

Home-School Relationships: The Communication and Engagement Practices of Schools and the Role of the Community Educational Psychologist

Submitted by Suzanne Bevington to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Educational Psychology in Educational, Child and Community Psychology, May 2013.

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Signature:

Suzanne Bevington

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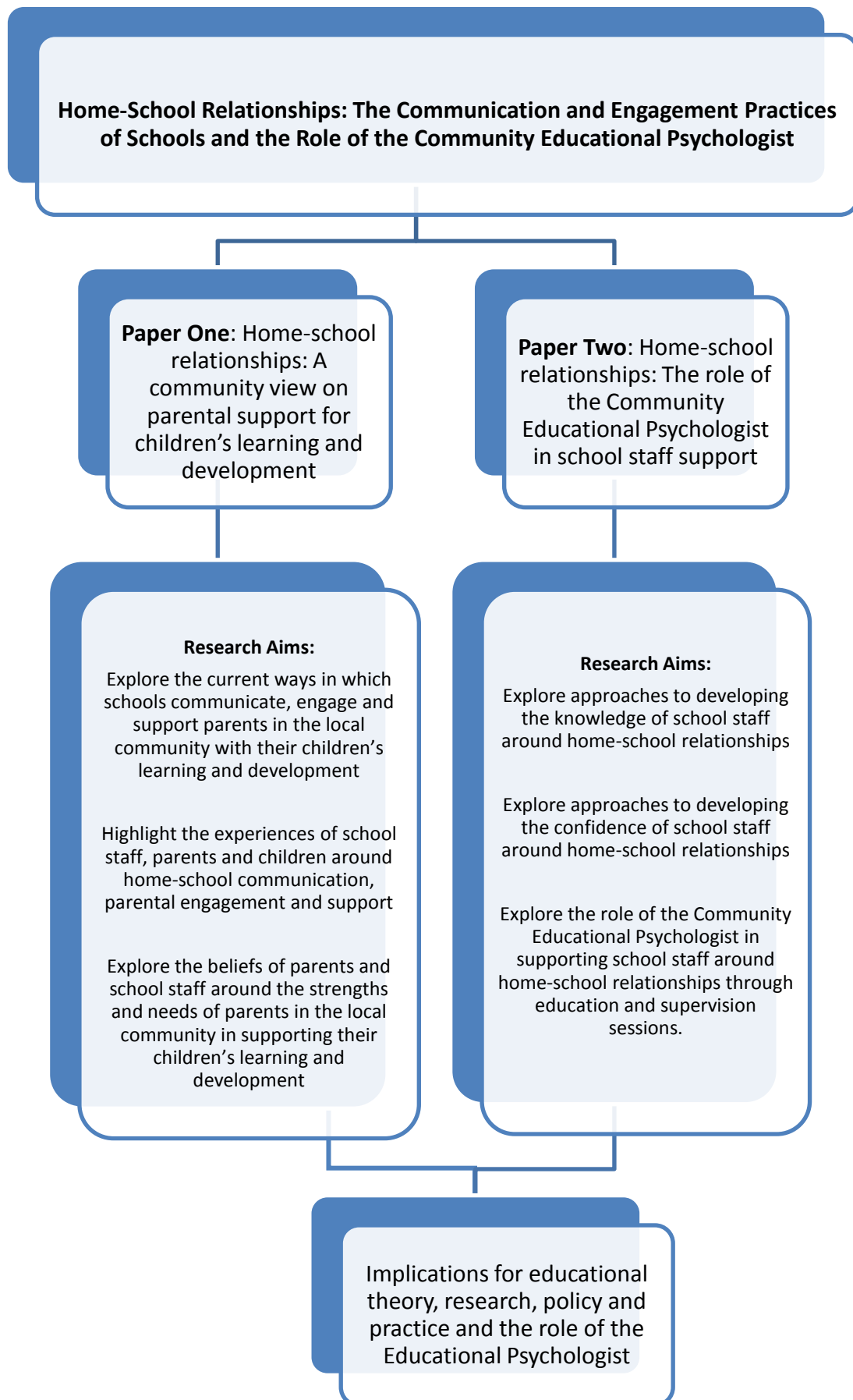


Figure 1. Conceptual map of the structure of the research.

1.1 Overview

This thesis is formed from two papers. The first explores home-school relationships in a local community and school approaches to communicating, engaging and supporting parents with children's learning and development. The second explores a role for the Community Educational Psychologist in supporting school staff in developing positive home-school relationships. Figure 1 presents a conceptual map of the structure of the research.

1.2 Paper One: Home-school relationships: A community view on parental support for children's learning and development

The literature reviewed for paper one sets out the existing evidence to support the importance of parental involvement in education for children's learning and development. It discusses both theory and research indicating influential factors around engaging parents and approaches to developing effective home-school 'partnerships'. The importance of seeking the 'parental voice' is emphasised in order to highlight needs and tailor support to local families, demonstrating the value of exploring school staff, parent and student perceptions of home-school relationships.

The rationale informing this paper therefore includes:

- The positive influences of parental involvement for children's learning and development.
- The current focus on engaging parents and developing effective home-school partnerships.
- The importance of gaining community views in order to tailor support to meet local needs.

Paper one therefore explores the views and experiences of school staff, parents and children from a local community around home-school communication and engagement practices and their beliefs around the strengths and needs of parents for supporting children's learning and development. A mixed-methods approach involved questionnaires, a focus group and interviews with school staff, parents and children from four Primary schools in a local community.

It finds, consistent with the home-school relationship literature, that effective communication is key for encouraging home and school to 'work together' and highlights the need for tailored support around developing parental knowledge and skills in order to best support children's learning and development. Implications for practice include the value of seeking local views and experiences to inform more effective home-school relationships in the future as well as demonstrating a wider community role for Educational Psychologists.

The findings from paper one influenced the development of paper two as an approach to sharing these findings and exploring ways to support school staff with developing positive home-school relationships with parents.

1.3 Paper Two: Home-school relationships: The role of the Community Educational Psychologist in school staff support

The literature reviewed for paper two highlights the overlapping influences of schools, families and communities on children's learning and development and demonstrates developments in research and theory increasing knowledge around ways to foster and maintain positive home-school-community relationships. It indicates the need for increased school staff support and highlights the value of group problem solving

approaches and reflection for supporting better partnerships with families. Exploring the role of the Community Educational Psychologist in supporting the development of positive home-school-community partnerships suggests a new approach for the profession in applying psychology at a wider school community level.

The rationale informing this paper therefore includes:

- The positive influences of home-school-community relationships for children's learning and development.
- The need for increased school staff support around developing and managing home-school interactions.
- Community Educational Psychologists as well placed to provide support to school staff around working with families.

Paper two therefore explores the development of group education and supervision sessions to support school staff knowledge, confidence and reflective skills around home-school relationships, and the role of a Community Educational Psychologist in facilitating these groups. A triangulation of data collection methods including questionnaires, TME ratings and SWOT analyses were used with a group of school staff from a Primary school in the local community.

It finds significant impacts of these sessions for improving staff knowledge and confidence and the value of the Community Educational Psychologist in facilitating these groups. Consistent with staff group support research, the findings highlight the benefits of providing a supportive and reflective environment for staff to share and learn together. Implications for practice include recommended use of such approaches to support other school staff groups, along with increased awareness of the varied role of

Educational Psychologists and the wide-ranging applications of psychology outside the tradition school remit.

Paper one and two together provide an in-depth exploration of the home-school relationships within a local community – highlighting positive practice and areas for development – and demonstrate an effective approach for EPs supporting school staff in their daily practice and interactions with parents in order to build long lasting positive home-school partnerships.

1.4 Author's perspective

The inspiration for this research comes from my own professional interests and experience of home-school relationships and practice as a Community Educational Psychologist; this may be best illustrated through an example from practice.

***Practice example:** During a shadowing opportunity with a colleague, I observed two separate meetings – one with a parent, one with a class teacher – regarding the same student. Both parties provided their own accounts of the current situation, each clearly dedicated to supporting this young boy and wanting the best for him in school, yet harbouring very different views on his level of need and the support he required. As an observer of the process, rather than a contributor to the meeting, my attention was drawn to the dynamics in this home-school relationship and the tensions that seemed to have arisen from a lack of understanding between the two systems. Both home and school appeared isolated from one another, unable to acknowledge the views of the other, and struggled to move forward.*

Witnessing this left me questioning – ‘why are there so often tensions between the home and school systems?’ and ‘how can these two systems better understand each other and work together more effectively?’ I also reflected on the traditional role of Educational Psychologists (EPs) working within the school system and wondered about the role for EPs working outside of this, engaging in community working with parents and families. I found myself asking: ‘Is there a role for EPs outside of the school system and within the community?’, and, ‘In what ways could a ‘*Community Educational Psychologist*’ be involved in supporting the relationships between families and schools?’ These experiences informed the focus of this thesis research.

As a researcher, my perspective is informed by my experiences within school settings working with children and young people, school staff, parents and families, striving to encourage ‘working together’ to enable thorough understanding of needs and ensure appropriate support. These experiences have given me a specific interest in empowerment approaches, particularly Community Psychology, which brings a critical realist positioning to this research.

Paper One: Home-school relationships: A community view on parental support for children's learning and development

2.1. Abstract:

Developing positive relationships between schools and families has become an increasing priority within education in order to best support children and young people's learning and development. Despite an increasing focus on seeking the parental 'voice', the views and experiences of school staff, parents and children appear to have limited prominence within the literature. This paper presents a piece of illuminative Community Psychology research that explored home-school relationships from the perspectives of school staff, parents and children from four Primary schools in a local community. A mixed-methods approach to data collection involved twenty-eight staff and sixty-four parent questionnaires, a focus group with eight children, and semi-structured research interviews with six staff and five parents. The importance of effective communication to encourage home and school to 'work together' is highlighted along with the need to provide support tailored to local needs focused around developing parental knowledge and skills to support children's learning. The findings offer valuable insights into the views and experiences of parents, school staff and children around the current communication and engagement practices of schools in a local community. There are also implications for educational practice, including within Educational Psychology, in developing more effective home-school relationships in the future.

2.2 Introduction

This is the first of two papers exploring home-school relationships and the support for parents around children's learning and development. This paper focuses on gaining the views and experiences of parents, school staff and children in a local community around school approaches to communicating, engaging and supporting

parents. Parental involvement in education has been extensively explored in both theory and research and has become a prominent focus within educational policy and practice. In the following literature review, I will demonstrate the value of effective home-school partnerships for children's learning and development and show that in order to foster such positive relationships there is a need to explore the views and experiences of communities to develop a better understanding of local need and appropriate support.

2.3 A Review of the Literature

Within this review the existing theory, research, policy and practice around home-school relationships and parental engagement is explored. It will begin with a discussion of the influence of government policy and legislation on the changing roles and responsibilities of parents in their children's education and then review the research and theory around parental involvement and educational outcomes. Approaches to engaging parents and factors that affect engagement are discussed as well as practical approaches and considerations for developing home-school relationships. To conclude, previous research exploring staff and parental perceptions of home-school relationships is outlined and the purpose of the current research paper in filling gaps within existing literature and advancing research in this area of study is described.

Literature was sourced through academic search engines (EBSCO, JSTOR, ScienceDirect and PsycARTICLES) to access relevant journals and articles, along with library and personal books. A variety of search terms to follow 'home-school' included: 'relationship', 'partnership' and 'communication' and variations in search

strings using 'community', 'parent', 'home' and 'school' were used to ensure a wide-ranging search of diverse sources. The term 'parent' is used throughout this review to indicate the main caregivers for children and young people.

2.3.1 Parental Involvement in Education

The roles and responsibilities of parents in their children's education have transformed over the past half-century (Bastiani & Doyle, 1994) with government reports and legislation increasingly focused on parental 'rights' and developing home-school links (e.g. DES, 1991; DES, 1977; DfEE, 1997; Education Reform Act, 1988). More recently, home-school practices have encouraged working in partnership, seeking the parental 'voice' and tailoring services to suit parental needs, such as 'Every Parent Matters' (DfES, 2007).

2.3.2 Parental Involvement and Educational Outcomes

The benefits of 'parents as educators' of their children at home have long been advocated (Christenson, 2004; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Topping, 1986). Commonly held assumptions around the positive influence of active parental involvement on children's educational outcomes appear to be supported by a substantive body of research evidencing the specific benefits for children's academic achievement and adjustment (see Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; and Henderson & Mapp, 2002 for reviews). The benefits for academic achievement have been a prominent focus of many studies (Fan & Chen, 2001) with some marking the influence of parental involvement on achievement as beneficial regardless of social background and as having greater impact than schooling itself (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003).

2.3.3 Theoretical Perspectives on Parental Involvement

From a theoretical perspective, the most prominent models of parental involvement appear to be Epstein (2001) and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995). Based on extensive research, Epstein (2001) developed a framework of parental involvement categorising six types: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making and collaborating with the community (see Figure 2). This is a widely used framework and often referred to as guidance for developing methods to engage parents within schools (Hiatt-Michael, 2001).

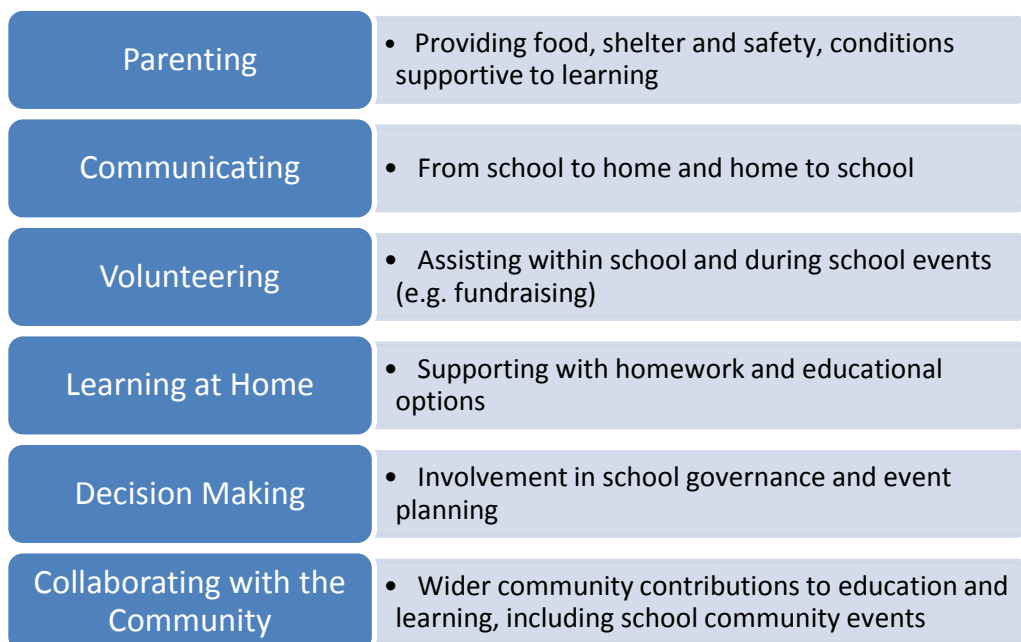


Figure 2. Six types of parental involvement, adapted from Epstein (2001)

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995) comprehensive, five-level model describes factors influencing parental involvement, methods to engage parents and the impacts of involvement on children's educational outcomes (see Figure 3). The model provides an in-depth exploration of the reasons why parents may or may not become involved with their children's education and highlights three influential factors. These include: personal construction of the parent role – what the role

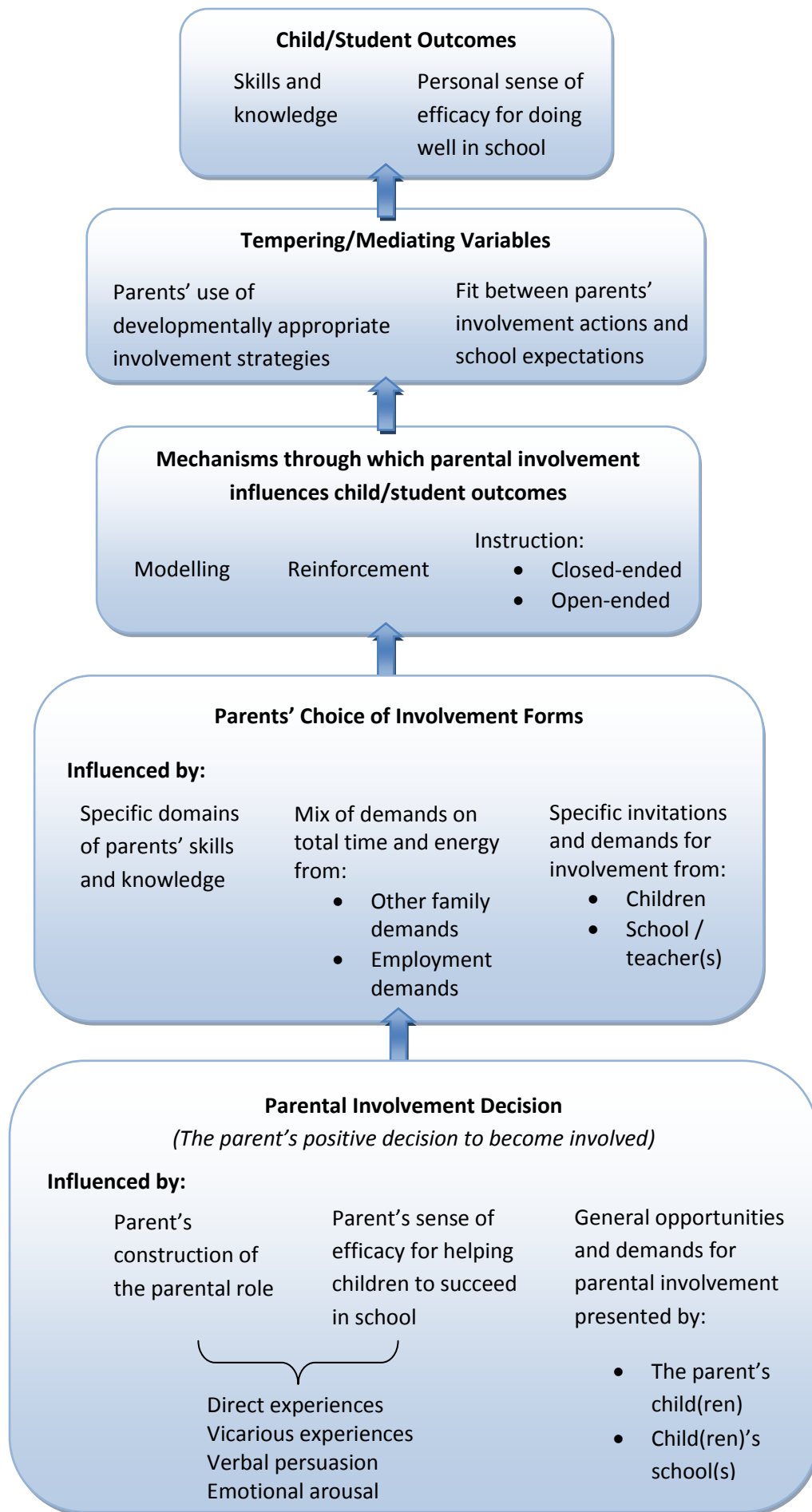


Figure 3. Causal and specific model of parental involvement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995)

of parent means and what this entails; personal sense of efficacy – how able the parent feels to carry out this role; and parental responses to invitations – parental reactions when presented with opportunities to engage by both their children and the school (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). The authors also discuss a range of other influential factors presenting barriers to parental involvement including individual factors: parental experience of, and value placed on, education; social factors: race and culture, socio-economic status, external constraints (i.e. work commitments) and school factors: school environment and staff unwelcoming and unconnected with the community (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995).

2.3.4 Engaging Parents in Education

A review of UK education authority initiatives to engage parents in children's learning highlighted an increasing variety of approaches including: parent workshops, home-school agreements, home visits, family literacy classes and after-school clubs (Bastiani, 1993). Guidance for schools around 'best practice' for engaging parents continues to be a focus for many government commissioned research reports (for example, Day, Williams, & Fox, 2009; Goodall & Vorhaus, 2011). Typical school methods to communicate with and engage parents (i.e. written reports and parents' evenings) can restrict parent-teacher interactions, often excluding the students themselves from any active involvement (Munn, 1993b). Munn (1993b) argues that these traditional approaches rarely reflect a reciprocal process, instead reinforcing passive involvement from parents listening to and accepting the authority of the school and viewing teachers as 'knowing best' without acknowledging their own value as educators of their children.

Communication is described as a key ingredient to enable schools and parents to work together effectively (Crozier, 2000). The use of more creative approaches, including incorporating technology (i.e. voicemail, websites and text messaging), are suggested in order to support effective communication with parents (Graham-Clay, 2005). Initiatives, such as the Home-School Knowledge Exchange project (Hughes & Pollard, 2006), encourage reciprocal exchanges of information between home and school, aiming to increase parental awareness of what occurs within the classroom learning environment.

2.3.5 Developing Home-School Partnerships

With an increasing focus on home and school 'working together', the development of home-school partnerships that reflect open and equal relationships, recognising the role and expertise of all parties involved are widely encouraged (Munn, 1993b; Swap, 1990). Munn states this kind of partnership must involve,

"...a shared commitment to means and ends, a joint understanding of the realistic and attainable goals for individual pupils, how these are to be achieved and the respective parts which teachers, parents and pupils will play in this process." (1993b, p. 176)

Key factors identified for the effective development of home-school partnerships include: a positive school ethos, whole school commitment and priority, utilising existing good practice and gaining parental views (Bastiani & Doyle, 1994) along with available sources of knowledge, time and materials (Hancock, 1998). Hancock (1998) describes the need for teachers to receive pre- and in-service training and support specifically focused around developing positive home-school relationships and strategies to encourage active parental involvement. From a parental

perspective, school practices that welcome parents, value their contributions and connect them with the school community are described as key for fostering and sustaining successful and trusting home-school relationships (Mapp, 2003).

Students are noted to be most successful when there is continuity between home and school levels of support and influence (Keyes, 2002). Although there appears a generally positive view of home-school partnerships, Edwards and Warin (1999) describe the need to be mindful around these links, warning against ‘the colonisation of the home by the school’.

2.3.6 The views of staff, parents and students around home-school relationships

Despite extensive literature around parental involvement and home-school relationships, study of the views of the key stakeholders’ within these relationships – school staff, parents and students – appears limited and mostly focused around academic achievement (such as DePlanty, Coulter-Kern, & Duchane, 2007; Radzi, Razak, & Sukor, 2010). In the UK, stakeholders’ views are more frequently sought through government reports informing policy and practice (for example, DCSF, 2008; 2009c, 2009d; OfSTED, 2011).

Agreement around the importance of parental involvement for academic achievement has often been noted (DePlanty, et al., 2007), however, reluctance from teachers to develop home-school relationships (Ramirez, 2000) and views of parental involvement in the home as more effective than in the school (DePlanty, et al., 2007) have also been found. Practical constraints such as limited time and money, work and other life commitments are often seen as barriers to parental involvement (Ramirez, 2000). Views of parents feeling ‘intimidated’ by school

(DePlanty, et al., 2007), lacking confidence with supporting learning (DCSF, 2009c), and concerns about appearing 'over demanding' (OfSTED, 2011) suggest the need to support parents in engaging with their children's education.

Common themes when exploring parental views around involvement include parents wanting their children to succeed, desiring to be involved with learning and understanding the benefits of their involvement both at home and in school (Mapp, 2003). Russell and Granville (2005) describe 'making sense of children's schooling' as a common parental priority.

The balance between home-school collaboration and independence has also been explored from the parental perspective (Wanat, 2010). Wanat (2010) gathered parental views about ways for schools to improve the balance of home-school practices which included: better communication – more open, frequent, specific and immediate information – sharing of ideas, such as strategies to support learning, and more creative ways to involve parents and utilise their unique skills. UK government reports reflect similar findings, with parents predominately describing their need to feel reassured by schools around ways to help and support their children (DCSF, 2009d; OfSTED, 2011).

Studies exploring staff, parents and student views often discuss findings in relation to theoretical models of parental involvement (Bhering, 2002; DePlanty, et al., 2007; Pelco & Ries, 1999; Radzi, et al., 2010). Pelco and Ries' (1999) study of teacher attitudes towards home-school links related their findings to the influential factors at the 'parental involvement decision' in Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995) model (see Figure 3). The authors proposed that teachers are more likely to

actively involve parents when they: view collaboration with families as within their professional role, feel they have the necessary knowledge and skills to engage parents in the educational process, and view there is a demand and opportunities to involve parents (Pelco & Ries, 1999). With reference to Epstein's (2001) framework (see Figure 2), parental involvement through 'parenting' and 'learning at home' is commonly noted but 'communication' is described as crucial for effective home-school partnerships (DePlanty, et al., 2007; Radzi, et al., 2010).

Perceptions of the different tasks and roles of parents and schools – teachers as educators and parents as preparing children for education – have been found (Bhering, 2002; DCSF, 2008), yet Bhering (2002) suggests that these differences should not prevent them from being complementary to each other. Increased staff awareness around involving parents in learning and parental knowledge about how to support their children's learning was noted as an important area for development (Bhering, 2002).

2.4 The Present Research – An Outline

This literature review suggests why there may be tensions between the home and school systems and ways in which these two systems can better understand each other and work together more effectively. However, it seems there remains a need for deeper exploration of views and experiences at a local level in order to best support effective home-school partnerships.

The present research draws together the aspects discussed in the literature review by adopting a Community Psychology approach to exploring home-school relationships. This paper will explore the views and experiences of parents, school

staff and students in a local community around current home-school communication and engagement and the strengths and needs of parents in supporting their children's learning and development. This research will build upon current studies of home, school and community relationships and approaches to communicating, engaging and supporting parents in education. It will apply principles from Community Psychology to support positive change by highlighting the voices of a specific community. It has relevance to current social and political focus on promoting the parental and student 'voice' in education. It provides an original contribution to this area of study and demonstrates the role of the Educational Psychologist in supporting an in-depth exploration of community views to ensure support meets local needs.

2.4.1 Research Aims

The specific aims of this research are to:

- Explore the current ways in which schools communicate, engage and support parents in the local community with their children's learning and development
- Highlight the experiences of school staff, parents and children around home-school communication, parental engagement and support
- Explore the beliefs of parents and school staff around the strengths and needs of parents in the local community in supporting their children's learning and development

2.4.2 Research Questions

The research questions for this study are:

- In what ways do schools currently communicate with parents in the local community around their children's learning and development?
- In what ways do schools currently engage and support parents in the local community with their children's learning and development?
- What are the beliefs of parents, school staff and children about ways in which schools can provide support for parents with their children's learning and development?
- What are the beliefs of parents and school staff about the strengths of parents in the local community in supporting their children's learning and development?
- What are the beliefs of parents and school staff about the needs of parents in the local community around supporting their children's learning and development?

2.5 Research Methodology

The aims of the present research to explore the views and experiences of school staff, parents and children in a local community are well-suited to a Community Psychology (CP) orientation. CP fits within a critical paradigm, its purpose to explore individual and group beliefs, perceptions and experiences, seeking to voice the views and concerns of oppressed groups (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). The assumptions within the critical paradigm of an external reality created by social and institutional structures, but with individual perspectives of this reality, influence the methods used in this area of research (Robson, 2002).

Research methods within CP often adopt a pragmatic position of methodological pluralism seeking both quantitative and qualitative data (to ensure triangulation of data) typically through participatory and action-oriented working (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). A review of the research methods employed by studies exploring parental involvement and home-school relationships appear to reflect this mixed-methods approach – the use of quantitative measures such as assessment and survey data to produce statistical analysis (Fan & Chen, 2001; Pelco & Ries, 1999) as well as more qualitative approaches through interviews (Mapp, 2003). Explorations of teacher, parent and student views frequently use a combination of surveys and interviews (e.g. Bhering, 2002; DePlanty, et al., 2007; Wanat, 2010) and the value of mixed methods research designs for this area of study is advocated (Hughes & Pollard, 2006).

The critical realist perspective of the author also supports the use of mixed methods (Bhaskar, 2008). Therefore, a mixed-methods CP approach, balancing the advantages of methods that gain wide-ranging views alongside in-depth experiences of members of the school and local community was considered as most appropriate for the present study.

2.6 Research Design

This illuminative CP research employed a mixed-methods design using questionnaires, a focus group and individual semi-structured interviews to gain views and experiences from a range of individuals as well as more in-depth individual experiences around home-school relationships.

2.6.1 Participants

This research took place within schools and local community of a town in the East of England with high levels of deprivation relative to other areas of the county (APHO, 2010). Staff, parents and children from four primary schools in a local community were involved in this research.

Questionnaire: For the initial pilot, an opportunity sample of 5 parents and 3 school staff were involved. The researcher approached the parents during a parenting course and the school staff during school visits, asking for their feedback on the questionnaire, specifically about question clarity, relevance and appropriateness. For the full questionnaire, cluster sampling was used. All staff working with students (including Head teachers, SENCos, class teachers and teaching assistants) in all four schools were sent the questionnaire totalling 104 staff. All parents from the 3 smaller schools, and parents from one class in each year group for the larger school, were sent the questionnaire totalling 638 parent questionnaires (a detailed breakdown of the sample can be seen in Appendix 1). 28 staff and 64 parents responded to the questionnaire and were involved in the main sample reflecting a response rate of 27% for staff and 10% for parents. Although this represents a fairly low response rate, due to the high number of questionnaires initially sent out this sample size provided a good data set to be analysed.

Focus Groups: Each of the four schools were approached to take part in the children's focus groups, however, this was only possible within one school. The school SENCo selected 8 children they felt would be happy to meet with the researcher and share their views.

Interviews: The semi-structured research interviews involved a self-selected sample of 6 school staff and 5 parents from 3 of the schools involved in the study. A statement at the end of the questionnaire invited participants to take part in interviews to discuss their experiences of home-school relationships in more detail. Those who expressed an interest were contacted and all those willing to take part formed the sample.

2.6.2 Materials

Questionnaire: The researcher designed and piloted initial staff and parent questionnaires and, following feedback, minor modifications were made (see Appendix 2a for staff & 2b for parent questionnaires). A brief describing the research was attached to each questionnaire (see Appendix 2c). Due to the extent of families with English as an Additional Language (EAL) in the local community being studied, translations of the parent brief and questionnaire were developed in the four prominent local languages (Lithuanian, Latvian, Polish and Russian) and sent to those EAL parents involved in the sample (see Appendix 2d for an example).

Focus group: Flip-chart paper and pens were used to record the focus group responses.

Interviews: The researcher designed the staff and parent interview schedules (see Appendix 3a & 3b) building upon the questionnaire in order to gain more in-depth views and experiences of home-school relationships.

2.6.3 Methods

Questionnaire: Paper copies of the questionnaire were given to staff, parental copies were sent home with students. The questionnaire was self-completed, returned to the school (within one week) and collected by the researcher.

Focus group: The focus group was facilitated by the researcher. The aims and purpose of the research were introduced and their involvement in the group was explained (see Appendix 4a). In order to gain the children's views in a brief and informal manner, an approach similar to that of 'a drawing and its opposite' (Ravenette, 1980) was used. Participants were provided with two sheets of flip-chart paper entitled 'good' and 'bad' home-school communication (the researcher's constructs). They were asked to write down and draw images that represented their views of both good and bad aspects of their experience of relationships between their home and their school (see Appendix 4b for a photograph of the sheets).

Interviews: The researcher visited the participants and carried out the interviews in their homes, each lasting approximately 30 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded using a Dictaphone and were fully transcribed (see Appendix 3c for an example).

