**Education Committee Life Chances Inquiry**

**Submission from TACTYC, the Association for Professional Development in Early Years**

June 2018

**TACTYC promotes the highest quality professional development for all early years educators in order to enhance the educational well-being of the youngest children.**

Our activities include:

* **advocacy and lobbying** – providing a voice for all those engaged with the professional development of practitioners through responding to early years policy initiatives and contributing to the debate on the education and training of the UK early years workforce;
* **informing** – developing the knowledge-base of all those concerned with early years education and care by disseminating research findings through our international *Early Years* Journal, annual conference, website and occasional publications;
* **supporting**– encouraging informed and constructive discussion and debate and supporting practitioner reflection, the use of evidence-based practice and practitioner-research through, for example, our newsletter and website [www.tactyc.org.uk](http://www.tactyc.org.uk)

TACTYC supports the aims of the inquiry into understanding the impact that early education and social policy have on determining children’s life chances. It is critical that the concept of quality in early years provision includes approaches to pedagogy which are well-informed by evidence of the impact on children’s learning and development not just for the present but also for their futures. Current government pressures on education in the early years, based on expectations of formal learning more appropriate for older children, will not support life chances for many children. Widening child poverty and economic inequality have negative effects on children’s life chances, compounded by the loss of integrated services in Children’s Centres to support families. Oral communication and language are crucial underpinnings for children’s learning and social adjustment and are best supported through skilled interaction with adults in playful experiences. It is of concern that opportunities to develop the necessary skills in the workforce are at risk.

**The role of quality early years education in determining life chances and promoting social justice**

1. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is truly foundational, in that children’s learning capabilities are primarily formed in the early years, as are their dispositions and attitude towards learning. During the early years children assimilate information more rapidly than at any other point in their lives. Strong neural pathways are formed which allow them to accommodate this new information which help them to understand the world around them and how to navigate within it.
2. There is a large body of evidence about the elements of quality provision that have lasting impact on children’s outcomes. Most well-known is perhaps the Perry Preschool longitudinal studies which demonstrated social, educational and economic benefits into their 40’s for children who had attended High/Scope preschools, compared with children who had not attended preschool or who had attended more formal, didactic preschools. As well as a pedagogy which encouraged active learning, teachers supporting, stimulating and challenging learning, and self-regulation through plan-do-review in child-initiated activities, the High/Scope programme also involved close and ongoing work with families.
	1. (Sweinhart et al, Significant Benefits: The High/Scope Perry PrePreschool Study through Age 27. Monographs of the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, No. Ten**)**
3. The longitudinal EPPSE studies in England provide evidence of the pedagogical approaches which demonstrate lasting positive impact for children (<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/research/featured-research/effective-pre-school-primary-secondary-education-project/publications>). The findings included, for example:
	1. Children who had early years education gained higher English and mathematics GCSE results and were more likely to achieved five or more GCSEs at grades A\*C.
	2. Children who had experienced high quality pre-school education were better at self-regulation and social behaviour, and were less inclined to hyperactivity.
	3. Children who had experienced high quality pre-school settings were more likely to follow a post-16 academic path.
4. The associated REPEY study also explored features of the pre-schools which had the greatest positive impact and identified some pedagogical elements:
	1. a balance between teacher-led and freely chosen activities;
	2. differentiation which enabled children to build on their own starting points;
	3. opportunities to challenge children’s thinking;
	4. impact was greatest when parents or carers were aware of the learning activities taking place within school and built upon these experiences in the cultural context of the home.
5. Studies have found that attendance at high quality preschool between the ages of 2 and 3 years is linked to significant cognitive and socio-emotional benefits pertaining to attainment on entering school and academic success. ‘High quality’ in these studies means pedagogical approaches that include play and self-directed learning for young children. The OECD (2010) agree that widening access to high quality early years provision improves academic performance and reduces social disparity, as long as the quality of his provision is not compromised through widening access.
6. The government’s introduction of funding for 30 hours for 3-4-year-olds may be having a negative effect on life chances of children growing up in disadvantage, since the funding is available only to families where both parents are working. The introduction of 30 hours funding is having a negative effect on availability of early years places. Large settings are being forced to increase the number of places they offer to 2-year-olds in order to cover costs, while small settings are closing up and down the country. In one county alone the number of home-based childcare providers has fallen by 47%.
7. The DfE has recently published its research priorities, the first of which is: ‘What is the prevalence of different pedagogical approaches in different early years settings, including maintained nurseries and nursery provision in primary schools? How does this vary across the workforce? Which of these approaches have the greatest impact on development?’
8. This is certainly a pressing question, especially given the contested space that early years education has become with a large body of professionals steeped in early child development and the nature of early learning struggling against a more top-down agenda pushing formalised learning and assessment into the early years.
9. The EYFS identifies three prime areas of learning and development – Communication and Language; Personal, Social and Emotional Development; and Physical Development – as forming the foundation for all areas and representing essential development in the sensitive period of the early years. There is also a strong body of evidence on the importance of developing cognitive self-regulation during the early years, described in the EYFS as the Characteristics of Effective Learning, which are best supported through children’s active exploration, play and thoughtful conversations. The four specific areas -- Mathematical Development, Literacy, Understanding the World and Expressive Arts and Design – are not as time-sensitive, and can equally well be encountered and developed later.

