

# English Policies for Early Years Children and their implications for primary education provision and economic returns on investment

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## **Abstract**

The paper takes a socio-historiographical approach to understanding educational policy frameworks that exist for pre-school education (birth to five years) in England, and how they connect to compulsory education, particularly primary education. Documentary desk based analysis was conducted. Findings reveal that since 1997 there has been a dramatic and rapid increase of pre-school education provision from random and sparse provision to free pre-school places currently offered to all three and four year olds. The evidence reveals there are problems recognizing quality in education beyond using measurable outcomes. High quality pedagogical relationships facilitate high quality learning experiences and these need to be recognized. When recognizing high quality pedagogical relationships it is important to understand that learning is complex. A learning experience provided in a lesson on Monday, may not result in a child learning until a day later, a week later, a year later or much later. Implications for policy are for pre-school providers, the middle tiers including local authorities, trusts, and boards, the government at state level, and Ofsted to take a mixed methods approach to recognize quality in pre-school education. Quality will thus be recognized through measurable outcomes against standards and learning goals, and high quality staff who develop high quality pedagogical relationships that facilitate meaningful and worthwhile learning experiences. Thus taking a mixed methods approach to recognizing quality pre-school education may enable more transparency regarding reducing the poverty/achievement gap, meeting directorates for health and well-being, and returns on investment in education.

## **Introduction**

The aims of this paper are to consider what early years policy exists in England, what strengths and challenges exist within the policy frameworks, and how the investigation might inform policy discourse. The earliest years in a child's life in England are defined as birth to

five years of age (Tickell, 2011). This stage of a child's life is critical for building the foundations for healthy development. Children need equal access to resources, and secure foundations linked to well-being or there will be long-term negative consequences for the child and for society (Tickell, 2011). Frameworks now exist for quality provision for the early years in England. However policy remains conflicted with regard to the divide between care, and education, the processes of participation in educational relationships and the measurable outcomes in terms of standards and gaining skills and qualifications. What these tensions are, and how these tensions are negotiated between government, the middle tier such as the local authority or trusts, and the local and particular providers and stakeholders requires investigation (McDowall Clark and Baylis, 2011). The findings have the potential to contribute to informing the policy discourse (Ball, 2004). The methodology is desk based documentary analysis (Taysum and Iqbal, 2012; Hodgson and Spears, 2006). The aims will be addressed with three research questions. First, what policy frameworks exist for Early Years provision in England? Second, what is the influence of 'quality' pre-school education on children's outcomes at age three, four, seven and 11? Third, what are the implications of the research for Early Years policy discourse?

### Documentary Analysis

Using Taysum and Iqbal (2012) approach I have collected and theorized educational policy focusing on the early years and primary education with some reference to compulsory secondary education in England. I have looked at these policies through a social historiography lens (Gale, 2001). Social historiography enables me to examine potential relationships between what is happening now and what has happened in the past (Kincheloe, 1991). I have taken a rigorous, systematic and critical approach to analyzing the policy documents that have revealed what Taysum and Iqbal (2012) call educational issues that are in the public interest and are public, and private troubles. When engaging with documentary analysis Taysum and Iqbal (2012) argue that shifts in policy can be connected to shifts in government and argue that in such shifts policy memory can be lost. With rapid shifts in policy the strengths of a previous policy can be abandoned. The introduction of a new strategy or educational reform may not align with what educational professionals have done before that was grounded in their professional education, training and continuing professional development. The result may be a weakened profession whose autonomy is eroded leaving them reliant on prescribed policy that is delivered. Delivering a standards based curriculum is potentially very different from constructing meaningful learning experiences that require educational professionals' pedagogical expertise. The problem can be compounded if educational professionals did not participate in the forming of policy (Hodgson and Spours, 2006). When engaging with documentary analysis it is important to reveal the extent to which education policy and its implications have been communicated to those im-

plementing it and those affected by it. Further it is important to understand how participation has been facilitated (Shields, 2007). To engage with full policy analysis therefore I take Taysum and Iqbal (2012) approach that seeks to understand *what* is happening regarding educational policy by analyzing quantitative data. I combine this approach with understanding *how* and *why* it is happening by drawing on qualitative data. Thus the documentary analysis takes a mixed methods approach.

