

# **Enabling Parents Study**

**The role of PEEP in  
supporting parents as adult learners**

## **Key findings**

## What is PEEP?

PEEP (Peers Early Education Partnership, now *Parents* 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 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 *Enabling Parents Study*

The *Enabling Parents Study* was carried out by the Department of Educational Studies at the University of Oxford. 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 by supporting their parents rather than working primarily with the children.

The *Enabling Parents Study* used mixed methods to examine the effects of the programme specifically on mothers, in areas related to their roles both as parents and as adult learners.

### Key research question

The key question addressed in the study was:

*Does PEEP benefit parents and, if so, in what ways?*

### Research design

The research compared 75 families who had attended a PEEP group with an equal number of families, individually matched on demographic characteristics, who lived in an area with a very similar socio-economic profile, but who had no access to a PEEP group. The sample, and some of the data, were drawn from the *Birth to School Study* (Evangelou *et al*, 2006).

Quantitative data was collected from mothers at home using an interview and standardized instruments administered as a questionnaire. These provided information about education and employment, and assessed parenting skills, well-being and social support.

A qualitative approach was used to explore experiences of participating in a PEEP group and its impact on day-to-day activities at home.



## Key findings

The findings from both the qualitative and quantitative elements of the research supported each other, strengthening the validity of the study.

Mothers who had attended PEEP groups:

- made a significant\* improvement in their socio-economic status,
- took significantly more courses,
- reported significantly greater awareness of their child's literacy development and of ways to foster it,
- saw PEEP as a source of support and encouragement,
- reported that the social support offered by PEEP was an important factor in their decision to extend their employment related skills and to enhance their parenting techniques,
- identified several factors important to continued attendance at PEEP.

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

## Discussion of the key findings

### Professional development of mothers

One of the principle findings of the study showed that mothers who had participated in a PEEP group made a significant improvement in their socio-economic status (SES). The SES was based on assessment of the type of job held by the mother. This was complemented by the finding that the PEEP mothers had also taken more courses, further reinforced by qualitative evidence from the interviews that suggested that support from PEEP had been key to their decision to access training opportunities. PEEP mothers were also able to take Open College Network certificates at both level 1 and level 2. Taken together, there is strong evidence that attending a PEEP group benefited those attending in terms of raising their socio-economic status.



### Parenting skills

A further important finding was that PEEP mothers felt they understood much more about how their children developed language and literacy skills. They knew how to use modelling techniques and to look for opportunities to use environmental print to stimulate their child. The mothers also acknowledged that singing and stories are essential to language development, many of them saying they had not realised children could enjoy and benefit from these things from such a young age.



### Social support

Social support was another theme to emerge from the research and was fundamental to many parents. Those who had attended PEEP groups reported that feeling supported in the group helped motivate them to take steps to improve their skills and to learn about their child's development.

### Why PEEP?

Mothers spoke of being motivated by seeing their child enjoy the activities, getting ideas for new activities at home, and the chance to meet other mothers with children of the same age. They also stressed the importance of feeling welcomed and valued from the very first session.

## Summary

The *Enabling Parents Study* reinforces findings from the *Birth to School Study*, which found that attending a PEEP group had positive benefits for parents. In particular, the *Enabling Parents Study* demonstrates that the PEEP *Learning Together* programme influenced mothers to return to some form of education, helping them to improve their socio-economic status, and that it increased maternal awareness of their children's language development. It also emphasises the considerable social support for mothers gained from attending a group.

## References

Evangelou, M., Brookes, G., Smith, S. and Jennings, D. (2005) *Birth to School Study: A longitudinal evaluation of the Peers Early Education Partnership* Research Report SSU/2005/FR/017) London, DfES

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

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The Research Brief and full Report can be found at [www.peep.org.uk/research](http://www.peep.org.uk/research).

Further information about parent accreditation through PEEP – with OCN (Open College Network) or SQA/ WEA (Scottish Qualifications Authority & Workers' Educational Association in Scotland) can be found on the PEEP website [www.peep.org.uk](http://www.peep.org.uk)



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