



The role of intentional pedagogy in supporting self-regulation in the Foundation Stage

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Some slides are taken from Inaugural Lecture of S Howard with kind permission

Plan of the talk

What is self-regulation

Why it is important

Interventions to enhance self-regulation (Howard et al)

Supporting the development of S-R in the early years foundation stage

The effect of playful learning pedagogy (as measured via ECERS-E) on the development of S-R

Findings from the EPPSE research in the UK

Limitations

Future research on the play continuum

A take-home message



What is self-regulation

Self-regulation enables children to exert **control** over their **attention, thinking, behaviour, social interactions, and emotional reactions** in alignment with their own goals and the context they are in. They exert control in the face of distractions or strong feelings.



Why is self-regulation important? (slide adapted from S Howard)



Self-regulation frees the child from external control by adults, children or the environment

Freedom from needing guidance from adults or peers

Freedom from distraction by others or by objects such as digital screens

A child skilled at self-regulation is better able to:

resist distractions

sustain their attention

persist when faced with challenge

endure temptations

delay gratification

wait their turn

initiate behaviours (e.g., hanging up their jacket) and cease behaviors (e.g., stop playing when it's time to tidy-up) that conflict with their immediate preferences or impulses

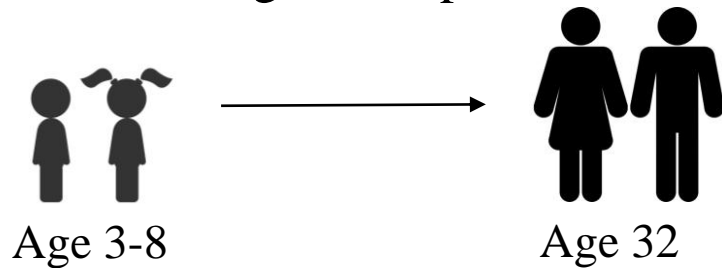
Self-regulation in development and government policy



- Early self-regulation predicts later academic success, better social development and even health outcomes in adulthood
- Difficulties in self-regulation are a concern of parents
- S-R is increasingly included in ECE national curricula, e.g., the English Early Years Foundation Stage specifies self-regulation as one of its Early Learning Goals
- Children low in S-R disrupt the learning of others in the classroom
- Prominent in the media (e.g., children's screen time and their digital choices are linked to their lack of S-R)

Self-Regulation in development (slide from S Howard)

Moffit et al. (2011) carried out a longitudinal study of 1,000 children from age 3 to 32 in New Zealand and found that self-regulation predicted later



Health
Status



Criminal
Conviction



Wealth &
Finances



Substance
Dependence

Early self-regulation has also been linked to:



School Readiness
(McClelland, 2014)



Academic
Achievement
(Wanless, 2016)



Prosocial
behaviour
(Russell, 2016)

Meta-analysis by Robson, Allen & Howard (2020)



Correlations between early self-regulation and later developmental outcomes

Academic: Mathematics; Literacy; Vocabulary; Class engagement

Employment: Holding a job

Social: Social competence

Behaviour Problems: Peer victimization; Externalizing problems; Aggressive behavior; Criminal behavior;

Internalizing problems. E.g/ anxiety

Health & Wellbeing: Depression; Obesity; Substance abuse; Cigarette smoking

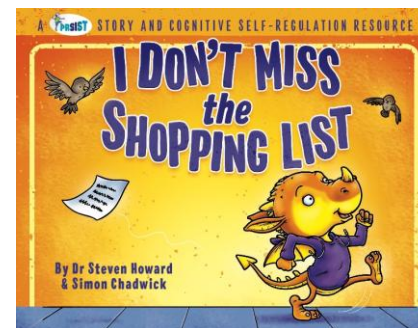
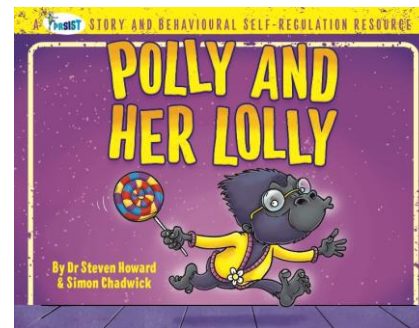
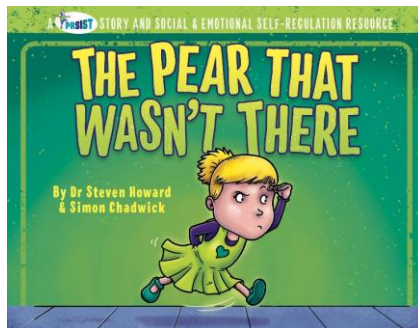
Supporting Self-Regulation Growth

