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An exploration into Year 4 pupils' perspectives surrounding how their parents help them to learn

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Abstract

This small- scale case study explores the perspectives of Year 4 pupils surrounding how their parents help them to learn. Initially, participants were asked to draw and annotate a picture of an adult who helps them to learn. Semi-structured interviews were then conducted to further explore pupils' drawings and annotations and to allow access to richer data. Pupils' responses were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) comprehensive guide to thematic analysis. Most notably, findings appeared to indicate that children may possess narrow perceptions of learning as they predominantly focused on traditionally academic areas when asked how their parents help them to learn.

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Introduction

There is general agreement that parents play a vital role in their children's learning with Harris and Goodall (2008) arguing that parental engagement is the single most changeable factor in the British education system. Whilst parental engagement is a well-researched field, the motivation to conduct this research emerged from the limited literature that covers pupils' perspectives. Flutter and Ruddock (2004) note that pupils are well placed to provide their perspectives and first-hand experiences and the data elicited from them could help to develop their learning.

This small-scale study was conducted in a one-form entry suburban school located in the east of England where I had an established link. In 2008, the school received an Ofsted classification of 'outstanding'. The aim of this study is to provide and analyse the perspectives of pupils surrounding how their parents help them to learn. Whilst the contributions of this research will be modest, it is hoped that the findings will help parents better understand their children's perspectives on how they help them to learn. Additionally, it is hoped that educators may be better informed to provide support to parents. After careful consideration of existing literature, a research question was developed:

What are the perspectives of pupils in Year 4 surrounding how their parents help them to learn?

Literature Review

Terminology

Learning

Given the title and the research question of this paper, it is necessary to define the term 'learning'. The term has multiple definitions that are contested within and amongst various disciplines such as

psychology, neuroscience and ecology. However, the word restrictions of this paper do not allow for an in-depth discussion of the multiple definitions of learning and the significant challenges they each may present. For this reason, Breedlove, Rosenzweig and Watson's (2007) definition will be used to aid simplicity and clarity. They define learning as the "process of acquiring new and relatively enduring information, behaviour patterns or abilities characterised by modification of behaviour as a result of practice, study or experience" (p.18).

Parental Involvement and Parental Engagement

Parental involvement is a multifaceted term encompassing a broad range of parental behaviours and parenting practices (Harris & Goodall, 2008). Consequently, literature has found it difficult to define the term consistently. However, it is generally agreed that parents must take part in an activity or event for parental involvement to occur. To aid clarity, Epstein (2011) developed a framework for defining six types of parental involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making and collaborating with community. As well as parental involvement, the term parental engagement is used frequently in literature and schools and, traditionally, both have found it difficult to determine and explain the relationship between the two terms. For example, Harris and Goodall (2008) reported that schools saw parental engagement as parents supporting the school, instead of a more equitable distribution of agency between the school and parents to support children's learning. Helpfully, Goodall and Montgomery (2014) draw an important distinction between parental involvement and parental engagement. They argue that parental engagement includes more than simply participation in an activity; it involves a "greater commitment, [and] a greater ownership of action" (p.400) than parental involvement. They have also constructed a continuum on which parents' involvement with school moves towards their engagement with their child's learning. This continuum emphasises and distinguishes between the active nature of parental engagement compared with the more passive nature of parental involvement. Additionally, it has helped the educational field to distinguish between the two terms and to understand their inherent interconnectedness. For clarity, this paper refers to any adult who has legal responsibility for a child as a parent.

Parental Impact

There is a substantial body of research that focuses on the impact of parental engagement on children's learning. Numerous academics, for example Groves & Baumber (2008), assert that through co-educating, parents can regenerate schools. Additionally, both The Schools White Paper (Department for Education (DfE), 2010) and The Field Review on Poverty and Life Chances (Field, 2010) highlight and reinforce the importance of parental engagement. These claims are not without significant evidence. Research examining the benefits of parental engagement has found that it has the ability to increase children's engagement and motivation with learning, boost self-esteem and raise both achievement and attainment (Fan & Williams, 2009; Kim, 2009; Goodall & Vorhaus, 2011). Arguably, the most notable finding rehearsed in literature has been parental engagement's ability to raise the educational aspirations of young people (Goodall & Vorhaus, 2011). To provide a comparison, the impact of parental engagement has been reported to be significantly larger than that of the quality of school a child attends (Okpala, Okpala & Smith, 2001). Importantly, this finding is evident across a broad range of ethnic and socio-economic groups**.**

