

# Enabling Parents:

## The Role of PEEP in Supporting Parents as Adult Learners

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### Introduction

The Enabling Parents project studied the effects of the PEEP programme on parents as adult learners. More specifically it investigated the effect of PEEP on parenting skills and on the support networks used by parents. The two year project was funded by The Learning and Skills Council (LE26003119). It employed a quantitative approach to establish the impact of PEEP on maternal employment, training and parenting skills. In addition, a qualitative approach was used to investigate mothers' subjective experiences of participation in the PEEP programme and to learn more about the ways services for parents have an impact on their everyday activities.

### Key findings

PEEP participants (Intervention group):

- Had made a significant improvement in their socio-economic status;
- Took significantly more basic skills 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.

### Aims

The overall aim of this study was to investigate the effect of PEEP on mothers, in their roles as parents and as adult

learners. The two components of this study address different aspects of these questions and quantitative and qualitative methodologies were used. The quantitative component explored the effects of PEEP on

three domains: maternal employment and training, parenting skills, and social support. The qualitative component focused on parental experiences of PEEP and reasons for their continuing attendance.

### **What is PEEP?**

The PEEP programme is a pre-school programme that works with parents and carers of children from birth to five years old. PEEP aims to promote parents' and carers' awareness of children's very early learning and development through making the most of everyday activities and interactions. Additionally, it aims to support parents and carers in the development of their child's literacy. For a short description of PEEP see [www.peep.org.uk](http://www.peep.org.uk).

The programme offers a structured curriculum for each age-group which is based on specific curricular areas such as literacy, numeracy and self-esteem. The activities are implemented on a weekly basis in group sessions for parents and children. Parents are given a curriculum folder with suggestions for activities at home and they can borrow activity packs and books between sessions.

Between 1999 - 2000, employment support was also provided by "The Learning Bridge"; a PEEP initiative offering links between the parents and opportunities in education and employment. This initiative allowed the parents to learn about their child as well as learn about prospects for themselves in further training or education.

Other studies have looked at the child outcomes of PEEP (Evangelou & Sylva, 2003). The Enabling Parents Study (EPS) aimed to build on the work of these studies by focusing specifically on the parental outcomes.

### **Design Outline**

The Enabling Parents Study follows a quasi-experimental design. It compares the experiences and attitudes of two groups of parents; those who have attended PEEP sessions (intervention group) and those living in another community where PEEP does not operate (comparison group). An interviewer visited the mothers at home to administer a set of questionnaires and an interview. An interview alone was used for the qualitative component.

### **Sample**

The PEEP group sample was drawn from the pool of mothers who had attended five PEEP sessions or more since the birth of the child. Each family in this group was then matched to one from the comparison area where PEEP was not available. The comparison area was economically similar to the intervention area and had similar amounts of family and child services. Three demographic variables were used to ensure a close, one-to-one match of the families; family structure, mother's highest qualification, and socio-economic status. The final sample for the quantitative component was 74 in the intervention group and 71 in the comparison group.

The qualitative component drew on the same sample as the quantitative component; from mothers who had attended at least five PEEP sessions and these were supplemented by a sub-sample who had attended less than five sessions. They were categorised as high, medium, or low attendance participants. Fifteen families were contacted through the quantitative component and a further five families were added to give a final qualitative sample of twenty. Analysis indicated that although the comparison group did not attend PEEP, they did attend a comparable number of other groups in the area. There was no

difference in the number of groups the intervention and comparison groups reported that they attended.

### Procedures

For the quantitative component, two research tools were used; a questionnaire and an interview. The Enabling Parents Interview was designed by the research team to assess the parents' employment and basic skills, parenting skills, parental well-being and social support. During the quantitative assessment, it was not made clear to the parent that the study was focused specifically on PEEP. Instead, it was explained that the main focus of the study was to explore the services available to parents and children in their area. This avoided researcher bias.

The questionnaire included seven instruments which had been used in previous research on parents. Parenting skills were assessed with the Involve Parent, Parent Discipline, Parental Feelings and Parental Modernity instruments. The parents' well-being was assessed with the Parenting Stress, Generalised Self-Efficacy, and Social Support instruments.

The qualitative interview was developed to cover the factors relating to the mothers' attendance at PEEP sessions, how they felt about the sessions, and their opinions on the activities at PEEP. At the qualitative interview it was made clear to the parent that the focus was on PEEP.

