

Research
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Peers Early Education Partnership

The Birth to School Study

**A longitudinal evaluation of
Peers Early Education Partnership (PEEP)
1998–2005**

Key findings

PEEP Research Series

What is PEEP?

PEEP (Peers Early Education Partnership) is an early learning intervention which aims to contribute towards improving the life chances of children, particularly in disadvantaged areas. Set up in 1995, its purpose is to raise educational attainment, especially in literacy. The PEEP *Learning Together* intervention model consists of a set of principles, a programme with a learning framework, a curriculum, core activities and materials, and a spectrum of delivery methods.

Early years research and policy since 1997 recognise that parents are central to children's early learning, and that supporting parents in this role will increase the children's life chances.

The PEEP *Learning Together* programme

The PEEP *Learning Together* programme focuses on how to make the most of the learning opportunities in everyday life at home – listening, talking, playing, singing and sharing books. By working *with* adults *about* their children's very early learning, PEEP *Learning Together* supports parents and carers in their role as the first educators of their children.

The programme is structured around the ORIM framework (Hannon, 1995). This recognises that children benefit from:

- Opportunities to learn,
- Recognition and valuing of their early efforts and achievements,
- Interaction with adults to talk about what they do and how they feel,
- Modelling by adults of behaviour, attitudes and activities.

The ORIM framework is woven into the PEEP *Learning Together* curriculum, which covers the years from birth to age four and explores ways in which children's development can be encouraged and supported through day-to-day activities. The curriculum focuses on five main developmental areas: self-concept and learning dispositions (such as perseverance and curiosity), oral language, reading, writing, and numeracy. These areas are explored in different ways at each age level, enabling parents to benefit whether they have contact with PEEP for a short or longer period. A series of *Learning Together* materials supports parents/carers and practitioners to use PEEP ideas and activities at home.

The *Birth to School Study*

The *Birth to School Study* is a longitudinal evaluation of PEEP as it was implemented in Oxford between 1998 and 2004, when the programme was delivered mainly through universal groups. It was on a large scale, involving over 600 families. The Department of Educational Studies at the University of Oxford carried out the study.

The PEEP *Learning Together* curriculum is delivered to parents/carers when they are together with their children. PEEP aims to encourage children's early development in language, literacy, and numeracy, as well as nurturing their self-esteem, by supporting their parents rather than working primarily with the children. Consequently, the *Birth to School Study* sought to investigate the effects of attending a PEEP group, firstly on parents, and secondly on the children themselves. Data was collected on a yearly basis. The six-year span of the study allowed time for potential effects on parents to 'filter down' to the children. It also enabled the researchers to look at the rate of children's progress over time.

Key research questions

Two questions which the study addressed were:

Did parents who attended PEEP differ in their parenting views and practices from a matched group of parents who lived in the comparison area?

Did children whose parents attended PEEP differ in their cognitive and socio-emotional development from a matched group of children who lived in the comparison area?



Research design

The research was carried out by comparing individual families who had attended a PEEP group with families, matched on demographic characteristics, who lived in a comparison area with a very similar socio-economic profile (measured by the Indices of Deprivation) but who had no access to a PEEP group.

The parents were interviewed at home when the child was a few weeks old, then each family was seen once a year, close to the child's birthday. The researchers gathered information about family circumstances and used a range of measures to establish the impact of PEEP *Learning Together* on parents. The children were assessed each year, using standardised instruments, on their cognitive development including measures of language, literacy, numeracy and general cognitive ability. Their socio-emotional development, including their social behaviour and self-esteem, was also assessed.

Key findings which demonstrate the effectiveness of PEEP

The effects of PEEP on parents

- ▶ PEEP parents, compared to matched parents from the comparison area, reported a significantly* enhanced view of their parent-child interaction when their children were aged one.
- ▶ When the children were two years old, PEEP parents were rated significantly higher on the quality of their care-giving environment.

*If a result is statistically 'significant', it is unlikely to have occurred by chance.

These results are consistent with the way in which the PEEP *Learning Together* programme encourages specific aspects of parenting that are about having a positive and communicative bond with the child.

The effects of PEEP on the cognitive development of children

PEEP children made significantly greater progress over time than matched children from the comparison area in certain skills related to future literacy success:

- Vocabulary,
- phonological awareness of rhyme and alliteration,
- letter identification,
- understanding of books and print,
- writing.

These skills are a good indication of reading readiness, specifically the ability to read by the end of the Foundation Stage. The findings are a reflection of the literacy focus of the PEEP *Learning Together* curriculum, which promotes talking, singing, book sharing and other activities related to literacy from birth.

The effects of PEEP on the socio-emotional development of children

When the children in the study were five years old, self-esteem was measured for the first time.

Children from the PEEP group showed a significant advantage, compared to the matched children from the comparison area, in the following measures related to self-esteem:

- peer acceptance,
- cognitive competence,
- physical competence,
- general competence,
- total self-esteem.

These effects reflect how self-esteem is integral to the PEEP *Learning Together* programme, through which parents are supported in understanding that children learn best when they are happy and confident and when their efforts and actions are valued and understood.



Discussion of the key findings

These key findings substantiate evidence from other research across a range of early interventions, both in the UK and in other countries.

- ▶ Enhanced early parenting skills anticipate improved outcomes for children as they get older.

The effect of PEEP on parents was established before the outcomes related to the children's early language, literacy and self-esteem emerged. This can be explained by the PEEP model for *Learning Together*, which is delivered primarily to parents when they are together with their children, and which encourages parent/child interaction that is focused on communication, responsiveness and modelling. It is this relationship that PEEP considers to be at the heart of learning.

- ▶ Early interventions lead to cognitive and social benefits for children, particularly those at risk of educational underachievement.

Although the PEEP *Learning Together* programme can be, and is, used to support families from all walks of life, it was developed to be of particular value to families with children whose life chances may be compromised by the circumstances in which they live. The *Birth to School Study* was conducted in an area in which the majority of wards were in the 20% most disadvantaged as measured by the Indices of Deprivation.

The impact of the *Birth to School Study*

The duration and scale of the *Birth to School Study* put it in a unique position to support and influence early years policy. It highlighted the importance of the first five years of life on children's development and the crucial role played by parents.

PEEP *Learning Together* was subsequently included as one of the evidenced-based demonstration projects in the Early Learning Partnership Project (2006 – 2008), funded by the Government, as a programme that specifically addressed the needs of the most vulnerable and socially isolated families. The project also aimed to upskill the workforce, and funded the training of around 600 early years workers to deliver the *Learning Together* programme. These included family and outreach workers, speech and language therapists, library staff, health visitors, and teachers.

PEEP continues to train over 750 practitioners nationally per year and offers an accreditation module at both undergraduate and masters level. The programme has become a core offer in a number of local authorities and has been disseminated beyond the United Kingdom to countries including Ireland and Portugal.

The PEEP *Learning Together* programme is now included in the Commissioning Toolkit for Parenting Programmes developed by the National Academy for Parenting Practitioners (NAPP).

References

Hannon, P. 1995. *Literacy, Home and School: Research and Practice in Teaching Literacy with Parents*. London: The Falmer Press.

The research information in this document is from *The Birth to School Study: A Longitudinal Evaluation of the Peers Early Education Partnership* (PEEP) 1998–2005, August 2005.

Maria Evangelou*, Greg Brooks**, Sally Smith* and Denise Jennings*

* University of Oxford, **University of Sheffield

The Research Brief and full Report can be found at www.peep.org.uk/research.



PO Box 1404, Oxford, OX4 6XW

Tel 01865 395145

Fax 01865 395140

info@peep.org.uk

www.peep.org.uk