## Policy frameworks for Early Years in England

Early Years is defined as the period of time of a child's life from birth to 5 years of age (Tickell, 2011). According to the Childcare and Early Years Provision Survey (DfE, 2011) the childcare market in England has changed significantly over the past decade (DfE, 2011). Prior to the New Labour Government elected in 1997, pre-school education in England was not systematically implemented (Sylva et al, 2013). Sylva et al continue that the provision was by the Pre-School Learning Alliance, voluntary bodies and the private sector. However from 1998 all four year old children had access to a free pre-school place. Building on this foundation in 1999 a strategy called 'Sure Start' was initiated. Sure Start was aimed at children and families in the 20% lowest Socio-Economic Areas where arguably intergenerational unemployment was high (Taysum, 2013b). In 2004 all three year old children were entitled to a free pre-school place, which coincided with the introduction of the Children's Centre Programme for children and families in areas of low Socio-Economic Status in 2004. In 2006 the Children's Act aimed to reduce the poverty gap that still exists today (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2012). By 2010 The Children's Centre Programme for children and families was rolled out to all (Sylva et al, 2013), and in 2013 the Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative in 2013 built on the Sure Start programme which aimed at enabling parents to enter/rejoin the labour market.

Today there is a curriculum with common entitlement for children from birth to five years old with statutory standards of provision (DCSF, 2007; DCSF, 2008; DfE, 2012a). With these changes, the number of providers and their profiles have also changed dramatically since 2001 (DfE, 2011). The survey recorded:

107,900 settings providing different types of childcare and early years care, of which 15,700 were early years providers in maintained schools and 92,200 were childcare settings. This marks a slight increase from the figures in 2010, when the survey recorded a total of 105,100 childcare and early years settings. This change was driven by an increase in the total number of childcare settings, from 89,500 in 2010 to 92,200 in 2011. The number of early years providers in 2011 remained the same as that which was recorded in 2010 and

2009, with a total of 15,700 in each of those three years. Of those, 400 were nursery schools, 6,700 were primary schools with nursery and reception classes, and 8,600 were primary schools with nursery but no reception classes. Nursery schools remain particularly important in the 30 per cent most deprived areas of the country, where 59 per cent of all nursery schools were to be found in 2011. This was also true, to a lesser extent, of primary schools with nursery and reception classes, 44 per cent of which were to be found in the 30 per cent most deprived areas. Conversely, primary schools with reception classes but no nursery classes tended to be found in wealthier areas, with 87 per cent of all such settings to be found in the 70 per cent least deprived areas (p.1).

The statistics demonstrate that England's pre-school policy is heavily invested in and this is because early childhood education and care ties in with many benefits. Benefits include economic growth, development of cultural identity and tolerance for cultural diversity, the development of dispositions for life-long learning, social mobility, higher levels of child well being, reducing the achievement gap and reducing poverty (Taguma et al, 2012). These aspects are reflected in current legislation for the Early Years in England with the Children's Act (2004) and the Childcare Act (2006), with amendments, and outstanding changes not yet made by the legislation.gov.uk editorial team to Childcare Act 2006 (Childcare Act, 2006). Both these acts define roles and responsibilities to meet these aspects within early years provision. In the Children's Act (2004) and the Review of the Children's Commissioner in England: Children and young peoples guide (DfE, 2010) a Chief Children's Commissioner for England needs to be instated. Dr Maggie Atkinson is the current children's Commissioner for England. The role of the Children's Commissioner is to promote awareness, views and interests of children in England and to make provision about services provided to and for children and young people by local authorities and other persons (Children's Act, 2004). Each Children's Services authority in England needs to have Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCB's). The Boards are partners of children's services authority in England –

- a) where the authority is a county council for an area for which there is also a district council, the district council;
- b) the chief officer of police for a police area any part of which falls within the area of authority;
- c) a local probation board for an area any part of which falls within the area of authority;
- d) a youth offending team for an area any part of which falls within the area of the authority;
- e) a strategic health authority and a primary care trust for an area any part of which falls within the area of the authority;

- f) an NHS trust and an NHS foundation trust all or most of whose hospitals, establishments and facilities are situated in the area of the authority;
- g) a person providing services under section 114 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000 (c.21) in any part of the area of the authority;
- h) the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service;
- i) the governor of any prison in the area of the authority which ordinarily detains children (or in the case of a contracted out prison, its director) (p.12).