PRISIST Program (Howard et al., 2020)

- ECEC program comprising educator practices, 30 child activities, formative assessment embedded in everyday practice
- Cluster RCT with 50 preschools, 100 ECEC educators, 473 children
- Found significant improvements in EF, positive directional trends for SR and academic foundations associated with school readiness
- Adaptations and evaluations from Italy and Greece completed



Example: Musical Statues.



Guided play



Guided play includes adults scaffolding learning objectives but remains child-directed or co-directed.

In guided play, adults may initiate the learning process, constrain the learning goals, and are responsible for maintaining focus. While adults might initiate the play sequence, children direct their own learning within the play context. Thus, guided play is child-directed or do-directed/

In guided play, teachers can enhance children's exploration and learning by commenting on their discoveries, co-playing along with the children, asking open-ended questions, or exploring the materials in ways that children might not have thought of themselves.

(Weisberg et al. 2013)



Solitary and guided play to develop self-regulation: two videos of children learning to self-regulate and maintain balance

Video 1: A boy playing on his own learns how to balance on a wooden plank

Context is an ECE setting in a LMIC context

Video 2: Large group of children learn how to ride a bike

(context is Reggio Emilia nursery Diana, two teachers and three bikes in the garden outside)



The relationship between ECE quality pedagogy and the development of self-regulation: findings from the EPPSE study (Sylva et al 2010) in the UK



