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***Older children negotiating relationships between home and school:
A questionnaire-based study of 9-12 year olds in Scotland***

Gale Macleod
University of Edinburgh

Carla Cebula
Glasgow University

Anne Renwick, Evelyn Love-Gajardo, Mhairi MacNeill, Cleo Jones,
City of Edinburgh Council

Antonia Clark, Rachael Laburn, Jennifer Harwood
Scottish Book Trust

Iskra Hearn
University of Edinburgh

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Older children negotiating relationships between home and school: A questionnaire-based study of 9-12 year olds in Scotland

Abstract

Most research into parental involvement and engagement examines the perspectives of teachers and parents, but often not pupils. Additionally, the focus is commonly on younger children. This study addresses these gaps. A questionnaire was distributed to pupils in Primaries 5, 6 and 7 (ages 9–12), which, after data cleaning, resulted in a sample of 842 responses. The questionnaire asked about frequency of and attitudes towards support with learning at home and pupils' attitudes towards adults from home coming in to school. Findings show that changes in attitude towards home support previously reported in secondary pupils are also evident in this younger group. The oldest pupils in the study showed increased apathy, but no increased embarrassment, about adults from home coming in to school. Most children were happy with the support they received, with children at all stages wanting more help with writing than reading. Implications for practice are considered.

Keywords

parental involvement, parental engagement, pupils' perspectives, home-school links

Introduction

The positive impact of parental involvement/engagement in their child's education is well established (Wilder 2014). Parents can support their child's education directly in a number of ways, such as helping with homework, and indirectly, for example by talking to their children about subject choice, and offering encouragement (Bakker and Dennessen 2007; Wei et al. 2019). However, there is a dearth of evidence on how older children (aged 9–12) feel about the different ways in which their parents support their school education. In particular we do not know whether the resistance to parental involvement often seen in adolescence is also evident at this earlier stage. This study set out to address this gap by seeking the views of pupils in the upper primary stage of schools across five local government regions. The project was carried out by a collaborative group involving partners from university, the Scottish Book Trust and a local government authority. While the terminology of parental engagement and involvement is used throughout, 'parent' is understood broadly as an adult in the home with parental responsibility.

Lying behind the First Minister's Reading Challenge for older primary pupils, launched in 2016 (<https://www.readingchallenge.scot/>), was a concern with the poverty-related attainment gap and particularly declining literacy rates amongst pupils in Scottish schools (Scottish Book Trust 2017; McGeown et al. 2015). At the same time Scottish Government policy highlighted the role of parents in raising attainment building on the *Scottish Schools Parental Involvement Act* (2006) which identified learning at home and positive home school partnerships as key areas, alongside parental representation (National Parent Forum of Scotland 2017). A review of family learning conducted by Education Scotland (2016) concluded that 'improving and increasing ways in which parents and families can be equal partners in their children's learning at home, school and in communities is crucial to raising attainment for all and closing the poverty-related attainment gap.' (2016, 4). An evaluation of the First Minister's Reading Challenge found that parent engagement was low, even where schools had taken steps to make parents aware of it. Lack of involvement of parents was attributed either to the extent to which schools had tried to involve them, or to parents' unwillingness to engage (Scottish Book Trust, 2017). How the children involved in the challenge felt about their parents being involved (or not) was not explored. The collaborative group agreed to conduct research into older children's views on their parents' involvement with their learning at home and at school.

While this research was conducted in Scotland and was prompted by an evaluation of a Scottish government initiative, the issues which it addresses have wider relevance. Importance of positive relationships between families and schools are recognised in Westminster policy (Harris and Goodall 2007), and in *No Child Left Behind* in the US (Mapp 2012). As Deforges and Abouchaar (2003) reported, the efforts to enhance parents' involvement in their children's education 'occupy governments, administrators, educators and parents' organisations across North America, Australasia, continental Europe, Scandinavia and the UK.' (2003, 7). A large proportion of research on parental involvement/engagement has focused on the early years (Gorard and See 2013; Hampden-Thomson and Galindo 2017), on the challenges of developing parental engagement, particularly with those problematically labelled as 'hard to reach' (e.g. Thomson et al. 2018), barriers to engagement (e.g. Baker et al. 2016), the nature of partnership between schools and parents (e.g. Authors, 2020) and avoiding deficit discourses around parenting (e.g. Gorard, See and Davies 2012; Goodall 2019). In this article we focus on research on parental involvement/ engagement with older children, but begin with an overview which highlights some of the challenges of research in this area.