2.6.4 Data Analysis

Questionnaires: For the fixed-response questions, responses were coded in order to be entered as numerical data (e.g. No = 0, Yes = 1). Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data, with frequencies calculated for responses from each question to highlight the 'most' and 'least' common responses and reported in

percentages. For the open questions (Q5, Q7 & Q8) the qualitative responses provided were collated and grouped into themes.

Results were created for each of the four participating schools and fed back to each individually to thank them for their involvement in the study and ensure the research was valuable for participants as well as the researcher. For this paper, responses from all four schools were combined and grouped into generic 'staff' and 'parent' responses.

Focus group: The written and pictorial responses from the focus group were collated and reported.

Interviews: Thematic analysis was selected as the most appropriate method to analyse the interview data as it provides an accessible and flexible approach to organising and describing a rich data set enabling the researcher to identify and analyse themes across the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is an inductive data-driven approach which, as noted by Braun and Clarke,

"...acknowledges the ways in which individuals make meaning of their experience , and, in turn, the ways the broader social context impinges on those meanings," (2006, p. 9)

making it well suited for the critical paradigm of this piece of CP research.

The analysis was guided by Braun & Clarke's (2006) 6-phase guide to thematic analysis following a series of stages including:

- Familiarisation with the data (including conducting the interviews, fully transcribing the interviews, reading and re-reading the transcripts personally and noting down possible themes)

- Initial coding (descriptive: assigning a label to selections of text which described the content of the key meaning)
- Searching for themes (grouping similar codes into categories – ‘themes’)
- Reviewing themes
- Defining and naming themes
- Producing the report (thematic maps)

This process of thematic analysis was carried out for both staff and parent interviews (see Appendix 6a, 6b for coding and 6c, 6d for thematic maps) using qualitative data analysis software, NVivo.

2.7 Ethics

Ethical guidelines provided by the British Psychological Society and the University of Exeter were followed for this research. Approval from the University of Exeter’s ethics committee was obtained in March 2012. All participants in this study were briefed about the aims and purpose of the research prior to their involvement and informed written consent was obtained from all participants (including head teachers and parents of children in the focus group). Participants were made aware of their right to withdraw and were assured of the anonymity and confidentiality of all information. Please refer to Appendix 10 for complete consideration of all ethical issues and practices, along with example consent forms.

2.8 Results

Findings from the questionnaires, focus group and interviews are presented below in relation to each of the five research questions guiding this research. The thematic maps shown below are referred to throughout the results section (see Appendix 6e and 6f for further illustrative examples).

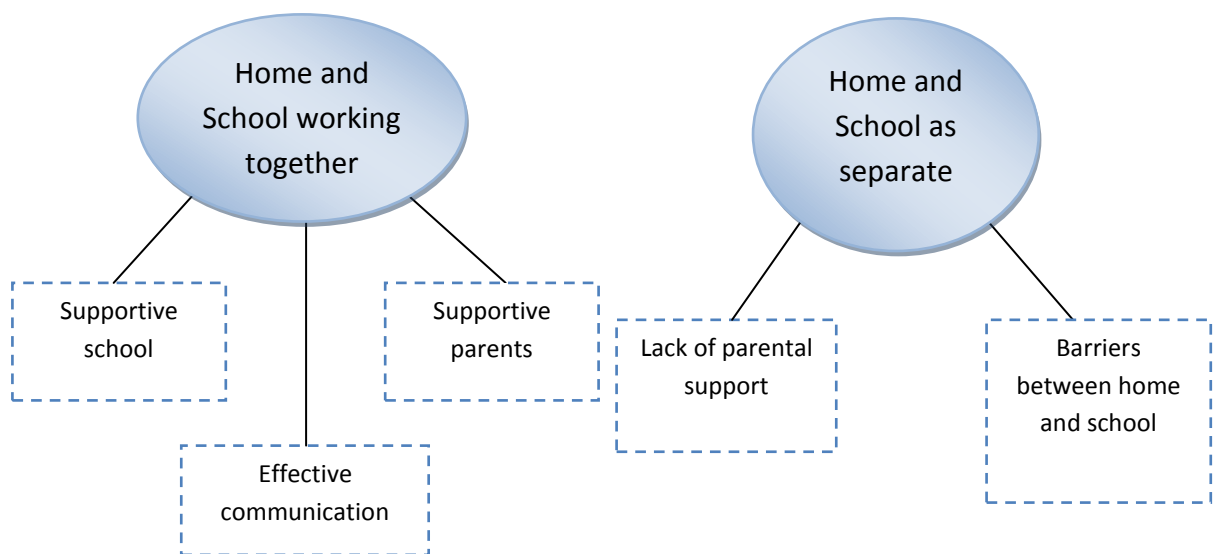


Figure 4. School staff thematic analysis map

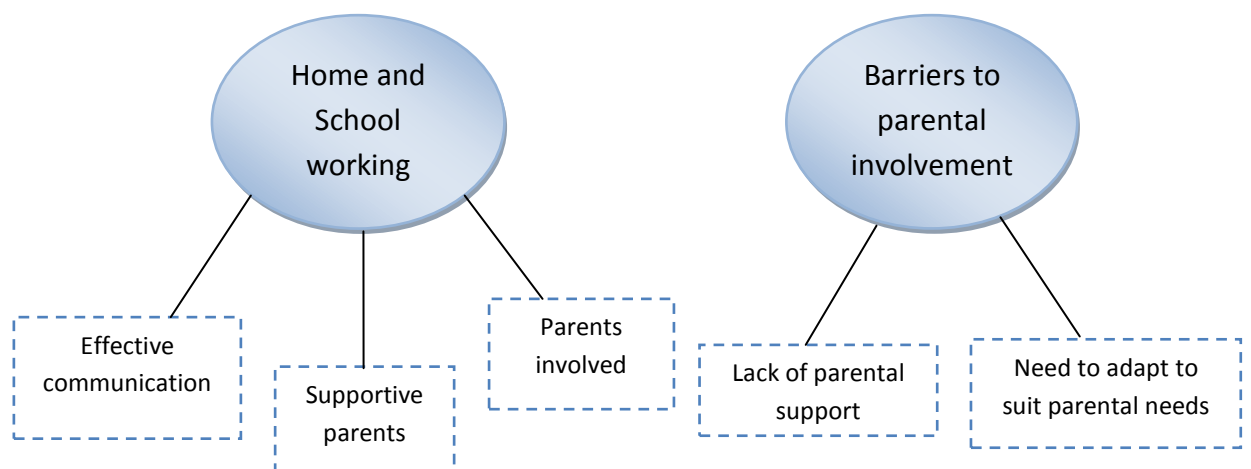


Figure 5. Parent thematic analysis map

2.8.1 Research Question 1

In what ways do schools currently communicate with parents in the local community around their children’s learning and development?

The questionnaire responses highlighted a range of ways in which schools currently communicate with parents (see Figure 6 below).

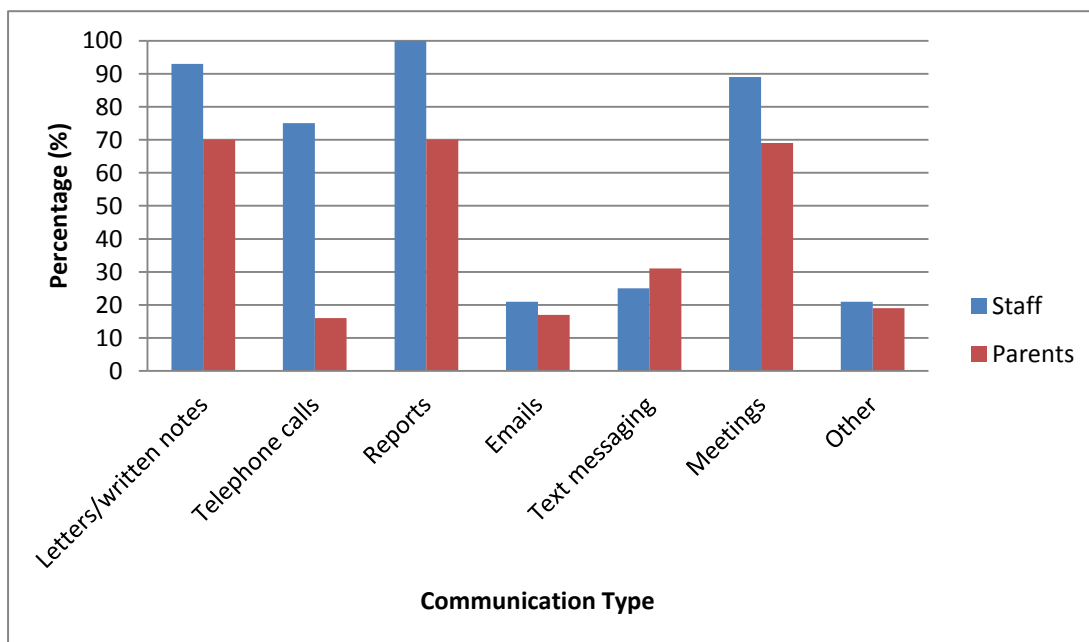


Figure 6. Graph of current school communication practices

The more traditional communication methods – reports, letters and meetings – were most commonly noted by staff and parents, whilst more modern approaches using technology through emails and text messages were found to be least common. There was some discrepancy between staff and parent responses, specifically in communication through telephone calls (75% staff compared to 16% parents) highlighting the variation that can occur between staff and parental perspectives. Respondents indicated a number of ‘other’ forms of school to home

communication including informal staff-parent chats and messages, parents' evenings and school websites (see Appendix 5a).

The most common frequency of communication from school was noted by staff (46%) and parents (43%) as 'several times a year', with the majority indicating a preference for the same level of communication to continue (86% and 64% respectively). However, this still left 34% of parents expressing a desire for more communication from their child's school, whilst only 14% of staff felt the school could provide this. These findings suggest an important area for development for schools in providing more communication but in a manageable way for staff. The majority of staff (61%) and parents (73%) describing communication from school to home as 'mostly positive' would appear beneficial for promoting positive home-school relationships.

Through the children's focus group, both positive and negative aspects of home-school communication were raised. Students shared their views around the benefits of sharing information around issues such as bullying, but also described their dislike when left out of communication (such as parents' evenings and reports). Many reported concerns about the amount of information shared between home and school, wanting to have a certain level of privacy at school.

The interviews provided greater insight into staff and parent experiences of home-school communication – '*effective communication*' was found to be a key theme noted by both groups. For staff, effective communication was described as integral for successful home-school relationships by keeping parents informed and encouraging them to engage. Staff explained the importance of a high level of

communication and the value of face-to-face contact with parents – *‘We do try really, really hard to find ways to draw them in...because we do, we really believe that that’s what makes the difference,’* (S3.S1). A key point noted by staff was the importance of reciprocal communication and consistency in message between home and school for supporting children’s learning and development – *‘I think if they can give the children the same message that we’re giving them, it does make the world of difference ... ‘mum says I’ve got to do it and Miss says I’ve got to do it, so I suppose I better do it!’* (S2.S1).

Parents described a variety of ways schools communicate with and provide feedback for parents from the more traditional, formal use of reports and parents’ evenings, to more informal discussions with staff at the start or end of the school day. The use of technology was noted as a particularly efficient approach valued by many parents – *“I do like the parent mail [electronic emailing system] because you know that way you’ve been informed personally and you know you’re going to get it. Emails, texts...reminders...I think is good because as a working mum it’s hard to remember those dates and times...”* (S1.P2).

2.8.2 Research Question 2

In what ways do schools currently engage and support parents in the local community with their children’s learning and development?

The large majority of both school staff (96%) and parents (98%) agreed that parental involvement in children’s education is important, indicating a high level of awareness and perceived value of parental involvement in education. This would

appear a positive foundation on which to develop and improve home-school relationships through effective communication and engagement.

The questionnaire responses highlight a range of ways in which schools currently engage and support parents (see Figure 7 below).

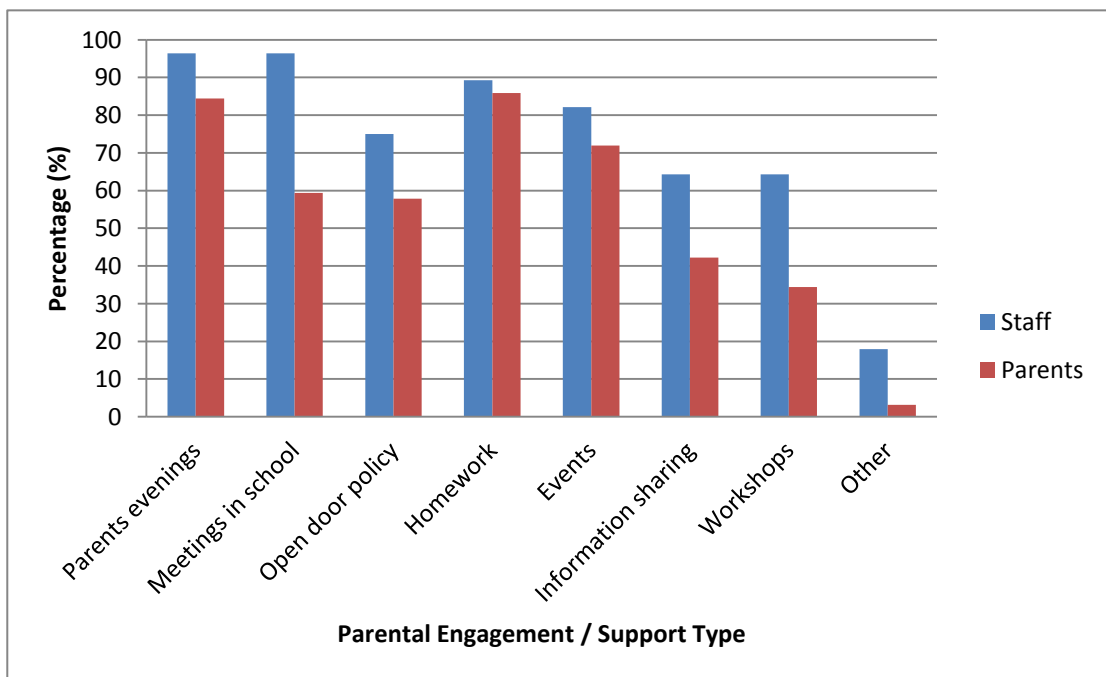


Figure 7. Graph of current school parental engagement/support practices

There were high levels of responses for the range of parental engagement and support practices. Parents' evenings and homework were most commonly noted by staff and parents, whilst information sharing and workshops least so – indicating potential areas for development. The discrepancies between staff and parent views (such as the use of meetings in school) may suggest staff view their school as providing more support and involvement for parents than parents themselves recognise receiving. A wealth of additional engagement practices were again reflected in responses to the 'other' option including assemblies, family days and

websites – the most popular being information evenings in school and involvement in children’s classrooms (see Appendix 5b).

Throughout staff interviews, a key theme ‘*supportive schools*’ was noted describing an open and welcoming environment to parents, seeking their views and being responsive to their needs. Many staff described school efforts to encourage parents: ‘*Well we try really, really hard as a school to encourage parents to participate in their children’s education...we’re constantly looking for ways that we can engage parents and get them involved,*’ (S3.S1). Staff discussed a variety of more informal and interactive approaches, including information and education sessions, school events and fun days, aimed at developing parental knowledge and skills and providing opportunities for parents to take an active role in their child’s education. Staff described aiming not only to increase parental presence in school but also to develop parental understanding of the ways their children learn and how they are being taught in order for parents to become part of this learning journey – ‘*...[we’re] trying to get the parents more on board with what’s happening, in their learning, in the curriculum,*’ (S3.S1).

A similar key theme ‘*parents involved*’ arose through parent interviews describing the encouragement and wide range of opportunities provided by schools to seek parental support and engage them in their children’s education. Fun activities and events, such as family gardening days were noted as well as supporting parental learning skills in order to support their children – ‘*They have sessions where you come in and do a Literacy session or a Numeracy session with them. Or they have a session where they’ll show you the work that they’ve been doing. You know, it’s*

really nice to come in and see what they're doing.” (S3.P1).

2.8.3 Research Question 3

What are the beliefs of parents, school staff and children about ways in which schools can provide support for parents with their children's learning and development?

Questionnaire responses indicated the majority of staff and parents felt schools should continue to provide the same level of support currently offered, yet over 35% of parents still said they would like more support from schools. Interestingly, when asked whether schools could do more to support parents with children's learning and education, the majority neither agreed nor disagreed. The popularity of this 'middle-of-the-road' response may reflect an uncertainty about what more schools could do, an acknowledgement of the constraints on schools that may make providing more support difficult, or perhaps, as noted earlier, a general satisfaction with current parental support. Given that 32% of staff and 39% of parents agreed that schools could do more, it seems increased focus on supporting parents with their children's learning would be welcomed.

School staff and parent qualitative questionnaire responses regarding ways schools could involve and support parents more were collated and organised into five categories (see Figure 8). The prominent areas for improvement involved providing parents with more frequent, in-depth information about their children's learning and progress, with specific focus on what children are learning and how they are

taught, as well as practical guidance on ways in which parents can support learning at home (see Appendix 5c for a full list of responses).

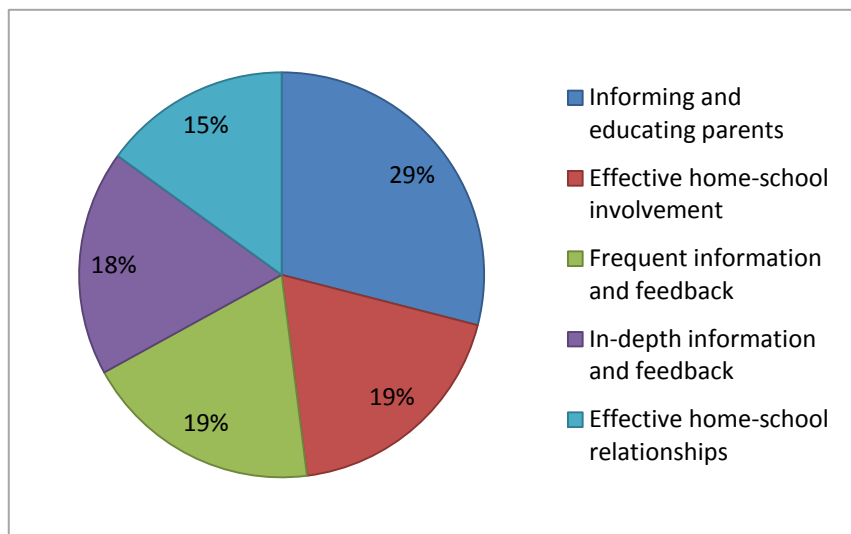


Figure 8. Chart to show ways schools could involve and support parents

These findings suggest the need for schools to provide support tailored to the needs of parents in the local community to develop better home-school relationships.

Through the focus group, students acknowledged the benefits of parents being aware of what they were learning in school and knowing how to help and support them at home. The group provided ideas for ways to involve their parents in their learning including fun and interactive homework projects and parental attendance and support through sports clubs at school.

Across the staff and parent interviews, discussion about ways for schools to support parents often raised issues around factors preventing effective engagement from both school and home and the need for these to be addressed. The key theme 'barriers between home and school' was noted for both groups.

Staff discussed several practical barriers preventing more parental involvement, such as the necessary but sometimes lengthy and expensive process of Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks required for any parents supporting within the school. A lack of, and inconsistency in communication from both home and school was noted, as well as the significant language barrier with parents in the local community due to the high level of migrant families with English as an Additional Language. School 'authority' was viewed as a barrier by staff, with many feeling parents perceive a hierarchy between themselves and school staff – as one member of staff shared, *"...they seem to think teachers are of a different league and they're not,"* (S2.S2) and described how the attitudes and behaviours of some staff actually reinforce this view. The formality of some school processes were also noted as impeding home-school interactions and creating an increased sense of separation between home and school – *"It's all very formal and most parents are put off by things being too formal because they feel intimidated. There doesn't seem to be so much openness to parents...there's been 'them and us' with parents I think,"* (S2.S3).

When discussing barriers to parental involvement, the views of parents also highlighted a sense that schools 'needed to adapt to suit parental needs'. Parents commented on the need for schools to demonstrate more understanding of parental commitments, such as work, impacting on their abilities to engage with their children's school, despite their wish to be involved whenever possible.

A main area raised by parents for schools to address was in supporting parental understanding of teaching and learning. All parents described their wishes for more information and support around how best to help their children with learning and

although parents recognised support currently offered by schools, they felt this was an area in which schools could continue to improve in order to increase parental engagement and develop positive home-school relationships. As one parent noted: *“How can we encourage them to learn if we’re teaching them a totally different way and confusing them?”* (S1.P2). Parents provided a number of other suggestions for ways school could adapt more to suit parental needs including: offering alternatives for working parents, such as evenings appointments, greater use of technology (i.e. emails and text messaging) to ensure more immediate and easier access to information and an increase in communication from school to home, particularly around seeking parental views and gaining feedback.

2.8.4 Research Question 4

What are the beliefs of parents and school staff about the strengths of parents in the local community in supporting their children’s learning and development?

The majority of staff and parents agreed that ‘all parents could support their children’s learning’, although this view was more prominent for staff (93%) than parents (77%). It may be that staff felt more able to give an absolute response when discussing the responsibility of a role other than their own, whilst parents may be more aware of (or gave greater consideration to) the barriers that may prevent ‘all’ parents being able to support learning.

School staff and parent qualitative questionnaire responses regarding parental strengths were collated and organised into five categories (see Figure 9).

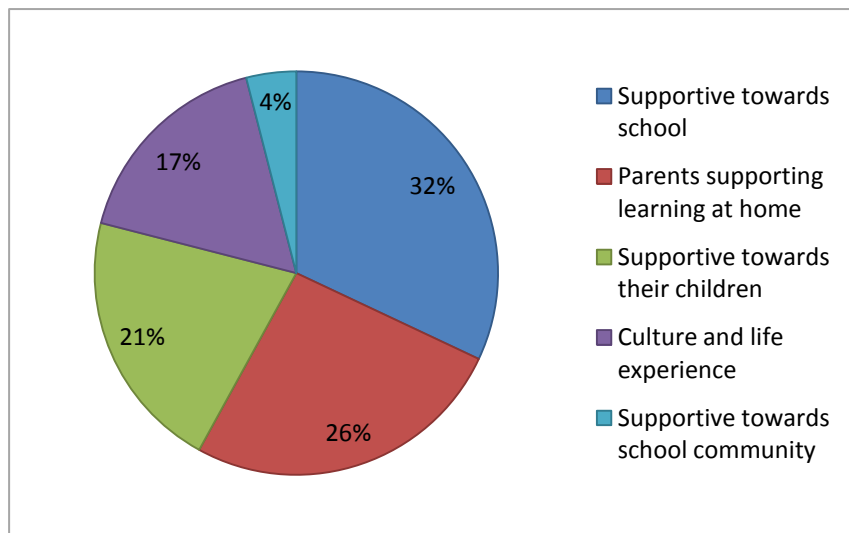


Figure 9. Chart to show parental strengths in supporting children's learning and development

The most common parental strengths were noted as being supportive towards school through positive attitudes, willingness to be involved and contributing to and working as team with the school. Other parental strengths included supporting learning outside of school through educational visits, helping with homework, showing interest and enthusiasm for learning and sharing their own skills with their children, as well as supporting other parents (see Appendix 5d for a full list of responses). These findings reflect many ways in which parents can be positively involved in their children's education and indicate the active roles and responsibilities required by both staff and parents to form effective home-school relationships.

Parental strengths were also described within the interviews – the key theme 'supportive parents' was apparent in both staff and parent interviews. Staff frequently discussed the supportive role of many parents often noting: "a certain group of parents that are always very keen to do everything," (S3.S1), and parents being willing to share their own skills to support in school. Examples were given of

parents volunteering their support for school events, such as Sports Day – *‘Lots of parents will come in and offer their help to choose first, second, third, that kind of thing. We will have so many parents wanting to hold the rope, wanting to sit with groups of children and it’s not on the letter for them to, you know, volunteer, but they do,’* (S1.S1).

The ‘willingness’ of parents to offer help and support to school and the value of this for home-school relationships was also commented upon in parent interviews.

Parental strengths in supporting children’s learning, particularly through homework, was frequently described and the benefits of this support were noted for the confidence of both the children and their parents – *“My husband’s not very good at reading – but he sits with the children and does the reading so that’s helping him as well.”* (S3.P1). Whilst recognising the value of parental involvement, parents also noted the importance of a healthy balance – *“Sometimes it’s nice for her not to have her mum around, it’s good for her as well. You want to help out but you don’t want to smother them and be there all the time – ‘oh that’s your mum again!’”* (S1.P2).

2.8.5 Research Question 5

What are the beliefs of parents and school staff about the needs of parents in the local community in supporting their children’s learning and development?

School staff and parent qualitative questionnaire responses around parental needs were collated and organised into four categories (see Figure 10).

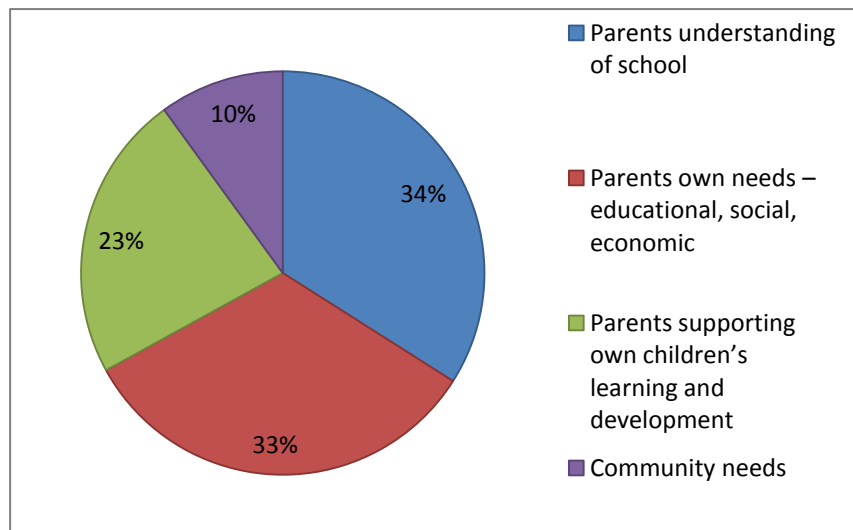


Figure 10. Chart to show parental needs in supporting children's learning and development

The most prominent area of parental need regarded limited parental knowledge about the school system, expectations for children's learning and ways to support learning. Without such knowledge, it is understandable that parents may find it challenging to support their children's learning and suggests that supporting parental understanding is crucial for developing effective home-school relationships.

Within 'parents own needs', the impacts of parental levels of education and educational experiences on their attitudes to education, aspirations for their children and confidence in their abilities to support learning were noted. Personal needs also included social and economic constraints, particularly for single and working parents being able to access school outside of their own work hours. 'Hard to reach' parents were indicated as particularly challenging in developing home-school relationships, suggesting approaches to access these parents is an important area for schools to develop (see Appendix 5e for a full list of responses).

The questionnaire findings regarding parental needs were reflected in staff and parent interviews which identified similar factors impacting on levels of parental support including: practical constraints (such as work commitments and DBS checks), limited parental skills and confidence, negative attitudes and low value for education. Staff most commonly described parents' own negative experiences of education as a barrier to engaging with their children's learning – *"I've had a couple of parents who are very, by nature and upbringing, are pretty anti-school, not particularly well educated themselves. They've had to be brought on board to see us as a positive thing rather than a necessary evil!"* (S2.S3).

The 'busy lives' of parents and the differing responsibilities of home and school were frequently referred to in interviews as significant influences on parental involvement, as one parent shared – *"I think there's only so much...you hold down a job and a house, you can only do so much for your children. They go to school and you hope they learn it all there and you teach them other qualities in life."* (S1.P2).

Community influences were also reported in parent interviews, specifically the impacts of increasing cultural diversity and feelings of a 'divide' in the local community.

A key theme of *'lack of parental support'* was noted in both staff and parent interviews and the difficulties of this were frequently raised by staff – *"It's the ones you want that don't come to things. It's the parents that don't turn up to parents evening that you really want to see. The one's that send you a voicemail that you really want to talk to."* (S2.S1). The detrimental effects of this parental 'lack of interest' on children's attitudes towards education were also discussed.

Key Findings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective communication as key to developing positive home-school relationships
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parental involvement in education valued by staff, parents and children
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wide range of approaches to communicate, engage and support parents, whilst continued need to develop interactive approaches utilising technology
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of schools and parents ‘working together’ to support learning and the need for both to actively demonstrate their support and shared responsibilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for schools to support the development of parental knowledge and skills regarding how children are taught and ways to support learning – recognising value of parents as educators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for greater acknowledgement of the barriers to parental involvement and for schools to tailor support and adapt to suit local parental needs

Table 1. Paper One Key Findings and Implications

2.9 Discussion

In this section the findings are discussed in relation to previous research in this area, the issues and limitations of the study are reviewed, implications for EP practice are considered and suggestions for future research are made.

2.9.1 Home-School Communication

The findings revealed similarities and differences between staff and parent perceptions about home-school communication. The need for a ‘common understanding’ between home and school in order to establish effective partnerships was highlighted by Munn (1993b) and the present research enables a greater insight into staff, parent and student views to ensure better understanding of local needs and appropriate support.

Given the high value placed on communication for home-school relationships (for example, Crozier, 2000), the frequency of home-school communication in the

present study seems limited, with over a third of parents wanting more. Staff were less likely to feel school could provide more communication which may relate to the findings of Hancock (1998) around the constraints and demands of the school day restricting staff levels of communication. The content of exchanges also seem an equally important consideration – likely influencing overall perceptions of school and impacting on home-school relationships – and the findings indicate the need for an appropriate balance between positive and negative feedback.

With more traditional approaches to communication (e.g. reports, letters, meetings) shown to be most common, increased use of technology as suggested by Graham-Clay (2005) may support more efficient and effective communication, which was a suggestion raised in staff and parent interviews. More creative approaches to communication, such as those demonstrated through the Home-School Knowledge Exchange project (Hughes & Pollard, 2006), could be a helpful guide for schools.

The importance of communication for home-school relationships noted in previous research (Crozier, 2000) is supported with ‘effective communication’ arising as a key theme in both staff and parent interviews. The ‘honesty’ of face-to-face contact was noted as particularly important as were the perceived benefits of consistency in messages between home and school, particularly for children, as discussed by Keyes (2002).

2.9.2 Parental Engagement and Support

The variety of ways to engage and support parents highlighted in the findings reflect many of the approaches suggested in current government guidance (DCSF,

2009a; Goodall & Vorhaus, 2011). A number of parents described wanting more support from schools, yet staff felt less able to provide this, reinforcing Hancock's (1998) view of the demands on school staff and the need for approaches to increasing parental involvement to be manageable for staff. The positive influence of a welcoming ethos within schools raised in the interviews relates to the suggestions of Mapp (2003) that schools need to show that they value parents by welcoming them into schools.

The findings highlighted the need to 'keep parents informed' through better information about what happens in schools (including curriculum content, school expectations and teaching methods) and approaches aimed at building parental skill and knowledge (such as workshops and education sessions) were noted as particularly effective and viewed positively by parents. Given the abundance of information and guidance specifically produced regarding such approaches (for example, Day, et al., 2009; DCSF, 2009c; Goodall & Vorhaus, 2011), improved dissemination of this information seems necessary. With information and recommendations often made at a national level, the present research aimed to explore this topic at a local level to ensure the findings were relevant to local schools and parents.