Effective Pre-School, Primary and Secondary Education EPPSE 1997 – 2016



A longitudinal study funded by the UK Dept for Education

**Principal Investigators: Kathy Sylva¹, Edward Melhuish¹, Pam Sammons¹,
Iram Siraj¹ and Brenda Taggart²**

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EPPSE design

6 Local Authorities, 141 preschools, 3000 children

3+ years



25 nursery classes in schools
590 children

34 playgroups (voluntary)
610 children

31 private day nurseries
520 children

20 nursery schools
520 children

24 local authority day care nurseries
430 children

7 children's (integrated) centres
190 children

Home
310 children

Age 5 - 7

Age 7 - 11

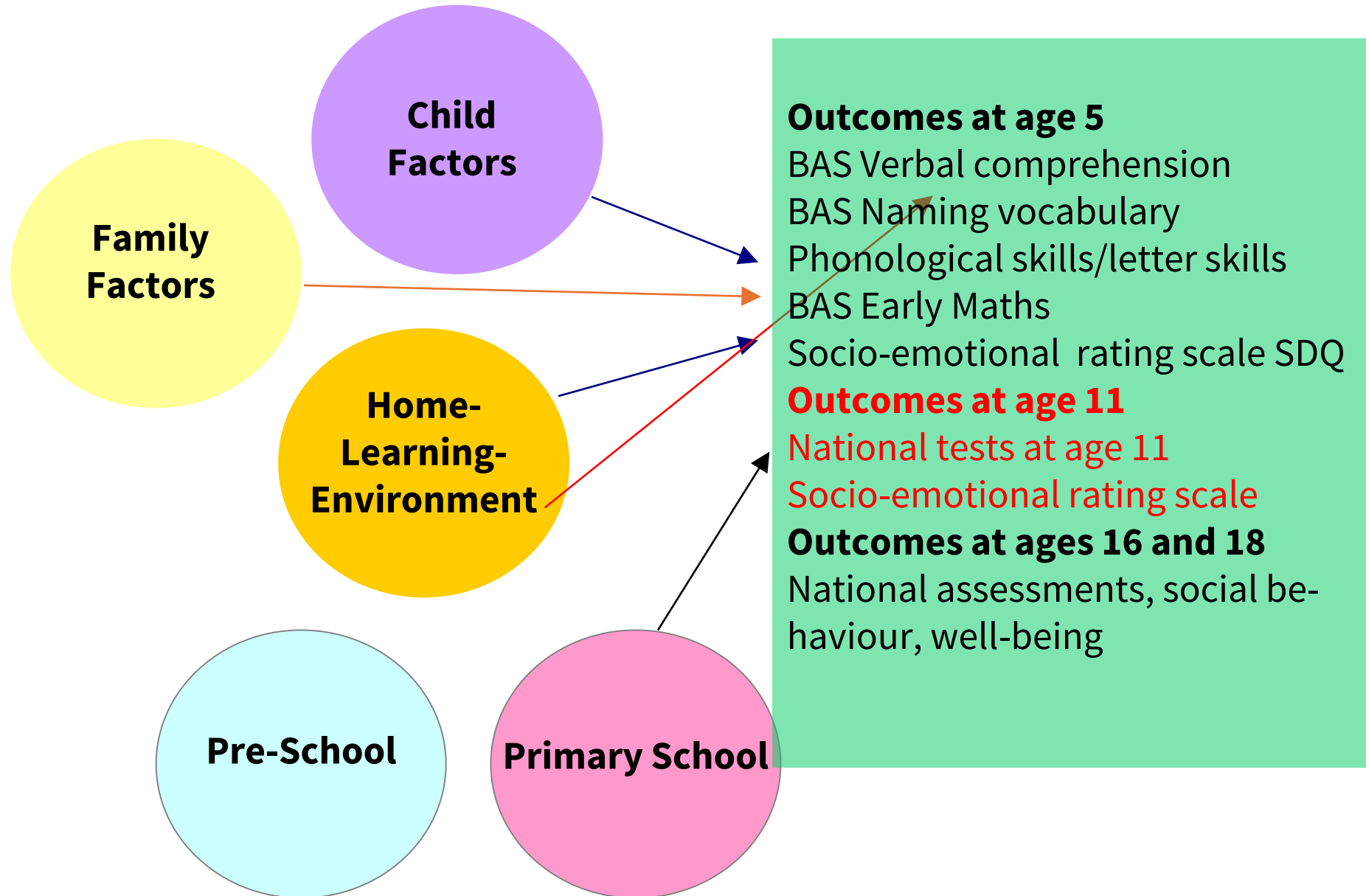
Age 11 - 16

Key Stage 1
600
schools

Key Stage 2
800
schools

Key Stage 3
800
schools

Influences on child outcomes



Two Early Childhood Environment Quality Observation Rating Scales

ECERS-R Global quality

- Based on observation
- 7 sub-scales:
 - Space and furnishings
 - Personal care routines
 - Language reasoning
 - Activities
 - Interaction
 - Programme structure
 - Parents and staff

Harms, Clifford & Cryer (1998)

ECERS-E Pedagogical quality based on the supporting the play continuum

- Based on observation
- 4 sub-scales:
 - Literacy
 - Mathematics
 - Science and environment
 - Diversity

Sylva, Siraj-Blatchford & Taggart (2010; now the Early Childhood Quality Rating Scale, Sylva, Siraj, Taggart & Kingston, 2025))

Items on self- regulation scale at age 5 and 11

Thinks things out before acting

Easily distracted, concentration wanders (reverse scoring)

Can move to a new activity on completion of a task

Can independently select and return equipment as appropriate

Constantly fidgeting or squirming (reverse scoring)

