



## 6 Involvement at the heart of practice

Session 6 revisits what the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) research tells us about home-learning environments.

Participants are asked to consider what they feel makes a strong learning environment at home for young children. What can parents do to enhance development?

Participants then look more closely at the activities that the EPPE study found most significant – of all those that parents reported engaging in with their children at home – in the enhancement of both intellectual and social/emotional development.

These activities are recorded at the top of Resource sheet 6.2 *What activities create a strong home-learning environment?* (reproduced on page 55 of this reader).

They are powerful activities educationally because they encourage thinking and ‘stretch a child’s mind’. The EPPE study also found that parents tend to engage far less with their young boys in these activities than they do with girls, and suggests that a rich home-learning environment can be viewed as a protective factor in reducing the incidence of special educational needs (SEN) assessments.

Practitioners need to share this information with parents and support them in providing strong home-learning environments for all their children. However, there are other equally important aspects of child development that need to be shared. These play activities are best delivered in the context of warm, loving relationships that build a child’s self-esteem. A range of research and experience also points to the need for children to learn from real experience, to make sense, be allowed to follow individual interests, and take the lead in play and activities. It is important to listen to children, extend their thinking with shared conversations, encourage their independence and (where their first language is not English) to maintain the use of a strong first language whilst acquiring English as a second.

In sharing this knowledge, practitioners need to work with parents, encouraging them to feel confident that what they already do at home with their children is valuable and support them to do more (see Session 5). We know that we will be most effective in this if we create authentic, respectful relationships and establish genuine, two-way, regular communication. The EPPE research and the wider Desforges review make it clear how the most effective settings achieve this. The key findings are summarised in Resource sheet 6.3 *How do the most effective schools and settings communicate with parents?* (reproduced on page 56 of this reader).