'Home and school working together' was an overarching theme from both staff and parent interviews, mirroring much of the literature advocating the need for home school 'partnerships' that demonstrate high levels of commitment, utilising existing good practice and both seeking and valuing participant voices (Bastiani & Doyle, 1994). However, considerations in relation to a healthy balance between home-

school involvement and separation noted in previous research (Edwards & Warin, 1999; Wanat, 2010) were also raised by parents and students.

Barriers to parental involvement raised in the present study acknowledged in the literature (such as language barriers and work constraints, Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995) require flexibility within schools to adapt to suit individual and local needs. The different agendas and priorities of school and home and the issue of school 'authority' over parents is similar to the 'intimidation' teachers described parents feeling in DePlanty *et al.* (2007).

2.9.3 Parental strengths and needs in supporting children's learning

A wide range of positive parent-school interactions, highly valued by both parties were described in the findings. Within interviews, the key theme of 'supportive parents' highlighted many parental strengths including 'willingness' to be involved and support learning at home, however, it was noted that regular active involvement can be limited to a select group of parents. By seeking views and experiences of what parents already do to engage with schools and support their children's learning, the present study highlights aspects of current home-school practices to build on and supports the recommendations of the Sherbert report (DCSF, 2009c) about the importance of acknowledging parental skills.

Exploring parental needs identified a lack of parental knowledge, particularly around the school system and how to support children's education, supporting earlier findings around the necessity of effective information and communication in developing home-school relationships. Individual parental needs, such as low literacy, indicate the need for parental engagement practices to be adapted to

parental needs and be manageable for a range of parents. This reflects an important consideration for schools that – as well as taking onboard national approaches (such as those outlined in government reports: Day, et al., 2009; DCSF, 2009b; Goodall & Vorhaus, 2011) – parental support must also be tailored to suit the strengths and needs of the local community, particularly those ‘harder to reach’ parents who often most need help and support.

2.9.4 Relation to theoretical models

As noted in the literature, relating findings to theoretical models of parent involvement raises some interesting points. With reference to Epstein’s (2001) parental involvement typology (see Figure 2), each ‘type’ appears to be represented in the findings but to different degrees. ‘Communicating’, ‘volunteering’, ‘learning at home’ and ‘parenting’ were most common in this local community reflecting similar findings from previous research (for example, Bhering, 2002). Parental involvement through ‘decision-making’ and ‘collaborating with the community’ are mentioned, but not as prominently, perhaps reflecting areas for further development. However, Epstein’s (2001) framework does not suggest that parental involvement needs to be equal across the six types – the different ‘types’ may be more or less suitable for each parent, school or community. Findings from the present study support previous research (such as, DePlanty, et al., 2007) indicating ‘communication’ as the predominate and integral factor in home-school relationships.

The findings are also particularly relevant to Hoover-Demsey & Sandler’s (1995) theoretical model (see Figure 3). Factors influencing the ‘parental involvement

decision' – especially parents' own experiences of education – were apparent throughout the findings. The influence of 'parental construction of the parent role' was also raised in many of the interviews – both positive and negative – as was 'parent's sense of efficacy', with many parents expressing their lack of knowledge or skills around supporting their children's learning. 'General opportunities and demands for parental involvement' were frequently discussed, with staff and parents describing many of the factors influencing 'parental choice of involvement', including parental skills, work commitments and time demands. Building on Pelco & Reis' (1999) recommended applications of this model to school staff, the present study provides an initial insight into staff perceptions of role, efficacy and opportunities around parental involvement. The findings support the view that developing school staff understanding about factors that influence parental involvement can encourage better home-school relationships.

2.9.5 Study limitations

Both methodological issues and personal reflections are considered here.

Low questionnaire response rates restricted the sample size, particularly for parents, leading to an unbalanced staff/parent sample. The large initial distribution helped to combat the expected low response rate, but a larger sample would have enabled more confidence in the findings as representative of the local community. This reflects an important consideration for schools that predominately use questionnaires to seek parental feedback.

The interview sample was self-selected – participants volunteering to share their views and experiences – which may not have represented the views of those

'harder to reach' parents. Also, no fathers took part in the interviews suggesting that future research should aim to gather a more representative sample. However, given the nature of this CP research, the aim was to capture the views and real 'lived' experiences of school staff and parents in a local community (rather than findings to be generalised) and could be illuminative in other schools and communities.

The role of the researcher is always an important consideration within CP research and possible researcher influences (i.e. through thematic analysis), cannot be ignored. However, each stage of the research process was treated with rigour to support reliability and validity and ensure confidence within the findings. The potential power imbalance within interviews was acknowledged and reflections made regarding the researcher as a non-parent studying parents, therefore every effort was made to support a sense of equality between researcher and participant.

2.9.6 Relevance to practice

This study provides valuable insights into the views and experiences of school staff, parents and children and highlights ways to foster, maintain and develop positive home-school relationships through parental involvement in children's learning and development. The current study builds upon previous research and theory in this area, supporting prior findings and theoretical models around parental involvement, particularly the integral role of communication in home-school relationships. As well as contributing to existing research and practice knowledge, this research advances this area of study helping to demonstrate the importance

and value of seeking views to develop understanding and better support the needs of the local community.

This research has relevance at local and national levels, providing feedback for local schools on current practices and ways to develop, as well as making an original contribution to broader theory, research, policy and practice around effective home-school relationships.

A number of implications for educational psychology practice can be identified:

- Increasing awareness of factors influencing home-school relationships
- Demonstrating the effective role of Educational Psychologists supporting schools through home-school research
- Providing in-school research that schools may wish to buy into as a traded service
- Demonstrating effective methods to study home-school relationships and other aspects of school life
- Developing a wider community role for the educational psychology profession

2.9.7 Future directions for research

Future research could develop from the present study, applying similar approaches to exploring the views and experiences of other communities regarding home-school practices to determine similarities and differences across areas and settings. Greater focus on the student voice would seem an important development in gaining more in-depth student experience as a valuable 'link' between home and school environments.

2.9.8 Links to paper two

Developing on the findings of paper one, paper two focuses on sharing psychological research and theory around home-school relationships with schools to empower staff to develop better home-school relationships. Supporting Pelco & Reis' (1999) recommendations to develop staff perceptions of their role, self-efficacy and opportunities and demands around parental involvement, paper two looks at:

- Supporting school staff to view collaboration with families as within their professional role
- Supporting skill development of school staff to enable them to feel they have the necessary knowledge and skills to engage parents in the educational process
- Encouraging staff to be aware of the demands and opportunities to involve parents and families

Paper Two: Home-school relationships: The role of the Community Educational Psychologist in school staff support

3.1. Abstract:

With an increasing focus on supporting parental involvement within education, the development of effective 'partnerships' between schools and families is widening. Despite the wealth of information and advice around engaging parents in education (DfE, 2011), there appears limited training and ongoing support for school staff on how to foster and maintain these positive interactions and how to tackle 'real life' issues faced within home-school relationships. This research explored the role of a Community Educational Psychologist working with school staff to develop and maintain positive home-school relationships. Through support and facilitation from a Trainee Community Educational Psychologist, a series of education and supervision sessions were developed with a group of school staff to increase knowledge and confidence around the applications of psychology within education and the influential factors in home-school interactions. A model of reflection was introduced through the supervision sessions to assist the creation of a sustainable support network for staff within school concerning their work with families. The findings highlighted a 'need to' and 'desire for' developing school staff knowledge and confidence and the significant impacts of the education/supervision sessions in achieving this. Factors enabling and preventing progress through these sessions were noted along with the value of 'sharing' within supervision. The necessity of continued practice in order to embed supervision into teaching practice was acknowledged, and the positive impact of a Community Educational Psychologist facilitating these groups was found. Implications for educational practice, including within Educational Psychology, in supporting school staff with home-school relationships are discussed.

3.2 Introduction

This is the second of two papers exploring home-school relationships and the support for parents around children's learning and development. This paper focuses on providing support for school staff to increase their knowledge and confidence with home-school interactions and develop their reflective skills within a peer support group. Developing home-school partnerships is becoming an increasingly prominent focus within educational research, policy and practice. In the following literature review, I will demonstrate that, despite the growing knowledge and practice on engaging and supporting parents in education, there is a need for a) school staff support for developing and maintaining effective home-school relationships and b) exploration regarding the role of the Community Educational Psychologist in facilitating this support.

3.3 A Review of the Literature

Within this review of the literature existing theory, research, policy and practice regarding home-school-community relationships are explored and the role of the Community Educational Psychologist in supporting positive home-school interactions and parental engagement is discussed. It will begin with an exploration of the research and theory around school, family and community relationships and then review approaches from policy and practice to support parents and school staff in developing these interactions. The area of Community Psychology is then discussed and related to the role of the Educational Psychologist in supporting the development of positive home-school-community partnerships. To conclude, an

overview of the current research paper and its purpose in filling gaps within existing literature and advancing research in this area of study is described.

Literature was sourced through academic search engines (EBSCO, JSTOR, ScienceDirect and PsycARTICLES) to access relevant journals and articles along with library and personal books. A variety of search terms were used to ensure a wide-range of diverse sources. The term 'parent' is used throughout this review to indicate the main caregivers for children and young people.

3.3.1 School, Family and Community Relationships

Extensive research around parental involvement in education and the benefits for children's learning and development has encouraged an increasing focus in both policy and practice on developing positive home-school relationships (see Peters, Seeds, Goldstein & Coleman, 2008 for a review). Literature in this area is increasingly looking towards the wider influences of the community on children's education and ways to develop 'school, family and community partnerships' (Buttery & Anderson, 1999). With parallels to the different levels of influence on development within Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1986) ecological systems theory, Epstein (1990) describes the interactive relationships between home, school, and the wider community as having, "...overlapping spheres of influence," (1990, p. 100) on children and emphasises the need for positive relationships (see Figure 11).

The most effective, school, family and community partnerships are described as: inclusive in nature with equal value for the school, home and community systems, encouraging active and democratic participation, involving communities in decision-

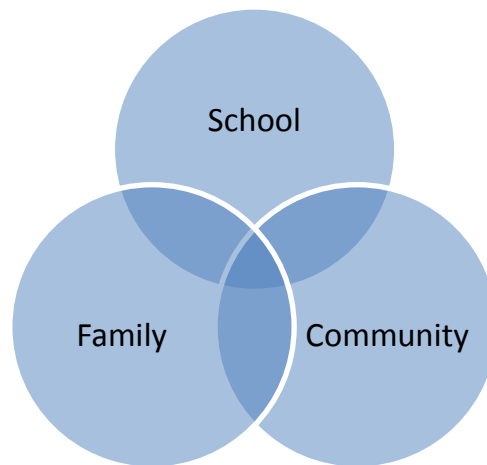


Figure 11. The ‘overlapping spheres of influence’, adapted from Epstein (1990).

making and presenting social as well as academic gains for students (Martin, Tett, & Kay, 1999).

Approaches to involve parents, the wider family and the local community in supporting children’s education, such as peer tutoring (Wolfendale & Topping, 1996) provide some interesting considerations and practical approaches for the development of home-school-community partnerships. Topping describes the benefits of peer tutoring as a ‘non-professional’ technique that can be, “...used by anyone, anywhere, with any material which is to hand and is of interest,” (Topping, Dekhinet & Zeedyk, 2011, p. 153) thus avoiding large costs, specialist equipment or extensive training.

The use of theoretical models of parental involvement, such as Epstein (2001) as a framework for schools to assess current links and guide thinking about ways to develop positive school, family and community partnerships have also been explored (Epstein & Jansorn, 2004) – see Figure 12.

Over the past decade, education policies and practice have also contributed to this wider focus on interactions between schools and their local communities with

publications promoting school partnership with families (DCSF, 2007; DCSF, 2009a; OfSTED, 2010) and initiatives including Sure Start’s ‘Local Programmes’ (DfES, 2003) and ‘Extended Schools’ (DfES, 2005) focusing on improving help and support for parents and communities, increasing access to services and shaping services around community needs.

Parenting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assist families with developing skills and understanding of child development
Communicating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strive for two-way communication, easy access for all parties and involvement in decision making such as GCSE options and career choices
Volunteering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Involving families as both volunteers and audiences in school, with opportunities for regular and occasional volunteers to suit varying family capacities
Learning at Home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acknowledge and utilise the unique knowledge and skills within families and communities Use of interactive homework and goal setting to encourage parental involvement
Decision Making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Families as participants within schools, contributing to school governance and decision making to ensure their voices are heard
Collaborating with the Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinate community resources to ensure fairer access

Figure 12. Approaches to establishing and maintaining school, family and community partnerships (adapted from Epstein & Jansorn, 2004).

3.3.2 Supporting Parents

Support for parental needs and skill development is often provided through parenting programmes, such as Webster-Stratton (Webster-Stratton, 1998) and ‘Triple P’ (Sanders, Markie-Dadds, & Turner, 2003) programmes. These courses aim to equip parents with knowledge of child development and positive parenting skills,

build their confidence with parenting, and improve parent-child relationships. The positive and preventative benefits of these approaches on the outcomes of children, parents and families have been highlighted (Barrett, 2010). The notion of a parenting programme does, however, reflect a 'deficit' approach towards parents as lacking skills and requiring training from others which may stigmatise those attending as 'bad parents'.

3.3.3 Supporting Staff

In the UK, there appears limited focus in teacher training regarding approaches to working with parents. Staff knowledge and skills around home-school interactions are typically learnt 'on the job' and pre-service training on parental engagement practices are recommended (Goodall & Vorhaus, 2011). Wilson (2004) describes the value of informal peer support (such as in the staffroom) but views these opportunities as diminishing. More structured approaches to staff support often refer to the work of Hanco (1995, 1999) on 'collaborative problem-solving groups' (see Figure 13 for an illustration of Hanco's model).

Hanco (1999) describes the need for an external facilitator to guide discussion throughout this problem-solving process, encouraging staff to 'pool' their knowledge and skills. Numerous approaches to staff support groups have utilised Educational Psychologists (EPs) for this role (Bozic & Carter, 2002; Farouk, 2004; Gill & Monsen, 1995; Stringer, Stow, Hibbert, Powell & Louw, 1992). Stringer *et al.* (1992) directly applied Hanco's work with EPs facilitating 'staff consultation groups' in schools and suggested that EPs are well placed as facilitators and can play an important role in supporting staff development and management of stress. The

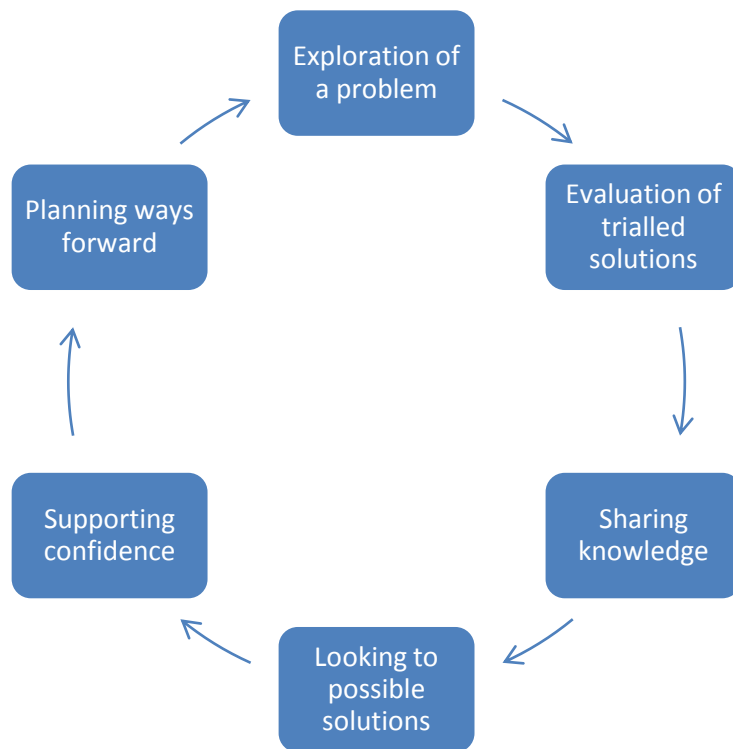


Figure 13. 'Collaborative problem-solving group' process, adapted from Hanko (1995, 1999).

importance of the facilitator acknowledging the influences of school culture and dynamics within these groups has also been discussed (Bozic & Carter, 2002; Farouk, 2004).

Overall findings from these staff support groups highlight the benefits felt by school staff including: reduced feelings of isolation and self-blame (realising others experience similar problems), increased opportunities to learn from and draw upon the experience of others, and the value of a dedicated time and space to reflect on experiences and plan ahead (Bozic & Carter, 2002; Farouk, 2004; Stringer, et al., 1992). Challenges of the process predominately concern time constraints due to the demands of school life as well as the need for an external facilitator – without this staff felt they would need extensive training and ongoing support (Bozic & Carter, 2002; Farouk, 2004; Stringer, et al., 1992).

Developments of Hanko's work continue – many with school staff and supported by EPs – aimed at providing opportunities for problem-solving and solution generation (Brown & Henderson, 2012; Gill & Monsen, 1995). Gill and Monsen's (1995) 'staff sharing scheme' follows three stages starting with a needs analysis (to assess current school resources), followed by skill development sessions and leading to teacher-support group sessions focused on supporting behaviour in schools.

The value of support groups is not a new concept – the Elton report (1989) described the importance of peer support and recommended that every school should have a support group. The need for emotionally competent teachers and the use of problem-solving approaches that consider children within school and family systems continue to be advocated in government policy (e.g. DCSF, 2008; DfEE/DoH, 1999).

Hanko (1999) commented that problem-solving and consultation are often a 'very new experience' for schools and the reflective process of supervision is missing from professional teaching practice (Elfer, 2012). Supervision supports professional learning and development and is generally described as serving three functions: educative (such as through joint problem-solving), supportive (practically and emotionally) and managerial (guidance and maintenance of effective practice) (Hawkins & Shohet, 2007). Carrington (2004) proposes the benefits of supervision for both supervisor and supervisee suggesting this approach may be applicable to the development of reflective skills through group support. Simple models of reflection, such as Gibbs (1988) provide guidance for a staged process of reflection that could support a group supervision approach.

Support for parents and school staff around home-school relationships appears quite separate, often focused on the specific parent or teacher role rather than a more collaborative approach to 'working together'. It would seem that approaches to developing home-school relationships could utilise aspects of group support and supervision to support staff in managing complex interactions with families through increased knowledge and development of reflective skills.

3.3.4 Community and Educational Psychology

Community Psychology (CP) – a sub-discipline of psychology – explores the relationships between people and their environments, specifically focusing on the rights and active participation of individuals in creating social change. CP adopts a holistic, strengths-based approach to the promotion and development of competence and well-being in communities through collaborative, action-based research (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). The concept of CP was formalised in Britain by Bender (1972) who described it as,

“Attempts to make the field of applied psychology more effective in the delivery of [its] services and more responsive to the needs and wants of the communities it serves,” (p. 212).

Julian Rappaport, a prominent figure within the field, describes three key themes of CP – human resource development, scientific inquiry and political activity – that are strived for through balancing values, research and action (Rappaport, 1977).

Educational Psychology (EP) reflects another sub-discipline of psychology that involves the application of psychology through identification, intervention and prevention around a child or young person's learning, behavioural, emotional and/or social needs in education. EPs work with children and young people,

parents, schools and other professionals to improve the outcomes of children and young people (Cameron, 2006). The EP profession plays an important role in the discussion of strengths and needs, problem-solving, intervention and training as well as statutory roles providing psychological advice for statements of special educational needs (Farrell et al., 2006).

3.3.5 Educational Psychologists and the Community

The driving principles behind EP practice reflect many parallels with the underpinnings of CP, and it has been argued that the origins of the EP profession were based around community working (MacKay, 2006). The increasing focus of EP work on solution-oriented, systemic and consultation-based practice has been noted as opening up new and constructive opportunities for EPs to contribute within the community (Cameron, 2006; Kelly, 2000). Stringer, Powell and Burton (2006) describe the central goal of EP work as ensuring applied psychology is continually adapted to meet the needs of all children and young people, be supportive to the change efforts of all involved and empower others – reflecting many parallels with Bender's (1972) CP definition.

The importance of engaging and involving parents within EP practice has been prominently discussed by Sheila Wolfendale (for example, Wolfendale, 1992; 1997). However, there seems limited evidence to demonstrate how EPs involve parents and families alongside schools in identifying needs, provision of support and developing an understanding of child development to support the empowerment of communities. In an exploration of teacher views and practices in engaging parents,

Pelco and Ries (1999) describe EPs as holding a unique role in facilitating home-school collaborations, stating that:

“School psychologists [EPs] can begin to take active roles in expanding teachers’ professional role constructions to include more family–school collaboration, improving teachers’ feelings of self-efficacy for implementing meaningful partnership practices, and increasing teachers’ perceptions of invitations and opportunities for increasing family involvement in education,” (p. 274).

Pelco and Ries (1999) propose other practical methods for EPs to support family, school and community partnerships through encouraging families to communicate high educational aspirations to their children, support the development of a home learning environment and help schools to develop ongoing home-school communication. The authors note that EPs can be particularly effective in supporting teachers to develop relationships and communication with parents, promoting self-efficacy and developing mutual trust (Pelco & Ries, 1999).

Christenson (2004) also advocates an EP role in supporting these partnerships by actively promoting a family-school focus. Christenson suggests EPs may become involved in raising awareness of both the benefits of home-school partnerships for children’s learning and the underlying psychological principles (i.e.

Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 1986) ecological systems theory), creating opportunities to work with young people and families in the community and tailoring EP involvement to individuals, schools, families and communities (Christenson, 2004).

3.4 The Present Research – An Outline

As home, school and community theory and research expands, a better understanding of these relationships and an awareness of practical approaches for creating and maintaining effective partnerships is encouraged. Literature documenting the early stages of the EP role developing into the community is promising. However, it seems that more is needed on ways in which *Community EPs* (CEPs) can work with schools and their local communities in order to support the profession's role in early intervention and empowerment.

The present research draws together the aspects discussed in the literature review by adopting a CP approach to exploring the role of CEPs in supporting school staff to develop and maintain positive relationships between schools and parents in the local community. The study engages in a participatory action research approach involving a series of education and supervision sessions for school staff. The sessions focus on building staff knowledge, skills and confidence to support parental engagement with children's learning and development.

Building upon the staff support literature this research uses principles from models of group problem solving and reflection (Gibbs, 1988; Hanks, 1999) to develop school staff reflective skills and experience of the reflective process. It aims to provide a flexible framework, adapted to the needs of school staff, to encourage staff to continue to engage in ongoing group supervision sessions following this research.

This research has relevance to current social and political focus on improving school and community partnerships in education and provides an original contribution to

this area of study. It demonstrates the role of CEPs in 'giving psychology away' to develop staff knowledge, understanding and skills and creating an ongoing peer support network.

3.4.1 Research Aims

The specific aims of this research are to:

- Explore approaches to developing the knowledge of school staff around home-school relationships.
- Explore approaches to developing the confidence of school staff around home-school relationships.
- Explore the role of the Community Educational Psychologist in supporting school staff around home-school relationships through education and supervision sessions.

3.4.2 Research Questions:

- In what ways can education/supervision sessions develop school staff knowledge around home-school relationships?
- In what ways can education/supervision sessions develop school staff confidence around home-school relationships?
- In what ways can education/supervision sessions develop a supportive and reflective school staff group?
- What factors are important for successful school staff support and development through education/supervision sessions?
- In what ways can a Community Educational Psychologist support school staff around home-school relationships?

3.5 Research Methodology

The aims of the present research to develop and support positive home-school relationships through staff education and supervision sessions relate well to a Community Psychology (CP) orientation. Based within the critical paradigm, CP explores individual and group understanding of social and institutional systems in order to create social change through participatory and action-oriented research (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). The current study reflects the principles of participatory action research – actions deliberately taken in an attempt to improve a situation – by engaging school staff in a series of group education and supervision sessions aimed at developing positive home-school relationships. This participatory approach was deemed appropriate as it provides a reflexive platform to develop, deliver and review support sessions tailored to local needs and aimed at empowering school staff.

Within participatory research, it is important to acknowledge the influence of the researcher throughout the research process and the role of their own philosophical assumptions about reality and knowledge within the world, which guide how the research is approached, conducted and interpreted (Langdrige, 2009). The influence of the researcher in the current study is acknowledged and reflected in one of the research aims to explore the role of a CEP in supporting positive home-school relationships through school staff support sessions.

Exploring the literature within home, school and community research provides guidance around ways in which the present research could be carried out most effectively. The wealth of theory and research in this area informs the content of

the education sessions, and approaches to group support and reflection inform the supervision sessions. Methods used in prior studies of staff support groups indicate appropriate evaluative measures for the 'real world' nature of the present study. The benefits of gaining a triangulation of data through multiple methods, such as traditional questionnaires (Bozic & Carter, 2002; Stringer, et al., 1992) combined with alternative measures, such as 'rounds of words' and SWOT analysis (Brown & Henderson, 2012) are often noted and were used to guide data collection and analysis in the current study.

3.6 Research Design

This piece of CP research reflects the principles of participatory action research through the development, delivery and evaluation of a series of group education and supervision sessions for school staff. A mixed-methods design was employed utilising a range of evaluative measures to explore the impacts of the sessions for school staff on home-school relationships.

3.6.1 Participants

This research involved two primary schools in the East of England with high levels of deprivation relative to other areas of the county (APHO, 2010).

A brief describing the group sessions (see Appendix 7a) was sent to four local primary schools inviting them to take part in the sessions – two schools requested to be involved and one agreed to hold the sessions for staff from both schools. A total of 19 teachers from the two schools were involved throughout the study – seven staff took part in the preliminary session and attendance at each of the three education/supervision sessions ranged from 7-19 participants. The researcher was

involved in all sessions – feeding back and facilitating in the preliminary meeting and preparing, delivering and facilitating all three education/supervision sessions.

3.6.2 Materials

A range of materials were developed for the education and supervision sessions and a number of evaluation measures used throughout. These included:

- **Education sessions:** The content and resources for each education session were developed by the researcher informed by the research literature. A range of handouts were produced for participants to refer to and for future reference (see Appendix 7b for an example).
- **Supervision sessions:** Models of group problem solving and reflection (Gibbs, 1988; Hanks, 1999) were used to guide discussion during the supervision and were adapted throughout the sessions to suit staff needs (see Appendix 7c & 7d). These models were selected as they provide clear, visual introductions to the reflective process used within supervision, with guidance through stages of reflection that can be used as a framework for schools to adapt as necessary to suit staff needs. The models seemed appropriate for school staff having a wide range of applications at an individual, group or organisational level and for a variety of issues – either specific or more general – and could be used by school staff without the need for an outside professional.
- **Evaluation measures:** Three evaluative tools were used in order to gain a triangulation of data:

- A pre- and post-questionnaire was developed to gain participant views on their current practices around home-school relationships before and after the sessions (see Appendix 8a & 8b).
- TME (Target, Monitor, Evaluate; Dunsmuir, Brown, Iyadurai, & Monsen, 2009) evaluations were used before and after each education session to measure the impacts on participant knowledge and confidence (see Appendix 8c for example and explanation of TME measure).
- A SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis was used following each supervision session to gain participant views on the reflective process and applications for their own practice (see Appendix 8d).

3.6.3 Methods

Preliminary Meeting

To ensure the programme of education and supervision were suited to the needs of the school staff, an initial preparation meeting was held with seven staff to introduce the aims and purpose of the sessions and to gain their input for the specific focus and content. Staff requested input about effective communication with parents and the psychology underpinning home-school relationships. Using this information, the researcher then developed the three education/supervision sessions described below.

Education/Supervision Sessions

The three education/supervision sessions took place on three separate occasions between December 2012 and March 2013 during after-school staff meetings.

Participants were invited to all of the groups, each lasting approximately one and half hours and split into two slots – one for the education input and one for the supervision. The researcher was involved in all three sessions, preparing and delivering the education input (informed by preliminary findings) and facilitating the supervision. The content of the sessions are described below and a summary of the procedure for each of the three groups is illustrated in Figure 14.

Session 1: The first session focused on communication with parents, sharing information from research literature regarding the importance of effective communication for home-school relationships and a range of skills and techniques to support communication from consultation and solution-oriented approaches. For the supervision, the models of group problem-solving (Hanko, 1999) and reflection (Gibbs, 1988) were introduced and discussed in order for staff to familiarise themselves with the processes ready for use in future sessions.

Session 2: The second session introduced the psychology underpinning home-school relationships, focusing on theoretical models of parental involvement, influential factors and barriers to parental involvement and approaches to developing positive home-school relationships. The reflective models were then discussed in more detail, running through a practice example, and adaptations were made to create a tailored model of reflection suited to the staff needs (see Appendix 7e).

Session 3: The third session focused on supervision and provided opportunities for staff to run whole group and small group supervision sessions using their adapted version of the models to guide the reflective process. Staff were encouraged to continue to use this model within school following the research.

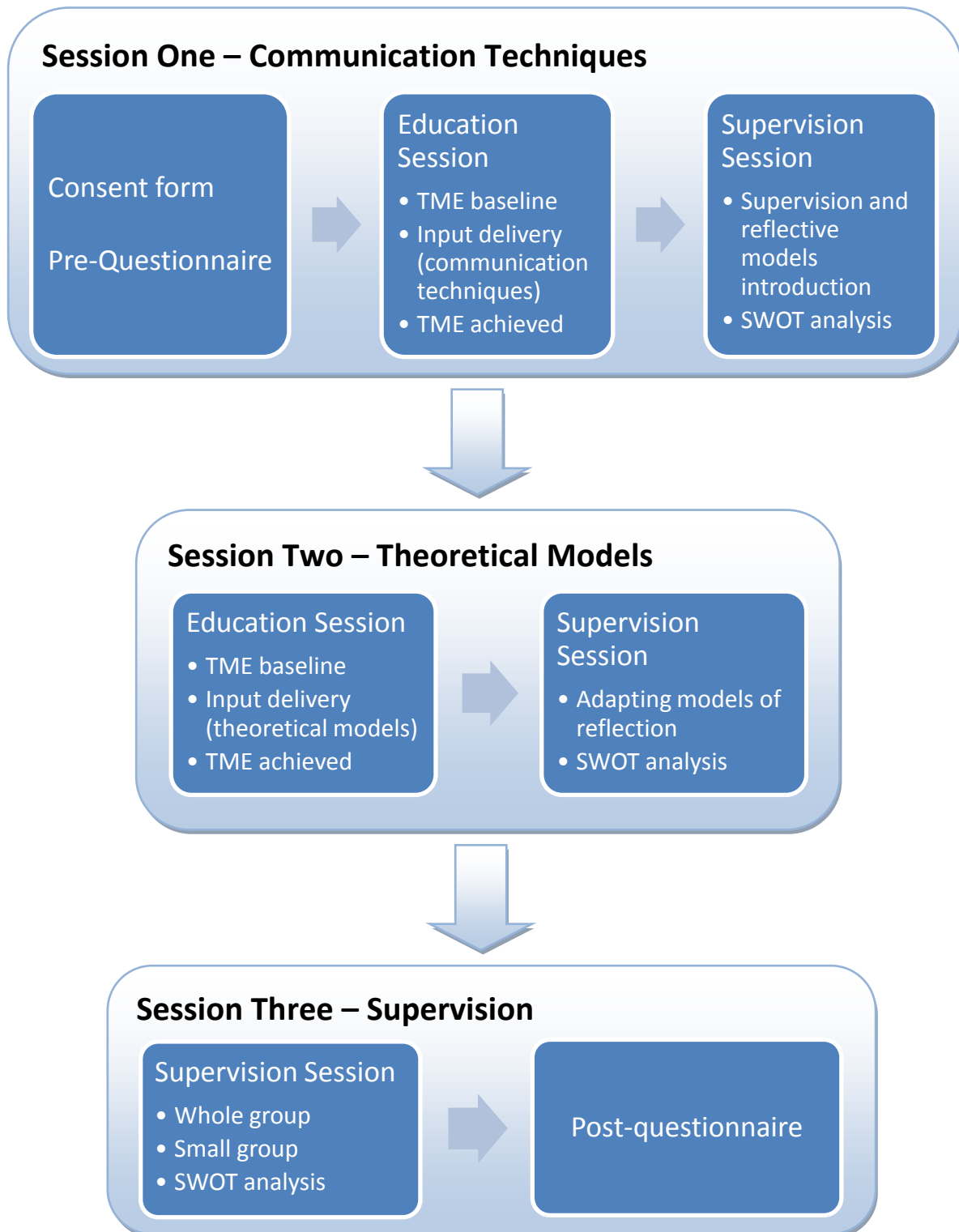


Figure 14. Summary of procedures for each of the three education/supervision sessions.