Parental Involvement/Engagement

When researchers first explored the link between home and school, and how it might support children's learning, 'parental involvement' was the term used (Epstein 1991; Eccles and Harold 1993). Epstein's 6 types of parental involvement are *parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making* and *collaborating with the community* (Epstein and Salinas 2004), however others might describe the latter 3 types as examples of parental engagement. Ferlazzo (2011, np) suggested 'involvement implies *doing to*; in contrast, engagement implies *doing with*.' [italics in original], a distinction that is also present in Goodall and Montgomery (2013) who describe increasing parental agency as activities move along a continuum from 'involvement' to 'engagement'. For Goodall and Montgomery (2013) an important distinction is to be made between engagement with learning (any learning, anywhere) and engagement with school (supporting the delivery of the school curriculum). This distinction has found its way into Scottish policy, for example Education Scotland's (2020) guidance document "*What is 'Parental Involvement' and 'Parental Engagement'?*", however the Westminster government uses 'engagement' broadly to cover all of Epstein's 6 types of activity (UK Government 2011; DfE 2019), and in the US the shift has been from 'parental involvement' to 'family engagement' with an emphasis on the responsibility of community members (Mapp 2012). In the literature reviewed below the terminology used in the sources is maintained.

Research into parental involvement/engagement is plagued by this lack of agreed definition, but also by the multitude of activities or interventions which could come under the heading (Desforges and Abouchaar 2003). Methodological weakness is another concern (Fan and Chen 2001; Goodall and Vorhaus 2011) with Gorard and See concluding that 'There is no good-quality evidence that parental involvement interventions result in improved educational outcomes, in most age groups and for most approaches.' (2013, 4). More recently Boonk et al. looked at different types of parental involvement and found, as with lots of research on complex phenomena, the findings are 'full of inconsistencies' (2018, 11) which they attribute, in part, to a lack of a consistent theoretical framework.

Parental involvement/ engagement in late childhood/ early adolescence

Parental involvement with schooling has been found to vary with the age of the child. Research has consistently shown that parental involvement declines as the child gets older, particularly as they move from primary/elementary to secondary/middle school (Hill and Tyson 2009; DeSpain, Conderman and Gerzel-Short 2018, Wei et al. 2019). However other reviews (Wilder 2014; Boonk et al. 2018) have concluded that what changes as the child gets older is not the amount of parental involvement but its nature, with parents of older children more likely to be involved in discussions around education and offering encouragement rather than directly helping children with their work. Some studies have suggested that parental involvement with schooling also varies with the sex of the child, with parents of girls more involved, particularly in indirect support such as discussions around education (Stevenson and Baker 1987; Sui-Chu and Willms 1996).

There are a number of possible reasons for changes in parental support with school work as children transition from primary to secondary school. Some relate to structural differences in schooling as pupils move from smaller primary/elementary to larger middle/secondary schools with more teachers (Eccles 1992). Other reasons may relate to developmental changes. Young people may seek greater independence from parents (Wei et al. 2019); parents may feel less able to give support as the level of difficulty of school work increases (Wilder 2014); and adolescents may be less likely to invite parental help than younger children (Hoover -Dempsey and Sandler 1995). The suggestion from Klauda and Wigfield (2012), from their study of parental support for reading with older children, is that the relationship between support and outcomes is ‘curvilinear’ with the possibility that “extreme encouragement (or that which is perceived as extreme) may backfire by undermining a child’s motivation.” (2012, 37). Similarly, the danger of ‘over control’ by parents resulting in pupil disengagement is explored by Nunez et al. (2017) who argue the need to find an optimal balance of control and support.

Very little research has sought the views of young people, and where it has been done it is almost always as part of a wider study. In their 2007 case study evaluation of the ‘Engaging Parents to Raise Achievement’ project, Harris and Goodall included 124 secondary school pupils alongside parents and teachers. They found different views on the purpose of parental engagement amongst the three groups, with the pupils seeing it as being mainly about ‘moral support and interest in their progress’ (2007, 39). This corresponds to what Wei et al. (2018) describe as ‘academic socialization’ and the kind of parental engagement most associated with improving educational outcomes (Wilder 2104). Similarly, in the United States, Barge and

Loges (2003) included the views of middle school students (aged 11–14) and reported that for these students, ‘encouragement’ was seen as important, however they also found that ‘support with homework’, and ‘interacting with schools’ were experienced by pupils as helpful. The difference in findings between these studies may be a result of the slightly younger pupils in the US study, or possibly cultural differences.

