THE EFFECTIVE PRE-SCHOOL, PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION (EPPSE) PROGRAMME OF RESEARCH

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Background to the topic

The EPPSE longitudinal study, commissioned in 1997 by the DfE followed the academic and social-behavioural development of 3,000 children from age 3+ to 16+. The Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) project explored the contribution of pre-school to children's development. Subsequent EPPSE studies have investigated a range of influences, such as the continuing effects of pre-school and their interaction with primary and secondary schooling. This paper describes how the EPPE project developed into a programme of research, having a profound impact on national policy and everyday practices associated with better outcomes for young children.

Research questions/focus of the enquiry

The EPPSE research provides evidence about what influences children's development over time. Starting with the contribution of individual child characteristics, it explores families, out of school learning and what happens inside educational institutions to support a child's long-term development.

Research methods/or mapping the literature

EPPSE was innovative in applying a school effectiveness methodology to the study of pre-school. It was the largest study in Europe to investigate early experiences. EPPSE combined statistical analyses of administrative databases with questionnaire, interview and case study data to provide robust outcome analyses. This paper discusses the uniqueness of longitudinal research in answering research questions about children's development, studying 'naturally occurring variation' in children's educational experiences rather than in experimental settings. It highlights the importance of an iterative relationship between qualitative and quantitative methods and how the interplay between these strands led to new findings and novel interpretations.

Analytical and/or theoretical framework

The analytic framework employed multi-level modelling to explain children's outcomes using predictors at child (gender etc.), family, (social class etc.), community (neighbourhood etc.) and school (effectiveness) level. Predictors were derived from interviews, questionnaires and direct observations. EPPSE considered the impact of predictors both uniquely and in combination. The powerful analytical framework enabled EPPSE to answer many questions about what contributes to children's attainment and progress.

Research findings and/or contribution to knowledge

EPPSE findings are of national and international importance and have contributed to the development of major policy initiatives (e.g. Sure Start Children's Centres). They have also made a major contribution to the knowledge about effective educational practices.

This paper describes the design and reports on the group of projects including the original and several sub-studies (good transitions from primary to secondary school, early identification of SEN, neighbourhood influence, etc.) that made EPPSE a longitudinal programme of research.