts may be found in Hansard (<http://www.cipd.co.uk/about/library/referencing.htm>) (for example Margaret Hodge in HC (House of Commons) Hansard (2004); Jacqui Smith, in HC Hansard (2005); Beverley Hughes in HC Hansard (2006); Lord Adonis in HL (House of Lords) Hansard (2006a, 2006c); Baroness Walmsley in HL Hansard (2006b)), and in Local Council Minutes (for example, Councillor Boyes, Rotherham Council, 1 October 2003). Department for Education and Skills (DfES) press notices also include reports citing EPPE, for example, from Children's Minister Margaret Hodge (23 June 2004), and Minister for Sure Start, Catherine Ashton (23 March 2003). Members of the EPPE team serve on advisory groups to Ministers in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Operational managers

Evidence of the adoption of national initiatives informed by EPPE findings abound, the following reference, drawn from the DfES' *Sure Start. Children's Centres Practice Guidance* (2005a) is typical:

The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) project (1997–2003) shows the positive impact that early years provision can have. Key findings from EPPE include:

- high quality pre-schooling is related to better intellectual and social/behavioural development for children;
- where settings view educational and social development as complementary and equal in importance, children make better all round progress; and
- settings which have staff with higher qualifications, especially with a good proportion of trained teachers on the staff, show better quality and their children make more progress... (DfES, 2005a, p. 23)

The DfES organised six regional conferences to support the dissemination to key practitioners of the REPEY research to LEAs throughout England in 2002–2003. Funding was provided for senior early years representatives to attend from each LEA. The highly influential Primary National Strategy *Key Elements of Effective Practice (KEEP)* (DfES, 2005b) document also refers to it; drawing predominantly upon 'two major pieces of DfES funded research on effective early years pedagogy' which included the EPPE/REPEY studies.

At a micro level, managers have been found to provide most of the support for developing evidence informed practice in nursing (Buxton et al., 1998), and the same may well be true in early childhood education settings as well (Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007). This was found to be the case in the *Early Excellence* evaluations of both the *Thomas Coram Centre* in London and the *Gamesley Centre* in Glossop (Siraj-Blatchford 2002a, 2002b)

Facilitators

Expert 'facilitators' are often employed to provide specific courses in the implementation of policy. Having benefited from its principles being promoted in a wide range of early years government initiatives, the EPPE findings have been incorporated into practitioner training courses at higher education and further education levels, they have been systematically reported in Sure Start regional conferences, and in the local training provided by advisory teachers.

The research findings of most significance to early childhood educational practitioners originate in the qualitative case study evidence that was first published in *Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years (REPEY)* (Siraj-Blatchford, et al., 2002), and in *EPPE Technical Paper 10* (Siraj-Blatchford et al. 2003). Both of these publications include extended transcriptions of the pedagogic interactions that we observed in the most effective settings. The qualitative case studies provide detailed accounts of teaching contexts, and the transcriptions provide practitioners with precisely the kind of concrete examples of effective pedagogy recommended by Galton (2000). The research and its recommendations for practice have been reported widely in practitioner publications (e.g. *Nursery World*, *Primary Practice*) and this has resulted in the project findings being disseminated in a wide range of lectures, seminars and workshops throughout the UK. These data have thus

been reproduced by trainers in numerous other publications and PowerPoint presentations (see, for example, Renewal.Net, 2006, p.4-6; General Teaching Council for England (GTCE), 2003).

As Hargreaves (2003) has argued, at the micro-level of practice, the focus of innovation must always be specific and limited, and one significant focus in early years educational practice in recent years has been associated with 'sustained shared thinking'. 'Sustained shared thinking' was a term first coined in the REPEY study (Siraj-Blatchford, et al., 2002) to describe an effective pedagogical process that involves an adult being aware of the child's interests and understandings, and involves the adult and child interacting together to develop an idea or skill. The application of this term therefore provides a useful means of judging the extent of our current influence. While its use may at times be restricted to the promotion of practices concerned with developing young children's language and cognition, on many occasions it also serves to identify references to the wider EPPE findings.