However, a number of studies suggest that older pupils may not welcome parental involvement in their schooling (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler 1995; Klaua and Wigfield 2012; Wei et al. 2019). Crozier and Davies (2007) note the embarrassment reported by pupils from Asian families around the home-school relationship which could be understood as typical ‘teenage behaviour’, although they emphasise that the racial harassment experienced by these young people makes their reluctance understandable. There have been no studies exploring whether this ‘typical’ teenage embarrassment affects all pupils and not just those from minoritized ethnic backgrounds, and if so at what age it begins. As a result, little is known about how older pupils within the primary stage feel about home-school relationships, and whether the adolescent desire for greater independence is beginning to have an influence on this group, and therefore whether this is potentially an area of tension between parents and children at this stage.

The current study explored the attitudes of upper primary pupils (ages approximately 9–12), towards direct and indirect parental support with learning, and their parents’. Support that features encouragement is categorised as ‘indirect’, with ‘direct’ used to describe parental involvement such as help with homework and attending parents’ evenings. The aim was to identify what these pupils want from their parents and these relationships with a view to informing schools’ decision-making over the kinds of parental involvement or engagement activities to promote for pupils at this stage. The research questions were:

- RQ1: How are different types of parental support with education (direct and indirect) experienced by older children and does this vary with gender and year group?
- RQ2: How do children in the upper primary stages experience home-school relationships?

Materials and Methods

In March 2019 students on initial teacher education programmes were invited to help with the data collection whilst in their placement schools. A paper questionnaire was identified as the most suitable large-scale, anonymous, data collection method for use with young people.

The questionnaire was developed through a series of meetings at which each partner organisation identified issues which they would like explored. The age of the respondents and the completion of the questionnaire during class time meant that it had to be straightforward, easy to navigate, and able to be completed within 10 minutes. The final questionnaire¹ was in English, four pages long, with low density text, straightforward syntax and a large blank space on the final page for children to draw or write their own ideas (Bell 2007). There were five sections reflecting the various interests of the partners: 1) About you and the people you live with (no personal identifying information was sought), 2) Reading and writing at home, 3) Libraries, 4) Book and game gifting, 5) Adults from home and school. Although children aged 11 and over are able to answer most question types (Arthur et al. 2017), as many potential respondents were younger all but three of the 27 questions were closed, requiring yes/no/don't know responses, or selection from a short list. Complex structure and negative formulations were avoided (Borgers *et al.*, 2000) and the questionnaire was designed to avoid looking like a test or school work (Omrani, Wakefield-Scurr, Smith and Brown 2018). The questionnaire was piloted with three children in the target age-group and slightly older using a 'think aloud' approach (Bell 2007). As a result, the options provided in section 5 to answer 'how did you feel about...' were amended to *happy, nervous, not bothered, excited, and embarrassed*.

Ethical approval was received from the university ethics committee and participating local authorities. Information sheets and consent forms were provided to the student teachers to seek consent from their headteacher and the upper primary class teachers in their schools. Questionnaires were posted with pre-paid reply envelopes to minimize inconvenience and cost to schools. Student teachers were provided with a script to use with pupils which included that they did not have to participate, they should not write their name, and no one in the school would be looking at their response. Pupils who did not want to participate were told that, if they wanted to, they could use the blank space on the final page to draw whilst their classmates completed the questionnaire. In total 1,378 questionnaires were sent out in May and June 2019,

¹ A copy of the questionnaire is available on request to the the lead author

of which 903 were returned from 11 schools, including 2 which were not completed but had drawings on the final page.

The recruitment of participants can best be described as non-probability opportunistic sampling and therefore statistical generalisation is not possible. However, the sample size and characteristics of the participants and their schools (in terms of size, location and demographics of catchment areas) allows some confidence in the transferability of the findings. The respondents were evenly spread between primary 5, 6 and 7 (31.9%, 34.1% and 34.0%) and boy/girl (45.8% boys, 49.3% girls with 4.9% 'prefer not to say'). While there was attrition at each stage of the process, there was no pattern identified in the schools which withdrew, suggesting there was no systematic bias in the achieved sample. Individuals who had missing responses to the key dependent variables (preference for support with reading and writing) and demographic variables (gender, language spoken at home, primary class and support they receive with reading and writing) were removed (listwise deletion) leaving a total of 842 participants. No patterns were found in terms of who was more/less likely to complete these questions.