These joined up services need to safe guard and promote the welfare of children in the area of the authority and comply with the Secretary of State's prescribed regulations. The prescribed regulations mean that the Secretary of State has the power to legislate drawing upon, or not drawing upon evidence (Taysum, 2012) and with or without listening to findings from consultation (Pollard and James, 2012). Yet, the Children's Act (2004) requires Children and Young People's plans to enable the discharge of the joined up services functions in relation to children and relevant young people (p.14). Therefore it is possible that those who are implementing the policy have had no input into its formulation. Thus the Director of Children's Services appointed by a children's services authority in England along with the Lead member for children's services according to the Children's Act (2004) may be working in very challenging conditions within top down structures. Top down structures may not permit participation in the policy process other than its implementation. The Children's Services are then inspected by the Chief Inspector of Schools. Further the Children's Act (2004, p. 18) states:

a performance rating of social services is given to each authority in respect of all the English local authority social services provided by, or pursuant to arrangements made by that authority.

However, it is not clear how each authority has the opportunity to explain why there may be low performance ratings. Further, it is not clear the extent to which the inspections take into account economic histories and socio-cultural historiographies of regions, or towns (Grimaldi and Serpieri, 2012) and research is recommended here. Such research is important because Sir Michael Wilshaw the Chief Inspector of Schools in his annual report published in November 2012 (Ofsted, 2012, p.16) states:

There is huge variation in the effectiveness of local authorities in these matters. One example of local variation is the great inequality of access to good or better schools across different areas. The child of primary school age in England has on average a seven out of 10 (69%) chance of being in a good or outstanding school. However, some have a better

than 90% and some worse than 50% chance to attend a good or better school depending on where they live. Although around 70% of providers across most sectors (early years, schools, and learning and skills) are good or better, this disguises the highly unequal opportunities that children and young people have to gain access to provision of this quality.

Serious questions need to be asked regarding how much influence pre-school education and compulsory education can have on addressing variances between regions. To try to address the inequalities identified by Ofsted rapid educational reforms have been taking place with comprehensive schools converting to academy status. Academy status means becoming independent of the local authority. However, Taysum (2013a) argues:

Authorities are being replaced by Trusts that are buying businesses in education and developing chains that are for profit and potentially work on the same principles as the entrepreneurial banking system (Pring, 2012).

This is arguably highly problematic for implementing the Children's Act (2004) and the Child-care Act (2006) because these acts became prescribed legislation with the old local authority structures. There are capacity issues here, and when such capacity issues are not addressed there are gaps in the provision. A review into how academies, trusts and all stakeholders can work together, with the Children's Commissioner, the Children's Services, the Local Safeguarding Children Boards, The Director of Children's Services, and the Lead Member for Children's Services is required. Such a review may help address the tensions that are arising with regard to the Statutory Guidance for Children's Services Chiefs published August 5th 2013 that state:

the Director for Children's Services and the Lead Member for Children's Services must ensure fair access to all schools for every child in accordance with the statutory School Admissions and School Admissions Appeal Codes and ensure appropriate information is provided to parents' (DfE, 2013, p.4).

The tensions have emerged because there is a crisis with regard to a quarter of a million extra school places being needed in England by autumn 2014. The Secretary of State argues the quarter of a million places, will be met by Free Schools (BBC, 2013). A professional challenge therefore exists for Local Authorities, Director of Children's Services, and Lead Member for Children's Services to deliver on their legislative remit to provide school places, when they are unable to influence Academy and Free School admissions policies because these organizations are independent. With the old structures the Local Authorities controlled and/or strongly influenced the admission policies. Further The Shadow Education Secretary Stephen Twigg said:

'David Cameron and George Osborne have cut capital spending by 58%. Their free school programme is setting up schools in areas, which already have enough places' (Harrison, 2013). Stefan Lofven who is Sweden's Social Democratic Workers' Party has identified that in Sweden the largest chain of Free Schools 'JB Education' went bankrupt in May 2013. Lofven has called the Swedish Education system with 'free schools' being run for profit as a 'Wild West' (Orange, 2013) and it is not clear how the policy borrowing for 'free schools' in England will overcome the problems 'JB Education' faced.