The British Association for Early Childhood Education (Early Education) has created training materials to support teachers in developing young children's 'sustained shared thinking' (Dowling, 2005). Early Education is the leading national voluntary organisation for early years practitioners and parents and has members and branches across the UK. These materials are also promoted by the *National Literacy Trust* on their *Talk to Your Baby* web pages and 2006 conference report. They are also being used in a range of courses including continuous professional development (CPD) courses offered by Liverpool John Moores University, and the Universities of Strathclyde, Derbyshire, Sandwell, Leeds, Medway, Northamptonshire, Derby, and York, and the Westminster Grid for Learning.

The importance of developing 'sustained shared thinking' is also employed in the new Early Years Foundation Stage guidance and in advice provided by Edexcel's policy regarding the design of programmes of study for the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Edexcel Level 4 BTEC Higher Nationals in Advanced Practice in Work with Children and Families. The term is now also being applied regularly by individual practitioners; one recent example was reported by an NCSL Research Associate reporting on developing assessment for learning as personalised practice (Cooney, 2006, p.11). It involved a reception teacher describing her efforts to support her pupils in learning to learn. 'Sustained shared thinking' has even featured in Professional Teacher Association Network (PTAN) training sessions supported by the Aga Khan University Institute for Educational Development as far away as Karimabad in Pakistan (13 January 2007).

In fact, *Amazon* lists a total of 21 Books containing the phrase 'sustained shared thinking', and another 20 books (not including project technical reports) that refer to the EPPE and/or REPEY projects. These include works by all of the leading UK early childhood authorities.

Opinion leaders and early adopters

Mediators play a key role in achieving impact, whether they be considered 'Development Managers' (Morris & Stanton, 2000) or 'Opinion Leaders' and 'Change Agents' (Kanefsky, 2001).

Evidence of early adoption may be found in a wide range of contexts, from the development of extensive training materials by the *British Association for Early*

Childhood Education (Dowling, 2005) referred to above, to the inclusion of EPPE findings in training course materials across universities and local authorities.

Issue champions and change agents

Of course, the authors of this paper have themselves contributed significantly to this in the process of disseminating their work at the national and international conferences of early childhood professional associations, in academic conferences, and also in local authority training events and consultations. Many other enthusiastic individuals often act as important catalysts for change and both indirect and direct evidence of this activity has been identified. EPPE research briefs have been downloaded from the DfES research pages and from their Standards Site, and through the TLRP DSpace online repository. The research briefs have also been made available for download from the Teacher Training Resource Bank and through links associated with reports on Conferences (for example, The University of Cambridge Faculty of Education Conference, March 2005), and in support of LEA based training. These include the web pages of Rotherham LEA, and Kings Cross and Holborn Sure Start. Similarly, EPPE PowerPoint presentations are available for download from other Conference pages (for example, the TACTYC Annual Conference, Siraj-Blatchford (2005); OECD/CERI, Taggart (2006).

On 2 February 2007 the *Google* search engine picked up 17,100 pages referring to 'Effective Provision of Pre-School Education' from all over the world (15,800 of these were in English, 75 in German, 17 in French, 13 in Spanish and 3 in Chinese). *Google Scholar* (covering academic papers, abstracts and citations) picked up 246 references.

In addition to those cited above, a number of other LEA websites were identified as including EPPE material (for example, Bath and North East Somerset, North Somerset, Norfolk, Hampshire, Liverpool, Enfield, Sunderland, Coventry, Bradford, Suffolk, Plymouth). This limited web-based survey also picked up many of the references made to the research in internet publications supporting practice development from the DfES, Sure Start, and the QCA, as well as documents produced by Non-Government Organisations such as the British Association for Early Childhood Education (BAECE), the Daycare Trust, and the Pre-school Learning Alliance.

REPEY featured as 'Research of the Month' on the GTCE's web site in January 2003 and this was followed up by a more comprehensive report on EPPE as Research of the Month in July 2005. Research of the Month is a series of research summaries on topics identified by the GTCE as considered to be of direct interest to teachers. REPEY was also reported in NERF's Summer 2004 Bulletin *Evidence for Teaching and Learning*, and it was the subject of Issue 2 of the Hampshire LEA Foundation Stage Journal on Pedagogy and Teaching.