1. There is growing concern that, as a response to DfE insistence on synthetic phonics as the sole method to teach early reading and the downward pressures resulting from the Year 1 Phonics Check, there is increasing pressure to focus on phonics in the Reception year when children are aged 4-5 to the detriment of all else. Phonics is a just a small part of literacy. This concern has been exacerbated in the wake of the pedagogically catastrophic report entitled ‘Bold Beginnings’ (OfSTED, 2017) As Early Education state:

‘The report ignores children with English as an Additional Language as well as those with SEND, summer-born children, and those who face other forms of vulnerability. The type of Reception curriculum emphasised in this report would exclude many children who, for a range of reasons, may be working at earlier levels of development and a premature focus on reading, phonics and formal maths will lead to a great number of children being unnecessarily identified as SEND.’

1. TACTYC also expressed our concern about Bold Beginnings:

‘It is clear to TACTYC that adherence to the report’s recommendations will cause long-term, detrimental effects on young children’s confidence, motivation and disposition to learn, as well as on their parents’ attitudes and early years teachers’ professional integrity.’

1. The risks of a narrow view of early education are compounded by DfE plans to reintroduce baseline assessment in the Reception year. In our response to the original consultation on these plans TACTYC stated:

‘A baseline assessment with its focus on a narrow range of knowledge and skills is likely to lead to a narrow range of experiences for children at even earlier ages. Practitioners in nurseries and preschools will be under pressure to demonstrate that their children are ‘ready for school’ and so may ‘teach to the test’. Reception teachers will be expected to show progress in these narrow measures within children’s final year of the EYFS. In consequence, children would be increasingly subjected to inappropriate and unnecessary formal teaching that would detract from the rich exploratory, playful, creative, and intellectual experiences which we know from research benefit children in the early years.’

1. Rebecca Marcon found negative effects of overly directed preschool instruction on later school performance in a study of three different curricula, described as either ‘academically oriented’ or ‘child-initiated’. By third grade, her group of 343 students — 96% African American with 75% of the children qualifying for subsidized school lunch — displayed few differences in academic achievement programs. After six years of school, however, students who had been in the groups that were ‘more academically directed earned significantly lower grades compared to children who had attended child-initiated preschool classes. Children’s later school success appears to have been enhanced by more active, child-initiated early learning experiences’. (Marcon, R.A. 2002. ‘Moving up the grades: Relationship between preschool model and later school success. *Early Childhood Research & Practice* 4(1). <http://ecrp.uiuc.edu/v4n1/marcon.html>.)
2. If we are to be able to be effective in improving the life chances of children, early years practitioners must be allowed to follow the pedagogically appropriate statutory guidance for the EYFS and focus on the prime areas of learning and Characteristics of Effective Learning through a playful pedagogy.
3. A further impact of government policy on quality of early education arises from the lack of funding to local authorities, resulting in depletion or elimination of local authority early years advisory teams. In consequence, opportunities for continuing professional development for staff in nurseries and preschools are now minimal or non-existent in many areas. In maintained schools and nurseries, the academies programme and lack of local advisory support has caused a fragmentation of professional development and support for school improvement based on thorough knowledge of early years issues and pedagogy.

**The importance of support for parents and families, and integration with other services, in prevention and early intervention**

1. In his paper on ‘The Impact of Early Childhood Education and Care on Improved Wellbeing’ (2014), Professor Ted Melhuish stressed that the early years, from birth to age five, are the most effective time to improve the lives of disadvantaged children. He presented powerful evidence to support the universal provision of high quality early childhood education and care and the integration of policies on social exclusion, public health and education to make this possible. While children’s home learning environment has a powerful impact on their life chances, it is difficult to assess and monitor the quality of care and interactions within the home. Professor Melhuish suggests that when support is focused on the child rather than the family it can have the greatest impact on the life chances of the individual.(<https://www.britac.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Edward%20Melhuish%20-%20The%20Impact%20of%20Early%20Childhood%20Education%20and%20Care%20on%20Improved%20Wellbeing.pdf>).
2. It must be kept in mind, however, that while early childhood education has an important role to play in supporting children’s life chances, it is not a panacea. Child poverty is growing rapidly, and pressures on housing, jobs, substance misuse and social exclusion in families all cause family stress and have powerful negative impacts on children’s future prospects. Government policy needs to be geared to narrowing economic inequality in society. At the same time, the nationwide rapid closure of Children’s Centres offering integrated support for families is a damaging phenomenon that should be reversed. In order to maximise the impact of early education and social policy, it is essential that education, health and social policies be integrated so that we are able to work in partnership with parents to support the citizens of tomorrow.