Moving beyond the structural issues with regard to implementing The Children's Act (2004), it is important to note the act works concurrently with the Childcare Act (2006). The Childcare Act (2006) sets out the General functions of local authority in England, which work with the Regulation of Provision of Childcare in England, Voluntary Registration, Common Provision, Miscellaneous and General, and Schedules of amendments and repeals. The Act (2006) states that An English local authority must:

- (a) improve the well being of young children in their area, and
- (b) reduce inequalities between young children in their area in relation to the matters mentioned in sub-section 2. (p.1)

Thus the elements set out by Taguma et al (2012) above are addressed by the act with regard to setting out the local authority's responsibility for improving the well being of young people and reducing inequalities. The Act (2006) defines 'well-being', as:

- (a) physical and mental health and emotional well-being;
- (b) protection from harm and neglect;
- (c) education, training and recreation;
- (d) the contribution made by them to society;
- (e) social and economic well-being (p.1)

These connect with Taguma et al (2012) as follows. Physical and mental health and emotional well-being will be enhanced by promoting the child's potential for engaging with the labour market to contribute towards economic growth. Further their physical and mental health and well being will be enhanced if they are able to construct and begin to evaluate a narrative regarding who they are and how they balance their identity as an individual with that of their class, their school, their community and so on (Goodson, 2012). In other words developing children's physical and mental health and well-being tie in closely with facilitating cultural and social cohesion. Thus developing a cultural identity and tolerance for cultural diversity connects

with their potential contribution to society and social and economic well being. However, if the area that the children are growing up in has high unemployment, there are potential issues for the community engaging with education and understanding what education might do for them. Taysum (2013b) cites a leader who is working for social justice and grappling with this issue:

The leader gave an example of a school in a place that formerly had lots of work involving mining and industry, and where now those opportunities do not exist at all. The leader needs to make sense of how to engage with a community that was used to one economic norm and one sense of community that does not exist anymore. Thus the leader reported that he makes sense of social justice in terms of people's own personal family history. The leader stated: 'if you grow up in a family where for two or three generations people have not worked then your chances of thinking that work is what we do, and the dignity of work that is really important, are significantly reduced'.

The leader stated that a way of addressing this issue was enabling young people to get a university education and Taysum (2013b) cites the leader who says this is:

a great way of giving them fabulous access to the labour market'. However, the leader warns that this is probably not going to be where they are living or where they grew up, or where their community is, or where their parents want them to be because of the economic changes described above. Thus the leader's work focuses on engaging properly with those issues and working well with communities, and understanding the labour market and the economy. It is worthy of note that the leader identified that he believes these issues are absent from policy discussion at the moment.

Thus developing children's physical, mental and emotional well-being means trying to understand the impact of a good education, and the strengths and challenges of social mobility for different communities in different contexts. The World Health Organization has produced in consultation 'Health 2020: The European Policy for Health and Well-being, which has influenced the 'Health and Well-being Directorate' from the English government which focuses on enhancing health and well-being. However, Mulholland et al (2013) research into the implementation of the policy has raised doubts over the extent to which the changes are enhancing promoting health and well-being. There are significant issues regarding educational professionals, students, community and stakeholder participation in education and health and well-being and further research is recommended here.

The next section of the Children's Act (2006), part b is protecting children from harm and ne-



glect and promoting education training and recreation. Again this can also contribute to economic growth and cultural and social cohesion as well as underpinning dispositions for life-long learning. Thus pre-school education and compulsory education has potentially good returns on investment. However again the strategy may lead to social mobility in areas of high unemployment and deprivation and a strategy of separatism (Pring, 2012) with regard to separating families. There are clearly tensions with regard to the benefits of higher levels of well-being brought about by reducing the achievement gap and reducing poverty and lower levels of well-being brought about by children being educated for jobs that do not exist in their area. However, Taysum (2013b) cites a leader who offers a strategy that facilitates university education and strengthens community cohesion:

An example of this is...a school which is on a very challenging estate where the health outcomes are poor and people do not have much education and unemployment is very high. One of the things that we see beginning to happen is that children who have been to university and come back are now part of the teaching force in that school and have a powerful sense of connection with that community and those young people. There is a real sense of 'here is what I have done, here is what I have achieved, this can be good for you, these are opportunities which are there for you', which can have a really positive reinforcing impact on the next generation of kids.

