



Quality Counts: Evidence from the Evaluation of the Early Education Pilot for Two Year Old Children



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What do we know?



- Access to early years education can have benefits for children's outcomes, particularly for disadvantaged children (Melhuish, 2004; Sylva et al, 2008)
- Children who experience **high quality** early years provision are well placed to achieve better outcomes in school and beyond, and develop better social, emotional and cognitive abilities necessary for life-long learning
- Poor quality provision, however, adds little or no value in the long term

The Early Education Pilot for Two Year Old Children

- As part of the 2010 Spending Review, the Government announced that the free entitlement to 15 hours of nursery education would be extended to every disadvantaged two-year-old.
- Prior to this, the **Early Education Pilot** (funded by the DCSF) had offered places offered to over 13,500 disadvantaged two year olds across 32 local authorities between 2006 and 2008
- Children were offered 7.5 hours (or 12.5) of early years education per week for 38 weeks of the year
- **Aims:**
 - to improve children's social & cognitive outcomes
 - to have a positive impact on parents and family

The National Evaluation

- Commissioned by the DCSF and carried out by NatCen & the Universities of Oxford/London.
- Several different evaluation strands, designed to assess the impact of the pilot by exploring:
 - How well the pilot was targeted
 - Parents' experiences of the pilot and perceptions of impact
 - *The impact of the pilot on the children's cognitive and socio-behavioural development*
 - *The quality of the pilot settings*

The impact study



- Two matched samples:
 - Families who took up pilot places
 - Comparison group drawn from families living in disadvantaged areas where the pilot was not operating (selected from Child Benefit records)
 - Two groups carefully matched on wide range of baseline characteristics including child cognitive development at age 2

Interviews/ assessments at two time points

	PILOT GROUP	COMPARISON GROUP
Pre-Test (age 2)	• Sure Start Language Measure (SSLM) - vocabulary knowledge	• Sure Start Language Measure (SSLM) - vocabulary knowledge
Parent report	• Adaptive Social Behaviour Inventory (ASBI) - rating scale for socio-behavioural development N=1,400	• Adaptive Social Behaviour Inventory (ASBI) - rating scale for socio-behavioural development N=1,821
Post-Test (age 3)	• SSLM • ASBI	• SSLM • ASBI
Parent report and researcher test	• British Ability Scales (BAS) II - naming vocabulary & picture similarity (non-verbal reasoning) N=1,116	• British Ability Scales (BAS) II - naming vocabulary & picture similarity (non-verbal reasoning) N=1,376

Initial findings



- No overall impact of attending pilot places on children's cognitive and social development relative to the comparison group
- Why?
- Several theories tested, eg:
 1. The user group received too few hours of pilot provision to have an impact on their outcomes
 2. The quality of the settings was too low to detect an impact

Assessing quality



- Observational assessments of quality in 75 settings (14% of settings, 38% of children)
- Quality assessment tool:
 - Infant-Toddler Environment Rating Scale-Revised (**ITERS-R**) Harms, Cryer and Clifford, 2003

Quality and impact



- Although the majority (77%) of provision in the pilot was 'adequate', only one fifth was rated as 'good quality'
- Split the sample to include only children who attended above-median quality*
- Impact on children's vocabulary found for children who were placed in relative high quality settings
 - Equivalent to moving a child from the 34th percentile for language development to the 46th percentile
- No impact for children attending lower quality provision

* ITERS score of 4 or above, on a scale of 1-7

Policy recommendations

- Pilot would have had a considerably larger impact had LAs been able to secure more high quality places
- If the impact of free early education for 2 year olds from deprived households on child development (particularly language) is to be maximised, settings offering places must be of medium to high high quality
- Immediate recommendation following the pilot (2009 LA guidance) was that provision should be restricted to settings with an Ofsted rating of at least 'good'
 - or if satisfactory, that the setting is able to demonstrate that it is actively working towards a good rating

For more information....



- Smith, Purdon, Mathers, Sylva, Schneider, La Valle, Wollny, Owen, Bryson and Lloyd (2009) Early Education Pilot for Two Year Old Children Evaluation *DCSF Research Report RR134*.
- <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/D-CSF-RR134.pdf>
- <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/D-CSF-RB134.pdf>

Discussion



Implementing the funded places

- How easy/difficult are you finding it to secure enough funded places?
- How are you defining 'disadvantage' in order to target places?
- To date, what have been your implementation successes and what are the main barriers you have faced?
-other questions for discussion?

Supporting high quality places

- **As a Local Authority...**
 - How are you making evidence-based decisions about quality to inform your funding allocations?
 - How are you ensuring that you have sufficient high quality places to narrow the gap for disadvantaged two year olds?
 - How are you empowering the practitioner community to lead quality improvement within your two year old provision?
 - How are you measuring the impact of your two year old project and provide evidence of improvement in quality?
 - How are you using the ITTERS (or ECERS) to support the provision of high quality places?