3.6.4 Data Analysis

Data from all three evaluative measures was gathered and analysed as below:

Questionnaires: Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data from both pre- and post-questionnaires and comparisons were made between the pre- and post-responses to determine the overall impact of the sessions on staff views, knowledge and skills around home-school relationships. For the open questions (Q9, Q10, Q11) the qualitative responses that were provided were collated and grouped into themes.

TME evaluation: Descriptive statistics and non-parametric Wilcoxon signed ranks tests were used to analyse the data from each participant's baseline and achieved scores for each session to evaluate the impact of the individual education sessions on staff knowledge and confidence.

SWOT analysis: The qualitative group responses from the SWOT analysis carried out at the end of each supervision session were collated and presented with the results.

3.7 Ethics

Ethical guidelines provided by the British Psychological Society and the University of Exeter were followed for this paper. Approval from the University of Exeter's ethics committee was obtained in March 2012. All participants in this study were briefed about the aims and purpose of the research prior to their involvement and informed written consent was obtained from all participants. Participants were made aware of their right to withdraw and were assured of the anonymity and

confidentiality of all information. Please refer to Appendix 10 for complete consideration of all ethical issues and practices, along with example consent forms.

3.8 Results

Findings from the questionnaires, TME evaluations and SWOT analysis are presented below in relation to each of the five research questions. The questionnaire rating scales ranged from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much so) and the TME evaluation scores ranged from 1 (low) to 10 (high).

3.8.1 Research Question 1

In what ways can education/supervision sessions develop school staff knowledge around home-school relationships?

The TME ratings indicate the positive impacts of the education sessions on staff knowledge around home-school relationships; the findings are summarised in Table 2 below.

TME Knowledge Ratings	Mean Baseline (0 – 10)	Mean Achieved (0 – 10)	Mean Progress
First Education Session (N = 19)	M = 4.89 (SD = 1.73)	M = 7.26 (SD = 0.93)	M = 2.47 (SD = 1.43)
Second Education Session (N = 8)	M = 1.13 (SD = 0.35)	M = 6.00 (SD = 1.20)	M = 4.88 (SD = 1.46)

Table 2. Summary of TME knowledge ratings

At the start of the first education session focused on communication techniques with parents, the mean TME ratings for staff knowledge of approaches to exploring issues in discussions with parents was below 5 out of 10 (M = 4.89). This suggests a need for more information and support for staff about ways to communicate with

parents. Individual differences between staff were apparent in the wide range in scores (from 2 to 8 out of 10) highlighting considerable differences in perceived knowledge between individual teachers. At the end of the session, the mean TME rating ($M = 7.26$) showed that all participants made progress – on average by 2.47 points. Analysis of the differences between these pre- and post-ratings was significant at the $p, 0.01$ level (Wilcoxon $t = 3.87, n = 20$) indicating the benefits of this session for improving staff knowledge.

Before the second education session focused on theoretical models of parental involvement, the mean TME rating indicated very low levels of knowledge amongst the group ($M = 1.13$), many describing they were unaware of the meaning of the term ‘theoretical model’. Such low scores suggest both a need for clarity around terminology when sharing psychological information as well as highlighting an area of restricted knowledge that would benefit from development. TME ratings following the session again showed progress by all participants ($M = 4.88$) with a mean knowledge rating after the session of 6.00. Analysis of the differences between responses at the start and end of the session was significant at the $p, 0.05$ level (Wilcoxon $t = 2.55, n = 8$) again suggesting the benefits of such interventions for improving staff knowledge.

The pre- and post-questionnaires before and after the series of three education/supervision sessions also highlighted staff views around their levels of knowledge in relation to home-school relationships (see Table 3).

Questionnaire Ratings	Mean pre-questionnaire response (0 – 5) N = 20	Mean post-questionnaire response (0 – 5) N = 9
Q2. 'I am knowledgeable about effective ways of communicating and engaging with parents'	M = 3.45 (SD = 0.69)	M = 3.89 (SD = 0.33)
Q4. 'I am aware of the psychology influencing home-school relationships'	M = 2.50 (SD = 0.89)	M = 4.00 (SD = 0)

Table 3. Summary of pre- and post-questionnaire Q2 and Q4 ratings

Mean ratings for the statement 'I am knowledgeable about effective ways of communicating and engaging with parents' showed a slight increase (M = 3.45 to M = 3.89) indicating the series of sessions had some impact on improving staff knowledge. The questionnaires also explored staff awareness of the psychology influencing home-school relationships. The mean pre-questionnaire rating (M = 2.50) suggests limited knowledge in this area but given the participants are teachers and not psychologists, this low initial rating may be expected. However, given the wealth of psychological theory and research in education and its value in supporting schools, families and children and young people it would seem that better dissemination to frontline staff is needed to develop their knowledge. The increase in the mean post-questionnaire rating (M = 4.00) provides further support regarding the positive impact of the sessions for encouraging improvement in staff knowledge of psychological theory and research around home-school relationships.

3.8.2 Research Question 2

In what ways can education/supervision sessions develop school staff confidence around home-school relationships?

The TME ratings indicate the positive impacts of the education sessions on staff confidence around home-school relationships; the findings are summarised in Table 4 below.

TME Confidence Ratings	Mean Baseline (0 – 10)	Mean Achieved (0 – 10)	Mean Progress
First Education Session (N = 19)	M = 4.95 (SD = 1.96)	M = 7.00 (SD = 1.70)	M = 2.05 (SD = 1.43)
Second Education Session (N = 8)	M = 1.25 (SD = 0.46)	M = 6.13 (SD = 1.64)	M = 4.88 (SD = 1.55)

Table 4. Summary of TME confidence ratings

At the start of the first education session the mean TME rating for staff confidence in using approaches to explore issues in discussions with parents was below 5 out of 10 (M = 4.95). The wide range in scores (from 1 to 8 out of 10) displays a considerable difference in confidence levels between individual teachers. These findings support the need for school staff to access more information and opportunities to develop skills and practice techniques for effective communication with parents. The majority of participants made progress with their confidence through the first education session – on average by 2.05 points. Analysis of the differences between responses at the start and end of the session was significant at the p, 0.05 level (Wilcoxon $t = 3.66$, $n = 20$) suggesting the benefits of such interventions for improving staff confidence.

The TME ratings from the second education session focused on theoretical models of parental involvement showed very low staff confidence at the start in applying aspects of theoretical models to home-school relationships (M = 1.25). All participants made progress following the sessions (M = 4.88) but this ranged from 2 to 7 points progress indicating the different impacts on different staff. Analysis of the differences between responses at the start and end of the session was significant at the p, 0.05 level (Wilcoxon $t = 2.53, n = 8$), again suggesting the benefits of such interventions on improving staff confidence.

The pre- and post-questionnaires also highlighted staff views around their levels of confidence in relation to home-school relationships (see Table 5).

Questionnaire Ratings	Mean pre-questionnaire response (0 – 5) N = 20	Mean post-questionnaire response (0 – 5) N = 9
Q1. <i>'I have positive home-school relationships with pupils' parents'</i>	M = 3.80 (SD = 0.70)	M = 3.89 (SD = 0.33)
Q3. <i>'I am confident in my ability to effectively communicate and engage parents'</i>	M = 3.60 (SD = 0.82)	M = 4.11 (SD = 0.33)

Table 5. Summary of pre- and post-questionnaire Q1 and Q3 ratings

In the pre- and post-questionnaires, a slight increase in the mean staff ratings for the statement, *'I have positive home-school relationships with pupils' parents'* (M = 3.80 to M = 4.00) suggests the majority of staff as happy with their current relationships with parents, but does acknowledge some room for improvement. Staff confidence regarding their ability to effectively communicate and engage parents also increased following the sessions (M = 3.60 to M = 4.11) again supporting the positive impacts on developing staff confidence.

3.8.3 Research Question 3

In what ways can staff education/supervision sessions develop a supportive and reflective school staff group?

Findings from the pre- and post-questionnaires provide insights into the value of education/supervision sessions for developing a supportive and reflective staff group (see Table 6).

Questionnaire Ratings	Mean pre-questionnaire response (0 – 5) N = 20	Mean post-questionnaire response (0 – 5) N = 9
Q5. 'I feel staff are supportive towards each other in school'	M = 4.70 (SD = 0.57)	M = 4.67 (SD = 0.50)
Q6. 'I am aware of effective ways to share and explore issues or concerns with other staff and reach positive outcomes'	M = 3.83 (SD = 0.82)	M = 4.11 (SD = 0.60)
Q7. 'I am reflective in my practice'	M = 3.95 (SD = 0.69)	M = 4.33 (SD = 0.71)

Table 6. Summary of pre- and post-questionnaire Q5, Q6 and Q7 ratings

Staff 'supportiveness' received very high ratings both before (M = 4.70) and after (M = 4.67) the series of sessions – a positive finding. It seems likely that this already supportive staff environment enabled and encouraged the education/supervision groups to be as successful as they were. Staff awareness of effective ways to share and explore issues or concerns with other staff increased (M = 3.83 to M= 4.11) indicating the value of the education/supervision in developing a supportive and reflective staff group. Staff responses around being 'reflective in practice' also increased following the sessions (M = 3.95 to M = 4.33). This finding indicates a

good foundation of staff reflective skills on which the group supervision was able to build and suggests continued supervision may help maintain these developments.

With specific reference to the supervision sessions, findings from the SWOT analysis highlighted staff views around the value and applications of the process of reflection for their practice. Staff described a number of strengths of the approach, comments included: 'cathartic', 'moves you forward', 'shows value for others', 'allows time for calm and rational reflection', 'joint problem-solving' and 'chance to share issues'. Weaknesses mostly concerned the time needed to meet as a group and share issues and the challenges of this within the constraints and demands of school life. Opportunities for practical uses of the supervision approach in both small and larger groups were identified as were threats to the process, particularly it 'being too easy to go home and not share issues' without structured time for supervision in place (see Appendix 9c for full list of responses).

3.8.4 Research Question 4

What factors are important for successful staff support and development through education/supervision sessions?

Within the TME evaluation ratings, staff noted factors that both enabled and prevented progress in their ratings within the sessions; the findings are summarised in Table 7 (see Appendix 9d for a full list of responses). These findings provide important considerations for ensuring effective approaches to staff development.

Factors enabling progress	Factors preventing progress
Session approach – appropriate ‘brisk’ pace, relevant to roles, handouts for reference and providing examples	Need for more specific/in-depth focus – i.e. on reluctant or uncooperative parents
Session content – clear and simple, range of new information and approaches, useable and easily applicable content	Need for opportunities to practice skills – i.e. communication techniques
Value of the content and applications – taking a positive focus, practices that involve parents/children more, reinforcing importance of ‘good’ listening, approaches for more difficult situations	Need for time to reflect around own current styles
Supporting current good practice – reminders and reassurances around approaches already in use whilst adding new skills	

Table 7. Summary of factors enabling and preventing progress in developing knowledge and confidence

The pre-questionnaire responses regarding staff hopes for the sessions ahead reflected two key aspects:

- **Developing and gaining new knowledge and skills** – effective approaches to communicating with parents, understanding the psychology underpinning home-school relationships, dealing with more challenging discussions with parents and engaging ‘hard to reach’ parents
- **Increasing confidence** – gaining reassurance on current practice and learning new skills to communicate with parents

Although the introductory brief describing the aims and purpose of the sessions is likely to have focused staff responses around building knowledge and confidence

with home-school relationships, it is positive that the session aims matched with the hopes of the participants (see Appendix 9e for a full list of Q9 responses).

Post-questionnaire responses regarding what staff felt they had gained included:

- **Gaining new skills** – how to reflect
- **Developing their understanding** – process and importance of reflective approaches, theoretical models
- **Positive experiences** – having time to reflect, sharing good practice, feeling supported, finding others also needing help
- **Increased confidence** – sharing issues

These findings match well with the initial hopes for the sessions and highlight their many benefits for staff development (see Appendix 9e for a full list of Q9 responses).

The post-questionnaire contained four additional questions to gain more insight into the factors contributing to the effectiveness of the education/supervision support. Comments regarding the most positive aspects of the group sessions included the value of sharing honestly with others without judgement and how supportive this felt. One staff member described, *“a problem shared helps to find a positive resolution and it feels like a ‘shared’ responsibility.”* The least positive aspects of the group sessions were identified as: limited time and the restrictions of this in applying learning from the groups into daily practice, and the reluctance of some staff to share. However, staff noted confidence to share would improve as the process became more familiar and embedded into practice (see Appendix 9f for a full list of Q10 & Q11 responses).

Overall, staff valued these sessions with all staff rating them either 4 or 5 out of 5 (M = 4.44, SD = 0.53) indicating a beneficial approach to staff education and support that could be developed and applied to other staff groups. Eight out of nine staff commented that they would like the intervention to continue, only one staff member noting 'not sure' qualifying this by stating, *"This is a totally new concept for teachers. It will take time to embed this in school."*

3.8.5 Research Question 5

In what ways can a Community Educational Psychologist support staff around home-school relationships?

Staff were asked to rate their 'awareness of the role of the Educational Psychologist in supporting staff development of knowledge, skills and confidence'. Prior to the sessions, the findings indicate a mean rating of 2.70 (out of 5, SD = 1.03) with a full range of scores (1-5) suggesting a large variation in staff knowledge of this area of EP support. Following the sessions, the mean rating increased to 4.33 (SD = 0.71). These findings suggest that more needs to be done to demonstrate the varied role of the EP to school staff (such as support for school staff) and provides support for the effectiveness of education/supervision in achieving increased staff awareness. Several comments were made regarding the value of the EP as the external facilitator for these groups, as one staff member stated: *"Thank you for offering us structure and helping to move things forward without rushing."* This final research question will be addressed in more detail in the discussion section.

Key Findings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant impacts of education/supervision sessions on improving staff knowledge
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant impacts of education/supervision sessions on improving staff confidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A 'need to' and 'desire for' developing school staff knowledge and confidence around home-school relationships
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of relevant and applicable content and delivery of training and constraints of time and demands of school life
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value of 'sharing' within supervision for supporting school staff and developing reflective skills and the need to practice these skills to be embedded into practice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive impacts of CEP facilitating education/supervision sessions

Table 8. Paper Two Key Findings and Implications

3.9 Discussion

In this section, the findings are discussed in relation to previous research in this area, the issues and limitations of the study are reviewed, implications for EP practice are considered and suggestions for future research are made.

3.9.1 Developing school staff knowledge

The findings revealed generally low initial levels of school staff knowledge about communication techniques with parents and the psychology influencing home-school relationships. This supports Goodall and Vorhaus' (2011) recommendations regarding the need for training to develop staff knowledge in working with parents. The education/supervision sessions in the current study reflect an effective way to improve staff knowledge through information sharing and discussion. This approach enables the application of psychology and effective dissemination of theory and research on theoretical models of parental involvement (Epstein, 2001; Hoover-

Dempsey & Sandler, 1995) and communication techniques to promote better home, school and community partnerships (Epstein & Jansorn, 2004).

The findings show significant improvements in staff knowledge, however these are over a fixed period of time and it is important to consider the longer-term support required for school staff in order to sustain knowledge increases and applications of theory into practice. The current study aimed to encourage ongoing learning and development through the exploration of issues and shared good practice within staff group supervision sessions. However, more extensive support appears necessary through both initial teacher training and ongoing professional development as proposed by Goodall and Vorhaus (2011).

3.9.2 Developing school staff confidence

As seen with staff knowledge, the findings also displayed initially low levels of confidence in approaches to communication with parents and the underpinning psychology within home-school relationships. These results reinforce the view that increased staff support and information is essential to enable the continued development of positive home-school relationships (Goodall & Vorhaus, 2011).

The present study aimed to build staff confidence with home-school interactions through developing knowledge and providing opportunities to practise skills through supervision sessions and demonstrated significant improvements in confidence ratings. Again, these were improvements over a fixed period and further exploration of approaches to building confidence that could be sustained over time and have positive impacts on practice would be helpful. An important point noted by one member of staff concerned the difficulty recognising any progress with their

confidence within the individual sessions, describing the, “...*need to practise to know I’d truly achieved it.*” Ongoing evaluation of the longer term impacts of this supervision on levels of confidence would be worthwhile.

3.9.3 Developing a reflective and supportive staff group

Seeking staff ‘hopes’ for the sessions enabled the content to be matched to staff requests in order to be most effective. Initial hopes described desires to develop knowledge and confidence and this personal investment in making progress is likely to have been an important factor in the perceived benefits of the groups. As seen in Gill and Monsen’s (1995) ‘staff sharing scheme’, this element of needs analysis seems particularly important for the planning and delivery of effective interventions and supports the collaborative approach of this CP research ‘doing with’ staff rather than ‘doing to’.

The value of an existing supportive staff group prior to running these sessions also seems an important factor in the current study in order to foster a safe and supportive environment for sharing issues and concerns. Although clearly beneficial, an existing supportive group may not be an essential requirement – the supervision approach could also be effective in creating a supportive staff group though the development may take considerable time. The same point could be made with staff reflective skills – the good foundation of reflective skills of staff in the current study is likely to have been a helpful factor in the success of the groups but the approach itself may also be helpful in developing the skills of less reflective staff groups. The improvements found staff reflective skills following the sessions are particularly positive as it was hoped that by developing staff abilities to reflect

these skills could then be applied outside of the supervision setting and have wider impacts on practice.

The positive approach and commitment of the head teacher of the school involved in the current study appears another influential factor supporting the success of the groups. As described by Martin et al. (1999), there is a need for whole school commitment with available opportunities and resources to support home-school relationships systems and these also seem important factors for the development and maintenance of school staff group support approaches.

The identified strengths of the education/supervision sessions in the current study reflect many findings from previous research using these approaches to staff support, particularly regarding reduced isolation through sharing problems, opportunities to learn from colleagues and the value of a dedicated time and space to reflect (Bozic & Carter, 2002; Farouk, 2004; Stringer, et al., 1992). The noted weaknesses are also similar to prior studies, specifically concerning time as a considerable barrier to such groups within busy school environments (Bozic & Carter, 2002; Farouk, 2004; Stringer, et al., 1992). With regards to the supervision sessions, the findings indicated staff valued learning ways to reflect and share in a structured format using Hanks (1999) and Gibbs' (1988) models to guide the session discussion. Staff commented on the value of sharing and learning from each other reflecting Carrington's (2004) description of how supervision can be a 'reciprocal' process for all involved.

The information gained from the current study regarding the important factors for these education/supervision sessions provides helpful guiding principles for setting

up future education/supervision support groups added to existing knowledge in this area and supporting the value of staff support groups.

3.9.4 The role of the Community Educational Psychologist

The findings suggest the effectiveness of the education/supervision for demonstrating the wider role of the CEP in supporting school staff and the value of CEPs in delivering education sessions and facilitating supervision groups. This supports previous research describing the valuable role of EPs as external facilitators within staff support groups (Bozic & Carter, 2002; Stringer, et al., 1992).

The CEP within the current study was well known to the school staff and this is likely to have supported the perceived effectiveness of the CEP role in facilitating the sessions. The value of this initial relationship with school staff would seem an important consideration for CEPs engaging in this approach to staff support.

As there seems an ongoing uncertainty about ‘what do EPs do?’ (Wood, 1998) – including from educational institutions, local authorities and even within the profession itself – the present study demonstrates an approach for CEPs to share their applied psychology in a way that is responsive to the needs of communities (as recommended by Stringer, et al., 2006). This approach to EP working also reflects the core principles of Community Psychology: sharing psychology, creating social change, ensuring active participation of staff to encourage their working with parents and promoting and developing competence and well being through an action-based, collaborative approach (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010).

The current research is underpinned by the suggestions from Pelco & Ries (1999) around the unique role of EPs in supporting staff development to improve home-

school relationships through developing professional constructions of role, self-efficacy and perceptions of opportunities and demands. The findings highlight effective ways to achieve this and the research demonstrates this in action.

3.9.5 Study limitations

Both methodological issues and personal reflections are considered here.

As with any piece of 'real world' research (Robson, 2002) there were a number of challenges that placed limitations on the current study. The small sample size restricts generalisation of the findings and the variations in attendance at the education/supervision sessions (ranging from 7-19 participants) made it not possible to compare individual pre- and post-questionnaires to gain further evidence of any significant effects. The use of pre- and post-measures also raises issues of possible social desirability bias in participant responses. Time restrictions impacted on the number of sessions that could be run (originally hoped to be six but reduced to three) as well as limiting data gathering methods, preventing a more in-depth exploration of participant views that may have been achieved through interviews. Exploring participant views and experiences of the reflection and supervision process over an extended period of time would be particularly interesting as an expansion on the current study.

Had the 'education' and 'supervision' aspects of the sessions been studied independently, a greater level of detail and evaluation may have been achieved. However, the current study aimed to address both short-term aims: to provide information around home-school relationships which could then be applied in practice, and long-term aims: to develop staff reflective skills and create a

supportive staff group environment guided by a tailored model of reflection.

Relating to the views of Hanko (1999) and Elfer (2012), feedback from school staff in the current study indicated supervision as an entirely new concept in the profession that would require considerable time and practice in order to be embedded into teaching practice. Although this extensive level of support was beyond the scope of the current research, the value of such 'aftercare' following the development of staff support groups is an important consideration area for future research.

3.9.6 Relevance to practice

This study has demonstrated the significant impacts of group education/supervision sessions on the development of school staff knowledge, confidence and reflective skills. It builds upon previous research and theory in this area, supporting prior findings regarding the benefits of staff support groups, particularly the value of sharing with and learning from others. As well as contributing to research and practice knowledge, this study also advances this area of study highlighting new approaches to supporting school staff in their work with parents and families.

The present research has relevance at both local levels – supporting a local school with staff knowledge, confidence and reflective skills around home-school relationships – and national levels – supporting and adding to government policy and agenda on approaches to developing partnership with families (DCSF, 2009a; OfSTED, 2010). The approach of this research demonstrates effective methods for other school communities to develop their knowledge and skills around home-school relationships as well as other aspects of school life.

A number of implications for educational psychology practice can be identified:

- Demonstrating the role for CEPs in offering schools education and supervision around home-school relationships
- Developing a wider community role for the EP profession
- Demonstrating variety in the work offered by EP services
- Identifying an approach to staff support that schools may wish to buy into as a traded service

3.9.7 Future directions for research

Future research could develop from the current study – conducting the education/supervision sessions over a longer period of term or narrowing the focus to solely the supervision aspect seeking more in-depth staff experiences of the reflective processes and their skill development. The approaches used in this research could be applied in different educational settings where professional supervision (or more reflective practice) may be helpful.

A key area for future development would be applying this work with parents. Early developments of the current research aimed to run the education/supervision sessions with parents. However, due to the higher levels of contact that school staff (compared to EPs) typically experience with families, it was felt that supporting the development of staff knowledge and skills would have wider and longer lasting impacts on home-school relationships. The lack of parent voice is a recognised limitation of the current study and a key area for future research would be to explore parental views of any impacts of the sessions on home-school relationships.

3.9.8 Conclusion: Linking paper one and two

This thesis is formed from two papers, together providing a Community Psychology study highlighting the views of a local community and developing school staff knowledge, skills and confidence in order to build positive home-school relationships. The distinct but connected approaches of these two papers have similarities to Gill and Monsen's (1995) problem analysis framework. The issue of *'how can the school and home systems work better together and how can the Community Educational Psychologist support this?'* is explored through a process of needs analysis (paper one), training and skill development (paper two education sessions) and intervention (paper two supervision sessions).

This thesis provides an original and significant contribution to the area of home-school relationships, offering valuable insights into the 'lived' experiences of school staff, parents and children and demonstrates the benefits of education sessions and supervision within schools. The active participation of school staff, parents and children engaged them as meaningful stakeholders and encouraged the creation of knowledge to empower and promote community competence and wellbeing.

Although focused in one local community, the findings support and develop much of the existing theory, research, policy and practice in this area and have wide-ranging implications for home-school relationships. This thesis supports a clearer view of what 'working together in partnership' means and how this can be achieved.

3.9.10 Post Script

As a piece of Community Psychology research, the ownership of this research is shared with the community whom helped create it. It was my aim as the researcher to reflect this shared ownership by reporting the research in a way that highlights the contribution of the participants and demonstrates the collaboration between the researcher and the participants. I view this project as a learning journey enabling substantial knowledge construction, development of shared values and supporting the wellbeing of all those involved. Reflecting on the process of the research, I recognise substantial developments in my own understanding of Community Psychology research and experience of carrying out participatory research that reflects the key principles of liberation and wellbeing.

Effective dissemination is an important next phase of this research. I aim to share this work through formal and informal presentations and discussions with other communities, schools and their staff, parents, children and young people, colleagues and other education professionals, with a view to journal publication in the near future. There are longer-lasting impacts of this research on my own career as a Community Educational Psychologist striving to instil the values of Community Psychology to empower and promote community competence through my own professional practice and research.

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Section Five – Appendices

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Appendix 1 – Breakdown of Sample

	School 1	School 2	School 3	School 4	Total:
Questionnaire:	Staff = 9	Staff = 11	Staff = 8	Staff = 0	Staff = 28
	Parents = 22	Parents = 17	Parents = 9	Parents = 16	Parents = 64
Focus group:	Students = 8				Students = 8
Interviews:	Staff = 1	Staff = 4	Staff = 1	Staff = 0	Staff = 6
	Parents = 3	Parents = 1	Parents = 1	Parents = 0	Parents = 5

Appendix 2 - 2a) Staff Questionnaire

Home-School Relationship Questionnaire – School Staff

Thank you for taking the time to answer this questionnaire; it should take around 5-10 minutes to complete. Please complete all the questions and return to ... School by...

The following questions use the phrase 'learning and development' – this can include pupil's academic achievements, progress, educational strengths and needs as well as their social, emotional and behavioural development and any issues or concerns within school.

1. In what ways does your school currently communicate with parents/guardians regarding pupil's learning and development? *(Please tick all that apply)*

- | | | | |
|------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|
| Letters/ Written notes | <input type="checkbox"/> | Text messaging | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Telephone calls | <input type="checkbox"/> | Meetings | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Reports | <input type="checkbox"/> | Other (please specify) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Emails | <input type="checkbox"/> | | |

2. For each of the following statements please tick the most applicable box:

a) My school sends communication to parents/guardians about pupil's learning and development:

Daily Several times a week Several times a month Several times a year Never

b) I feel my school could provide parents/guardians with:

More communication The same communication Less communication

c) The content of my school's communication with parents/guardians is:

Mostly positive Both positive and negative Mostly negative

3. In what ways does your school involve and support parents/guardians with pupil's learning and development? *(Please tick all that apply)*

- | | | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Parent Evenings | <input type="checkbox"/> | Events (i.e. sports, performance) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Meetings in school | <input type="checkbox"/> | Information sharing | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Open door policy / Drop-in's | <input type="checkbox"/> | Workshops | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Homework | <input type="checkbox"/> | Other (please specify) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | | | |

4. Please indicate whether you feel your school should provide less, the same or more support for parents/guardians around pupil's learning and development. *(Please tick the most applicable)*

More Same Less

5. In what ways do you think your school could involve and support parents/guardians more with pupil's learning and development?

.....
.....
.....
.....

6. For each of the following statements, please tick the most applicable box:

	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree
a) Parental involvement in pupil's education is important	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) Schools could do more to support parents /guardians with pupil's education	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) All parents could support their children's learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

7. What do you feel are the strengths of parents/guardians in the local community around supporting pupil's learning and development?

.....
.....
.....
.....

8. What do you feel are the needs of parents/guardians in the local community around supporting pupil's learning and development?

.....
.....
.....
.....

Thank You

This research will also involve informal interviews with school staff from the local community to explore their views and experiences of home-school relationships. If you would be willing to take part in an interview please tick the YES box below and complete the contact details. Please note, there is no obligation for you to take part in an interview.

YES, I would be willing to take part in an interview.

Name: Contact number:

Appendix 2 - 2b) Parent Questionnaire

Home-School Relationship Questionnaire – Parent/Guardian

Thank you for taking the time to answer this questionnaire; it should take around 5–10 minutes.
Please complete all the questions and return to ... School by ...

The following questions use the phrase 'learning and development' – this can include your child's academic achievements, progress, strengths and needs as well as their social, emotional and behavioural development and any issues or concerns within school.

1. In what ways does your child's school currently communicate with you regarding your child's learning and development? (Please tick all that apply)

- | | | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|
| Letters / Written notes | <input type="checkbox"/> | Text messaging | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Telephone calls | <input type="checkbox"/> | Meetings | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Reports | <input type="checkbox"/> | Other (please specify) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Emails | <input type="checkbox"/> | | |

2. For each of the following statements please tick the most applicable box:

a) I receive communication about my child's learning and development from their school:

Daily Several times a week Several times a month Several times a year Never

b) I would like the school to provide:

More communication The same communication Less communication

c) The content of this communication is:

Mostly positive Both positive and negative Mostly negative

3. In what ways does your child's school involve and support you with your child's learning and development? (Please tick all that apply)

- | | | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Parent Evenings | <input type="checkbox"/> | Events (i.e. sports, performance) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Meetings in school | <input type="checkbox"/> | Information sharing | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Open door policy / Drop-in's | <input type="checkbox"/> | Workshops | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Homework | <input type="checkbox"/> | Other (please specify) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | | | |

4. Please indicate whether you would prefer less, the same or more support from your child's school with your child's learning and development. (Please tick the most applicable)

More Same Less

5. In what ways do you think schools could involve and support parents/guardians more with children's learning and development?

.....
.....
.....

6. For each of the following statements, please tick the most applicable box:

	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree
a) Parental involvement in children's education is important	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) Schools could do more to support parents /guardians with children's education	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) All parents could support their children's learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

7. What do you feel are the strengths of parents/guardians in the local community around supporting children's learning and development?

.....
.....
.....

8. What do you feel are the needs of parents/guardians in the local community around supporting children's learning and development?

.....
.....
.....

Thank You

This research will also involve informal interviews with parents/guardians from the local community to explore their views and experiences of home-school relationships. If you would be willing to take part in an interview please tick the YES box below and complete the contact details. Please note, there is no obligation for you to take part in an interview.

YES, I would be willing to take part in an interview.

Name: Contact number:

Appendix 2 - 2c) Questionnaire Brief (Example – Parent)

Home-School Relationship Questionnaire – Parent/Guardian

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Please see the attached questionnaire. This questionnaire is part of a research project exploring the communication and relationships between schools and parents/guardians in the ... area. It aims to gain the views of parents/guardians about ways in which schools can offer them support around their children's learning and development.