The opportunities for children seeing education as meaningful and worthwhile for them because they can gain an education, go to university and return to their area and begin to build new enterprises to revive their economies is supported by 'Health 2020' (World Health Organization, 2013) which seeks to invest in economic development. Thus it can be seen that the Children's Act (2004) and the Childcare Act (2006) maps favourably with the OECD report on quality matters in the Early Years. However, the issues that emerge are complex and cannot be overlooked, with regard to communities participating in education. Communities need to understand the relevance to them for working hard and aiming for five GCSEs A\* to C. Such attainment needs to be meaningful and worthwhile for them and the construction of their life narratives (Goodson, 2012) and their hopes and aspirations for the future for themselves and for their community.

The Act (2006) was arguably very important and marked a significant affirmation of the importance of early years provision within England because it focused on an inclusive approach and engaged families and communities. The Children's Centre Programme for children and families built on the inclusive approach (Sylva et al, 2013), and in 2013 the Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative in 2013 built on the Sure Start programme aimed at enabling parents to enter/

rejoin the labour market. Today there is a curriculum with common entitlement for children from birth to five years old with statutory standards of provision (DCSF, 2007; DCSF, 2008) culminating with The Early Years Statutory Framework (DfE, 2012). The Early Years Statutory Framework focuses on setting the standards for learning, development and care for children from birth to five. This ties in closely with introduction of the Standards and Testing Agency (STA) that replaced the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency in March 2012. The STA is an executive agency of the Department for Education responsible for delivering statutory assessments from early years to Key Stage 3. Note that STA does not include the language development, curriculum, or pedagogy in its title as the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency did. I explore the developments in policy from 2007 to today in more depth in the next section because they engage with emerging issues around what quality is in pre-school provision and how it can be measured and recognized.

### Quality pre-school provision and its influence

Having established the rapid development of Early Years provision from 1997 to date, it is important to also understand what quality is, and how the aims of the legislation outlined above, are met. Education policies are shaped by historiographical contexts and thus definitions of quality vary across countries (Taysum and Iqbal, 2012). With regard to shaping quality in early childhood provision Taguma et al (2012) identify that the most important condition is the quality of the workforce, or in other words the adults who work with the children. The adults need to be educated and trained to a high level to facilitate the best cognitive and social outcomes for children (Taguma et al, 2012). However, Taguma et al identify that more important than the qualification is the educational professional's disposition for providing high quality learning experiences underpinned by high quality pedagogical relationships (Pring, 2000). To critique this, the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) research project that had significant impact on the development of policy in the early years (Sylva, 2013) used quantitative standardized tools to assess the quality of early years provision in different settings. The tool was the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) designed by Harms and Clifford (1980). The aim of the ECERS was to provide a self-diagnostic tool to educational professionals working in early years to provide evidence informed strategies for improvement. Clifford and Reszka (2010) identify that the tool had seven subscales:

- 1) Personal Care Routines,
- 2) Furnishings and display for children,
- 3) Language - Reasoning Experiences,
- 4) fine and Gross Motor Activities,

- 5) Creative Activities,
- 6) Social Development and
- 7) Adult Needs.

With an adapted version presented in 1998:

- 1) Space and Furnishings,
- 2) Personal Care Routines,
- 3) Language - Reasoning,
- 4) Activities,
- 5) Interaction,
- 6) Program Structure and
- 7) Parents and Staff.

The adapted version that was released 18 years after the first iteration reflected developments in the field of early years provision by focusing more on inclusion of children and families recognized as being disabled by society, and children and families recognized as low income and or linguistically, racially, or culturally diverse (Clifford and Reszka, 2010). However, Sylva et al (2011) argue that these measures were used in their research and they found them to be 'very broad brush' because:

they only take a day to administer, provide an estimate of quality that is robust but not deep. Indicators in these scales have to be 'objective' enough to allow inter-observer reliability, and 'frequent' enough to be picked up on a visit of a single day. More qualitative studies such as the EPPE case studies (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002, 2008) delve into the complexities of practice and the shared meanings (amongst staff) that underpin it. (p.120.)