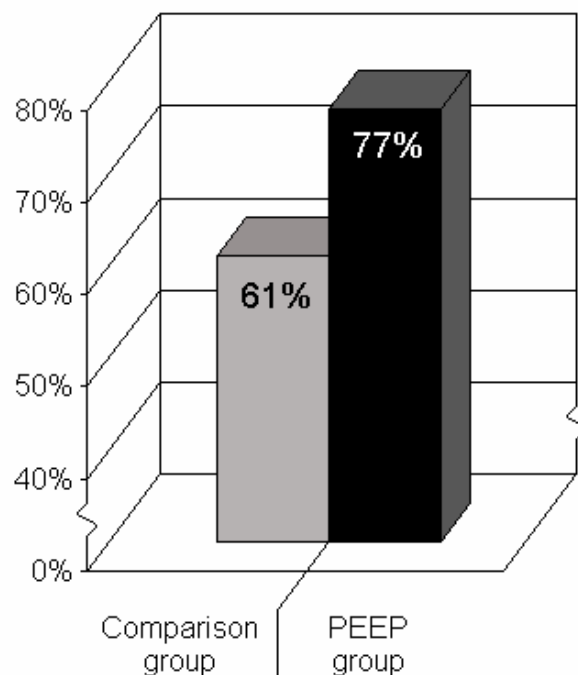
### Findings

The findings from the quantitative and qualitative components supported each other, boosting the validity of this study. The results are outlined below by outcome domain and include findings from quantitative and qualitative analyses.

### Professional Development of the Mothers

One of the main findings of the study was the change in the mothers' socio-economic status as assessed by the Computer Assisted Social and Occupational Coding (CASOC) scale. CASOC calculates a score based on an assessment of the job that the person has or had. This finding was complemented by the fact that the PEEP group mothers reported that they had taken more courses (*Figure i*). There was, however, no change in the number of formal qualifications, suggesting that the courses were basic skills courses. The changes are interesting because of the matching of the groups on their socio-economic score before the intervention. Combined with reports from the qualitative interview that PEEP helped mothers return to college and the fact that PEEP had provided The Learning Bridge, there is strong evidence that PEEP has benefited the attending mothers in terms of raising their socio-economic status.