REPEY also features strongly in pages dedicated to effective early years provision on *renewal.net*, an online guide to what works in neighbourhood renewal. The research is also featured on *High Scope UK*, *Association for Mathematics Education*, and *Association of Teachers and Lecturers* websites. References to 'sustained shared thinking' are also finding their way into Ofsted Inspection reports. (for example, <https://live.ofsted.gov.uk/reports/113/113987.pdf>)

EPPE has been influential in Scotland, where reviews of the research evidence are included on *Scottish Parliament*, *Scottish Executive* and *Learning and Teaching*

Scotland websites, and developments in the promotion of ‘sustained shared thinking’ have been particularly influential in East Renfrewshire. EPPE documents have been published on the *Welsh Assembly* and *Learning Wales* websites, and the *State Assembly for Jersey* website also reports on the research.

Extended references are made to the research in the OECD’s (2006) *Starting Strong II* thematic review of early childhood education and care policy, and research reports are also available for download from the *Ministerie van Onderwijs* website ‘Onderwijsachterstanden’ in the Netherlands, and on the *Centre national de la recherche scientifique* in France. References are also made to the research on the *Bayern Staatsinstitut für Frühpädagogik* in Germany. EPPE was included in the New Zealand *Quality Teaching Early Foundations: Best Evidence Synthesis* and in a report commissioned by the Ministry of Education and reported upon in the Parliament of Australia House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training in June 2003 (AGDofEST, 2005)

Research and development work concerned with Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in early childhood has provided another context for dissemination with notable impact being made through IBM’s *KidSmart* initiative throughout Europe. ICT publications that provide pedagogic guidance explicitly referring to the EPPE and REPEY studies include three books. *Familiesonline.co.uk* refer to the EPPE research in advising parents how to choose a nursery and REPEY has also attracted commercial interest with organisations such as *Clever Cloggs Educational Games and Activities* quoting aspects of the research in their marketing.

The efforts that the EPPE team has made to achieve impact through the provision of appropriate outputs have been outlined, and the quality of that effort has increasingly been recognised. A recent GTCE report referred to the ‘clear focus on pedagogy’ in the REPEY report:

Classroom interactions between children and adults are described in a lot of detail and points of good (and bad) practice are highlighted. The strategies described are meaningful to and potentially usable by other teachers including those in other phases. The study offers teachers the opportunity to review and reflect on their own practice and to build on their existing knowledge, beliefs and strategies. (GTCE, 2003)

In a paper presented at the *British Educational Research Association* (BERA) Conference in 2004, Philippa Cordingley discussed some the major challenges and successes experienced by the Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education (CUREE) team in providing the GTCE with its web-based *Research of the Month* feature (Bell, Cordingley, Evans, Holdich & Saunders, 2004). The REPEY project (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002) was cited as especially noteworthy:

...because it provided perhaps the most rigorous and far-reaching stream of evidence that we have encountered in preparing RoMs[Research of the Month] – and in a topic area highlighted by teachers as important (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002, p. 6).

The paper also highlighted the features that the CUREE team considered made the study particularly suitable for presentation as *Research of the Month*:

- a clear and fully developed research question;
- a large, triangulated qualitative and quantitative evidence base covering starting points, processes and outcomes and drawn from a mix of methods;
- detailed findings relevant to teachers in the Foundation Stage and those in other phases of education; and

- a number of examples of practice observed in the settings covered by the study which illustrated key features of interactions of adults and pupils shown to be effective and less effective. (Bell et al., p.7)

The paper also argued that:

Through a range of examples highlighting good and less effective practice the study encourages practitioners to reflect on their approach to teaching in the early years. The examples were selected to offer teachers the opportunity to explore ways in which they can develop and build on their interactions with young children to influence the children's cognitive and social behaviour. (Bell et al., p.7)

The ECERS-E

One of the instruments specifically developed for the purposes of investigating the effects of 'pre-school quality' in the EPPE study has also been taken up by many local authorities and individual early years settings. In fact, these applications may be considered a substantial spin-off effect. The *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale for England (ECERS-E)* (Sylva, Siraj-Blatchford & Taggart, 2006) was developed to include four sub-scales to cover educational quality in terms of: language, mathematics, science and environment, and diversity. This instrument was developed in an extended iterative process that involved both early childhood authorities and practitioners. Each item on the scale describes environmental features and practices predicated on practitioner interpretations of quality and good practice. Some LEAs and settings have gone so far as to seek external validation in order that the effectiveness of their local development programmes might subsequently be compared with National Standards (Sylva, Siraj-Blatchford, Sammons, Melhuish, & Taggart, 1999).