Sylva et al go on to state that shedding light on the learning processes and the pedagogical relationships requires both quantitative and qualitative methods. Thus to understand the quality of early years provision it is arguably important to take a mixed methods approach. One method uses the quantitative tools to provide a robust understanding of the provision using the items above. The second method is in-depth case studies that maps the educational preparation and continuing professional development of the staff (Sylva et al., 2013).

The quality of the processes and practices accessed via qualitative in depth case studies, and the snap shot views of the provision provided by the ECERS E and R need to be accompanied by the children's outcomes. The outcomes can be measured in different ways, and they can be

measured concurrently, and/or take a longitudinal approach. A longitudinal approach examines the impact of the early childhood provision at the end of key stage one (five year olds to seven years old) and at the end of key stage two (seven year olds to eleven years old). Sylva et al (2011) have published findings of outcomes that are net of influences such as family and child entry profiles, thus the findings regarding outcomes are 'value-added'. The outcomes do not measure virtues such as courage, and neither do they measure creativity or cheerfulness which are important to foster in educational settings. However having flagged up the constraints of using quantitative methods to measure quality of pre-school service, Sylva et al. (2011) found that children at age seven who had attended pre-school of any kind regardless of level of quality did better than those children who had no pre-school experience. By the age of 11 the benefits of low-quality pre-school had begun to diminish. Indeed Sylva et al. (2011, p.120) report:

In fact, for some cognitive and social behavioural outcomes, attending a low quality pre-school was no better than children remaining at home...High quality learning experiences at either home or pre-school setting can boost the development of children, thus acting as 'protective' factors. Previous experience of a high quality Home Learning Environment appears to act as a protective factor for children who had not attended pre-school (the home group) in terms of promoting higher levels of self-regulations. Similarly past experience of high quality pre-school is predictive of later improved self-regulation for children who had experienced only a very poor Home Learning Environment. Thus the disadvantage of not attending pre-school is countered if children have good learning experiences at home. Similarly, the disadvantage of a poor Home Learning Environment is ameliorated by high quality pre-school. Both aspects of early influence still show an impact on longer-term development up to the age of 11.

In sum, medium to high quality pre-school led to greater benefits in long-term cognitive and social development than low quality pre-school. Thus the extensive longitudinal study has implications for policy with regard to ensuring provision for high quality pre-school experiences. The research is supported by Young (2013) who identifies there is a relationship between pre-school provision and high economic returns greater than the relationship between high economic returns and any other phases of education. These compelling arguments have led to The Statutory Framework for The Early Years Foundation Stage (2012) (EYFS, 2012) that seeks to provide:

- Quality and consistency in all early years settings, so that every child makes good progress and no child gets left behind.

It is clear that the first aim links very closely to closing the achievement gap as indicated in the Childcare Act (2006) with an eye to providing high quality pre-school provision. The next aim of the EYFS (2012) begins to address the processes and practices that will enable this to happen:

- A secure foundation through learning and development opportunities which are planned around the needs and interests of each individual child and are assessed and reviewed regularly;

This combines the quantitative methods for identifying high quality pre-school provision using tools such as the ECERS-E and R with the qualitative methods for identifying high pre-school quality with regard to developing high quality learning experiences with high quality professional educationalists. The next aim of the EYFS (2012) identifies the need to work with parents:

- Partnership working between practitioners and with parents and/or carers

Issues arise here with regard to which practitioners are working in partnership with the staff in the pre-school provision. To support this work is The National Professional Development Framework for Leading and Managing children's Services in England (DCSF, 2008). The policy framework aims to focus the services processes and practices on improving outcomes for families and children. The outcomes can be measured via the profile and the learning goals with 17 elements including: listening and attention, understanding, speaking, moving and handling, health and self-care, self-confidence and self-awareness, managing feelings and behaviour, making relationships, reading, writing, numbers, shape, space and measures, people and communities, the world, technology, exploring and using media and materials, and being imaginative (please see annex 1). The framework calls for: 'resilient well-informed creative and innovative leaders with the requisite skills, knowledge and experience to ensure the effective delivery of integrated provision for children, young people and families at the local level' (Ang, 2011). The Act also seeks:

- Equality of opportunity and anti-discriminatory practice, ensuring that every child is included and supported.