This research is being carried out by Suzy Bevington, a Doctoral Trainee Educational Psychologist, as part of a thesis research project with Exeter University. Suzy is part of ... Community Educational Psychology Service and works with ... School, along with other schools in the ... area, to support children and young people, families and schools around Special Educational Needs. ... School are currently exploring ways to develop and increase effective feedback, including between school and home, and it is hoped that the findings from this research will provide valuable information to support the school with this work.

This is a short questionnaire and should take around 5-10 minutes to complete. Please note, this questionnaire is anonymous (unless you choose to 'opt-in' for an interview), all information gained will remain confidential, be securely stored and fully destroyed after use and you have the right to withdraw from this questionnaire at any time.

Your views and opinions as parents/guardians are extremely important and I would be grateful if you are able to take the time to complete this questionnaire and return it to ... School by An electronic copy of this questionnaire is also available on the school website.

Suzy Bevington

Doctoral Trainee Educational, Child and Community Psychologist

Suzanne.bevington@...gov.uk

...

Appendix 2 - 2d) Questionnaire Translation (Example – Polish)

Home-School Kwestionariusz cywilny - rodzica / opiekuna

Dziękujemy za poświęcenie czasu, aby odpowiedzieć na to kwestionariusz, powinien potrwać około 5-10 minut. Proszę wypełnić wszystkie pytania i powrócić do ... szkoły ...

Poniższe pytania zawierają zwroty "nauka i rozwój" – ten zwrot znaczy postępy w nauce twojego dziecka, mocne strony dziecka oraz potrzeby społeczne, emocjonalne i wszelkie problemy i wątpliwości w obrębie szkoły.

1. W jaki sposób ma szkole Twojego dziecka obecnie komunikować się z Tobą w sprawie dziecka uczenia się i rozwoju? (Proszę zaznaczyć wszystkie, które mają zastosowanie)

- | | | | |
|----------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|
| Listy | <input type="checkbox"/> | Wiadomości tekstowych | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| rozmowy telefoniczne | <input type="checkbox"/> | Spotkania | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Raporty | <input type="checkbox"/> | Inne (proszę określić) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| E-maile | <input type="checkbox"/> | | |

2. Dla każdego z poniższych stwierdzeń proszę zaznaczyć najbardziej odpowiedni kwadrat:

a) Otrzymuję komunikat o nauce i rozwoju mojego dziecka ze swojej szkoły:

Codziennie Kilka razy w tygodniu Kilka razy w miesiącu Kilka razy w roku Nigdy

b) Chciałbym aby szkoła zapewniła:

Więcej komunikacji Ta sama komunikację Mniej komunikacja

c) Jaka jest ta komunikacja:

W większości pozytywna Zarówno pozytywna jak i negatywna W większości negatywna

3. W jaki sposób szkoła twojego dziecka angażuje i wspiera cię w nauce i rozwoju? (Proszę zaznaczyć wszystkie, które mają zastosowanie)

- | | | | |
|--------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Zebrań rodziców | <input type="checkbox"/> | Wydarzenia (tzn. sport, występy) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Spotkania w szkole | <input type="checkbox"/> | Wymiana informacji | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Drop-in | <input type="checkbox"/> | Warsztaty | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Praca domowa | <input type="checkbox"/> | Inne (proszę określić) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
-

4. Proszę wskazać, czy wolisz mniej, samo lub więcej wsparcia ze szkoły dziecka z nauki dziecka i rozwoju. (Proszę zaznaczyć które najbardziej dotyczy ciebie)

Więcej Taki sam Mniej

5. W jaki sposób szkoła może polegać i wspierać rodziców lub prawnych opiekunów w nauce i rozwoju dzieci ?

.....

.....

.....

6. Dla każdego z poniższych stwierdzeń proszę zaznaczyć najbardziej odpowiedni kwadrat:

	Zgadzam się	Nie mam zdania	Nie zgadzam się
a) Zaangażowanie rodziców w edukacji dzieci jest ważna	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) Szkoły mogą zrobić więcej, by wesprzeć rodziców / opiekunów w edukacji dzieci	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) Wszyscy rodzice mogą wspierać ich dzieci naukę	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

7. Jak sądzisz jakie są mocne strony rodziców / opiekunów w społeczności lokalnej wokół wspierania nauki i rozwoju dzieci ?

.....

.....

.....

8. Jak sądzisz jakie są potrzeby rodziców / opiekunów w społeczności lokalnej wokół wspierania nauki i rozwoju dzieci?

.....

.....

.....

Dziękuję

Badania te również obejmują nieformalne wywiady z rodzicami / opiekunami ze społecznością lokalną w celu zbadania ich poglądów i doświadczeń . Jeśli chcesz wziąć udział w rozmowie proszę zaznaczyć TAK w polu poniżej i wypełnij dane kontaktowe. Proszę zwrócić uwagę, nie ma obowiązku, abyś wzięł/wzięła udział w wywiadzie.

TAK, byłabym/byłabym chętny/a do wzięcia udziału w wywiadzie.

Imię i nazwisko: Numer kontaktowy:.....

Appendix 3 – 3a) Staff Interview schedule

Semi-structured focused interview schedule - Staff

Intro:

Thank you for being willing to take part in a follow-up interview for this research project exploring home-school relationships. The aim of this interview is to gain your views and experiences of home-school relationships and ways in which you feel these could be developed in the future. The interview will last for approximately 30 minutes; there are 6 main questions which will allow around 5 minutes for each question. With your consent, the interview will be recorded. I'd like to assure you that you will remain completely anonymous and copies of your interview recording and any transcriptions will be securely stored and destroyed once the data has been analysed.

'Warm up' Q's:

- How long have you been working at ... school for?
- What year group do you mostly teach/support?
- Could you rate your general views of the school on a scale of 1-10 (1 being very negative, 10 being very positive)? Why?

Main body of interview:

Firstly, I'd like to ask you about your general experiences of home-school relationships...

Q1. Could you tell me a little about your experiences of the communication between your school and parents?

- Probes / Prompts – take details of:
 - How much are the school in touch with parents?
 - How much are parents in touch with the school?
 - Is this an equal balance?
 - An example of when there has been good home-school communication?
 - An example of when there has been not so good home-school communication?

Q2. Could you tell me a little about your experiences of the involvement of parents in school?

- Probes / Prompts – take details of:
 - How much does the school involve parents?
 - How much do parents get involved with the school?
 - Is this an equal balance?
 - An example of when there has been good home-school engagement?
 - An example of when there has been not so good home-school engagement?

I'd now like to ask about your experiences of the strengths and needs of parents in supporting children's learning and development. By '*learning and development*' I mean students academic achievements, progress, strengths and needs as well as their social, emotional and behavioural development and any issues or concerns within school.

Q3. What have you experienced as the main strengths of parents in the local community in supporting students learning and development?

- Probes / Prompts – take details of:
 - Are there specific topics/subjects you feel parents could support students with?
 - Are there specific skills...?
 - What value/difference/extra could parents bring?
 - Behaviours, i.e. help with the football?
 - Affect, emotional support, i.e. support on school trips, bullying issues?
 - Cognition, i.e. reading with children, homework?

Q4. What do you feel are parents' main needs in supporting students learning and development?

- Probes / Prompts – take details of:
 - Are there specific topics/subjects you feel parents need help with in order to support student's learning and development?
 - Are there specific skills...?
 - Behaviours, affect, cognition?

I'd now like to ask about your views on the ways in which positive home-school relationships could be developed through schools supporting parents and parents engaging with schools.

Q5. In what ways do you feel your school could provide support for parents/carers with their child(ren)'s learning and development?

- Probes / Prompts – take details of:
 - An example of positive support provided by school?
 - An example of less positive support provided by school?
 - Areas: academic, attendance, behaviour, homework, health (healthy lifestyles – eating, exercise), social/emotional needs, life skills (organisation, safety)?

Q6. In what ways do you feel parents could engage with schools and support students' learning and development?

- Probes / Prompts – take details of:
 - An example of positive engagement/support provided by parents?
 - An example of less positive engagement/support provided by parents?

- Areas: academic, attendance, behaviour, homework, health (healthy lifestyles – eating, exercise), social/emotional needs, school/community events, life skills (organisation, safety)?

'Cool down' Q's:

- The second part of my research project is to develop and deliver some education/support/discussion sessions for school staff/parents around ways to support children's learning and development at home – would this be something you would be interested in attending? Other ideas?
- Finally, do you have any other questions to ask me or anything else you would like to say?

Closure: Thank you again very much for your time, your input is extremely valuable. Please feel free to contact me with any further questions or queries regarding this research project.

Appendix 3 – 3b) Parent Interview Schedule

Semi-structured focused interview schedule – Parents/Carers

Intro:

Thank you for being willing to take part in a follow-up interview for this research project exploring home-school relationships. The aim of this interview is to gain your views and experiences of home-school relationships and ways in which you feel these could be developed in the future. The interview will last for approximately 30 minutes; there are 6 main questions which will allow around 5 minutes for each question. With your consent, the interview will be recorded. I'd like to assure you that you will remain completely anonymous and copies of your interview recording and any transcriptions will be securely stored and destroyed once the data has been analysed.

'Warm up' Q's:

- How long have your child(ren) attended ... school for?
- What age/year group are your child(ren) in at ... school?
- Could you rate your general views of the school on a scale of 1-10 (1 being very negative, 10 being very positive)? Why?

Main body of interview:

Firstly, I'd like to ask you about your general experiences of home-school relationships...

Q1. Could you tell me a little about your experiences of the communication between you and your child(ren)'s school?

- Probes / Prompts – take details of:
 - How much are the school in touch with you as a parent?
 - How much are you as a parent in touch with the school?
 - Is this an equal balance?
 - An example of when there has been good home-school communication?
 - An example of when there has been not so good home-school communication?

Q2. Could you tell me a little about your experiences of the involvement of parents in school?

- Probes / Prompts – take details of:
 - How much does the school involve you and other parents?
 - How much do you and other parents get involved with the school?
 - Is this an equal balance?
 - An example of when there has been good home-school engagement?
 - An example of when there has been not so good home-school engagement?

I'd now like to ask about your experiences of your strengths and needs as a parent in supporting your child(ren)'s learning and development. By '*learning and development*' I mean your child(ren)'s academic achievements, progress, strengths and needs as well as their social, emotional and behavioural development and any issues or concerns within school.

Q3. What do you feel are your main strengths as a parent in supporting your child(ren)'s learning and development?

- Probes / Prompts – take details of:
 - Are there specific topics/subjects you as a parent could support your children with?
 - Are there specific skills...?
 - What value/difference/extra could parents bring?
 - Behaviours, i.e. help with the football?
 - Affect, emotional support, i.e. support on school trips, bullying issues?
 - Cognition, i.e. reading with children, homework?

Q4. What do you feel are your main needs as a parent in supporting your child(ren)'s learning and development?

- Probes / Prompts – take details of:
 - Are there specific topics/subjects you feel you as a parent need help with in order to support your child(ren)'s learning and development?
 - Are there specific skills...?
 - Behaviours, affect, cognition?

I'd now like to ask about your views on the ways in which positive home-school relationships could be developed through schools supporting parents and parents engaging with schools.

Q5. In what ways do you feel your child(ren)'s school could provide support for you and other parents with children's learning and development?

- Probes / Prompts – take details of:
 - An example of positive support provided by school?
 - An example of less positive support provided by school?
 - Areas: academic, attendance, behaviour, homework, health (healthy lifestyles – eating, exercise), social/emotional needs, life skills (organisation, safety)?

Q6. In what ways do you feel you could engage with schools and support your child(ren)'s learning and development?

- Probes / Prompts – take details of:
 - An example of positive engagement/support you or other parents have provided?

- An example of less positive engagement/support you or other parents have provided?
- Areas: academic, attendance, behaviour, homework, health (healthy lifestyles – eating, exercise), social/emotional needs, school/community events, life skills (organisation, safety)?

'Cool down' Q's:

- The second part of my research project is to develop and deliver some education/support/discussion sessions for school staff/parents around ways to support children's learning and development at home – would this be something you would be interested in attending? Other ideas?
- Finally, do you have any other questions to ask me or anything else you would like to say?

Closure: Thank you again very much for your time, your input is extremely valuable. Please feel free to contact me with any further questions or queries regarding this research project.

Appendix 3 – 3c) Interview Transcript (Example – Staff Excerpt)

Title : School B_Staff_Int_2

Record date : 20/07/2012 10:58:02

Record time : 0:31:01

Interviewer: Okay, so the first bit, just a couple of open questions. How long have you been working at the school for?

Staff: 5 years, well 5 years here.

I: Do you have a lot of contact with certain year groups or parts of the school, or does it just tend to be quite general?

S: General, yeah.

I: And what about your views of the school as a whole? If you could give a perspective of the school, perhaps on a scale of one to ten, one being negative, ten being really positive. How do you feel about the school at present?

S: 8 or 8 and a half.

I: Yeah? So really high. What are your main reasons for that?

S: Er, I think it's staff morale, everyone gets on together well. The children are really lovely and friendly, there's always one or two but, you know, we've got people that deal with those issues. But we're a very supportive school and I think because we support each other and we have more of a...yeah, and parents are happy to come and talk to us. Erm...it just makes it flow better.

I: Yeah, it certainly comes across, you've been fantastically supportive to me, I really appreciate that! Okay, so the first main question is about your general experience of home-school relationships. Could you just tell me a little bit about the communication between school and home? So, you know...telephone conversations, emails, reports those kind of things?

S: I mean, for us, we tend to...most things that we send home go hard copy at the moment, we're looking into getting an electronic system. We did try one, it wasn't working so we've actually stopped using that. Erm...you know, we're quite happy to make 'phone call home, take calls that come in, pass on messages. Erm...parents are quite happy to come and talk, to come and ask to speak to any member of staff. Some of them, erm...you know, can be quite demanding there and then, others just say 'whenever' but you try and sort of say, 'well actually the teacher cannot come immediately but would this support you?' or whatever. But I think it's more the fact that, you know, we're willing to communicate with them...erm...and answer their questions to the best of our knowledge and if we can't, we seek advice from somewhere else, but yes, the education side of the home-school communication...erm...I couldn't tell you how that really works per class but I know it is

quite good and we have notice boards hanging at windows with regular daily updates and regular newsletters. But we do, you know, parents are welcome to email us, we get emailed absences, we get emailed messages about what lunch is it, that sort of things. And absent parents that request us to email information about their children, as long as they've got parental responsibility then we're willing to do that as well. And things like Social Care, they often come round to check certain children are in each day and we can check the register from this end.

I: Great, that's really helpful. I mean, you mentioned a few things there about how much parents are in touch with schools as well, erm, kind of through willingness to come in, are there any other ways that parents communicate with school?

S: Erm, well our website and there's actually a guestbook on there. And there's also a way of sending a message to us via the website which drops into my in basket and then I forward it to the relevant person to answer, often following up with a quick 'I have forwarded your email to so and so and they should be in touch shortly'. Erm...but we tend to do an awful lot by phone or face-to-face really 'cause parents are more comfortable that way. I think if they can see you, they know whether you're being honest or not – its' how I feel they...that's how the parents here feel too, that they like to know or like to speak to you face-to-face more than anything else really.

I: Yeah, okay. Erm...I mean do you think there's an equal balance between how much school communicate with home and home with school?

S: Erm...

I: Is it weighted one way or the other?

S: Erm, I don't know. From the admin perspective...I don't know. I just think, we don't ignore people, if you want to ask a question we'll answer it!

I: What about an example of really good home-school communication – has there been a time where you thought, 'oh that was, you know, really positive communication'? It doesn't have to be a specific time it could be a more general approach that you've found.

S: I mean, I liked when we had the electronic communication and felt that was much better because everybody that had email access could get it but if you get it from any computers, you don't have to have your own computer. It was just a shame that when we were sending them some people were getting them, some weren't – it wasn't our problem, it was the system we were using. But we used to get very positive feedback, because if a trip was coming back late we could send a text through that system saying 'if your child is on the trip to today' you can advise the coach is 30 minutes late. So I like the texting facility and I think being able to keep parents informed by text if there's any issues – when we had to close the school for a gas leak, when we've had to, you know that was a really important one – 'all children are safe at the local leisure centre, please could you arrange to take your child from there as soon as possible'. And we sent that text out to as many parents that had given us permission to text them. Erm...and I think that is really good and hopefully in September we'll have that back.

Appendix 4 – 4a) Focus Group Introduction Brief & Debrief

Brief & 'ground rules'

Thank you for coming along to this focus group. The reason we are meeting together is because for my job, I am doing a project to find out how schools and parents work together to help your learning. This group will last around half an hour/30 minutes. I would like us to use this time to do some drawings and talk about what you think about parents and schools working together to help your learning. There are no right and wrong answers in this group and it is important that you all listen to each other and respect each other's views. You are allowed to say what you think in this group but anything we talk about or draw in this room is confidential – that means we do not tell everyone else. Would you like to add any more rules for this group?

Ok then, let's begin...

- Firstly – do you think it is important for your parents and carers to be involved in your learning?
- How would you like them to be involved? Let's draw and write some ways (Picture 1).
- How would you not like them to be involved? Let's draw and write some ways (Picture 2).
- (Discussion about drawings)

Debrief

Thank you for taking part in this focus group – your thoughts and views are very important. As I talked about at the start of this session, everything we have drawn and talked about in this room is to help me with my project to find out about the ways in which schools and parents work together to help your learning. I will make sure that no-one knows who said or drew what in this session and you must try to remember to keep things from this session confidential. If you have any other questions for me please ask me now or ask your teachers another time and they will share your questions with me.

Appendix 5 – 5a) Results: Q1 – ‘Other’ Responses

Q1g. In what ways does your child’s school currently communicate with you regarding your child’s learning and development? Other (please specify) ...
Informal messages with older children (Yr5/6)
Websites
Homework
Information evenings i.e. maths, internet safety, SRE
Have the chance to talk to teacher before and after school
Seeing the teacher before and after school
Daily chats with class teacher
Websites
Signs by class doors
Informal discussion before and after school
Reading comment books
Certificate of achievement
Parent assemblies
Parents evenings
Parents evenings
Parents evenings
Parent assemblies
Drop in sessions
Comment book
Verbal communication when necessary
Open sessions / workshops
Open sessions in class
Quick chat when you drop them off if any concern
Parents evenings
School’s website
Teachers come out and chat

Appendix 5 – 5b) Results: Q3 – ‘Other’ Responses

Q3h. In what ways does your child's school involve and support you with your child's learning and development? Other (please specify) ...
Coming to lessons
Websites Displays
Class assemblies
New parents evenings Internet awareness evenings Maths evening for parents
Dad's challenge days Parents come to work with children
Comment book

Appendix 5 – 5c) Results: Q5 – Table of Categorised Qualitative Responses

Q5 – Table of categorised qualitative responses	
Informing and educating parents (29%)	<p>Information and guidance on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National curriculum – what is taught, what levels mean - Expectations of schools and education system - Teaching methods – how children are taught, specific subjects - Ways to help children learn at home <p>Through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Drop-in's - Q&A evenings - Workshops - Online learning for parents - Resources – packs for core subjects
More effective home-school involvement (19%)	<p>Through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Opportunities for families to attend in school/classes (i.e. family days) - Invitations for parents to help out in school (i.e. school plays) - Support groups - Interactive homework and projects
More frequent information and feedback on child's learning and development (19%)	<p>Through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Immediate information about behaviour on the day – text, email - More parents evenings - Information throughout year not just at the end – termly reports, weekly/monthly 'run-downs'
More in-depth information and feedback about child's progress (18%)	<p>Through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Comments on effort, not just attainment - Focus on specific areas of need and targets to support these – how parents can help with these areas, resources and workbooks to help - Increased access to children's books and work
More effective home-school relationships (15%)	<p>Through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consultation with parents – parental voice - More 1:1 meetings and liaison with parents, share and combine knowledge - Simpler communication – clearer for parents - EAL support - Persistence with hard to reach parents, patience and understanding of parent situations

Appendix 5 – 5d) Q7 – Table of Categorised Qualitative Responses

Q7 – Table of categorised qualitative responses	
Supportive towards school (32%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Willing to work with school, work as a team - Positive attitude towards school - Help out with school trips, fundraising, attend events – workshops, assemblies, meetings, parent evenings - Understanding of school day - Willing to ask for help, discuss issues or concerns - Keeping school informed of changes in children’s lives
Parents supporting learning at home (26%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Educational visits to libraries, museums - Develop and reinforce learning – homework, reading, practise basic skills
Supportive towards their children (21%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Showing an interest - Wanting children to do well and achieve - Encouraging and promoting learning - Ensuring children’s attendance - Knowledge of children’s strengths and needs
Culture and life experience (17%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Keen to share culture with others - Using own skills to teach and support children - Being positive role models – developing life skills (i.e. self care and safety) supporting positive behaviour management - Supporting children with English as an Additional Language (EAL) to learn English
Supportive towards school community (4%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Know other parents, support each other - Parent support groups

Appendix 5 – 5e) Results: Q8 – Table of Categorised Qualitative Responses

Q8 – Table of categorised qualitative responses	
Parents understanding of school (34%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - School and parents working together as a team - Expectations of school for children’s learning and development - Demands of education system on school, new teachers/TA’s - Curriculum, content of teaching, methods and approaches of teaching - Routine, rules
Parents own needs – educational, social, economic (33%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Literacy and numeracy, qualifications - Aspirations, confidence and self-esteem - Attitudes towards education – impact of own negative experiences, interest in and value of education - Isolated ‘hard to reach’ parents, reluctance to communicate with or visit school - Single parents, working parents – opportunities to meet, discuss and get involved with school outside of normal working hours
Parents supporting own children’s learning and development (23%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support with homework, reading to children - Spending quality time with children - Engaging in discussion and conversation to develop language skills - Advice on appropriate resources - Understanding of the importance of parental involvement - Supporting behaviour and social skill development, support from school – training, parenting classes.
Community needs (10%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Language needs – many families with English as an Additional Language, need for translation, access to English courses - Social community for parents, support each other, those parents who need help.

Appendix 6 – 6a) Thematic Analysis: Initial Codes - Staff

Initial Thematic map - themes	Initial Thematic map - subthemes	Initial Codes
School supporting parents	<i>Educating parents</i>	Educating parents
		Supporting children’s behaviour
		Supporting parents
School accessible to parents	<i>Encouraging parents</i>	Inviting parents to get involved
		Making effort to encourage parents
		Staff supportive towards each other
		Inviting feedback
		Welcoming to parents
		Access to staff visible presence in school
		Open access for parents
	<i>Responsive to parents</i>	School supporting community language needs
		Schools actively trying to improve
		Responding to parental feedback
Parents supportive towards education	<i>Parents willingness to be involved with school</i>	Learning at home
		Positive view of school
		Parental willingness to interact with school
		Parents asking for help
	<i>Parents strengths/skills</i>	Parent supportive of children’s wellbeing
		Parents sharing life skills culture
		Parental strengths
Communication – integral to home school relationships	<i>Keeping parents informed</i>	Need to keep parents informed
		Need for school to inform and support parents with learning at home
		Equality between school and home communication
		Value of face to face contact
		Strong home-school relationships
		Use of technology to communicate
		Importance of communication
		High levels of school-home communication
Benefits of consistency in message at home and school		
Value of parental involvement		Need for parents to be involved
		Importance of parental involvement
		Value of parental involvement
Barriers	<i>Authority of</i>	Perceived authority barrier of school

between home and school	<i>school</i>	Lack of information communication with parents
		School and home as separate
		Need to understand challenges of being a parent
		Need for respect between home and school
		Language barriers
		Parental commitments barrier to involvement
		Challenges of accessing hard to reach parents
Lack of parental support for education	<i>Challenges of engaging hard to reach parents</i>	Variation in parental involvement
		Challenges of involving parental role in school
		Negative impact of low parental involvement on children
		Lack of parental involvement in school
	<i>Negative parental experiences</i>	Negative preconceptions about school communication
		Negative impact of poor parental experience on involvement with school
		Parental lack of value for education
	<i>Parental needs/difficulties</i>	More parental support in early years
		Lack of parental support for learning at home
		Need for parents to make more effort
		Parental over reaction
		Parental needs
		Low parental confidence
		Lack of parental understanding
		Low parental literacy
		Parents not preparing children for school
Parents struggling with change		
Negative parental behaviours		

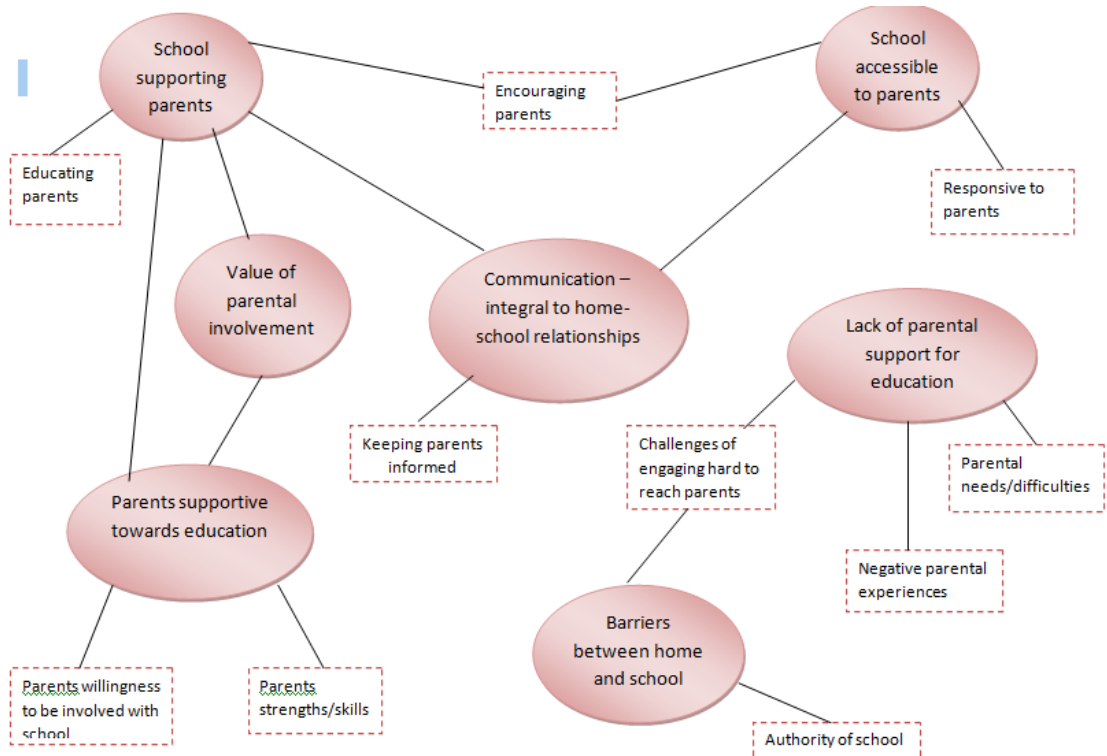
Appendix 6 – 6b) Thematic Analysis: Initial Codes - Parents

Initial Thematic map - themes	Initial Thematic map - subthemes	Initial Codes
Home and school working together	<i>Effective home-school communication</i>	Keeping parents informed
		Positive use of technology for communication
		Equality between home-school communication
		Emotionally supportive to parents
		School responding to parental feedback
		Home and school working together to support students
		Positive home-school relationships
		Benefits of parental involvement
		Importance of consistency in message at school and at home
	<i>Parents supporting learning</i>	Parents supporting learning at home
		Parents supporting each other
		Parents supporting children’s social, emotional development
		Parents making effort willing to be involved in school
		Positive view of school
	<i>Involving parents in school</i>	Open to parents access to staff
		Educating parents
		School making effort to involve parents
		Utilising parental skills
Barriers to parental involvement	<i>Lack of parental support</i>	Need for parents to get involved in community activities
		Variation in parenting around behaviour management
		Variation in parental involvement
		Need for parents to support children in school more
		Parents needing encouragement to get involved
		Lack of parental understanding around current teaching methods
		Language barriers
		Parental commitments as barriers to involvement
		Red tape as barrier to parental involvement

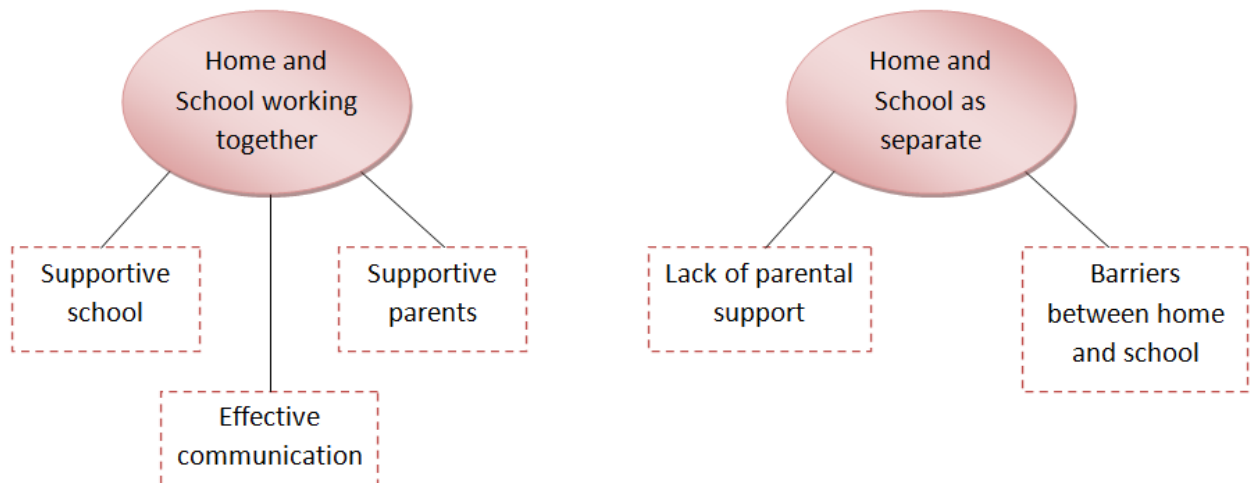
	<i>Negative parental attitudes</i>	Not parents role different role if supporting in school
		Parents lacking interest not willing to get involved
		Importance of some separation of home and school
		Impacts of parents' own experiences on involvement
		Negative impact of cultural community changes on learning
Need for school to improve	<i>Need to improve communication</i>	Need to seek feedback and gain views of parents
		Importance of recognising child's efforts
		Need for schools to provide more in-depth information
		Lack of input from head teacher
		School not informing parents
		Need for more communication from school to home
		Need for greater use of technology to communicate
	<i>Need for more parental support and understanding</i>	Need for school and home to work together more
		Need for school to inform an support parents with learning at home
		Need for school to acknowledge respond to parental commitments
		Need for school to support children's social skills