To investigate both direct and indirect parental support multiple dependent variables are used. Preference for frequency of parental support with reading and writing and feelings (happy, excited, not bothered, embarrassed, nervous) about parents visiting school to hear about what they are learning and to volunteer measure direct parental engagement. Feelings about parents attending a school concert or assembly capture indirect parental engagement. The core independent variables investigated across both direct and indirect engagement were primary stage, gender and language spoken at home. For support given for reading and writing at home we also considered the support they currently received.

Data were entered into SPSS and then imported into R for statistical analysis, primarily using the package *nnet* (Ripley and Venables, v 7.3 2020). Both bivariate and multivariate analysis were used to answer the research questions. A form of generalised linear model was required as the dependent variable, frequency of support preference, is an ordinal variable ('never', 'sometimes', 'often') and therefore cannot hold a normal distribution. Ordinal logistic regressions were initially carried out, but were found to violate the proportional odds assumption (Agresti 2012), therefore, multinomial logistic regression (MLR) was undertaken instead, where no ordering of the dependent variable is assumed. MLR allowed prediction of

the odds of being in one category of the dependent variable (e.g., often) compared to the reference category (never) when varying the independent variable and holding control variables constant (Azen and Walker 2010). Pearson Chi-square test for independence was used to address RQ2 and to further address aspects of RQ1 by identifying statistical relationships between two categorical variables (Agresti 2012). Analysis was undertaken using listwise deletion however this had no impact on the sample size for the MLRs, final sample sizes are presented throughout.

Limitations to the study include the non-probability sample discussed above. Additionally, the use of volunteer student teachers to administer the questionnaire limited control over how it was administered and what explanations were given to pupils. To mitigate this a script was provided for the student teachers to use. As with questionnaires generally this study aimed to describe the ‘big picture’ to look at broad patterns in what young people reported, and did not collect data which explained why young people gave the answers they did (Munn and Drever 1990). The connection between family resources and the parent-school relationships was not the focus of this study, but is an important consideration (e.g. Deforges and Abouchaar 2003). Measures of socio-economic background for this age group would typically be assessed through questions on parental occupation, education and income (Lien, Friestad and Klepp, 2001). Although some studies have utilised survey questions to gather such data from children in the top age range of our upper year group (primary 7 - age 11) (West et al. 2001) previous research has found a high non-response on these questions as age decreases, particularly for parental education (Francesco 2020). A final limitation resulted from the fuzziness of the boundary between indirect and direct parental engagement. As mentioned above, for the purposes of analysis, questions which mentioned schoolwork, homework, or learning at school were categorised as ‘direct’ parental engagement, with others (e.g. attending a school concert) were categorised as ‘indirect’. However, these are not absolute distinctions, for example a parent could help a child with their writing for pleasure, not for school.

Results

The pupils were asked about the frequency (‘never’, ‘sometimes’, ‘often’) with which an adult at home listened to their reading and helped them with their writing and how often they would like these things to happen (Table 1, by primary year).

Table 1. Frequency with which adults do help, and pupils would like them to help (as % of year group).

Primary Year	How often DOES this happen?				How often do you WANT it to happen?			
	P5 %	P6 %	P7 %	Total Count	P5 %	P6 %	P7 %	Total Count
An adult listens to you reading								
Never	34.9	46.3	55.6	386	27.1	38.3	52.8	334
Sometimes	40.5	33.4	32.9	299	41.3	39	35	323
Often	24.5	20.2	11.5	157	31.6	22.6	12.2	185
An adult helps you with your writing								
Never	23.8	19.2	23.1	185	19.3	21.3	26.6	189
Sometimes	41.3	49.1	50.3	396	46.8	49.5	52.4	418
Often	34.9	31.7	26.6	261	33.8	29.3	21	235

Pupils in all 3 years would like adults at home to spend more time helping them with their writing than listening to them reading but both the frequency and desire for these activities declines over the years. Pearson chi-square tests for independence show that for each activity older children are significantly more likely than the younger pupils to want less frequent support (reading to $\chi^2 = 48.4$, $p < 0.01$; help with writing $\chi^2 = 12.8$, $p < 0.05$). A much higher proportion of P5 pupils selected ‘often’ for both activities compared to P7 pupils with the opposite the case for those that selected ‘never’. Comparing the support that they would like to receive and what they actually receive, the majority of young people are happy with the support they receive across all frequencies, and where they would like a different frequency of support, broadly similar proportions want more and less (Table 2).