Equality of opportunity and anti-discriminatory practice requires educational professionals to examine their own constructs and work for cultural alignment within their own institutions (Taysum, 2013c). The approach means examining how exclusionary practices are unintentionally

replicated through 'taken-for-granted' cultural practices. An integrated approach to provision is essential, however there are issues with regard to realizing the overarching principles with measurement tools that are standardized because they cannot recognize the importance of pedagogical relationships and how these are situated in participatory processes and practices. The EYFS overarching principles of the framework (DfE, 2012b, p.4) state:

- Every child is a unique child, who is constantly learning and can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured;
  - Children learn to be strong and independent through positive relationships;
  - Children learn and develop well in enabling environments in which their experiences respond to their individual needs and there is a strong partnerships between practitioners and parents and/or carers; and
  - Children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates
- The framework covers the education and care of all children in early years provision, including children with special educational needs and disabilities.

There are tensions between realizing the principles including children learning in different ways at different rates if the learning is standardized and the children are measured against standards that identify they are or are not meeting the standards. Thus the aims and overarching principles of the EYFS tie in closely with Taguma et al (2012) declared benefits of pre-school education and are clearly very important. However, the standardized outcomes that are measured potentially undermine the aims and principles. Rodd (2006) argues that key to early childhood settings is creating a community and providing a high quality service. However, as identified previously in this paper there are tensions regarding what quality is, and how it can be measured. Taguma et al (2012) argue that building a community of high quality staff who build pedagogical relationships that facilitate high quality learning experiences is key to quality of pre-school education. This is affirmed by Ang (2011) who focuses on the importance of high quality of leadership. Quality here focuses on the processes and practices of a pre-school setting, relationships and participation which the Children's Commissioner also advocates. The arguments connect with Kilderry (2013) who presents evidence that early childhood teachers are social actors who can use their professional judgements to reject narrow parameters imposed on them through a standards agenda. However, Vincent and Braun (2011) argue that the potential for early years professionals to construct a professional identity is constrained by the standards and argue that this needs attention. If quality pre-school education

provision does not focus on pedagogical relationships and is measured by quantitative tools alone this situation is unlikely to change. Rather the quantitative tools that are robust but not able to shed light on processes and practices (Sylva, et al, 2012) are likely to reinforce a standards agenda that focuses on outcomes rather than processes.

A mixed methods approach to understanding quality in pre-school settings is potentially a way forward. However, Alexander (2008) suggests research reveals that pressures for schools to attain high test, exam outcomes and by implication high profile outcomes through the commodification of education (Ball, 2009, Masaaki, 2012) can have devastating affects upon the early years and pre-school education. The negative affects are caused by downward pressure that is exerted upon the early years and pre-school settings to produce children who will have high levels of self regulation and will fit straight into a year one classroom and get high test scores (Alexander, 2008). Alexander continues that consequentially teachers focus on numeracy and literacy in the early years and 'drill' three and four year olds in classroom management practices found in the 17 elements of the profile assessment (appendix 1). Alexander states that to meet particular learning goals on learning journeys, targets for the development of children's skills as defined as targets to meet the standards in their profiles (DfE, 2012c) are set that some children can never hope to achieve. Setting targets that are not achievable lowers self-esteem and potentially demotivates children at a very young age. Those that are most vulnerable here are the youngest children and those recognized as being disabled by society (Alexander, 2008). Alexander argues that undermining confidence at an early age can have negative affects on reducing the attainment/achievement gap.