Appendix 6 – 6c) Thematic maps - Staff

Staff Initial Thematic Map

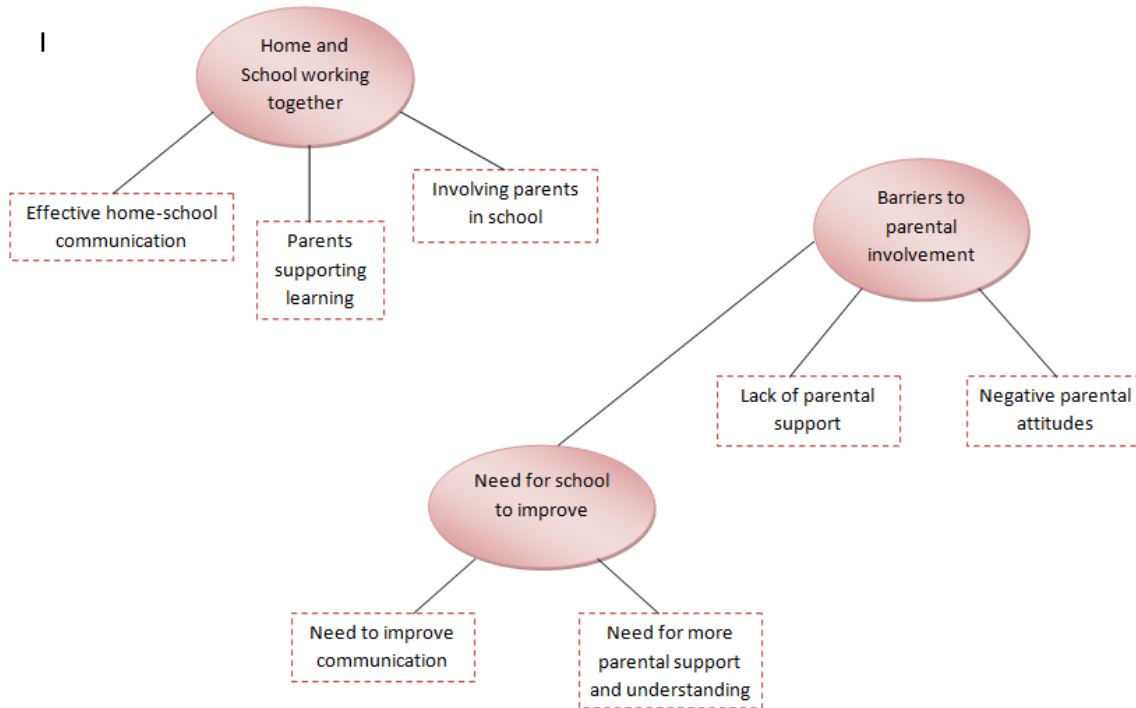


Staff Final Thematic Map

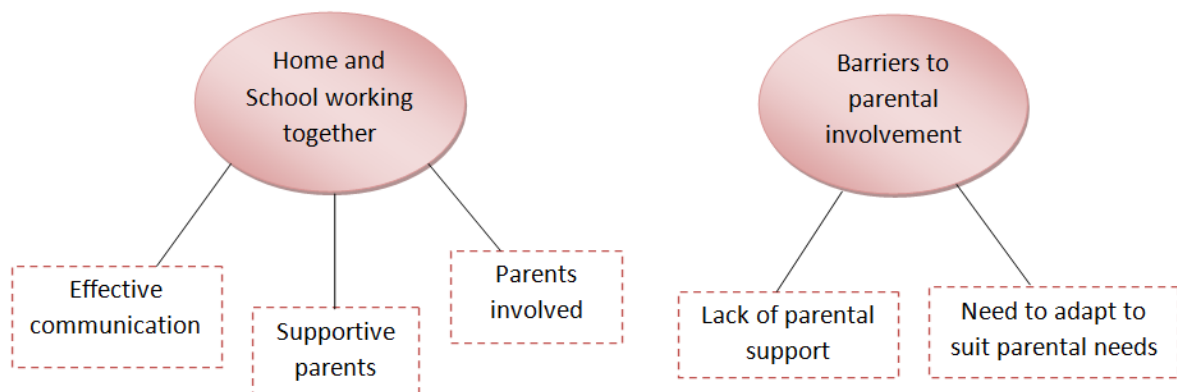


Appendix 6 – 6d) Thematic maps - Parents

Parents Initial Thematic map



Parents Final Thematic Map



Appendix 6 – 6e) Thematic Analysis: Illustrative examples – Staff

Theme	Illustrative example	
Home and school working together	Supportive School	<p><i>“So from the very beginning we welcome parents to be in the school...that would be one of the things that we would say to them, ‘never stew on a problem, always come in’. (S1.S1)</i></p> <p><i>“Well we try really, really hard as a school to encourage parents to participate in their children’s education...we’re constantly looking for ways that we can engage parents and get them involved.”(S3.S1)</i></p>
	Effective Communication	<p><i>“Erm...but we tend to do an awful lot by phone or face-to-face really ‘cause parents are more comfortable that way. I think if they can see you, they know whether you’re being honest or not.” (S2.S2)</i></p> <p><i>“We go out onto the playground and again we can catch parents and speak to them then and they again feel very, sort of, welcome to come in and speak to us.” (S2.S4)</i></p>
	Supportive Parents	<p><i>“We had some Polish parents who came and shared a whole feast of Polish food that all the school... You know they came and they asked ‘could we do it’ and they kind of approached school in just the right way for it and it was wonderful. And they cooked enough food for all the children to have a taste which was lovely!” (S3.S1)</i></p> <p><i>“We’ve got parent helpers who come on trips and like help with swimming erm... We’ve got a few people who will come in and just hear the children read, or if you’ve got a particular thing like if you know you’re going to do some sewing and you could so with a couple of extra adults in the room there’s a few parents around that you know you can give them a quick ring...they’ll come in.” (S2.S1)</i></p>

Home and School as Separate	Lack of Parental Support	<p><i>“We go on and on about ‘you need to read at home’, ‘you need to learn your spellings’, ‘you need to practice you tables’, and I think some parents just think we’re just saying it to be awkward! I think with some people, they’re just not that bothered, they don’t see school as actually that important. If they didn’t necessarily get on well at school, erm but they’ve done okay as an adult, they don’t see why it’s a problem for their child.” (S2.S1)</i></p> <p><i>“Parents not turning up to meetings, it is a big, big problem that we’ve had.” (S2.S1)</i></p>
	Barriers Between Home and School	<p><i>“They seem to think teachers are of a different league (laughs) and they’re not. Yeah and they’re sort of a little bit scared of what they think of them. And I know as a school we try and break that down.” (S2.S2)</i></p> <p><i>“I think a lot of the parents are very busy, a lot of them have got more than one job and things like that again, particularly for the EAL children, working shifts, unsociable hours, younger children to try and look after at the same time.” (S2.S4)</i></p>

Appendix 6 – 6f) Thematic Analysis: Illustrative examples – Parents

Theme	Illustrative example	
<p>Home and school working together</p>	<p>Effective communication</p>	<p><i>“I do like the parent mail because you know that way you’ve been informed personally and you know you’re going to get it, so that’s good. Emails, texts...reminders, which again I think is good because as a working mum it’s hard to remember those dates and times.” (S1.P2)</i></p> <p><i>“We get comments on the school report that they ‘clearly read at home and that’s a good thing and thank you for your enthusiasm and help in this area’.” (S2.P1)</i></p>
	<p>Supportive Parents</p>	<p><i>“We’ve done a lot of fundraising and things. Obviously because of my job (florist) I contributed a lot towards school at fairs, well we’ve done the Rose Fairs and things like that. We’ve contributed financially as well, out of my own pocket, you put hours in to, kind of, raise funds for the school.” (S1.P2)</i></p> <p><i>“Because not only can you get support from the school, you get it from other parents as well who’ve probably been through the same thing.” (S1.P1)</i></p>
	<p>Parents Involved</p>	<p><i>“Well, like the computer day, we’ve had gardening days in the past. It’s mainly to get the parents round, inviting everybody in, bringing your spades and bringing your shovels and all work together and we had a really fun time.” (S2.P1)</i></p> <p><i>“They have sessions where you come in and do a Literacy session or a Numeracy session with them. Or they have a session where they’ll show you</i></p>

		<p><i>the work that they've been doing. You know, it's really nice to come in and see what they're doing." (S3.P1)</i></p>
<p>Barriers to parental involvement</p>	<p>Lack of parental support</p>	<p><i>"I think for parents, they drop them at school and that's as far as it goes – they're at school and they don't have any other involvement." (S3.P1)</i></p> <p><i>"You've got a broad spectrum of backgrounds – you've got working mums that haven't got time to go into the school, then you've got the mums that are not bothered, they've probably got five or six kids and they're pleased to get rid of them." (S1.P3)</i></p>
	<p>Need to adapt to suit parental needs</p>	<p><i>"Yeah, I do, especially the education bits because a lot of us parents were taught different ways in maths and spelling, because we didn't have phonics. We were like, 2 add 2, but we had them in the long lines not the columns like they do now. So I can do it the same way. It's all different now, I was taught 'ay, bee, sea' and they are taught 'a b c'." (S1.P1)</i></p> <p><i>"I think sometimes you need, like you say, asking people's opinions to find out whether there's a better way of doing it or if the way you do it is the correct way of doing it. It's important I do think it is important. I do feel sometimes we're disregarded or it's easy to blame the parents but sometimes I don't feel there is enough communication." (S1.P2)</i></p>

Appendix 7 – 7a) Resources: Group Session Brief

Home-School Relationship Research – School Staff

Dear Staff,

Thank you again to all those who took part in the home-school relationship research through questionnaires and interviews. The responses were fantastic and have provided many valuable insights into the views and experiences of both school staff and parents around home-school communication and engagement, the strengths and needs of parents in the local community and ways to develop and improve current home-school practices in the future. After collating and analysing the results over the summer, I am currently writing up the research paper and will be feeding back the findings to each school in the coming months.

Following on from this initial research, I am keen to use these findings to support schools in continuing to develop positive home-school relationships to support children's learning and development. I would like to offer a series of group education and supervision sessions aimed at supporting the professional development of school staff. The sessions will provide information around home-school relationships (including feedback from the initial research and psychological theories, models and practices of parental involvement) along with opportunities to share and discuss experiences of working with families to support children's learning. An initial view of the running of the sessions would involve a small group (approx. 4-5 staff, facilitated by myself) attending 4-6 sessions running between November 2012 and February 2013, for 1-1½ hours each (this may be best after school). However, the frequency, timings and content of sessions can be adapted to suit the needs of those staff taking part to ensure they are of interest, relevance and value to those involved.

Supervision is an integral part of many professions aimed at providing a supportive environment with dedicated time and space to share and reflect on experiences in professional practice, develop understanding and problem solve to work towards positive outcomes. Throughout my Educational Psychology training I have personally found supervision an essential part of my development, both personally and professionally, and feel it would be a fantastic opportunity, exciting and beneficial for school staff to experience for themselves.

If you feel you would be interested and able to take part in these group supervision sessions, or have any queries regarding the sessions, please feel free to contact me via email or telephone (details below) by week beginning 5th November.

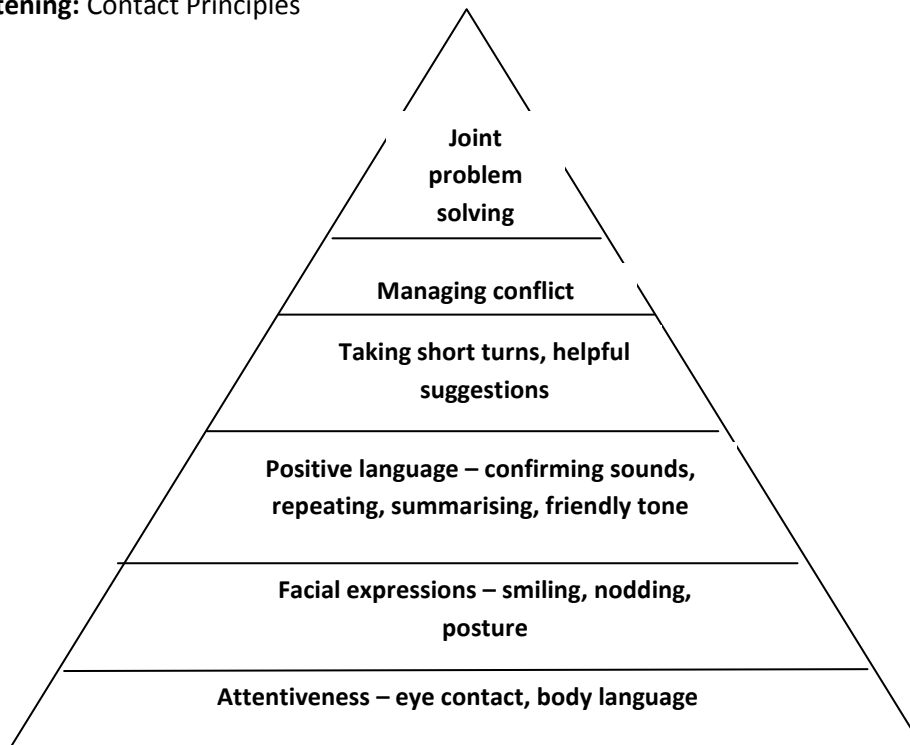
Yours sincerely,

Suzy Bevington (Doctoral Trainee Educational, Child and Community Psychologist)

Appendix 7 – 7b) Resources: Education Session Handout – Example

Education Session One – Building on the Structured Conversation Handout

Active Listening: Contact Principles



Best Hopes:

- ‘What are your best hopes for this discussion?’
- ‘How would this conversation be most helpful for you?’
- ‘How will you know that it was useful coming here today?’
- ‘What will it take for you to say that this has been worthwhile?’
- ‘If this discussion is helpful, what will be different?’

Questioning techniques:

- Circular – digging deeper: ‘who, what, where, when, why?’
- Time – ‘has this happened before?’ ‘Why now?’
- Perceptual – ‘who sees this as a problem?’
- Ordering – ‘who is most concerned/least concerned?’
- Triadic – ‘what would ... (others) say if they were here?’
- Future/Hypothetical – ‘can you imagine a time when ... is no longer an issue?’ ‘if ... (the issue) was better, what would it be like?’
- **What else?**
- **Tell me about...**

Reflection techniques: (must check back!)

- **Parroting** – repeating exact words/phrases – demonstrate listening – ‘So you say it’s ‘hard’?’

- **Rewording/paraphrasing** – ‘so it’s quite challenging...would you say?’ ‘Could it perhaps be...?’
- **Summarising** – ‘We have talked about...’, ‘Can I check I’ve understood everything so far...’, ‘Am I right in thinking...?’
- **Framing** – **‘walking around the problem’** – ‘Why might they be behaving in that way?’, ‘What might they be feeling?’, ‘If I were in their shoes...?’
- **Reflecting meaning/feeling:**
 - ‘What I’m hearing is...’
 - ‘What has been the effect of the issue on you?’
 - ‘Are there others problems that you are facing that have been affecting the way you are feeling about this issue?’
 - ‘How does that make you feel?’
 - ‘It sounds like /perhaps you’re feeling/I get the sense that ...?’
- **‘I wonder if...?’**

Scaling:



0

10

-
- ‘How are things on a scale of 0 to 10?’
 - ‘Why 5 out of 10?’
 - ‘Why not a 4?’ / ‘Why not a 6?’
 - ‘Have things been higher/lower in the past?’ ‘What helped then?’
 - ‘Where would you like things to be?’ ‘What would be ‘good enough?’
 - ‘What would that look like?’ / ‘How would you know?’
 - ‘What would one step up be like?’ ‘What about one more step up?’
 - ‘What would help to get there?’ ‘What would hinder getting there?’

Exception Finding:

- ‘What...*all* the time?’
- ‘When does it not happen/happen less?’
- ‘When does it seem less intense?’
- ‘When are the times when it bothers you less?’
- ‘Tell me about those times...’ ‘What, where, when, who, how?’
- ‘What helps contribute to the difference?’
- **There is always an exception.**

Miracle Question:

- ‘Imagine that a miracle happened tonight and tomorrow this problem wasn’t here.’ ‘What would be the first thing that you’d notice?’
- ‘What would it be like?’ ‘How would you feel?’
- ‘What would other people notice?’

Coping questions:

- ‘How have you been getting through?’ ‘What has helped you to keep going?’
- ‘What do you think ... (others) admire about the way you have dealt with this?’

Practice, practice, practice!

6 Stage Model of Reflection (Gibbs, 1988)

Stage 1 – Description of the event

Look at the context of the situation who what why when and where and how you and others were involved and what was the outcome

Stage 2 – Thoughts and Feelings

Try and remember how you felt at the time and how these emotions affected the outcome, how did others make you feel and how do you feel now ?

Stage 3 – Evaluate

Weigh up what was good and what was bad about the experience and outcome.

Stage 4 – Analysis

Separate the outcomes into individual sections so you can critically review and ask more detailed questions about the event what you did and how others contributed to the outcome

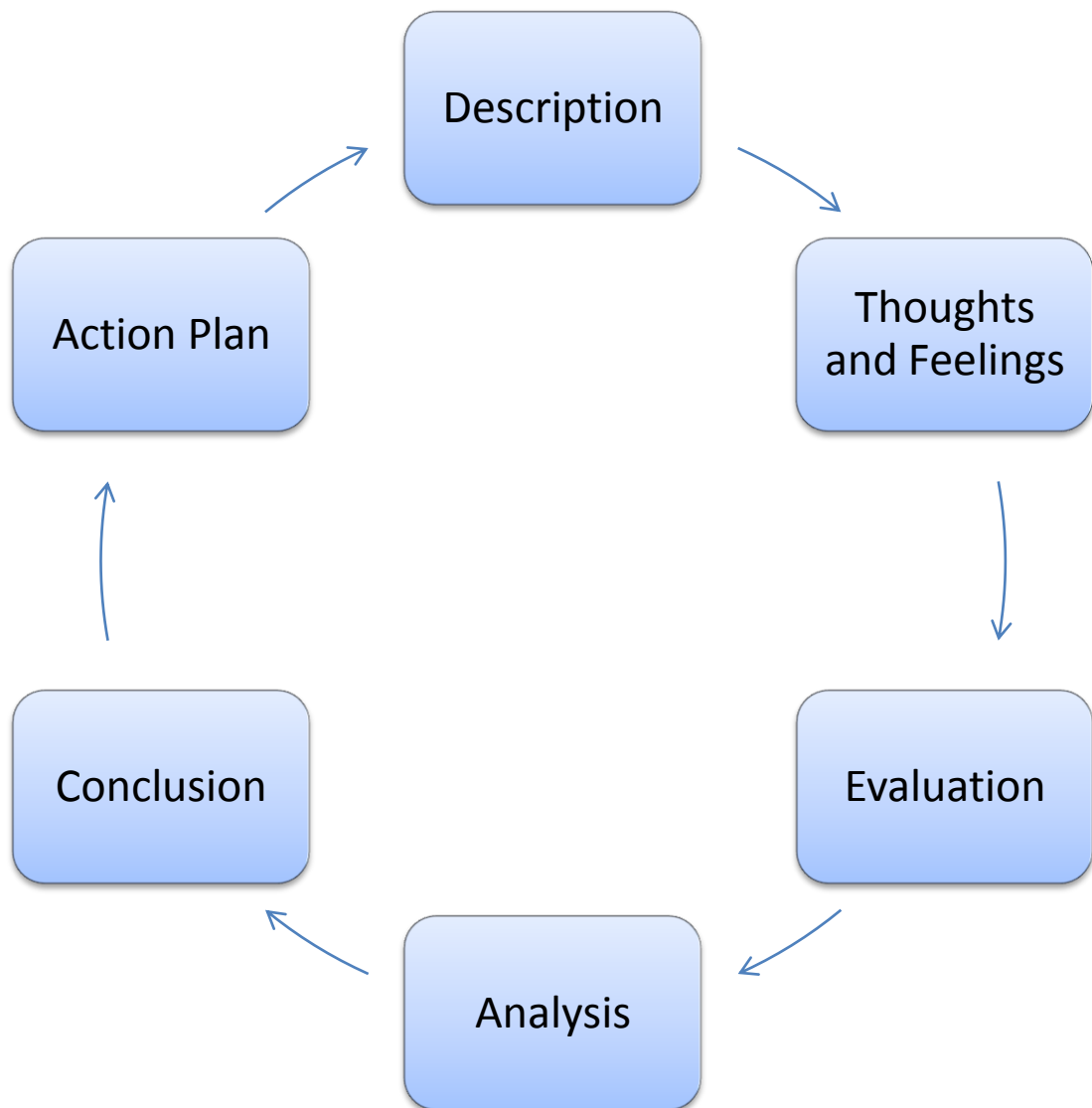
Stage 5 – Conclusion (synthesis)

This stage allows you to take into consideration all the ingredients that have affected the event and also allow you take a step back and view the situation from an honest and objective stance.

Stage 6 – Action plan

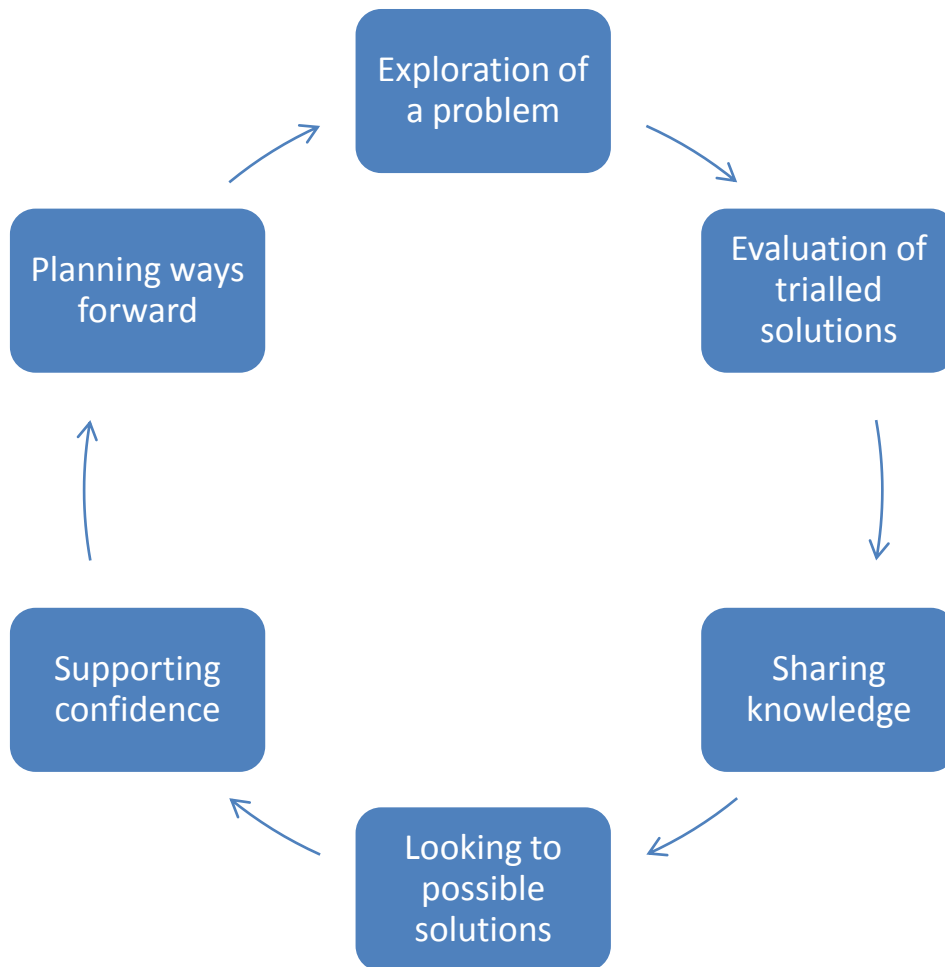
If you are going to go through this situation again how will you plan differently and what will you do the same, and in so doing you will complete the initial cycle and start a new one.

6 Stage Model of Reflection (Gibbs, 1988)

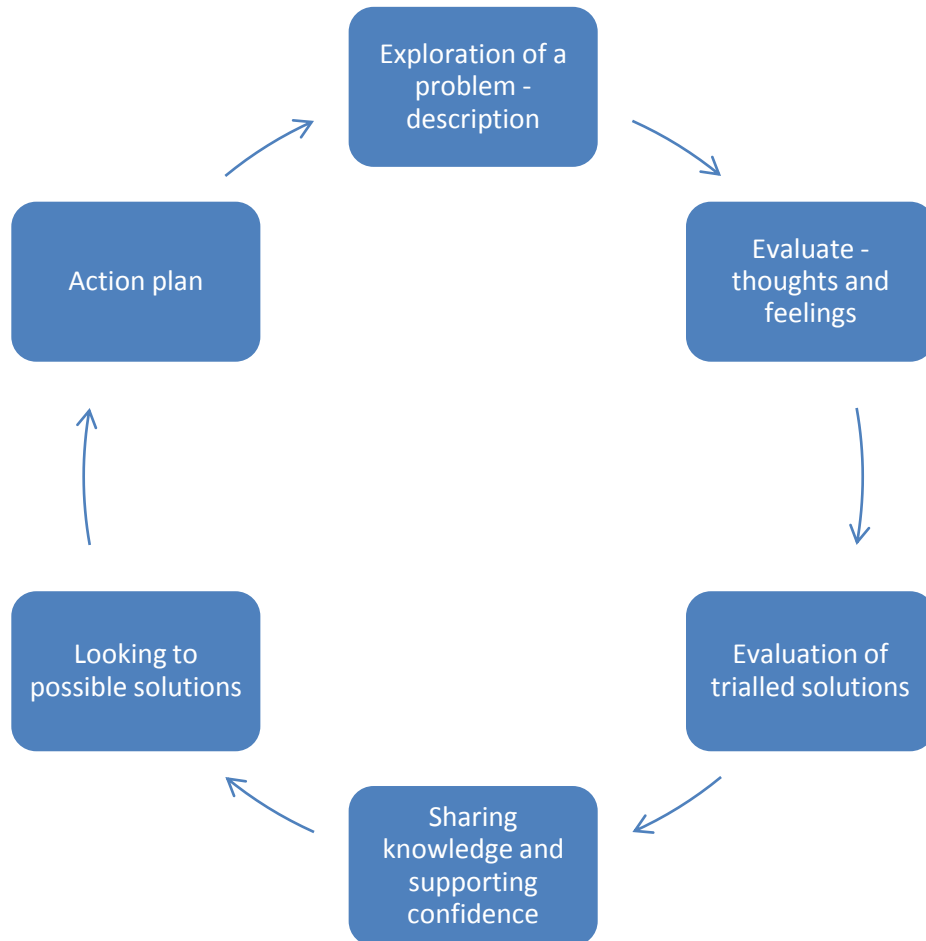


- **Description** – what happened during this experience?
- **Thoughts and Feelings** – what were you thinking and feeling during this experience?
- **Evaluation** – what was good and not so good about this experience?
- **Analysis** – what sense can you make of this experience?
- **Conclusion** – what else could you have done in this experience?
- **Action Plan** – if a similar experience arose again, what would you do?

Appendix 7 – 7d) Resources: Hanko (1999) Model of Group Problem-Solving



Appendix 7 – 7e) Resources: Adapted Model of Group Reflection/Problem-Solving



Appendix 8 – 8a) Measures: Pre-Questionnaire

Staff Development Session Pre-Questionnaire

This short pre-questionnaire is designed to gather your views around your current level of knowledge and skills around home-school relationships and ways to further develop your understanding and practice.

Please give yourself a score for the following statements (*1 = not at all, 5 = very much so*)

1) I have positive home-school relationships with pupils' parents/carers

1 2 3 4 5

2) I am knowledgeable about effective ways of communicating and engaging with parents/carers

1 2 3 4 5

3) I am confident in my ability to effectively communicate and engage parents/carers

1 2 3 4 5

4) I am aware of the psychology influencing home-school relationships

1 2 3 4 5

5) I feel staff are supportive towards each other in school

1 2 3 4 5

6) I am aware of effective ways to share and explore issues or concerns with other staff and reach positive outcomes

1 2 3 4 5

7) I am reflective in my practice

1 2 3 4 5

8) I am aware of how the school Educational Psychologist can support staff in developing their knowledge, skills and confidence

1 2 3 4 5

9) What do you hope to gain from these group education/supervision sessions?

.....
.....
.....
.....

Thank You

Appendix 8 – 8b) Measures: Post- Questionnaire

Staff Development Session Post-Questionnaire

This short post-questionnaire is designed to gather your views around your current level of knowledge and skills around home-school relationships and ways to further develop your understanding and practice following the group education/supervision sessions.

Please give yourself a score for the following statements (1 = not at all, 5 = very much so)

1) I have positive home-school relationships with pupils' parents/carers

1 2 3 4 5

2) I am knowledgeable about effective ways of communicating and engaging with parents/carers

1 2 3 4 5

3) I am confident in my ability to effectively communicate and engage parents/carers

1 2 3 4 5

4) I am aware of the psychology influencing home-school relationships

1 2 3 4 5

5) I feel staff are supportive towards each other in school

1 2 3 4 5

6) I am aware of effective ways to share and explore issues or concerns with other staff and reach positive outcomes

1 2 3 4 5

7) I am reflective in my practice

1 2 3 4 5

8) I am aware of how the school Educational Psychologist can support staff in developing their knowledge, skills and confidence

1 2 3 4 5

9) What do you feel you have gained from these group education/supervision sessions?

.....
.....
.....
.....**P.T.O.**

10) What were the most positive aspects of the group education/supervision sessions?

.....
.....
.....
.....

11) What were the least positive aspects of the group education/supervision sessions?

.....
.....
.....
.....

12) Overall, how valuable have these group education/supervision sessions been for you?

1 2 3 4 5

13) Would you like these sessions to continue?

Yes No Not Sure

Any other comments?

.....
.....
.....
.....

Thank You

Appendix 8 – 8c) Measures: TME (Dunsmuir et al. 2009)

TME (Target, Monitor, Evaluate; Dunsmuir, et al., 2009) is an approach to measuring outcomes through target setting and evaluation. TME involves the setting of specific and measurable targets and collates baseline, expected and achieved ratings to provide target-oriented feedback. TME was selected as an appropriate measure for the current study as it provides a robust tool to evaluate the effectiveness of the education sessions against the two specific aims: to develop school staff knowledge and confidence. At the start of each education session participants were asked to provide ‘baseline’ (current level) and ‘expected’ ratings; and an ‘achieved’ rating after each session. The baseline and achieved ratings were collated and analysed to evaluate the effectiveness of the sessions. (See an example TME sheet for the first education session below).

Education Session Evaluation

Please circle and mark B (Baseline) to indicate your current level, circle and mark E (Expected) at the level you expect to be at the end of the session. At the end of the session please circle and mark A (Achieved) to indicate the level you have achieved during the session.



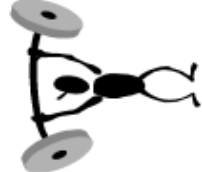

Target 1: To increase knowledge of approaches and techniques to explore issues in discussions with parents/carers										
Rating:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
(1 = low, 10 = high)										
Descriptor of baseline level:										
Descriptor of level achieved:										

Target 2: To increase confidence in using approaches and techniques to explore issues in discussions with parents/carers										
Rating:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
(1 = low, 10 = high)										
Descriptor of baseline level:										
Descriptor of level achieved:										

Factors that enabled progress from baseline?	Factors that prevented progress from baseline?

Appendix 8 – 8d) Measures: SWOT Analysis

Supervision Session Evaluation

<p>Weaknesses:</p>  A stick figure is shown from behind, bent over and struggling to lift a barbell. The figure's head is tilted back, and there are radiating lines around the head, suggesting strain or difficulty.	<p>Threats:</p>  A cartoon-style bomb with a lit fuse. The fuse is lit with a bright yellow flame, and there are small orange and yellow sparks or smoke coming from the tip.
<p>Strengths:</p>  A stick figure is shown from behind, standing upright and lifting a barbell. The figure's arms are extended upwards, and the barbell is held above their head.	<p>Opportunities:</p>  A stick figure is shown in profile, running quickly. They are carrying a briefcase in their right hand. There are several glowing yellow and orange spots around the figure, suggesting speed or energy.