Perseveres in the face of difficult or challenging tasks

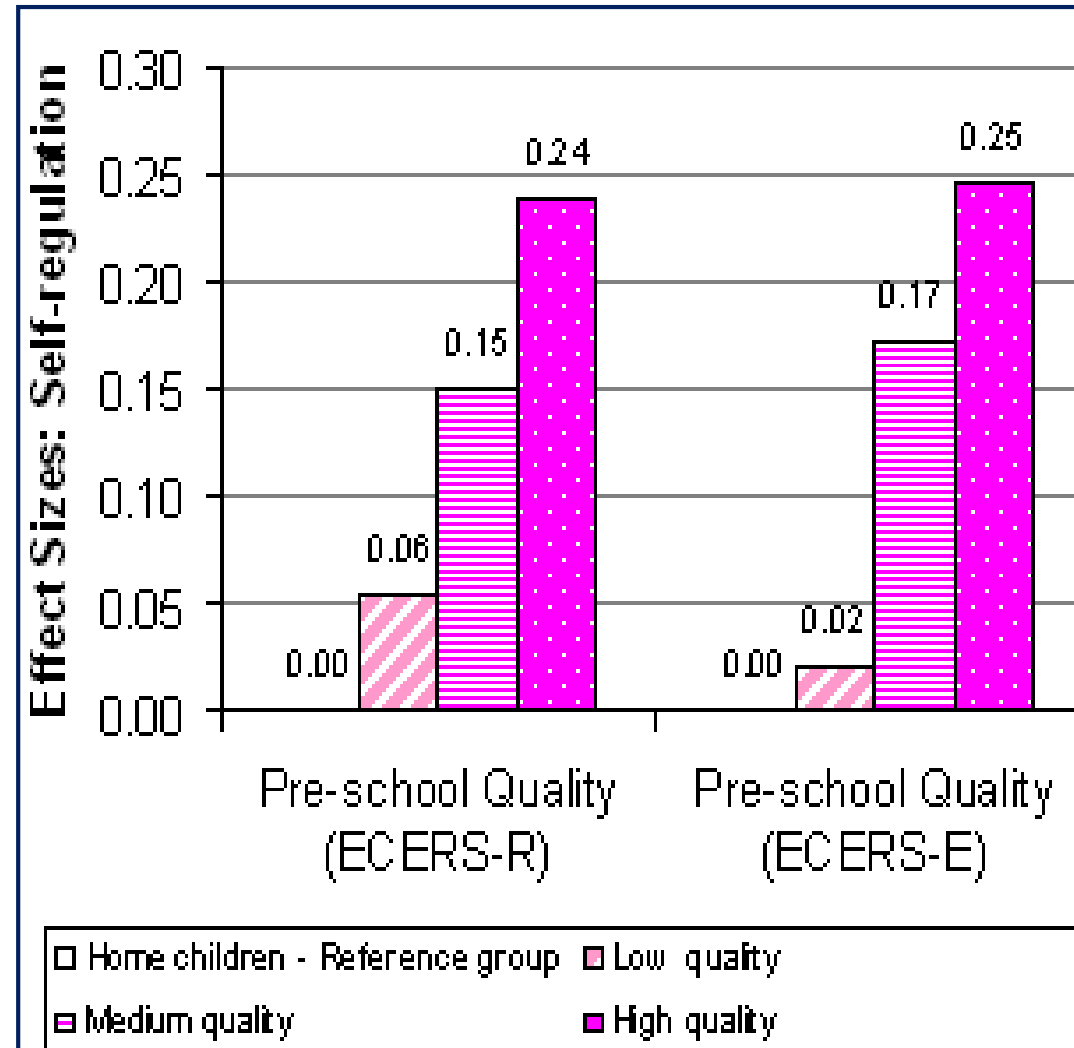
Likes to work things out for self; seeks help from teacher/other children
only as a last resort; can work independently

Restless, overactive, cannot stay still for long (reverse scoring)