Table 2. All pupils, % frequency adult listens to child reading/helps with writing and child preference.

		Help received					
		Reading			Writing		
		Never n=386	Sometimes n=299	Often n=157	Never n=185	Sometimes n=396	Often n=261
Preference	Less	-	19.4	36.9	-	15.7	39.5
	The same	69.7	60.2	63.1	61.6	67.9	60.5
	More	30.3	20.4	-	38.4	16.4	-

To better understand the relationship between primary year and preferences for adult support, multinomial logistic regressions were carried out controlling for gender, language spoken at home and how frequently their adults are currently involved in these activities at home.

Two models were undertaken for each of our dependent variables, the second building upon the first by adding how much support they currently receive at home for the activity under question. The following tables present the coefficients and odds ratios (OR) for each independent variable. The odds ratio can be interpreted as that group's odds of having the preference for receiving help 'sometimes' or 'often' compared to 'never'. An odds ratio greater than one shows it is more likely and an odds ratio less than one means that it is less likely. For example, in Model 1, Primary 7 children are 0.36 times or, in other words, 64 per cent less likely (1-OR) than Primary 5 to select a preference for an adult at home to listen to them reading 'sometimes' compared to 'never'.

Reading

Table 3: Multinomial Logistic Regressions –Frequency child wants adults at home to listen to them read.

	Model 1				Model 2			
	Preference Sometimes		Preference Often		Preference Sometimes		Preference Often	
	β	OR	β	OR	β	OR	β	OR
Intercepts	0.22		-0.02		-0.92**		-1.92**	
Primary 6 (ref=Primary 5)	-0.46*	0.63	-0.80**	0.45	-0.34	0.71	-0.68*	0.51
Primary 7 (ref=Primary 5)	-1.01**	0.36	-1.82**	0.16	-0.85**	0.43	-1.58**	0.21
Girl (ref = boy)	0.48**	1.61	0.53**	1.71	0.50**	1.65	0.66**	1.93
Other/s (ref =English/Scottish only)	0.76	2.13	1.03*	2.81	0.71	2.04	1.00	2.71
English & Other/s (ref =English/Scottish only)	0.25	1.29	0.00	1.00	0.27	1.31	0.08	1.09
Actually gets support sometimes (ref=Never)	-	-	-	-	2.15**	8.56	2.28**	9.75
Actually gets support often (ref=Never)	-	-	-	-	3.10**	22.23	4.99**	146.51

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, $N = 842$

Models 1 and 2 (Table 3) demonstrate that older children prefer less support from their adults at home, even when controlling for gender, language spoken at home and the frequency with which adults at home actually listen to them read. In Model 1, it was found that children in P6 are 37% ($p < 0.05$) less likely to have a preference for their parents to listen to them read ‘sometimes’ and 55% ($p < 0.01$) less likely to want support ‘often’ than children in P5. A similar but stronger pattern is found for P7 children. In Model 2, the frequency that their adult/s at home actually listen to them read is also included as an independent variable in the model. There is a clear increase in the odds ratios for both P6 and P7. This would confirm our interpretation of Table 2, whereby most children are receiving the level of direct support that

they want from their adults at home, with older children wanting less support. Additionally, there is a very strong association between the frequency that an adult from home listens to them read and the child’s preference, with large statistically significant odds ratios for an adult listening to them read ‘sometimes’ and ‘often’ (Model 2). In both Models 1 and 2 being a girl has an odds ratio higher than 1 for preferences ‘sometimes’ and ‘often’ meaning girls are more likely to want their parents to listen to them read ‘sometimes’ or ‘often’ compared to children that selected they were a boy. In Model 2, where current support is included, this increases to almost double the odds of boys (OR=1.93, $p<0.01$).

Writing

Table 4: Multinomial Logistic Regressions – Frequency child wants parents to help with writing.