**The importance of communication skills and language development**

1. As Pound, (2008: 72) states, ‘Learning to talk is probably the most effective piece of learning we do in our lives’. Research from the Communication and Language Trust, (2011), suggests that on school entry the oral vocabulary of children from low income homes is up to a year behind that of children from middle income families. In areas of poverty this means that more than half of all children start school with delayed language. Children’s oral vocabulary at age 5 is a strong predictor of academic success. If children are unable to communicate orally, they rely on their behaviour to do so. As they attempt to convey their frustration and confusion, their difficulties can lead to social difficulties which further impact their self-esteem and disposition to learning. Statistics from the Communication and Language Trust (2011) indicate that two out of three children with delayed language also have behavioural problems. In fact, 40% of 7-14-year- olds referred to child psychiatric services are found to have undiagnosed language impairments. Additionally, 50-90% of children with communication and language difficulties also go on to have reading difficulties which limit their access to the whole curriculum.

Further evidence of the importance of Communication and Language:

1. Silke Fricke et al (2012) stress that later literacy is directly impacted if vocabulary knowledge is not well established in the reception year, leading to difficulties and educational underachievement. They concluded that early intervention for children with oral language difficulties is effective and can successfully support the skills, which underpin reading comprehension. (Silke Fricke, C., Bowyer-Crane, A., Haley, C., Hulme, C. and Snowling, M. (2012) Efficacy of language intervention in the early years. *The Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry,* Volume 54, Issue 3 March 2013 Pages 280–290)
2. Duff et al (2015) found a longitudinal relationship between children’s pre-literacy vocabulary knowledge and their subsequent reading ability. Infant vocabulary was a statistically significant predictor of later vocabulary, phonological awareness, reading accuracy and reading comprehension (Duff, F.J., Reen, G., Plunkett, K., Nation, K. (2015) Do infant vocabulary skills predict school-age language and literacy outcomes? *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines 56*(8), pp. 848-856).
3. Case study data (Alsford et al 2017) indicate that social deprivation can seriously delay language development, and that many children start school with weak communication skills. Delayed language prior to starting school is seen to persist and affect ongoing attainment. The impact of a child’s vocabulary and oral proficiency in the English language on children’s attainment is especially pronounced where English is an additional language or disadvantages are experienced at home. This research indicates that a clear focus on oral language development for children who are socially deprived or with EAL may be necessary through Reception and into Year one (lsford, E., Ralephata, A., Bolderson, S., Young, D., Pring, T. (2017) The wrong side of the tracks: Starting school in a socially disadvantaged London borough. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy* 33(2), pp. 145-156).
4. Further evidence of the importance of the right environmental support for language learning in the preschool years is presented in Law, J. Charlton, J. Dockrell, J. Gascoigne, M. McKean, C. Theakston, A, (2017) *Early Language Development: Needs, provision, and intervention for preschool children from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds* A Report for the Education Endowment Foundation October 2017.

Supporting communication and language development:

1. In order to learn language children need to be immersed in a language-rich environment and to be supported through interactions with others who are able to model and engage in effective communication (Rogoff, 1990). There is substantial evidence that language learning is best supported through serve-and-return conversations, rather than through direct teaching with children as passive recipients. For example, the Better Communication Research Report (DfE RR247-BCRP8) reported:

‘Conversations between adults and children that are characterised by high quality language learning interactions are the core of the communication supporting classroom.

A classroom may have an exemplary physical environment and a deliberate provision of daily language activities; however, **without adult-child interactions of sufficiently high quality and sensitivity, these efforts are not likely to result in the desired child outcomes.’**

1. Recent research demonstrated that children who had experienced more conversational turns with adults had greater brain activity. This sort of conversational experience impacts neural language processing over and above SES or the quantity of words heard, and significantly explains the relation between language exposure and verbal skill (Romeo, RR et al (2018) Beyond the 30-Million-Word Gap: Children’s Conversational Exposure Is Associated With Language-Related Brain Function, *Psychological Science* 29 (4) November 2017).
2. Other research found that back-and-forth conversation contributed the most to the child’s future language score (six times more so than adult speech alone), while adult monologuing (one-sided conversation, such as reading a book to a child without the child’s participation) was more weakly linked to language development.