*Figure i – Percentage of parents who reported taking a course*

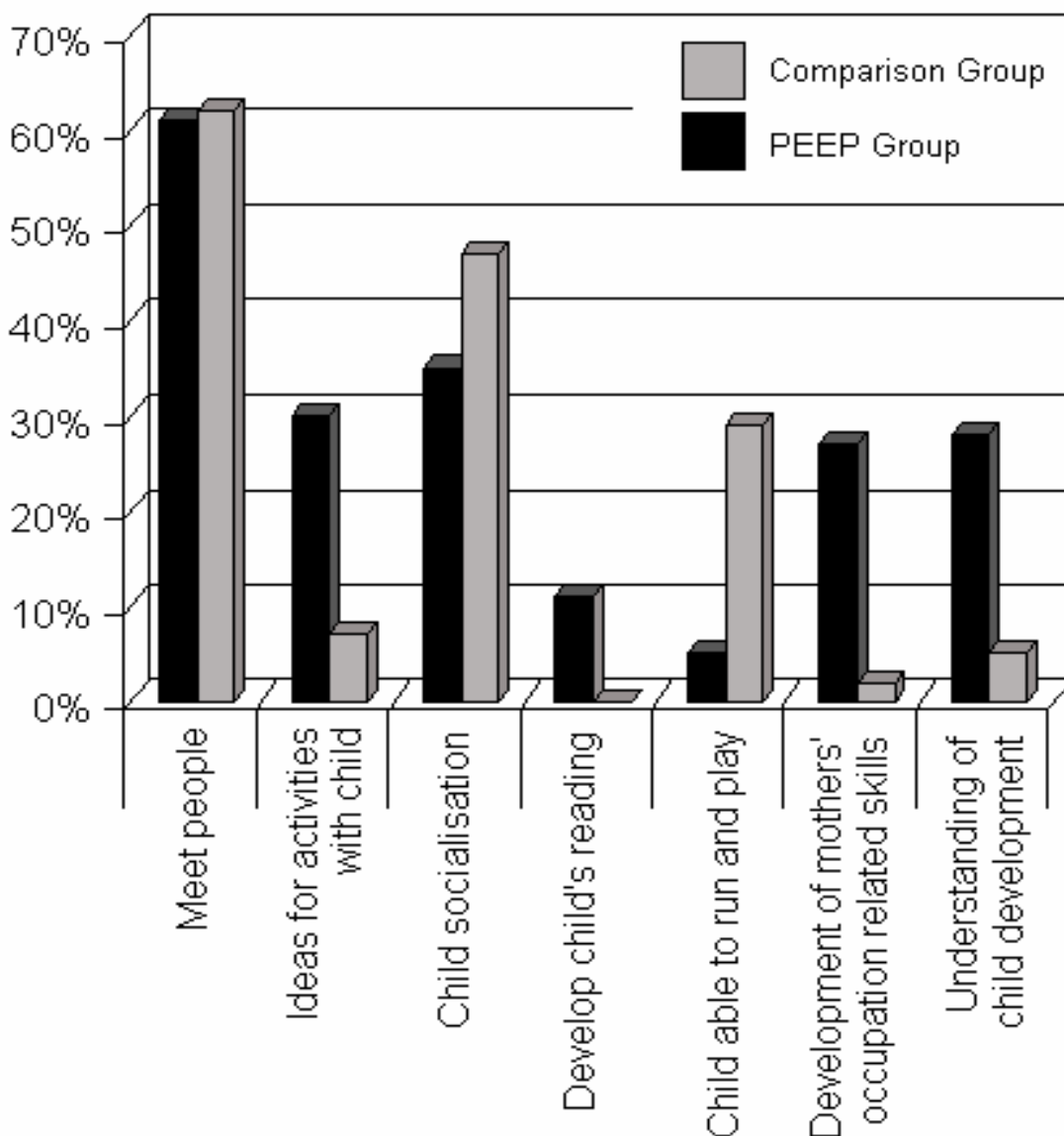


## Parenting Skills

Mothers in the PEEP group reported a greater awareness of their children's literacy development, including how children develop language. Parents in the intervention group reported significantly more frequently that they would use modelling techniques and environmental print to stimulate their child. The use of music and play to support children's literacy development by PEEP was recognised

by the parents as important in increasing their awareness of their children's language development. This theme emerged strongly from both the quantitative and qualitative components of the study. For example, one parent was pleased that PEEP had provided her and her children with the opportunity to enjoy books as she did not see herself as a reader at all. Some of the perceived benefits of attending parenting groups and PEEP can be seen in *Figure ii*.

Figure ii - Perceived benefits of attending a group



## Social Support

Another theme clearly emerging throughout the study was that of social support for the mother. Both the PEEP and comparison groups in the quantitative component reported it as important for attending *any* groups.

There were no significant differences between the groups on a measure of social support; this was almost certainly explained by the wide availability and variety of groups in the comparison area. However, PEEP was seen as a valued source of support by those who attended, a theme arising from the qualitative and quantitative areas.

## Staying with PEEP

Continuing to attend PEEP sessions was looked at in detail only in the qualitative interview, but did reveal several factors that contribute to the continued attendance of mothers at PEEP sessions. The first session was crucial, and set the tone for the rest of those mothers' experiences with PEEP. Most of those who did not find the group friendly did not go on to attend many sessions. Even those who attended more frequently reported their first session as difficult, be it either "nerve-wracking", "embarrassing", or simply "overwhelming".

Despite concerns over the first session, those who did continue to attend spoke of several motivational factors; including seeing their child enjoy themselves with the activities, getting ideas for new activities at home, or for the chance to meet with other mothers with children the same age. This links with the finding in the quantitative section that social support is crucial for continued attendance at PEEP sessions and furthermore, shows how PEEP can help to nurture that supportive environment.

## Summary

The demographic matching procedure of the two groups in the quantitative component and the inclusion of a wide range of levels of attendance in the qualitative component adds validity to the conclusions of this study. The two main limitations of the design of the study are that random assignment was not possible and it does not include those who never attended a group.

The study does, however, show a clear advantage to the members of the PEEP group in terms of an improvement in socio-economic status, employment and awareness of children's language development. The PEEP programme influenced the parents as adult learners mostly in terms of returning to some form of education; be it a formal qualification or otherwise. Not only did those in the intervention group benefit from attending PEEP, many of them attributed these changes to PEEP. It is clear that some of the parents can see the advantages PEEP offers them.

This well controlled study shows that attendance of five or more PEEP sessions has led to lasting effects on the parents as learners, workers and teachers of their children.

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For further information, please see "Enabling Parents: The Role of PEEP in Supporting Parents as Adult Learners".

This report is available on <http://www.edstud.ox.ac.uk/research/fell.html>

More information on PEEP can be found on [www.peep.org.uk](http://www.peep.org.uk)

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