	Model 3				Model 4			
	Preference Sometimes		Preference Often		Preference Sometimes		Preference Often	
	β	OR	β	OR	β	OR	β	OR
Intercepts	0.53		0.29		-0.79		-2.09	
Primary 6 (ref=Primary 5)	-0.05	0.96	-0.25	0.78	-0.22	0.81	-0.40	0.67
Primary 7 (ref=Primary 5)	-0.21	0.81	-0.76**	0.47	-0.39	0.68	-0.91**	0.40
Girl (ref = buy)	0.52**	1.68	0.39	1.47	0.52**	1.69	0.52*	1.68
Other/s (ref =English only)	0.26	1.31	-0.13	0.88	0.14	1.15	-0.66	0.51
English & Other/s (ref =English only)	0.51	1.66	0.50	1.65	0.50	1.65	0.47	1.59
Sometimes (ref=Never)	-	-	-	-	2.12**	8.36	2.28**	9.80
Often (ref=Never)	-	-	-	-	2.58**	13.16	4.73**	113.84

* $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$, N=842

Earlier chi-square tests suggest that the older children are more likely to want less help from adults at home with their writing than younger children, however, Table 1 also shows that children seem to want more help from their adult/s at home with writing than listening to them read. Models 3 and 4 (Table 4) reflect this, showing a less strong relationship between primary year and preference than those found in Models 1 and 2.

In Model 3, there is generally no difference between primary years in their preference for help from their adult/s at home with their writing. The one exception is for P7 children who are significantly less likely than P5 children to select that they want help ‘often’ (OR=0.47, $p<0.01$). The only other significant difference is found for girls, who are 68% ($p<0.01$) more likely than boys to select that they want help with their writing ‘sometimes’, but no difference between girls and boys in wanting help ‘often’.

Similar patterns are found in Model 4 which includes the support they actually receive from their adults at home with their writing. Girls are more likely to want help ‘sometimes’ (OR=1.69, $p<0.01$) and ‘often’ compared to boys (OR=1.68, $p<0.05$). As in Model 2, there is a very strong association between the frequency that they get help with their writing and the frequency that they want help with their writing with very high, statistically significant odds ratios for receiving help both ‘sometimes’ and ‘often’.

Parents coming in to school: indirect v direct support

Pupils were asked whether an adult from home had come in to school in the past year 1) to talk to a teacher about their schoolwork (for example, at a ‘parents’ evening’) 2) to attend an event such as assembly, school play, concert or 3) as a volunteer helper. Table 5 presents the proportion of young people that selected ‘yes’ to each reason an adult from home came to school by primary year. Where this had happened, they were asked how they felt by selecting as many of the following 5 responses as applied: ‘happy’, ‘nervous’, ‘not bothered’, ‘excited’, ‘embarrassed’.

Table 5: Proportion of pupils reporting an adult from home had visited the school in the past year by primary year.

	See what they had been learning	Attend an event	Volunteer
P5	72%	86%	40%
P6	83%	82%	49%
P7	80%	85%	43%
N	827	826	832

Tables 6, 7 and 8 show the distribution of responses across primary years 5, 6 and 7 and tests for significant differences across these years (Pearson's Chi-squared test with Yates' continuity correction). Significant differences across years were found for feeling 'not bothered', 'happy' and 'excited' about adults coming into school. A higher proportion of P7 pupils selected 'not bothered' while larger proportions of P5 pupils reported feeling 'happy' and 'excited' for all three reasons for adults coming into school. No significant difference was found across years in reporting feeling 'nervous' or 'embarrassed'. Pupils in all year groups were most happy with adults coming in to see an assembly or concert (indirect support) and least happy with them coming in to see schoolwork (direct support) and this difference is most pronounced at P7.

Table 6: % of pupils reporting adults coming in to school to see what they have been learning selecting each response.

	Adult comes in to see what they have been learning				
	Happy	Excited	Not Bothered	Embarrassed	Nervous
P5	45.9	35.1	33.2	9.3	15.1
P6	38.6	24.3	42.5	15.1	13.9
P7	32.1	17.7	55.2	11.2	18.1
χ^2	8.96*	18.34**	22.67**	3.8	1.75

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, N=705

Table 7: % of pupils reporting adults coming in to school to attend a concert or assembly selecting each response

	Adult comes in to a concert or assembly				
	Happy	Excited	Not Bothered	Embarrassed	Nervous
P5	52.9	40.6	20.5	11.5	25.8
P6	41.1	33.7	29.3	11.4	30.5
P7	42.9	27.8	39.0	13.1	23.9
χ^2	8.03*	9.15*	20.6**	0.46	2.91

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, N=749

Table 8: % of pupils reporting adults coming in to school to in to help with activities in school selecting each response.