The impact of negative affects impact all the other aims of the Children's Act (2004) and the Childcare Act (2006) and the Early Years Foundation Stage because they begin to focus on the quality of the outcomes against the standards rather than the qualities of the very young human beings in front of them. Accordingly all the benefits that might be accrued from having equitable pre-school provision are lost. Further Alexander (2008) makes the case that there is no evidence that learning formally produces better outcomes than learning through play. Indeed evidence from Finland reveals children do not go into formal lessons until they are six and they focus on social and emotional development and developing positive relationships in the early years through play (Taguma, 2012). Alexander (2008, p.4) argues:

In fact, research suggests the opposite; that far too formal too soon can be dangerously counterproductive. In 14 of 15 countries that scored higher than England in a major study of reading and literacy in 2006, children did not enter school until they were six or seven. And more children read for pleasure in most of those countries that do so in England.

Many review witnesses called for England to fall into line with international practice. On average only 16 percent of European Union five-year-olds are in school. The majority attend nursery schools, pre-schools or kindergartens until they are six or seven, settings in which they follow a developmentally-appropriate curriculum. In Finland for example they concentrate on social physical and moral development until they are six and then spend a year preparing for transfer to school at seven.

The Alexander review found that the foundation stage should extend to the age of six, allowing children to foster a love of learning and lay a firm foundation upon which to build a life long love of learning. Part of this approach would remove the standards approach and bring coherence to the early years. The Alexander review also recommended removing Key Stage One and having one large phase up until 11 years old with a coherent holistic child centred approach to learning.

### Conclusions and Implications for Policy

A balance needs to be struck between a standards driven approach, and a humanistic approach to developing human beings to lead a good life balancing the interests of the self with that of their community. A standards driven agenda is where students need to deliver outcomes in terms of high stakes tests to meet the needs of the labour market. A humanistic approach focuses on developing character and dispositions so that students can become resilient, reliable, adaptable to change, able to work with other people, and be creative. A mixed methods approach may be a good way of developing a balanced approach whilst meeting economic and socio-cultural needs. The challenge is for frameworks for the early years to recognize a mixed methods approach. The frameworks need to include profiles that meet learning goals with measurable outcomes, anything less than that would not be acceptable. However working with high expectations for outcomes needs to be with an explicit understanding of how to improve the health and well-being of young children (DfE, 2013; Malholland et al, 2013). This is particularly so in areas that Ofsted have said are unsatisfactory and where it is imperative that inequalities between young children are reduced. Such an approach includes exploring the economic and socio-cultural historiographies of the area and facilitating participation of parents, children and stakeholders in making sense of education tied into building healthy life narratives for the future (Goodson, 2012).

The implications for policy is that this is going to be difficult to measure. Anything in the affective domain that connects with character, dispositions and laying the foundations for health and well-being will be arguably difficult to measure. A strategy to address this might be to develop



autonomous educational professionals who are mentored and/or coached by leading pedagogues and educational leadership to develop their own dispositions and character. Such educational professionals may be in a stronger position to develop pedagogical relationships that facilitate high quality learning experiences that are meaningful and worthwhile to the children located within their local and particular community and its economic and socio-cultural history. As Taysum (2013c) identifies as educational professionals get to know themselves better they will be in a stronger position to work for cultural alignment and inclusion.

There is therefore a need to recognize what quality is in pre-school and compulsory education beyond measurable outcomes. A way forward may be to take a mixed methods approach where quantifiable outcomes are measured, and high quality pedagogical relationships that facilitate high quality learning experiences are recognized. When recognizing high quality pedagogical relationships it is important to understand that learning is complex and a stimulus provided in a lesson on Monday, may not result in a child learning until a day later, a week later, or a year later. In such circumstances it is very challenging to tick the child's shift in identity, or 'learning' against a particular lesson. This is arguably the challenge for policy.

### Questions to emerge from the paper

1. To what extent does the economic and socio-cultural history of an area influence the education outcomes, and why?
2. How much influence can pre-school education and compulsory education realistically have on addressing variances between regions?
3. To what extent do educational institutions need to connect with the communities they serve to promote full engagement in educational processes and practices?
4. What opportunities and challenges arise when a named official of a serving political party elected for four years, prescribes regulations?
5. What opportunities and challenges arise if a more participatory approach to policy making is developed between named officials of political parties, named officials of the shadow political party, local authorities and those engaging with children's services, local and particular pre-school education institutions and all compulsory education institutions, children, the Chief Children's Commissioner employers and investors in economical development, and parents?
6. What key issues does this paper raise for you, and why?

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