Appendix 9 – 9a) Results: TME Raw Data Education Session One – Example

	Knowledge 1	Knowledge 2	Knowledge Progress	Confidence 1	Confidence 2	Confidence Progress
	6	8	2	6	8	2
	3	8	5	3	8	5
	5	7	2	5	7	2
	5	8	3	6	8	2
	2	7	5	2	7	5
	4	6	2	1	1	0
	7	8	1	8	8	0
	7	8	1	7	8	1
	5	7	2	4	6	2
	4	6	2	4	6	2
	5	7	2	5	7	2
	7	8	1	7	8	1
	4	6	2	5	6	1
	5	7	2	5	7	2
	7	8	1	7	8	1
	8	9	1	8	9	1
	3	8	5	4	8	4
	3	6	4	3	6	3
	3	6	4	4	7	3
Mean	4.89	7.26	2.47	4.95	7.00	2.05
Median	5	7	2	5	7	2
Mode	5	8	2	5	8	2
SD	1.73	0.93	1.43	1.96	1.70	1.43
Min	2	6	1	1	1	0
Max	8	9	5	8	9	5

Appendix 9 – 9b) Results: TME Raw Data Education Session One – Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Example

Hypothesis Test Summary

	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
1	The median of differences between Knowledge_1 and Knowledge_2 equals 0.	Related-Samples Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test	.000	Reject the null hypothesis.

Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .05.

Hypothesis Test Summary

	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
1	The median of differences between Confidence_1 and Confidence_2 equals 0.	Related-Samples Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test	.000	Reject the null hypothesis.

Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .05.

Appendix 9 – 9c) Results: SWOT Responses

SWOT analysis – Group Supervision/Reflection Sessions

Strengths:

- Moves you forward
- Shows value for others
- Allows time for reflection following issues, calm, rationale perspective
- Joint problem solving
- Sharing issues

Weaknesses:

- Time constraints – when to fit it in
- Restrictions
- Availability

Opportunities:

- Cathartic
- Small group / larger group

Threats:

- Too easy to go home and not share issues

Appendix 9 – 9d) Results: Factors that Enable/Prevent Progress Responses

Factors that enabled progress from the baseline?
Types of questions that enable more participation (from parents)
Looking for little steps of progress
Actually realised I was doing some of these things without realising! Will definitely use the scaling technique and spend longer allowing child to tell me how they're feeling
Realised that I do a lot of these things
Thinking about techniques that we may have known about but forgotten about
Brisk pace and informal style of delivery really helped
Clear, simple tips and techniques
Good handout to keep by when holding structured conversation
Have been given some really good ideas, particularly for more difficult conversations, to make parents feel more comfortable
Good ideas
Useful to hear things again that I've done before but not for a while
Good ideas that are simple, clear and I can use from tomorrow
Hand outs with different open questions I could use with a parent
Techniques: scaling, exception finding, miracle question
Good to feel that we could cope with this pace – you weren't teaching granny to suck eggs. Thank you
Using the scales and miracle question and coping questions – not used them in conversations – a good way forward
Importance of good listening to parents, gauging conversations and letting parents talk
More information
Really helpful! Many of these things we do instinctively, but this is great list of ideas for those 'tricky' situations where emotions are running high or you feel like the conversation is going round and round in circles! Some ideas I have never come across before
Questions/examples to use as point to start from
Practical examples relevant to our position
Helped focus on previous skills and added to them
Sheet with info to take home to remind for use with parents

Factors that prevented progress from the baseline?
Would have found <i>[preferred]</i> coverage in greater depth for developing relationships with reluctant or uncooperative parents.
Not having time to try techniques to develop confidence
Time for reflection and exploration of own styles
Will need practice

Appendix 9 – 9e) Results: Q9 – Pre-/Post-Questionnaire Qualitative Responses

Pre-Questionnaire

Q9. What do you hope to gain from these group education/supervision sessions?
To learn more about different approaches to dealing with parents
To become more confident at communicating with parents/carers
I want to find out more about the psychology influencing home-school relationships
Reassurance and ideas
To develop my skills in communicating effectively with parents – especially those not always willing to communicate
New ideas and reinforcement of areas I feel quite confident in
Strategies to help me approach parents whose children have behavioural problems
Greater awareness of psychology influencing home-school and how EPs can support me in developing my knowledge, skills and confidence further
Strategies to engage parents who have difficulty accepting their child has behavioural problems in school
A better understanding of home-school relationships and new ideas of how to engage 'hard-to-reach' parents
Deeper understanding of effective ways to communicate with parents
An insight into ways to improve practice and communicate more effectively

Post Questionnaire

Q9. What do you feel you have gained from these group education/supervision sessions?
I find the principles and practice cathartic
Seeing how the sessions work
Time to reflect, share good practice
Confidence in discussing with colleagues on other matters
How to become more reflective with different experiences
That everyone is having experiences that they sometimes need help with
Having reflective time to think about communication with parents
Knowledge of processes involved and importance of each stage
Sharing experiences and supporting each other
Further understanding of theories and looking at different perspectives

Appendix 9 – 9f) Results: Q10 & Q11 Post-Questionnaire Qualitative Responses

Q10. What were the most positive aspects of the group education/supervision sessions?

Honesty and feeling we could share without being judged

Sharing good practice

Time to share and discuss issues

Support of/for colleagues

Sharing experiences

A problem shared helps to find a positive resolution and that it feels like a 'shared' responsibility

Hearing the views of others

Acceptance of issues – important and no issue can be too small

Listening and sharing experiences

Talking to each other and exploring ways to develop relationships

Q11. What were the least positive aspects of the group education/supervision sessions?

Time!

When you haven't found a satisfying resolution

Initial reluctance to talk but this will improve as process becomes more embedded into practice

Appendix 10 – 10a) – Certificate of Ethical Approval



**STUDENT HIGHER-LEVEL
RESEARCH**

Graduate School of Education

Certificate of ethical research approval

DISSERTATION/THESIS

To activate this certificate you need to first sign it yourself, and then have it signed by your supervisor and finally by the Chair of the School's Ethics Committee.

For further information on ethical educational research access the guidelines on the BERA web site: <http://www.bera.ac.uk/publications/guidelines/> and view the School's statement on the GSE student access on-line documents.

READ THIS FORM CAREFULLY AND THEN COMPLETE IT ON YOUR COMPUTER (the form will expand to contain the text you enter). **DO NOT COMPLETE BY HAND**

Your name: Suzanne Bevington

Your student no: 600035759

Return address for this certificate: 306, Columbine Road, Ely, Cambridgeshire, CB6 3WR

Degree/Programme of Study: DEdPsych Professional Training in Educational Psychology

Project Supervisor(s): Tim Maxwell & Karen Harris

Your email address: sb463@exeter.ac.uk

Tel: 07725833698

I hereby certify that I will abide by the details given overleaf and that I undertake in my thesis to respect the dignity and privacy of those participating in this research.

I confirm that if my research should change radically, I will complete a further form.

Signed: *S. Bevington*

Date: 13-02-2012

NB For Masters dissertations, which are marked blind, this first page must not be included in your work. It can be kept for your records.

Certificate of ethical research approval

Your student no: 600035759

Title of your project:

A Community Psychology approach to exploring home-school relationships and developing parental support.

Brief description of your research project:

This research explores relationships between schools and parents/carers and ways in which schools can offer parental support for children's learning and development. This research is guided by a Community Psychology (CP) approach to exploring home and school systems within a community and focuses on developing a rich knowledge and understanding of the strengths, needs, hopes and expectations of these systems for children's education. It looks towards exploring ways for schools to work in partnership with parents/carers in order to provide support that is tailored to needs of the community and enables parents/carers to develop knowledge and skills, build confidence and self-efficacy and empower them to actively support the learning and development of their children.

The research is divided into two papers. The first paper is a piece of illuminative Community Psychology research aimed at exploring the views of parents/carers, school staff and children and young people in a community on the needs of parents/carers for supporting children's learning and development. This second paper is a piece of participatory action research that will involve the development and delivery of a range of in-school parental support sessions (comprising of half education/workshop and half time for discussion/group problem solving) and review the effectiveness of these sessions for developing positive home-schools relationships and building parental skills and confidence.

Give details of the participants in this research (giving ages of any children and/or young people involved):

Paper 1:

- Survey
 - Pilot – 5 parents/carers, 5 school staff
 - 30 school staff (from 2 primary schools)
 - 100 parents/carers (from 2 primary schools)
- Focus groups
 - 20 children and young people (5 Year 3 students (ages 7-8), 5 Year 6 students (ages 10-11) from each of the two primary schools)
- Interviews
 - 5 parents/carers, 5 school staff

Paper 2:

- Support sessions
 - 10-20 parents/carers and school staff per session
- Interviews
 - 5 parents/carers

Give details (with special reference to any children or those with special needs) regarding the ethical issues of:

- a) **informed consent**: Where children in schools are involved this includes both headteachers and parents). Copy(ies) of your consent form(s) you will be using must accompany this document.

It will be essential to obtain informed consent from all participants in this research. Consent will be gained in the following ways:

- Survey
 - At the top of every survey, written brief to be read by/read to all involved in survey. Brief will explain the research, the aims, purposes and future uses of information gathered through the surveys and details of the right of each participant to withdraw at any time. Survey not to be completed unless participants consent to do so.
 - Option to 'opt in' to take part in interviews at end of survey.
- Focus groups
 - Letter of consent to be given to the parents/carers and head teachers of children and young people involved in the focus groups – signed consent from to be obtained before students can take part in the focus groups.
 - Letter of consent to be given to the children and young people involved in the focus groups – signed consent from to be obtained before students can take part in the focus groups.
- Interviews
 - Consent form with brief to be read by/read to all involved in interviews and to be signed by participants to ensure informed consent gained before interviews conducted.

Records of when, how and from whom consent was obtained will be recorded. As stated above, children and young people involved in the focus groups in Paper 1 will also be invited to participate in the consent process. Participants will also be made aware of how the research findings will be used. Participants will be reminded that they have the right to withdraw from the research at any given time.

a) **anonymity and confidentiality**

It will be essential that every effort is made to ensure the protection and safety of all participants and for all information gathered through this research is anonymised and remains confidential. This will be achieved in the following ways:

Paper 1:

- Survey
 - Anonymous – no names on surveys.
- Focus groups
 - Begin groups with brief, discuss ground rules for group (i.e. respect for other's opinions) and highlight confidentiality of contents of discussion and finish with debrief.
- Interviews
 - Pseudonyms used for interview transcripts and reporting of data.

Paper 2:

- Support sessions
 - Begin discussions part of sessions with brief, discuss ground rules for group (i.e. respect for other's opinions) and highlight confidentiality of contents of discussion and finish with debrief .

- Interviews
 - Pseudonyms used for interview transcripts and reporting of data.

All information will be coded to ensure anonymity. No individual participant will be identifiable except to the researcher. This will remain anonymous in the write up of the research and pseudonyms will be used. All data will be held only by the researcher and personal details will be destroyed once the data has been analysed and conclusion drawn. Collected written information will be shredded and destroyed. Any audio recording will also be disposed of digitally. Details of how data will be securely stored to support anonymity and confidentiality are described in the corresponding section below.

Give details of the methods to be used for data collection and analysis and how you would ensure they do not cause any harm, detriment or unreasonable stress:

Paper 1:

- Survey
 - Pilot of survey to ensure all questions suitable and appropriate.
 - Option to 'opt in' to take part in interviews at end of survey.
- Focus groups
 - Begin groups with brief, discuss ground rules for group (i.e. respect for other's opinions) and highlight confidentiality of contents of discussion and finish with debrief.
 - Interviewer to make participants feel comfortable and at ease during the focus groups e.g. begin with problem free talk.
 - A Dictaphone will be used to record interviews, however, if participants feel uncomfortable with audio recordings they will be offered a choice of the interviewer making notes instead.
- Interviews
 - Participants will be provided with a full debrief and additional time to answer any of questions or concerns.

- Interviewer to make participants feel comfortable and at ease during the interviews e.g. begin with problem free talk.
- Sensitive questioning – interviewer to be aware of participant’s response to the process and act accordingly e.g. if participant is displaying distress, interviewer to give participant option to opt out/continue. Interviewer will ensure the participants’ well-being at all times.
- A Dictaphone will be used to record interviews, however, if participants feel uncomfortable with audio recordings they will be offered a choice of the interviewer making notes instead.

Paper 2:

- Support sessions
 - Begin discussions part of sessions with brief, discuss ground rules for group (i.e. respect for other’s opinions) and highlight confidentiality of contents of discussion and finish with debrief .
 - Session facilitator to make participants feel comfortable and at ease during the discussion sessions e.g. begin with problem free talk.
 - Sensitive questioning – Session facilitator to be aware of participant’s response to the process and act accordingly e.g. if any participant is displaying distress, session facilitator to give participants option to opt out/continue. Session facilitator will ensure the well-being of participants at all times.

Give details of any other ethical issues which may arise from this project (e.g. secure storage of videos/recorded interviews/photos/completed questionnaires or special arrangements made for participants with special needs etc.):

It will be important to store all data securely as it may contain personal details of participants, such as names. Records of the data collected (including transcripts and any audio recordings) will be stored in a secure and safe place. Electronic information will only be accessed by the researcher with their username and password. This information will be stored on a secure system with recognised virus protection. Electronic and paper information will be locked in a secure building.

Give details of any exceptional factors, which may raise ethical issues (e.g. potential political or ideological conflicts which may pose danger or harm to participants):

Due to the nature of Paper 2 as a participatory action research project involving close and open communication amongst the people involved, the development of the programme must remain visible and open to suggestions from others. The researcher must be explicit about the nature of the research process from the beginning, including all personal biases and interests and opportunities for involvement of all participants must be maximised.

This form should now be printed out, signed by you on the first page and sent to your supervisor to sign. Your supervisor will forward this document to the School's **Research Support Office for the Chair of the School's Ethics Committee to countersign. A unique approval reference will be added and this certificate will be returned to you to be included at the back of your dissertation/thesis.**

N.B. You should not start the fieldwork part of the project until you have the signature of your supervisor

This project has been approved for the period: Jan 2012 **until:** Jan 2014
By (above mentioned supervisor's signature): *[Signature]* **date:** 24 Feb 2012

N.B. To Supervisor: Please ensure that ethical issues are addressed annually in your report and if any changes in the research occur a further form is completed.

GSE unique approval reference: *[Handwritten: 2/11/12/41]*
Signed: *[Signature]* **date:** 13/03/2012
Chair of the School's Ethics Committee

This form is available from <http://education.exeter.ac.uk/students/>

Chair of the School's Ethics Committee
updated: April 2011

Appendix 10 – 10b) Consent Form – Focus Group (Head teacher)

Dear (*Headteacher*),

I am writing to request your permission for the following students
to be involved in a focus group at ... school on at This focus group will form part of my
doctoral research project that ... is currently involved with exploring the relationships
between schools and parents/carers in the ... area and aiming to find ways in which schools
can offer parental support for children’s learning and development. The aim of the focus
group is to gain the views of children and young people around home-school relationships
and ways in which these could be developed in the future. The focus group will be practical
involving drawings and discussion with students; it will last approximately 30 minutes and
will be facilitated by myself, Suzy Bevington, as a member of the ... Community Educational
Psychology Service. Any notes taken during the focus group will be securely stored by the
researcher and destroyed once the data has been analysed.

If you are happy for these students to be involved in the focus group, please sign the
consent slip below and return to Suzy Bevington.

Yours Sincerely,

Suzy Bevington

Doctoral Trainee Educational Psychologist

University of Exeter

CONSENT SLIP:

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the research project and
consent for the above students to participate.

I understand that:

- There is no compulsion for these students to participate in this research project
and, if I do choose for them to participate, I may, at any stage, withdraw their
participation.
- I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about
these students.
- Any information which these students give will be used solely for the purposes of
this research project, which may include publications.
- All information these students provide will be anonymised and treated as
confidential.
- The researcher will make every effort to preserve anonymity of participants.

.....
(Signature of Head Teacher)

.....
(Printed name)

.....
(Date)

Data Protection Act: The University of Exeter is a data collector and is registered with the Office of the Data
Protection Commissioner as required to do under the Data Protection Act 1998. The information you provide
will be used for research purposes and will be processed in accordance with the University’s registration and
current data protection legislation. Data will be confidential to the researcher(s) and will not be disclosed to any
unauthorised third parties without further agreement by the participant. Reports based on the data will be in
anonymised form.

Appendix 10 – 10c) Consent Form – Focus Group (Parent)

Dear Parent/Carer,

I am writing to request your permission for your son/daughter,, to be involved in a focus group at ... school on ... at This focus group will form part of a doctoral research project that ... is currently involved with exploring the relationships between schools and parents/carers in the ... area and aiming to find ways in which schools can offer parental support for children’s learning and development. The aim of the focus group is to gain the views of children and young people around home-school relationships and ways in which these could be developed in the future. The focus group will be practical involving drawings and discussion with students; it will last approximately 30 minutes and will be facilitated by Suzy Bevington, a member of the Community Educational Psychology Service. Any notes taken during the focus group will be securely stored by the researcher and destroyed once the data has been analysed.

If you are happy for son/daughter,, to be involved in the focus group, please sign the consent slip below and return to ... School.

Yours Sincerely,

Suzy Bevington

Doctoral Trainee Educational Psychologist

University of Exeter

CONSENT SLIP:

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the research project and consent for my son/daughter,, to participate.

I understand that:

- There is no compulsion for my son/daughter to participate in this research project and, if I do choose for them to participate, I / my son/daughter may, at any stage, withdraw their participation.
- I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about my son/daughter.
- Any information which my son/daughter gives will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications.
- All information my son/daughter gives will be anonymised and treated as confidential.
- The researcher will make every effort to preserve anonymity of participants.

.....

(Signature of parent/carers)

.....

(Printed name)

.....

(Date)

Data Protection Act: The University of Exeter is a data collector and is registered with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner as required to do under the Data Protection Act 1998. The information you provide will be used for research purposes and will be processed in accordance with the University’s registration and current data protection legislation. Data will be confidential to the researcher(s) and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties without further agreement by the participant. Reports based on the data will be in anonymised form.

Appendix 10 – 10d) Consent Form – Focus Group (Student)

Dear Student,

I am writing to request your permission to be involved in a focus group at ... school on ... at ... This focus group will form part of a doctoral research project exploring the relationships between schools and parents/carers in the ... area and aims to find ways in which schools can offer parental support for children’s learning and development. The aim of the focus group is to gain the views of children and young people around home-school relationships and ways in which these could be developed in the future. The focus group will last approximately 30 minutes and will be facilitated by a member of the Cambridgeshire Community Educational Psychology Service. The focus group will be recorded (with your consent); copies of the recordings and any transcriptions will be securely stored by the researcher and destroyed once the data has been analysed.

If you are happy to be involved in the focus group, please sign the consent slip below and return to ...

Yours Sincerely,

Suzy Bevington

Doctoral Trainee Educational Psychologist

University of Exeter

CONSENT SLIP:

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the research project and consent to participate.

I understand that:

- There is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to do so, I may, at any stage, withdraw my participation
- I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about me
- Any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications
- All information I give will be anonymised and treated as confidential
- The researcher will make every effort to preserve my anonymity

.....

(Signature of student)

(Printed name)

(Date)

Data Protection Act: The University of Exeter is a data collector and is registered with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner as required to do under the Data Protection Act 1998. The information you provide will be used for research purposes and will be processed in accordance with the University’s registration and current data protection legislation. Data will be confidential to the researcher(s) and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties without further agreement by the participant. Reports based on the data will be in anonymised form.

Appendix 10 – 10e) Consent Form – Interviews

Dear

Thank you for expressing an interest in being further involved in the research project through an interview. As you are aware, this interview will form part of my doctoral research project exploring the relationships between schools and parents/carers in the ... area and aims to find ways in which schools can offer parental support for children’s learning and development. The aim of the interview is to gain your views and experiences of home-school relationships and ways in which you feel these could be developed in the future. The interview will take place at
.....on at, lasting for approximately minutes and will be facilitated by myself, Suzy Bevington, as a member of the ... Community Educational Psychology Service. The interview will be recorded (with your consent); copies of the recordings and any transcriptions will be securely stored by the researcher and destroyed once the data has been analysed.

If you are happy to be involved in the interview, please sign the consent slip below.

Yours Sincerely,

Suzy Bevington

Doctoral Trainee Educational Psychologist

University of Exeter

CONSENT SLIP:

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the research project and consent to participate.

I understand that:

- There is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to do so, I may, at any stage, withdraw my participation.
- I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about me.
- Any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications.
- All information I give will be anonymised and treated as confidential.
- The researcher will make every effort to preserve my anonymity.

.....

(Signature of staff/parent)

(Printed name)

(Date)

Data Protection Act: The University of Exeter is a data collector and is registered with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner as required to do under the Data Protection Act 1998. The information you provide will be used for research purposes and will be processed in accordance with the University’s registration and current data protection legislation. Data will be confidential to the researcher(s) and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties without further agreement by the participant. Reports based on the data will be in anonymised form.

Appendix 10 – 10f) Ethical Considerations

Ethical guidelines provided by the British Psychological Society and the University of Exeter were followed for this research. Approval from the University of Exeter's ethics committee was obtained in March 2012. As a piece of Community Psychology research there are a number of specific ethical considerations which are discussed in more detail here.

Informed consent

At each stage of the study (questionnaires, focus group, interviews education/supervision sessions) participants were briefed about the aims and purpose of the research prior to their involvement and informed written consent was obtained from all participants (including head teachers and parents of children in the focus group) as detailed in the certificate of ethical approval. Records of when, how and from whom consent was obtained were recorded. Participants were made aware of their right to withdraw at any time during the study.

Confidentiality & Anonymity

Due to the nature of this study exploring personal views and experiences, confidentiality and anonymity of the data were important issues. All participants were assured of the anonymity and confidentiality of all information; questionnaires, interview transcripts and evaluation forms were anonymous, and all information was coded for the reporting of data. Issues of confidentiality were also discussed within the focus groups and education/supervision sessions brief and debrief. All data was securely stored with written information shredded and audio recordings disposed of digitally.

The Role of the Researcher

The role and influence of the researcher is always an important ethical consideration, particularly within the participatory action research approaches of Community Psychology. To support reliability and validity and ensure confidence within the findings, each stage of the research process was treated with rigour. The potential power imbalance within the interviews was acknowledged and reflections made regarding the researcher as a non-parent studying parents, therefore every effort was made to support a sense of equality between researcher and participant.

Social Ethics

Social Ethics in Community Psychology Research is an essential consideration. This piece of Community Psychology research explored individual 'lived' experiences, with a focus on parental and school staff strengths for supporting home-school relationships. This study ensured the active participation of school staff, parents and children to engage them as meaningful stakeholders and encourage 'working together' to support children's learning and development. Participants were viewed as 'resource collaborators' in creating knowledge and social change to empower and promote community competence and wellbeing.

Section 6 – Literature Review

This literature review has been marked and is not to form part of the thesis examination. It is included here for completeness.

Home-School Relationships and Parental Support for Children’s Learning and Development: A Role for the Community Educational Psychologist? A Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review supports two research papers. The first paper explores home-school relationships, the needs of parents in a local community and ways in which schools can support parents with children’s learning and development. The second paper explores a role for the Community Educational Psychologist in providing support tailored to the needs of parents and school staff in the local community in order to support children's learning and development. The inspiration for this research comes from my own professional interests and experience of home-school relationships and practice as a Community Educational Psychologist; this may be best illustrated through an example from practice.

Practice example: *During a shadowing opportunity with a colleague, I observed two separate meetings – one with a parent, one with a class teacher – regarding the same student. Both parties provided their own accounts of the current situation, each clearly dedicated to supporting this young boy and wanting the best for him in school, yet harbouring very different views on his level of need and the support he required. As an observer of the process, rather than a contributor to the meeting, my attention was drawn to the dynamics in this home-school relationship and the tensions that seemed to have arisen from a lack of understanding between the two systems. Both home and school appeared isolated from one another, unable to acknowledge the views of the other, and struggled to move forward.*

Witnessing this left me questioning – ‘why are there so often tensions between the home and school systems?’ and ‘how can these two systems better understand each other and work together more effectively?’ I also reflected on the traditional role of Educational Psychologists (EPs) working within the school system and wondered about the role for EPs

working outside of this, engaging in community working with parents and families. I found myself asking: 'Is there a role for EPs outside of the school system and within the community?', and, 'In what ways could a *Community Educational Psychologist* be involved in supporting the relationships between families and schools?' My first step in addressing these questions is to explore the existing theory, research, policy and practice in these areas – this is the aim of the current review.

For this review, literature was sourced through academic search engines (EBSCO, JSTOR, ScienceDirect and PsycARTICLES) to access relevant journals and articles along with library and personal books. A variety of search terms were used to follow 'home-school' including: 'relationship', 'partnership' and 'communication' and variations in search strings using 'community', 'parent', 'home' and 'school' were used to ensure a wide-ranging search of diverse sources.

This literature review will:

- Firstly, explore the roles and responsibilities of parents in education through government policy and legislation.
- Secondly, review the research and theory around parental involvement and educational outcomes and discuss approaches to engaging parents and developing family-school-community partnerships.
- Thirdly, define Community and Educational Psychology and discuss the role of Community Educational Psychologists in supporting home-school relationships.
- Fourthly, discuss the methodological orientations within this area of study.
- And lastly, describe the present research papers and their purpose in filling gaps within existing literature and advancing research in this area of study.

The term 'parent' is used throughout this review to indicate the main caregivers for children and young people.

1. Home-School Relationships

This section will explore the developing role and responsibilities of parents in their children's education. It aims to provide an overview of government policy and legislation, theory and research around parental involvement and children's achievement and adjustment and the factors that affect the engagement of parents, as well as practical approaches and considerations for developing home-school relationships.

1.1 Parental Rights and Responsibilities in Education

Historically, there has been disparity between perceptions of the home and school around parental involvement (Bastiani & Doyle, 1994), however, the role of parents in their children's education has evolved over the past half-century. The influential Plowden Report (CACE, 1967) called for significant increases in parental involvement in education and the need for schools to engage with parents, sparking a wave of government reports and legislation about parental involvement (Green paper (DES, 1984); Taylor report (DES, 1977); Education Reform Act, 1988). The Taylor committee report (DES, 1977) made recommendations to establish better home-school links and communication and also advocated the rights of parents to be involved in school decision-making boards, such as governing bodies. The steady increase in the recognised roles and responsibilities of parents continued into the mid-1980's as engaging parents in education became integrated as a standard of 'good practice' within the education system (Vincent, 1996).

Parental rights and participation in education continued to extend through Government reports, including the 1984 Green Paper (DES, 1984) and the introduction of grant-maintained schools and the National Curriculum in the Education Reform Act (1988).

During this time, it seems that parental involvement became more an 'entitlement' for

parents, particularly regarding choice of school. The Parents' Charter (DES, 1991; DfE, 1994) promoted a parent's 'right to know' introducing a statutory minimum for school communication with parents (including prospectus, reports and league tables). However, these minimums have been described as merely encouraging one-way communication from school to home and not supportive of the reciprocal home-school relationships that are desired (Bastiani & Doyle, 1994). The 1997 White paper, 'Excellence in Schools' (DfEE, 1997) drew together existing government education strategies and included a specific focus around the importance of working with parents. The paper described the need to increase parental access to information about schools and the curriculum, provide opportunities for parents to voice their views and concerns, and encouraged schools to work more in 'partnership' with parents.

New legislation continued to expand the rights of parents in education, including parental ability to appeal decisions regarding educational provision and placement (Education Act, 2002) and the need for the parental voice to be actively sought and acknowledged within the education system (Children's Act, 2004). Government reports and legislation have also addressed the rights of parents of children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) including: the SEN Code of Practice (DfES, 2001) – a set of guidance for those working with children with SEN which highlighted parental responsibilities and the need for home-school partnership; the Lamb Inquiry (DCSF, 2009b) which focused on increasing parental confidence in the SEN system; and the SEN Green Paper (DfE, 2011) which called for increased parental control in the education of children with SEN. More recent legislation, such as 'Every Child Matters' (DfES, 2004) and 'Every Parent Matters' (DfES, 2007) reflects a move towards the role of the government in supporting the welfare of children and parents, creating opportunities for parents to engage in their children's education and tailoring services to suit their needs.

The extent of government legislation and recommendations highlighted here demonstrate the significant changes that have occurred over the past 50 years surrounding parental rights and involvement in education and the shift in attitudes to ensure parental engagement is embedded within teaching practice. Such an intense and prolonged focus on parental rights and responsibilities from both political and social arenas has led to a wealth of theory and research exploring parental involvement in education, its impacts on children's learning and the development of effective ways to engage parents and develop positive home-school relationships. Key ideas and findings from this body of research are discussed below.

1.2 Parental Involvement and Educational Outcomes

Parents play a fundamental role in their children's lives, encouraging, guiding and shaping their overall development and the 'need' for parental involvement in education to enhance learning has often been advocated (Christenson, 2004; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Topping, 1986). A DCFS report by Peters, Seeds, Goldstein and Coleman (2008) indicated that parental perceptions of being 'very involved' in their children's education have increased over the past decade from 29% in 2001, to 38% in 2004 and 51% in 2007. Vincent (1996) describes a range of roles that parents can adopt in schools – 'supporter/learner' assisting in the classroom and with extra-curricular activities, 'consumer' reinforcing high school standards by actively choosing schools based on past performance, 'independent' having minimal involvement in school or 'participant' playing an active role in their own children's education and wider school issues such as school governance.

Traditional parental 'involvement' may include help with homework, attendance at parents' evenings, contact with school staff, and participation in school governance.

However, many other ways in which parents may engage with their children's education

are described, particularly within the home, including expressing interest in current learning topics, parent-child discussions (i.e. about the school day), encouragement and praise for school work, supporting learning at home and modelling educational values and high aspirations (Desforges & Abouchar, 2003; Mapp, 2003; Topping, 1986). Keith Topping, a prominent educational and social researcher, has long advocated the benefits of 'parents as educators' of their children at home and has carried out a wealth of research and reviews highlighting the positive impacts of parental involvement in children's education (for example, Topping, 1986; Wolfendale & Topping, 1996).

Commonly held assumptions around the positive influence of active parental involvement on children's educational outcomes do appear to be supported by a substantive body of research evidencing the specific benefits of such involvement on children's academic achievement and adjustment (See Desforges & Abouchar, 2003; and Henderson & Mapp, 2002 for a review). The benefits for academic achievement have been a prominent focus of many studies (Coleman, 1998; Epstein, 1991; Fan & Chen, 2001; Fehrmann, Keith, & Reimers, 1987) with some marking the influence of parental involvement on achievement as beneficial regardless of social background (Atkin, Bastiani, & Goode, 1988) and as having greater impact than schooling itself (Desforges & Abouchar, 2003). A meta-analysis of quantitative studies (Fan & Chen, 2001) indicated a meaningful relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement but with small to moderate effects. Fan and Chen questioned the empirical strength of some research claims and proposed that the prominent use of qualitative and non-empirical data in previous research may have misguided findings and led to exaggerated claims.

1.3 Theoretical Perspectives on Parental Involvement

Parental involvement in education has also been explored from a theoretical perspective, the most prominent theoretical models appear to be Epstein (2001) and Hoover-Dempsey

and Sandler (1995). Based on extensive research, Epstein (2001) developed a framework categorising six types of parental involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making and collaborating with the community (see Figure 1). This framework is widely used by other research and literature in the field and is often referred to as guidance for developing methods to engage parents within schools (Hiatt-Michael, 2001).