	Adult comes in to help with activities in school				
	Happy	Excited	Not Bothered	Embarrassed	Nervous
P5	48.6	29.2	36.1	6.2	5.6
P6	36.7	26	50.3	7.1	4.7
P7	36.1	15.1	47.9	12.0	8.5
χ^2	6.24*	9.82**	7.05*	4.02	2.18

*p<0.05, **p<0.01, N=479

Relationships between parents and school

The final section of the questionnaire asked pupils a series of yes/no question on their feelings about the relationship between adults at home and school (N=830). The data were analysed to identify any differences between year groups. There is a significant difference across years in wanting adults to come into school more often ($\chi=27.7$, $p<0.01$), wanting their teacher to let their adults know when they've done something really good ($\chi=9.36$, $p<0.01$) and when they are finding something difficult ($\chi=12.3$, $p<0.01$), and wanting school to provide activities that they can do as a family ($\chi=20.6$, $p<0.01$), with a higher proportion of P5 wanting each of these compared to P7. There was no statistically significant difference between primary years for selecting that they like to keep home and school separate, are happy with how things are, and would like their teacher to speak to an adult in their family more often. Low numbers across all years selected 'yes' for wanting their teacher to speak with their family more often and wanting their adults to go to school more often.

Discussion

The study investigated how older primary pupils felt about different kinds of support from adults at home, and relationships between home and school. We explored whether there were differences between boys and girls and between pupils in different year groups. Our findings show that the majority of young people are happy with the support they currently receive, and with relationships between home and school. Desire for support with reading and writing declines from P5 to P7, with the children in this study wanting more support with writing than

with reading at all stages. The girls wanted more frequent support than the boys with both reading and writing. Contrary to our expectations, we found no increase in embarrassment associated with adults from home coming in to school across the 3 years groups, although excitement around adults coming into school declined significantly. Finally, across all three year groups we found a preference for indirect support and this difference was most marked by Primary 7. While our analysis focuses on differences between children at different stages and attributes these largely to maturational effects, it is possible that school-based differences (e.g. in terms of expectations of pupil independence) between these stages also has some effect.

The bivariate analysis presented in Tables 1 and 2 shows differences in preference between younger and older primary school children but that the majority of young people are satisfied with the frequency of support they currently receive from their adult at home, for both listening to them read and helping with their writing. The strongest association with desired frequency of support for both reading and writing is how much support is currently reported. This association is stronger than between desired frequency and stage (P5, 6 or 7), whether a boy or a girl, and what languages are spoken at home. This could be interpreted in different ways. One possibility is that adults in the home are getting it ‘right’ for their child in terms of how much help they want. Alternatively, we could be observing children expressing a preference for what is familiar. In support of the first interpretation, our analysis shows that the level of satisfaction does not decline across the years, but the frequency of support does, suggesting that changes in support from adults at home is in step with changing support wishes of their children as they get older. It is not possible to know from our data whether this ‘in step’ change is driven more by the adults or the children and further research would be required to investigate this. What we can say is that for the majority of children in our study this is a ‘good news’ story that chimes with principles underpinning family learning practices that parents are the experts in their children’s learning (Auerbach 2010)

The decline in desire for support from P5 to P7 is already visible by P6 (age 10–11) but is more pronounced in P7 (age 11–12), suggesting a trend across all three year groups rather than a sudden ‘drop-off’ in the last year of primary school. Our findings therefore suggest that the decline in direct parental support (e.g., helping with homework) found in research with slightly older populations (e.g., Wei et al. 2019) is present from an earlier age. Our findings are also relevant to the debate about whether what changes is desire for support or type of support (Wilder 2014; Boonk et al. 2018). In our study boys and girls in all years are happier with

parents coming in to see concerts (indirect) than to see their work or to volunteer (direct) and this difference is largest by P7. The higher proportion of boys and older pupils in our study who selected 'not bothered' across all three types of in school events suggests that there may be both maturational effects and gender effects in terms of either the emotional response or their level of comfort in expressing an emotional response. In other words, older boys may genuinely be less excited than younger girls about adults from home coming in to school, or they may be equally excited but have been socialised out of expressing it. Another interpretation is simply that the novelty of adults coming in to school has worn off by time children are in the later years of primary school, having had six or seven years to get used to it. Interestingly although the pupils in this study were slightly closer in age (although still younger) to those in Barge and Loges (2003), our findings have more in common with those of Harris and Goodall (2007) in terms of pupil preference for indirect support rather than attendance at parents' evenings or help with homework.