So far, support has been provided to 13 LEAs (including Bury, Suffolk, Sheffield, East Sussex) in training their advisory staff to apply the instrument specifically for the purposes of raising 'quality' across maintained and non-maintained sectors. Sales of the ECERS-E are buoyant in the UK, Europe and the USA.

The ECERS-E was also applied as part of the Early Excellence Evaluations of two centres; the *Gamely Early Excellence Centre* in Derbyshire; and the *Thomas Coram and Coram Parents' Early Excellence Centre* in London (Siraj-Blatchford, 2002a, 2002b).

Conclusions

As with most other research projects and programmes, the EPPE research was never funded to investigate the impact of its own findings. In fact, given the inevitable time lag between publication and implementation it is difficult to see how any large-scale project might collect all the necessary data to provide such evidence. In writing the paper it has therefore been necessary for us to rely heavily upon secondary sources, and to make a number of inferences from the evidence available. In doing so we have argued that the EPPE qualitative case studies have provided those most significantly involved in the implementation of early years educational policy (practice related) with precisely the sort of detailed accounts of teaching contexts, and concrete examples of effective pedagogy, that they have required in the promotion of effective practices. We have also provided what evidence we have been able to collect (so far) that these materials *are* being applied.

Hargreaves (2003) has argued that educational improvement requires the development of a learning culture that involves both radical and incremental innovation, and as Pugh (2003) has suggested, the introduction of the *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage in England* (DfES, 2000), provides, for the first time; 'a clear and unambiguous statement of the principles which should underpin both learning and teaching' (Pugh, 2003, p.190). The introduction of the Foundation Stage may therefore be seen to constitute the kind of radical innovation which has the potential of transforming early childhood education. The implementation of the government's *Birth to Five* initiative, its *Ten Year Plan* and the proposed revisions of the Foundation Stage in 2008, should provide for enhanced continuity between services for children under three and those over three. Even more importantly, it promises to deliver precisely the sort of broad and long-term vision of an integrated approach to services that Pugh was calling for in 2003.

In this paper we have shown how the EPPE project continues to contribute towards achieving these radical improvements in practice. For Hargreaves, this kind of radical innovation is essential:

Incremental innovation keeps you in the game; but it is radical innovation that puts you ahead of the game and indeed often changes the rules of the game. Incremental innovators swim with the tide; radical innovators swim against it. Incremental innovation starts from the present and works steadily forwards; radical innovation starts from the future and works backwards. (Hargreaves, 2003, p. 1)

As Nutley and Davies (2000) suggest, lasting change is best achieved when multi-faceted strategies are employed rather than single-stringed approaches. As we have seen, the implementation of EPPE-informed practices are being supported by their inclusion in a major 'top-down', 'whole-system' re-development of the Foundation Stage in England. In Local authorities and in individual settings there is also substantial evidence that EPPE is having an effect in influencing organisational practices and in 'bottom-up' initiatives that are altering the attitudes and practices of individual practitioners.

The EPPE studies have supported, and in turn they have been supported by, the transformation of early childhood educational structures, processes and cultures in England. The EPPE experience supports Nutley and Davies' (2000) contention that the relationship between research, knowledge, policy and practice is always likely to remain loose, shifting and contingent:

One crucial lesson is the need to move to more holistic models that bring research producers, research funders and commissioners, policy makers, and practitioners into much closer and more sustained collaborations. (Nutley & Davies, 2000, p. 90)

Notes

1. Now confirmed to the age of 10 years (Sammons et al., 2007).
2. <http://www.tlrp.org/themes/themes/userengage.html>

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