



People: Moving up the evidence scale

A Feasibility Trial in preparation for a full scale Randomised Controlled Trial.

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Parental Engagement Fund

The Sutton Trust working in partnership with Esmée Fairbairn Foundation established the Parental Engagement Fund building on the evidence that engaging parents in their children's learning can have a positive impact on their attainment. The aim of the fund is to increase attainment for disadvantaged children in the early years through the development of more effective parental engagement. In addition, the hope is to leverage future support and to identify features of good practice to share with the Early Years sector. Peep is one of five organisations that the fund has worked with. An evaluation team, (Jelley, Sylva, Eisenstadt) from the Department of Education at the University of Oxford, has worked with Peep, acting as a critical friend and expert advisor supporting them to develop their delivery and demonstrate impact.

Peep

Peep is a charity based



in The Leys area of Oxford whose mission is to narrow the attainment gap by working with parents/carers to support their children's learning through everyday activities at home. They have been a trusted provider of services to local families since 1995 and since 2002 they have been training practitioners from across the UK to use the Peep Learning Together Programme in their work with families with children under five. They train and resource around 1000 practitioners per year. In 2018, the Brotherhood of St Laurence, based in Melbourne, will be licensed to disseminate the Programme in Australia.

The Peep Learning Together Programme

The Peep Learning Together Programme is based on 20 years of research and practice. It comprises 74 topics across five strands of learning: Personal, Social and Emotional; Communication and Language; Early Literacy; Early Maths; and Health and Physical Development (see Appendix 1). The Programme covers three stages of development (babies, toddlers and pre-schoolers). It is based on the ORIM framework which was developed at the University



of Sheffield by Peter Hannon and Cathy Nutbrown. (The ORIM framework represents the four ways parents help their children learn. Parents are supported to create more Opportunities for learning; to Recognise and value small steps in development; Interact in positive ways and act as a Model).

The Programme is delivered by trained practitioners to parents/carers together with their children. It teaches parents about how children learn and develop, to help them build on what they are already doing, to improve the Learning Environment at home. The programme also promotes parental confidence, self-esteem and social support and provides accreditation opportunities for parents.

Existing evidence base

Like the other projects in the Parental Engagement Fund, the Peep Learning Together Programme is based on robust evidence which shows that the quality of the Home Learning Environment is a better predictor of later achievement than either class or maternal

education.

In addition, earlier versions of the Learning Together Programme have been shown to impact on children's educational attainment in two quasi-experimental design evaluations carried out by the University of Oxford. These include the Birth to School Study which followed 600 families over six years and found positive effects on vocabulary, phonological awareness and comprehension (Evangelou and Sylva, 2003; Evangelou, Brooks and Smith, 2007).

Feasibility Study for a Randomised Controlled Trial

The next step to moving up the evidence scale was to evaluate the Programme using a Randomised Controlled Trial (RCT). To prepare for this, the Parental Engagement Fund provided the opportunity to carry out a Feasibility Study as basis for a future large-scale RCT of the Peep Learning Together Programme.

The Feasibility Study included:

selection of topics and duration; setting recruitment; techniques for recruitment and retention of families; piloting and selection of parent & child outcome measures; and development of a mentoring guide for intervention settings.

During the Feasibility Study, Peep delivered the Peep Learning Together Programme to families eligible for, or enrolled in, the Peep Pre-school. They carried out a mini-RCT with four settings, with two settings receiving the intervention and two control settings (who were offered Programme training at the conclusion of the trial).

Learning from the Feasibility Study

Programme topics and duration

During the Feasibility Study, they trialled different combinations of topics over 10 and 20 weeks.

They learnt:

- the importance of including topics from the Personal, Social and Emotional Development Strand of the Programme (to address behavioural issues about which parents were concerned)
- that the minimum duration for the intervention for the LTS should be 20 weeks plus a home visit (to build relationships, to give time for families to settle into the routine of the group and to allow for a higher dose of content, particularly as regular attendance can be an issue)



The final list of topics used in the Learning Together Study is shown in Appendix 2.

Recruitment and retention of families

During the Feasibility Study they recruited families to join the Learning Together Programme groups at the Peep Pre-school. The additional three settings who were part of the mini-RCT also recruited families into the Study.