(Teaching by listening: the importance of adult-child conversations to language development.

[Zimmerman FJ](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=Zimmerman%20FJ%5BAuthor%5D&cauthor=true&cauthor_uid=19564318)1, [Gilkerson J](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=Gilkerson%20J%5BAuthor%5D&cauthor=true&cauthor_uid=19564318), [Richards JA](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=Richards%20JA%5BAuthor%5D&cauthor=true&cauthor_uid=19564318), [Christakis DA](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=Christakis%20DA%5BAuthor%5D&cauthor=true&cauthor_uid=19564318), [Xu D](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=Xu%20D%5BAuthor%5D&cauthor=true&cauthor_uid=19564318), [Gray S](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=Gray%20S%5BAuthor%5D&cauthor=true&cauthor_uid=19564318), [Yapanel U](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=Yapanel%20U%5BAuthor%5D&cauthor=true&cauthor_uid=19564318). [Pediatrics.](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19564318) 2009 Jul;124(1):342-9. doi: 10.1542/peds.2008-2267.)

1. There is a bidirectional relationship between language and thinking.The Effective Provision of Preschool Education project, (Sylva et al 2004), drew attention to the importance of sustained shared thinking. This is achieved through high quality conversations on areas of interest to the child in which their thinking is challenged and extended.
2. The Early Years Workforce Strategy (DfE 2017) supported the expansion of the skills base within the early years workforce through high quality training and professional qualifications. Well trained, qualified practitioners are able to support the development of language and communication skills, and also to identify children who are struggling and to signpost caregivers to the additional support their child might require. However, because of funding cuts, preschool settings are increasingly unable to employ the most highly qualified staff, which means that staff may not have the skills, experience and qualifications to be able to do this effectively.

Specific populations:

1. It is estimated that 10% of children have some difficulty with their speech and/or language (Connolly et al 2005). Here in the UK children with speech sounds disorders make up a significant proportion of Speech and Language Therapy caseloads. In a study by Joffe and Pring (2008) Speech and Language Therapists report that more than 40% of their caseload is made up of children with Speech Sound Disorders.

Connolly, M., Curtis, E., Henn, P., Nichol, C. and Ryan, L. (2005) 'Training Programme for Public Health Nurses and Doctors in Child Health Screening, Surveillance and Health Promotion Unit 5 Developmental Assessment', [online], available:

<http://hse.ie/eng/services/Publications/services/Children/Unit_5_Developmental_As> sessment.pdf

Joffe, V. and Pring, T. (2008) 'Children with phonological problems: a survey of clinical practice', International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders, 43(2), 154-164.

1. Children with Specific Language Impairment experience significant difficulties with language that cannot be attributed to problems with hearing, neurological status, nonverbal intelligence, or other known factors (Leonard, 2000). Although the subject of SLI has been researched for many years formal criteria and characteristics for the identification of SLI have emerged only gradually.
2. To understand and meet the needs of children with SLI an understanding of these emerging characteristics is required. Early intervention involving diagnostic assessment will validate a diagnosis, provide a description of a child’s language deficits and strengths, outline the potential impact of the impairment for future planning needs and provide long and short term goals for intervention. The earlier this process can begin the more beneficial and meaningful intervention becomes and greater effect is seen.

Leonard, L. B. (1998) Children with Specific Language Impairment, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.

Impact of delayed intervention:

1. Early intervention and specific treatment for children with speech and/or language difficulties should optimally take place before literacy skills are acquired as children are more likely to encounter literacy difficulties due to the deficient phonological awareness abilities that frequently co-occur with speech sound disorders (Dodd 2005).

Dodd, B. (2005) Differential Diagnosis and Treatment of Children with Speech Disorder,London: Whurr Publishers Limited.

1. It is therefore important that children receive early intervention in order to diminish difficulty with early language acquisition (Williams et al 2010).

Williams, L. A., McLeod, S. and McCauley, R. J. (2010) Interventions for Speech SoundDisorders in Children, Communication and Language Intervention Series, Michigan: Brookes Publishing Co., Inc.

1. Furthermore, deficits in speech and/or language can have a significant and negative psychosocial impact on children. A study by Law et al reports children with speech sounds disorders which persist into primary school age may have long term negative effects on literacy, socialisation, behaviour and academic achievement (Law et al 2003).

Law, J., Garrett, Z. and Nye, C. (2003) 'Speech and Language Therapy Interventions for Children with Primary Speech and Language Delay or Disorder'.