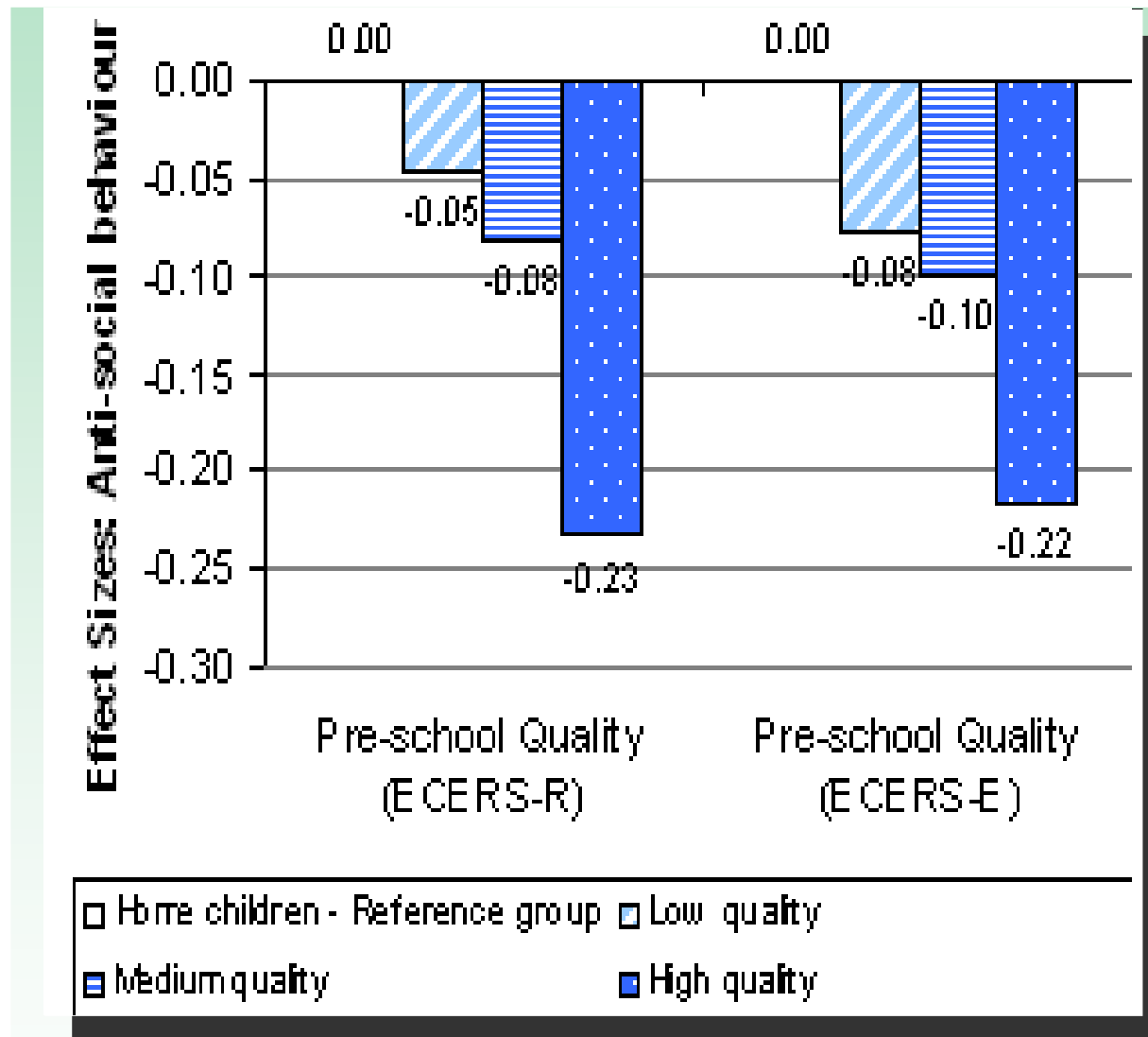
Sees tasks through to the end, good attention span



The impact of pre-school quality (ECERS-R and ECERS-E) on self-regulation at age 11 after controlling for co-variates



The impact of pre-school quality (ECERS-R and ECERS-E) on anti-social behaviour at age 11



Take home messages



Self-regulation in the preschool child leads to higher academic achievement in school and better adult outcomes

EPPSE study show that high quality playful pedagogy leads to increased self-regulation at ages 5 and 11 years in a large English sample

Videos show that self-regulation can be supported by solo play but also by guided play (through intentional pedagogy)

Limitations? PRSIST study is an RCT while the EPPSE study is a correlational one, including control for confounding co-variates

Future research?

- Experimental studies contrasting effects of free vs guided play

- Interventions to promote self-regulation in ECE , e.g., PRSIST?

- Studies of self-regulation/executive function in children not in ECE, particularly in LMIC contexts

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