They learn that:

- recruiting families can be challenging
- settings need to ensure that the Programme is offered at a time which suits their own schedules and fits with the wishes of parents
- flexibility is important to find what works with recruitment
- texting families as a reminder before sessions is helpful
- a welcoming, uncluttered venue, easily accessible from the setting is important
- offering food and other

incentives can make a difference

Initially, the Programme was offered only to families with children eligible for a funded two year old place or the Early Years Pupil Premium. Perhaps inevitably, many of these families were contending with complex issues outside of their pre-school experience which, understandably, impacted on the frequency of their participation in the group.

They learnt that:

- recruiting a mix of families is helpful
- families from different backgrounds can offer positive support to each other

As a result, they decided to broaden the setting selection criteria for the LTS beyond those in the 10% and 20% centiles of the Indices of Deprivation. They also decided to focus on families with three year olds and not to restrict participation within the settings to families eligible for the Early Years Pupil Premium.

Parent measures

Three measures for parent outcomes were trialled during the Feasibility Study. These were The Very Early Home Learning Environment (to measure the Home Learning Environment, parent self-report) (Sylva et al., 2010), The Tool to Measure Parental Self-Efficacy (TOPSE) (to measure parenting confidence and self-efficacy, parent self-report) (Kendall & Bloomfield, 2005) and Brief Early Skills & Support Index (BESSI) (to measure family support, practitioner report) (Hughes & White, 2015).

Parents who participated in the Learning Together Programme at the Peep Pre-school were asked to complete the parent questionnaires. They were then invited to a focus group conducted by Fiona Jelley (from the University of Oxford). Practitioners were asked to complete the BESSI for their key children.

The HLE and the TOPSE have both been selected as parent outcome measures for the LTS. The BESSI subscale for family



support is not being used as a parent measure.

Child measures

The Feasibility Trial provided the opportunity to explore a number of different measures of early language and literacy development. These were The British Picture Vocabulary Scale (BPVS; Dunn et al. 2009), the Renfrew Action Picture Test (RAPT; Renfrew, 1997), Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals Preschool (CELF; Wiig, Secord, & Semel, 2006), and Concepts about Print (CAP; Clay, 2014).

Peeples learnt that:

- the CELF and the CAP measure aspects of language and early literacy development that are most closely aligned to the aims of the Learning Together Programme.

Our recommendation (plus other factors, such as inter-rater reliability for the RAPT) has led to selection of the CELF as the primary outcome and the CAP as the secondary outcome for the LTS. They were also able to trial the uses of different books with the CAP and have agreed on the use of The Gruffalo.

Setting recruitment

The mini-RCT conducted as part of the Feasibility Study enabled us to prepare and pilot a range of promotional and explanatory material to explain the Study and the intervention (the Learning Together Programme) for both settings and parents. A Memorandum of Understanding was also

produced to outline the terms and details of the agreement between Peeples and the participating settings.

These documents formed the basis of those that they generated for the LTS.

Mentoring Guidance

During the Feasibility Study, experienced Peeples Practitioners from Peeples piloted a range of different mentoring techniques to support the newly-trained practitioners. These have informed the mentoring guidance which is being used by the five mentors who are now supporting the Programme in the new RCT.

The new RCT funded by the EEF

The RCT, funded by the Education Endowment Foundation, is currently being conducted in 150 settings randomised to either treatment or business as usual control. The RCT is known as the Learning Together Study (LTS).

As an efficacy trial, the LTS is evaluating the Programme

under 'ideal' (or more ideal) conditions than might be found in the real world. In the real world, trained practitioners can select any combination of Programme topics to suit their particular requirements and can deliver them over any period of time. However, for the purposes of the LTS, they agreed that all settings would deliver the same topics and in the same order with a focus on language and literacy outcomes for three-year olds. They also agreed to provide additional support for the treatment settings through regular mentoring sessions with experienced Peeples practitioners.