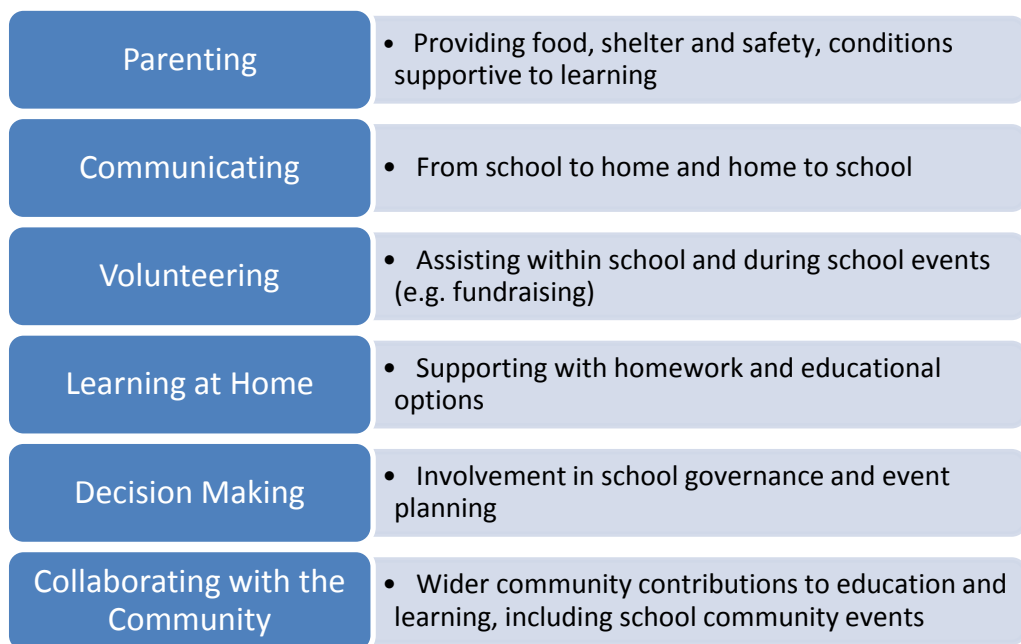


Figure 1. Epstein's 'Six Types of Involvement', adapted from Epstein (2001)

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995) comprehensive, five-level model describes factors influencing parental involvement, methods to engage parents and the impacts of involvement on children's educational outcomes (see Figure 2).

The model provides an in-depth exploration of the reasons why parents may or may not become involved with their children's education and highlight three influential factors. These include: personal construction of the 'parent' role – what the role of 'parent' means and what this entails, personal sense of efficacy – how able the parent feels to carry out this role, and parental responses to invitations – parental reactions when presented with

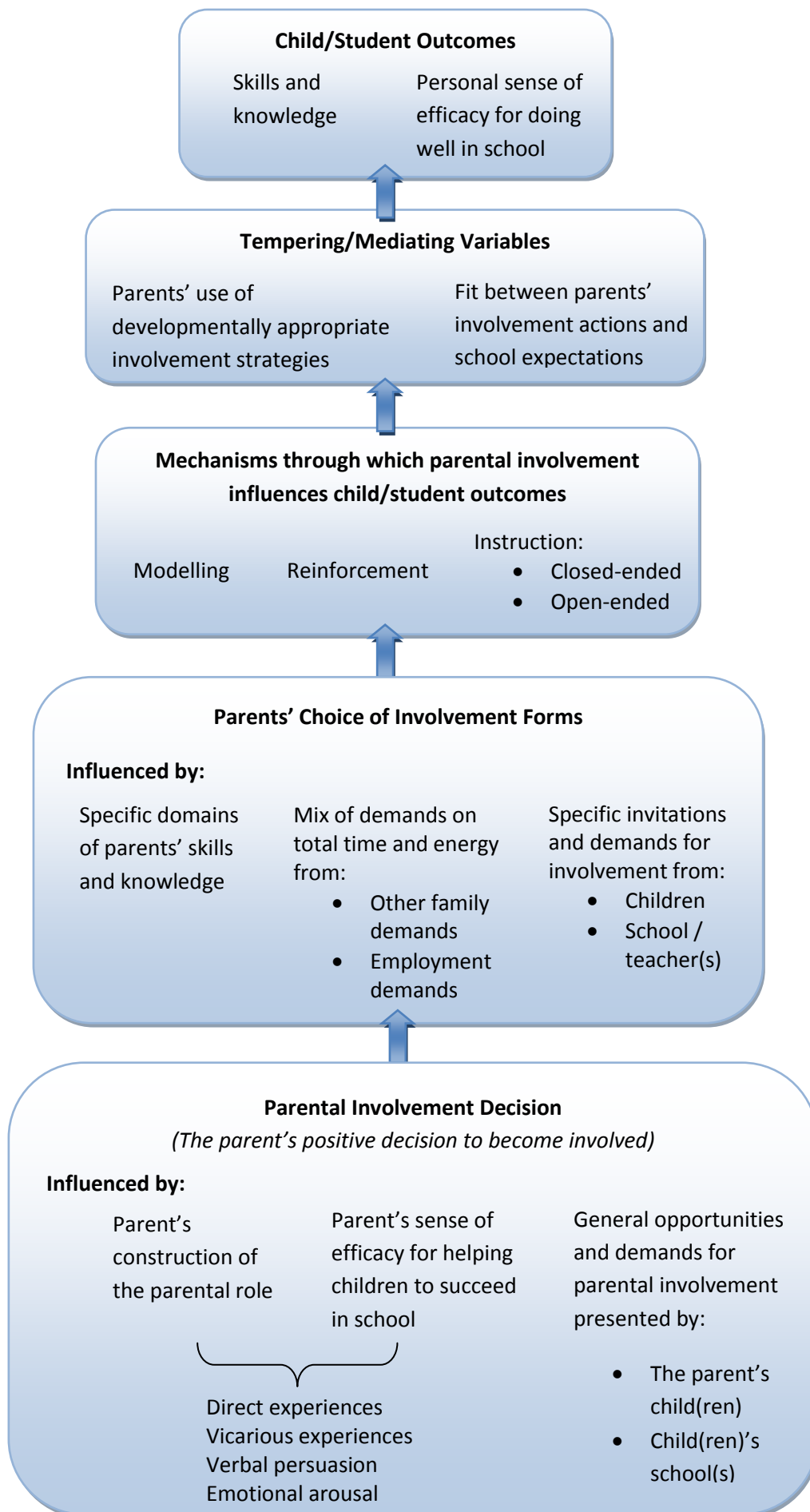


Figure 3. Causal and specific model of parental involvement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995)

opportunities to engage by both their children and the school (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). The authors also discuss a range of other influential factors presenting barriers to parental involvement including individual factors: parental experience of, and value placed on, education; social factors: race and culture, socio-economic status, external constraints (i.e. hours of work affecting opportunities to become involved) and school factors: school environment and staff unwelcoming and unconnected with the community (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995).

The research and theoretical findings from the parental involvement literature discussed here highlight the potential benefits of active parental engagement for children and young people's achievement and adjustment (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003) and indicate influential factors affecting parental involvement, affirming this as an important area of study. Approaches to engaging parents in education are discussed next.

1.4 Engaging Parents in Education

Due to the extent of research and theory surrounding parental involvement and the prominent focus within government agendas, approaches to developing and improving home-school relationships have received a great deal of attention and input (Bastiani, 1993). Typical methods used by schools to communicate with and engage parents (i.e. written reports and parents' evenings) have been described as providing restricted parent-teacher interactions and often excluding the students themselves from any active involvement (Munn, 1993a). Munn argues that these traditional approaches rarely reflect a reciprocal process, instead reinforcing passive involvement from parents, listening to and accepting the authority of the school and viewing teachers as 'knowing best', without acknowledging their own value as educators of their children. In line with legislation recommendations (DfEE, 1997), Swap (1990) describes how home-school interactions should reflect a 'partnership' in which there is an open and equal relationship that

recognises the role and expertise of all parties involved. Munn states that to be effective this kind of partnership must involve,

“...a shared commitment to means and ends, a joint understanding of the realistic and attainable goals for individual pupils, how these are to be achieved and the respective parts which teachers, parents and pupils will play in this process,”

(Munn, 1993a, p. 176)

Gill Crozier, a prominent researcher in the area of home-school relations, suggests communication as a key ingredient to enable schools and parents to work together effectively and proposes that more creative approaches are required to develop positive home-school relationships and gain holistic views of children and their needs in education (Crozier, 2000). Approaches to developing and improving communication links between home and school have been a prominent focus within education research (Hiatt-Michael, 2001). Papers such as Graham-Clay (2005) provide a range of strategies for teachers around supporting effective communication with parents, including more innovative methods incorporating modern technology (i.e. voicemail, websites and text messaging).

More formal initiatives such as the Home-School Knowledge Exchange project (Hughes & Pollard, 2006) offer an alternative approach to improving home-school communication and increasing parental involvement through the reciprocal exchange of information between home and school. Examples of such exchanges from school to home include: teachers video-recording lessons for parents to watch to increase their understanding of the teaching content and style; and from home to school include: children filling a shoebox with items related to their home for them to share with their teachers and class. Such approaches to increasing parental awareness of what occurs within the classroom learning environment corresponds with research findings that note ‘wanting to help’ and ‘making

sense of children's schooling' as a main priority for many parents (Russell & Granville, 2005).

Approaches to developing home-school relationships by engaging parents within schools have been explored within the literature. Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler and Brissie (1987) categorise four methods of parental involvement including: parent-teacher conferences (e.g. parents' evenings), classroom volunteer work, tutoring at home and home-instruction programmes. A review of UK education authority initiatives to engage parents also highlighted several common methods including: parent workshops, home-school agreements, home visits, family literacy classes, story telling, book events and after-school clubs (Bastiani & Doyle, 1994). There also appears to be a variety of approaches focusing on parental involvement around specific areas of learning need, including home visiting for literacy difficulties (Feiler, 2003), utilising maths homework as a vehicle for parental participation whilst enhancing children's learning (Merttens & Newland, 1996) and parental tutoring methods, such as paired reading to improve children's reading skills (Topping, 1986, 2001).

Originally developed by Keith Topping, paired reading has been used as an effective parental tutoring method for advancing children's reading skills through short daily reading sessions that follow a simple process of modelling, practice, feedback and reinforcement (Topping, 1986, 2001). The approach has shown to be highly effective, ensuring a balance between shared and independent reading and allowing the reader to maintain control through self-selection of reading material to support interest and engagement (Topping & Lindsay, 1992). The significant impacts of this approach for supporting children's learning have also been noted within the literature for other skills including spelling and writing (Topping, 1995).

1.5 Developing Home-School Partnerships

Arising from the literature are numerous considerations for ways to create the most effective home-school partnerships. Bastiani and Doyle (1994) convey that a high level of commitment and a positive school ethos towards parental engagement are essential for developing effective and successful home-school relationships. The need for a whole-school approach, driven by the head teacher and placing home-school links as a priority within the school development plan are also proposed along with utilising existing good practice and gaining parental views to ensure response to local need (Bastiani & Doyle, 1994). Practical considerations including having available sources of knowledge, time and materials have been discussed (Hayes & Chodkiewicz, 2006; McKenna & Willms, 1998; Van Voorhis & Sheldon, 2004), along with a particular emphasis on the necessity of time for teachers to implement such practices that acknowledge the constraints of the school day (Hancock, 1998). An interesting point raised by Hancock (1998) notes the need for teachers to receive pre- and in-service training and support specifically focused around developing positive home-school relationships and strategies to encourage active parental involvement.

Research exploring parental perceptions of home-school partnerships, such as Mapp (2003), have highlighted several key elements that appear to foster and sustain successful and trusting home-school relationships, including school practices that welcome parents, value their contributions and connect them with school community. Mapp identified a number of themes through parent interviews – parents wanted their children to succeed, had a desire to be involved with their children’s learning and understood that their involvement both at home and in school helped their children – that disregarded views expressed by some teachers that ‘parents don’t care’ (Mapp, 2003). Similar explorations of teacher attitudes towards home-school links, such as Pelco and Ries (1999), have indicated that teachers do value parental involvement but found that teachers perceived increasing

student age as a barrier to engaging parents and, as a result, made less frequent attempts to involve the parents of older students. The perceived reduction in parental involvement as student age increases may however reflect a less visible parental presence due to increases in student autonomy and more subtle support from parents. Using the findings from this study, and with reference to Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995) theoretical model, Pelco and Ries described three factors influencing the extent to which teachers engaged parents. The authors proposed that teachers are more likely to actively involve parents in their student's education when they: view collaboration with families as within their professional role, feel they have the necessary knowledge and skills to engage parents in the educational process, and view there is a demand and have access to support and opportunities to involve parents and families (Pelco & Ries, 1999).

Several important considerations around developing successful home-school partnerships are highlighted in the literature and it seems that acknowledging both school and family hopes and expectations for children's learning and development are particularly important (Keyes, 2002). As Hayes and Chodkiewicz state, "[There is a] need to break down the pervasive views that learning *only* takes place at school and that teachers are *the* experts when it comes to curriculum matters," (2006, p. 16). Keyes (2002) notes that students are most successful when there is continuity between home and school levels of support and influence. However, it may also be important to consider the level to which involvement and partnership between the home and school systems is pushed and whether there is a point when connecting homes and schools goes too far, as Edwards and Warin (1999) put it, 'the colonisation of the home by the school,' should be avoided.

1.6 School, Family and Community Partnerships

Literature exploring parental involvement in education appears to have steadily expanded its focus from interactions between the parent and the school to looking towards the wider

influences of the community on children’s education and ways to develop ‘school, family and community partnerships’ (Buttery & Anderson, 1999). With parallels to Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 1986) ecological systems theory’s different levels of influence on development, Epstein (1990) describes the interactive relationships between home, school, and the wider community as having, “...overlapping spheres of influence,” (1990, p. 100) on children and emphasises the need for positive relationships (see Figure 3).

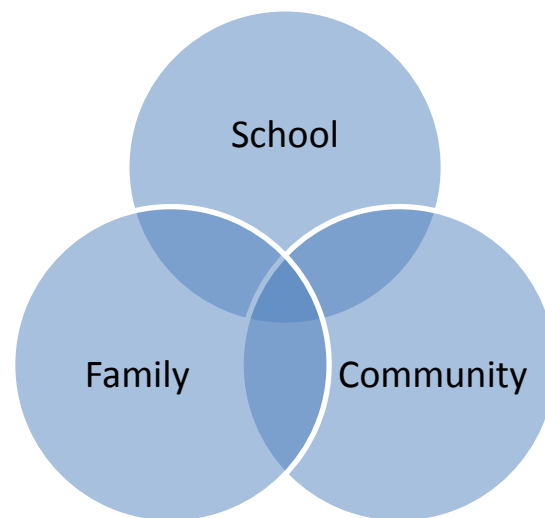


Figure 3. The ‘overlapping spheres of influence’, adapted from Epstein (1990).

School, family and community partnership literature builds on many of the fundamental principles described in the study of home-school partnerships – advocating the need for a collaborative ethos detailed as a priority for school development, adequate consideration of the challenges of creating partnerships and ways to overcome these, and ensuring support is tailored to the needs and resources of the local community (Epstein & Jansorn, 2004; Martin, et al., 1999). Martin *et al.* (1999) describe the most effective school, family and community partnerships as inclusive in nature with equal value for the school, home and community systems, encouraging active and democratic participation, involving communities in decision-making and presenting social as well as academic gains for students.

Theoretical models of parental involvement, such as Epstein (2001), have also been referred to in this area as providing frameworks for schools to assess their current links

with parents and local communities and guide their thinking around the variety of ways to develop positive school, family and community partnerships (Epstein & Jansorn, 2004). Epstein and Jansorn propose that at the framework's first level, 'parenting', families can be assisted with developing skills and understanding of child development, and at the 'communicating' level, two-way communication should be strived for to ensure easy access for all parties, along with involvement in decision making such as GCSE options and career choices. At the 'volunteering' level, Epstein and Jansorn suggest involving families as both volunteers and audiences in school, with opportunities for regular and occasional volunteers to suit varying family capacities whilst at the 'learning at home' level the unique 'funds of knowledge' (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) within families and communities should be acknowledged as well as the use of interactive homework to encourage parental involvement. With reference to the final two levels of the Epstein's (2001) framework, Epstein and Jansorn describe that at the 'decision making' level families can become participants within schools, contributing to school committees to ensure their voices are heard, and for 'collaborating with community' community resources can be coordinated to ensure fairer access.

Over the past decade, education policies and practice have contributed to this wider focus on interactions between schools and their local communities with publications such as 'Every Child Matters' (DfES, 2004) and The Children's Plan (DCSF, 2007) promoting school partnership with families, and initiatives including 'Excellence in Cities' (DfEE, 1999), Sure Start's 'Local Programmes' (DfES, 2003) and 'Extended Schools' (DfES, 2005) focusing on improving help and support for parents and communities, improving access to services and shaping services around community needs. The introduction of Sure Start Children's Centres (DfES, 2004) provided a unique approach to supporting communities by providing a range of education, health and work services based within individual centres around the country. Each centre's specific provision is devised based on a needs analysis of the local

area and informed by service user views to ensure support is tailored to the surrounding community. This focus working towards communities developing competence and self-help skills is also reflective of the current government's 'Big Society' approach (BBC News, 2010) and links with many of the principles of Community Psychology discussed later in this review.

The work of Keith Topping and colleagues around peer tutoring approaches, such as paired reading described earlier, reflects effective ways to involve parents, the wider family and the local community in supporting children's education (Wolfendale & Topping, 1996). Topping describes the benefits of peer tutoring as a 'non-professional' technique that can be, "...used by anyone, anywhere, with any material which is to hand and is of interest," (Topping, Dekhinet & Zeedyk, 2011, p. 153) thus avoiding large costs, specialist equipment or extensive training. Topping's peer tutoring projects, such as 'Read On' (Topping & Hogan, 1999) and 'Problem-Solving' (Topping & Hogan, 2002), have provided an active role for parents in developing children's reading, thinking and mathematical skills that values their contributions as parents and considers the wider interests of children as learners in the community. The extensive work of Topping and colleagues around peer tutoring and parental involvement provides some interesting considerations and practical approaches for the development of home-school-community partnerships.

1.7 Supporting Parents

Despite the prominent focus on schools developing relationships with parents and the community, support for parental needs and skill development appears mostly to be offered outside of the school environment. Direct support for parents is often provided through parenting programmes, such as the 'Triple P' Positive Parenting Programme (Sanders, et al., 2003) and the Webster-Stratton Parenting Programme (Webster-Stratton, 1998) which aim to equip parents with knowledge of child development and positive parenting skills, build

their confidence with parenting and improve parent-child relationships. Many of these programmes have been evaluated positively (see Moran, Ghate, & van der Merwe, 2004 for a review) and the positive and preventative benefits of such programmes on the outcomes of children, parents and families have been highlighted (Barrett, 2010), although there have been queries regarding the strengths of these impacts (Desforges & Abouchar, 2003). The notion of a 'parenting' programme does, however, reflect a 'deficit approach' towards parents as lacking skills and requiring training from others which may stigmatise those attending as 'bad parents'. There may be room for such programmes to work more collaboratively with parents and families, consulting with service users as to their specific areas of need whilst also considering their areas of strength.

1.8 Home-School Relationships Summary

This section has highlighted the substantial changes in the roles and responsibilities of parents in education that have occurred over the past half century through educational laws, research and practice. Government legislation has clearly had a marked impact with the early recommendations of the Plowden (CACE, 1967) and Taylor reports (DES, 1977) encouraging increased parental involvement, indicating the responsibilities of schools in engaging parents and advocating the need to improve home-school links. Government publications such as 'Excellence in Schools' (DfEE, 1997) and 'Every Parent Matters' (DfES, 2007) have promoted 'partnerships' with parents and highlighted the importance of seeking the parental voice and bringing their needs to the forefront in order to tailor services around parents and families. Research has demonstrated the many positive impacts of parental involvement on a range of outcomes for children and young people, particularly for academic attainment and adjustment (Desforges & Abouchar, 2003; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). The theoretical perspectives and models illustrated in this section have proved informative in developing thinking around parental involvement in education and highlighted important and influential factors that affect engagement

(Epstein, 2001; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). These models also appear to have value in providing guidance to schools on improving home-school links, alongside findings from other research around approaches to home-school partnerships (Bastiani & Doyle, 1994), developing communication (Hughes & Pollard, 2006; Munn, 1993a) and essential considerations for schools developing home-school practices (Mapp, 2003). This section has discussed the 'overlapping spheres of influence' (Epstein, 1990, p. 100) that the family, school and wider community have on children and young people's learning and development, approaches to developing family, school and community partnerships (Epstein & Jansorn, 2004; Wolfendale & Topping, 1996) and support provided for parents. The next section of this review expands on these wider interactions by exploring the role of applied psychologists in developing these relationships and supporting parents with their children's learning.

2. Community Educational Psychology?

This section will explore the role of Community and Educational Psychology in family, school and community working, initially defining these areas of psychology, exploring parent and professional interactions and finally discussing the role of Community and Educational Psychologists in supporting schools and communities.

2.1 Defining Community Psychology

Community Psychology (CP) – a sub-discipline of psychology – explores the relationships between people and their environments, focusing on the rights and active participation of individuals in creating social change. CP adopts a holistic, strengths-based approach to the promotion and development of competence and well-being in communities through collaborative, action-based research (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). The concept of CP was formalised in Britain by Bender (1972) who described it as, "attempts to make the field of applied psychology more effective in the delivery of [its] services and more responsive to

the needs and wants of the communities it serves,” (Bender, 1972, p. 212). Defining CP is noted as a challenge due to its nature as a ‘perspective’ or a ‘way of thinking’ that alters and evolves, rather than a fixed entity (Rappaport, 1977). Author of one of the first CP textbooks, Julian Rappaport has been a prominent figure within the field and describes three key themes of CP – human resource development, scientific inquiry and political activity – that are strived for throughout CP work balancing values, research and action (Rappaport, 1977).

2.2 Defining Educational Psychology

Educational Psychology (EP) reflects another sub-discipline of psychology that involves the application of psychology through exploration, support and intervention around a child or young person’s learning, behavioural, emotional and/or social needs in education.

Educational Psychologists (EPs) work with children and young people, parents/carers, schools and other professionals in a variety of ways through discussion of strengths and needs, problem-solving, intervention and training as well as statutory roles providing psychological advice for statements of special educational needs (Farrell, et al., 2006).

Although EP may appear more clear-cut to define than CP, the literature documents the profession’s own ongoing challenge to define the distinctive role of EPs and answer the recurring question ‘what do EPs do?’ (Boyle & Lauchlan, 2009; Burden, 1999; Cameron, 2006; Farrell, et al., 2006; Gillham, 1978; MacKay, 2002; Wood, 1998).

2.3 Educational Psychologists and the Community

The EP profession plays an important role in early identification, intervention and prevention to improve the outcomes of children and young people (Cameron, 2006).

Although working with parents has become a regular part of EPs work, there seems limited evidence to demonstrate how EPs involve parents and families in identifying needs, provision of support and developing understanding of child development to support

empowerment of the community. Within the profession, the importance of engaging and involving parents has been discussed prominently by Sheila Wolfendale (for example, Wolfendale, 1992; 1997). Wolfendale (1992) identified four principles to encourage parent involvement, including rights (involvement in decision-making), equality (equal status between parents and professionals), reciprocity (benefits for all involved leading to shared accountability) and empowerment (opportunities to develop knowledge and skills). These principles appear to relate closely to many aspects of the parental involvement framework developed by Epstein (2001), particularly enhancing working practices with parents around communication, skill development and working within the community.

As noted earlier with regards to the relationships between parents and teachers (Munn, 1993a), similar patterns have been found in literature exploring the relationships between parents and professionals, with parents often viewing themselves as passive recipients and the professionals as 'experts' (for example, Cunningham & Davis, 1985; Vincent, 1996).

More recent studies specifically looking at parental views of EPs revealed positive perceptions and comments from the majority of parents who were satisfied with EP involvement (Cuckle & Bamford, 2000; Squires et al., 2007). To maximise the success of relationships between parents and professionals and to ensure an 'authentic partnership' (Wolfendale, 1985) the literature proposes several important factors including: a strengths-based approach (Hartas, 2008), consensus around the purpose of the partnership, who is involved and why, equal power distributions, active participation in contributing to and receiving services and shared responsibility to ensure mutual accountability (Pinkus, 2005; Wolfendale, 1985). The consultation model (Wagner, 1995) adopted by many EP services would seem to support this collaborative, community approach.

The driving principles behind EP appear to reflect many parallels with the underpinnings of CP, and it has been argued that the origins of the EP profession were based around

community working (MacKay, 2006). The increasing focus of EP work on solution-oriented, systemic and consultation-based practice has been noted as opening up new and constructive opportunities for EPs to contribute within the community (Cameron, 2006; Kelly, 2000). Current perspectives look towards EP Services developing this CP approach (Jones, 2006; Stringer, et al., 2006) with increasing numbers of services becoming Community EP Services. Stringer, Powell and Burton (2006) describe the central goal of EP work as ensuring applied psychology is continually adapted to meet the needs of all children and young people, be supportive to the change efforts of all involved and empower others – reflecting many parallels with Bender’s (1972) own CP definition.

Within the literature, there appear several papers proposing the value of EPs adopting community approaches (Christenson, 2004; Pelco & Ries, 1999). In their exploration of teacher views and practices in engaging parents, Pelco and Ries (1999) describe EPs as holding a unique role in facilitating home-school collaborations. With reference to the three key factors highlighted as influencing teacher’s efforts to involve parents, Pelco and Ries state that,

“School psychologists [EPs] can begin to take active roles in expanding teachers’ professional role constructions to include more family–school collaboration, improving teachers’ feelings of self-efficacy for implementing meaningful partnership practices, and increasing teachers’ perceptions of invitations and opportunities for increasing family involvement in education,”

(Pelco & Ries, 1999, p. 274)

Pelco and Ries (1999) propose other practical methods for EPs to support family, school and community partnerships through encouraging families to communicate high educational aspirations to their children, support the development of a home learning environment and help schools to develop ongoing home-school communication. The

authors note that EPs can be particularly effective in supporting teachers to develop relationships and communication with parents, promoting self-efficacy and developing mutual trust (Pelco & Ries, 1999). Christenson's (2004) review of the systems and interactions and the potential barriers involved in parent-school partnerships also advocates an EPs role in supporting these partnerships and provides several suggestions for ways in which EPs may become involved. These include: actively advocating a family-school focus, raising awareness of both the benefits of home-school partnerships for children's learning and the underlying psychological principles (i.e. Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1986) ecological systems theory), creating opportunities to work with young people and families in the community and tailoring EP involvement to individuals, schools, families and communities (Christenson, 2004). The work of Keith Topping (1986, 2001) around parental tutoring for children's learning discussed earlier would also seem to reflect an approach through which EPs could provide a more community-focused role, supporting schools and parents to develop more effective home-school-community partnerships.

2.4 Community Educational Psychology Summary

Through discussing the definitions of CP and EP, this section has shown the many parallels between the two disciplines (MacKay, 2006) and highlighted ways in which the EPs can expand their roles towards working as '*Community Educational Psychologists*' (Jones, 2006; Stringer, et al., 2006). Reviewing the literature on the relationships between EPs and parents has provided a number of important considerations for EP work and the importance of EPs continuing to develop these relationships (Pinkus, 2005; Wolfendale, 1992, 1997). Literature discussing approaches to Community EP working appears to be increasing (Christenson, 2004; Pelco & Ries, 1999) but it seems that more is needed around ways in which EPs can work outside of the school system and within communities in order to support the profession's role in early intervention and empowerment of others to the full. Expanding research in this area will demonstrate the diverse roles EPs can adopt and

perhaps help the profession to finally answer that nagging question, 'Ok, then what do EPs do?' (Wood, 1998). The next section explores the methodological approach to studies around parental involvement and community working and discusses implications for future research.

3. Methodology in Home, School and Community Research

This section will briefly discuss methodological approaches to the study of family, school and community relationships and provide a rationale for the way in which the present research intends to explore firstly, views around current home-school communication and parental engagement and secondly, the role of the Community EP working with schools and families to support children's learning and development. This section is not intended as a full methodology.

Following a review of theory, research, policy and practice around parental involvement in education and a discussion of the role of the Community EP in supporting parents and schools, it is important that the present research considers the methodological approaches reflected within these areas. CP fits within the critical paradigm, its purpose to explore individual and group understanding of social and institutional systems by gaining individual beliefs, perceptions and experiences and seeking to voice the views and concerns of oppressed groups (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). This seems a fitting methodological orientation for the aims and research questions of the initial paper in the present research to better understand the needs of parents in a local community. The aims and research questions of the second paper in the present research to develop parental skills and confidence in supporting their children's learning and development reflect the principles of action research – research deliberately undertaken in an attempt to improve a situation (Lewin, 1946) – a common approach adopted by CP research. The participatory approach of action research seems appropriate for the present research as it involves working with

people to support change – to empower both parents and school staff to develop knowledge and skills to support children’s learning and development and create positive and effective home-school relationships.

The research methods within CP often seek both quantitative and qualitative data typically through participatory and action-oriented working (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). A review of the research methods employed by studies exploring parental involvement and home-school relationships appear to reflect this mixed-methods approach. Researching the effects of parental involvement on children’s achievement and adjustment has often involved quantitative measures (e.g. assessment and survey data) to produce statistical analysis (Fan & Chen, 2001; Pelco & Ries, 1999), whilst explorations of influential factors in engaging parents and the community have utilised more qualitative approaches through interviews and diaries (Hartas, 2008; Mapp, 2003). In their Home-School Knowledge Exchange paper, Hughes and Pollard (2006) advocate the value of mixed methods research designs for this area of study. Discussions around methodological issues are also present in this area of research (See Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Seitsinger, Felner, Brand, & Burns, 2008). The approaches and issues discussed in home, school and community research throughout this literature review provide guidance for the ways in which the present research could be studied most effectively. This appears to be through a mixed-methods CP approach, balancing the advantages of methods that gain wide-ranging views alongside in-depth experiences of members of the school and local community, and a participatory action-oriented approach to supporting parents with children’s learning and development.

4. Conclusions

Through prominent government agendas, policy and practice over the past half-century parental rights and responsibilities and awareness of the value of parental involvement for children’s educational outcomes has been substantially increased. The large body of both

theory and research in this area has enabled a better understanding of home-school-community relationships and practical approaches for creating and maintaining effective partnerships. Literature documenting the early stages of the EP role expanding into the community is promising, yet it seems there is much more work to be done. Reviewing the methodological orientations within this area of study also highlights appropriate means for future research and exploration.

This literature review has begun to answer my earlier questions: Why are there so often tensions between the home and school systems? How can these two systems better understand each other and work together more effectively? Is there a role for EPs outside of the school system and within the community? In what ways could a 'Community Educational Psychologist' be involved in supporting the relationships between families and schools? It has also given me guidance on ways in which I can continue to develop this area of study through my own research.

5. The Present Research – An Outline

The present research draws together the aspects discussed in the literature review by adopting a CP approach to exploring home-school relationships, the needs of parents in a local community and the role of the EP in supporting parents around children's learning and development. The research consists of two distinct papers:

- **Paper 1** will explore the views of parents/carers, school staff and children and young people around current home-school communication and relationships and the needs of parent/carers in the local community in terms of supporting their children's learning and development.
- **Paper 2** engages in a participatory action research approach to developing in-school support sessions for parents focused on building knowledge and skills to support children's learning and development.

This research will build upon current studies of home, school and community relationships, approaches to engaging and supporting parents in education, and the developing role of the Community EP. By utilising principles from CP, this research reflects a collaborative, action-oriented approach to supporting positive change by highlighting the voices of a specific community and developing parental support tailored to local needs. It has relevance to current social and political focus on parental rights in education and the 'Big Society' in which communities develop competence and self-help skills, as well as exploring the developing role of the EP profession and community working.

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