An unpredicted finding was that the pupils in this study wanted more support with writing than with reading. The desire for support with writing declined less significantly than for reading between P5 and P7. It is not possible to tell from a questionnaire response exactly what 'help with writing' looks like for these pupils, and what kind of aspects of writing they want more help with. It could range from reading and commenting on drafts and helping plan stories, to correcting spelling, expanding vocabulary and supporting them with grammar and punctuation. The relatively high proportion of older children who report that an adult at home never listens to them reading, and are happy with this, may suggest that reading is seen as a skill which needs no further development once a level of competence has been reached, for example, being able to read independently and silently. Indeed, previous research (Martin-Chang and Gould 2012) suggests that children reading aloud tends to be viewed as an opportunity for skill improvement, rather than for literacy development which is more associated with adult to child reading.

Previous research (Stevenson and Baker 1987; Sui-Chu and Willms 1996) reported parents of girls as more involved in indirect support. Our findings suggest that the girls in our study are more likely than the boys to want help with their reading and writing, which we would characterise as direct support, 'sometimes' rather than 'never'. These differences remain even when current levels of support are controlled for. The role of gender identity in relation to education is complex, particularly as it intersects with ethnicity and class (Borg 2015). While

it is important to note the range of gender identities available and their fluid nature (Mac an Ghaill and Haywood 2007), our analysis is in keeping with the extensive literature which suggests that boys and girls are socialised differently and that literacy favours characteristics associated with a feminine identity (Jones and Myhill 2010). For example, McGeown, Goodwin, Henderson and Wright (2012), a study with a similar age-group to ours, found that feminine identity was associated with higher intrinsic motivation to read. Our study adds to the volume of evidence suggesting there is work to be done in addressing gender differences in attitudes towards literacy (e.g., McGeown and Warhurst 2020).

We expected to find greater embarrassment around home-school connections amongst older pupils, and that the typical teenage embarrassment identified by Crozier and Davies (2007) would be evident in our participants. However, there was no increased embarrassment found for any of the activities where adults might come in to school but instead a greater expressed apathy with a higher proportion of P7 pupils expressing that they felt ‘not bothered’. In addition, we found no overall difference in general attitude towards home-school relationships across the 3 year groups, although P7 pupils were less likely to indicate they wanted specific options when these were presented to them. This was particularly the case when asked if they wanted school to let adults at home know if they were finding something difficult, with only just over a third of P7 pupils saying yes. Overall older pupils want less communication between home, and the proportion saying they are happy with how things are suggests that this is happening.

Conclusion

This study examined the views of 842 upper primary school pupils through a short, age-appropriate questionnaire. Analysis showed that attitudes towards home school relationships found amongst older pupils in previous research are also evident in the pupils in this study. This suggests that changing attitudes to home school relationships as pupils go through the school system are not only a result of structural changes in how schooling is delivered, such as school size and number of different teachers, but are also likely to be maturational effects. In this study the change in attitude to adults coming in to school was a decline in excitement and increased apathy, rather than an increase in embarrassment. The implication is of course not that schools should stop inviting parents of older pupils in to school to discuss their child’s

progress, nor should they ask parents of older pupils to stop volunteering. However upper primary class teachers should not be surprised by any apparent lack of enthusiasm for these activities amongst their pupils and may want to avoid making assumptions about how their pupils feel about upcoming events.

The desire of pupils for more help with their writing was an unexpected finding. Further research would be needed to find out specifically what types of support are wanted. Nevertheless, our study suggests that schools may want to emphasise to their families the important role adults in the home can play with supporting older pupils' writing. Schools may want to consider working with families to identify literacy practices at home that support children's writing development. The finding that almost half (45%) of the pupils in the study never read aloud to an adult suggests a narrow 'skills development' understanding of the purpose of reading aloud. There appears to be an opportunity here for organisations such as Scottish Book Trust, along with schools, to celebrate and promote the value of reading aloud for people of all ages.

Overall, the message from our study is positive: adults at home are keeping pace with the changing needs of their children as they progress through upper primary school. Although the amount of direct support declines, pupil satisfaction with the support they receive stays relatively constant. These findings will be important for the design of any future interventions to support learning in pupils at this age as asking parents to become directly involved may have limited success. In contrast, highlighting to parents the importance of their indirect support and encouraging them to maintain it may be more effective.

Conflict of Interest Statement

There is no conflict of interest to declare

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