Conclusion

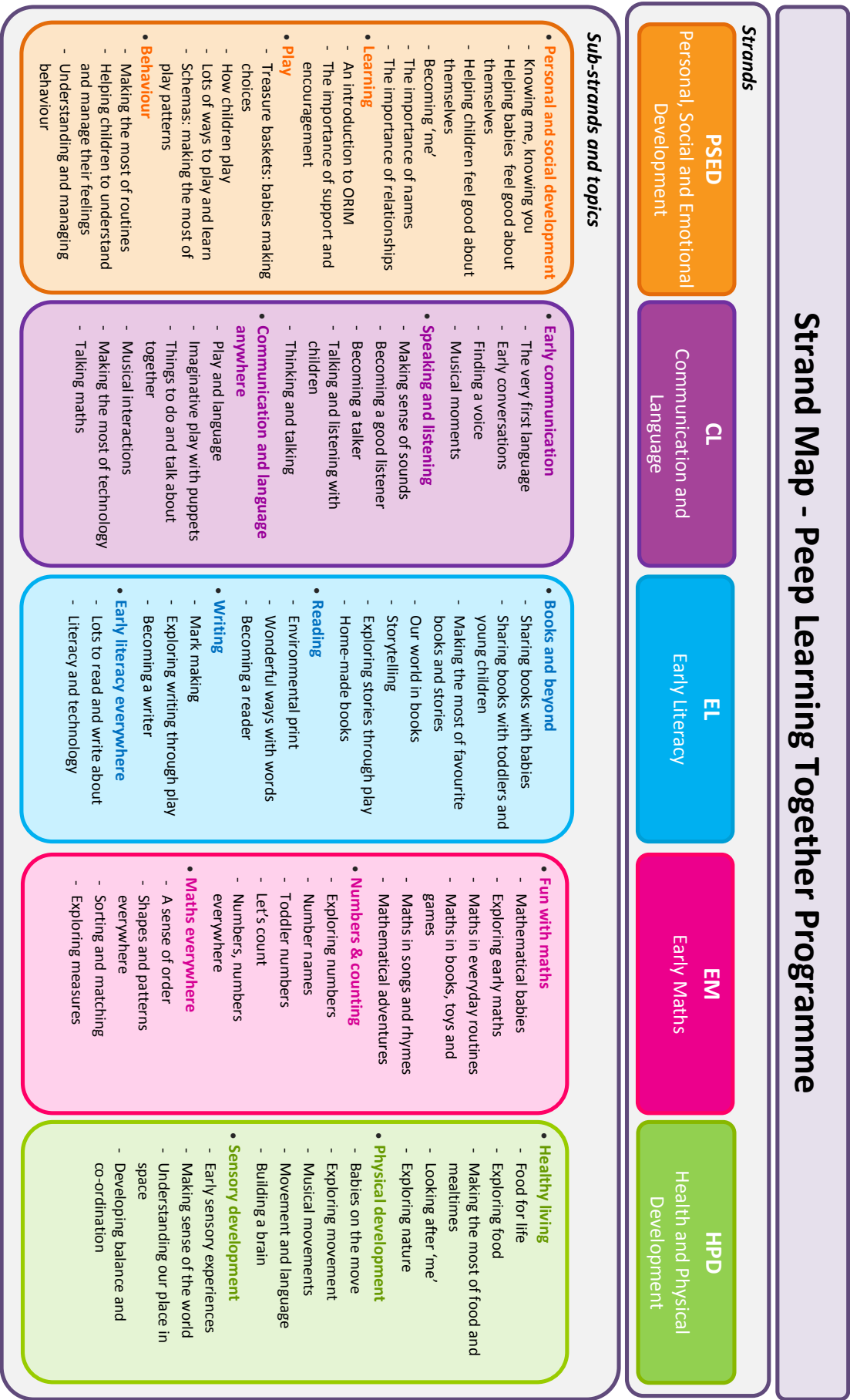
The 21-week bespoke version of the Programme will be delivered in the treatment settings from January 2018. Results from the Study will be available in summer 2019.

Learning from the Parental Engagement Fund Feasibility Study enabled our preparation for this large scale study which if evidence of impact is found will represent a significant move up the evidence scale.



References

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Peep Learning Together Study Weekly Plan

	Topic Title
Week 1	Introduction / The importance of names
Week 2	Helping children feel good about themselves
Week 3	Helping children to understand and manage their feelings
Week 4	Understanding and managing behaviour
Week 5	An introduction to ORIM
Week 6	Becoming a good listener
Week 7	Talking and listening with children
Week 8	Play and language
Week 9	Making the most of technology
Week 10	Musical interactions
Week 11	Thinking and talking
Week 12	Talking maths
Week 13	Sharing books with toddlers and young children
Week 14	Our world in books
Week 15	Homemade books
Week 16	Environmental print
Week 17	Becoming a writer
Week 18	Lots to read and write about
Week 19	Exploring writing through play
Week 20	Celebrating our success