Much research has aimed to establish the additional gain for children's educational outcomes that can be provided by parental engagement. Although issues with cross-cultural transferability exist, two recent systematic reviews in the United States concluded that general strategies provide, on average, three to six months additional gain for children's educational outcomes (Jeynes, 2012; Van Voorhis, Maier, Epstein, Lloyd & Leuong, 2013). For targeted interventions, the average gain was four to six months. Whilst the evidence appears conclusive, it is important to note that issues with both the design and methodology of these studies exist (Higgins & Katspipataki, 2015). Furthermore, when Gorard and See (2013) attempted to conduct a meta-analysis on parental engagement studies in the United Kingdom (UK), they reported issues such as high or unequal drop out and misuse of statistical techniques. From the above, it is evident that the impact of parental engagement on educational outcomes is difficult to measure. This difficulty is predominantly attributed to the large variation in approaches and evaluations, as well as design and methodological flaws (Higgins & Katspipataki, 2015).

Although there remains general agreement that parents play a vital role in their children's learning, due to the issues discussed above, there is less agreement surrounding the specific practices that have the largest impact. It is not appropriate, or within the scope of this paper, to examine and

critique parenting. However, the value of authoritative parenting in relation to children's learning is increasingly prominent within literature since Baumrind's (1971) initial research. Authoritative parenting is characterised by high demands, responsiveness, nurturance, acceptance, praise, warmth, as well as the setting and implementation of clear, fair and consistent rules (Baumrind, 1971; Goodall, 2013; Larzelere, Morris & Harrist, 2013). The list above is not exclusive and it is important to note that authoritative parenting, like other parenting styles, is dependent on a complex web of factors (Pinderhughes, Nix, Foster & Jones, 2001). The benefits of authoritative parenting on children can be extensive and include high self-esteem, self-reliance, self-control, maturity and independence (Baumrind, 1971; Harris & Goodall, 2008; Heaven & Ciarrochi, 2008; Larzelere, Morris & Harrist, 2013). Rosenzweig (2001) alongside others notes that these, combined with the positive attitudes towards school and learning that authoritative parents encourage, are related to high levels of student achievement. When relating authoritative parenting to parental engagement, Goodall's (2013) six-point model is useful. Authoritative parenting underpins the other five elements (learning at home, beginning early, active interest, high aspirations and staying engaged) and these interlock and complement one another. Whilst Goodall (2013) herself acknowledges that it is not a universal 'solution' to parental engagement, it provides both parents and teachers with a clear model that can be adapted for different individuals and contexts (Goodall & Vorhaus, 2011).

Barriers to Parental Engagement

It is essential to note that there are significant barriers to parental engagement but Goodall & Montgomery (2014) assert that these do not "reflect a [parents'] lack of desire to be involved in their children's learning" (p.402). Firstly, individual parent and family barriers exist and these include gender, ethnicity and socio-economic status (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018). However, arguably the greatest barrier in this category is the personal experiences of the parent(s) (Harris & Goodall, 2008). If a parent had a negative schooling experience, unpleasant thoughts and feelings may be evoked which could act as barrier to parental engagement. Secondly, Hornby and Blackwell (2018) note that factors relating specifically to the child such as age, behavioural problems and learning difficulties can also act as a barrier. Thirdly, parent-teacher factors can be significant barriers. For example, they may be unable to meet since the times of proposed meetings may conflict with working hours (Harris & Goodall, 2008; Hornby & Blackwell, 2018). Crucially, parents who do not speak English, or speak it as an additional language, may find it challenging to establish a relationship with the school, thus impacting their level of parental engagement. Finally,

Hornby & Lafaele (2011) note that historical, political and economic factors converge to form societal factors and these may also act as barriers to parental engagement.

Pupils' Perspectives

Whilst numerous academics have researched parental engagement, there appears to be minimal literature that includes the perspectives of pupils. Smith, Duncan and Marshall (2005) believe that this is somewhat representative of the field of educational research as a whole. Of the studies that do exist, to the author's knowledge, only one study with primary school children has been published in the UK. Chapman and Wood's (2009) research used a quantitative design and asked children to complete a questionnaire relating to their parents' involvement in their learning. Whilst the researchers reported that it was interesting to statistically analyse pupils' reports, instead of solely those completed by parents, they acknowledged that their research provided little depth. However, it offered a first step in incorporating pupils' perspectives when exploring how parents help them to learn. Additionally, they encourage conducting further research in the area, especially qualitative research (Chapman & Wood, 2009).

In line with article 12 of the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Children (UNCRC) (1989), the UK Government believe that by allowing pupils to express their perspectives they are encouraged to become active participants within a democratic society (DfE, 2014). Additionally, their contributions may improve achievement and attainment (DfE, 2014). As noted above, whilst the role of parents is a well-researched field, it appears to have somewhat neglected the perspectives of the key stakeholders, the children.

Methodology

Participants and Sampling

To gain participants, an information sheet with an attached informed consent form was sent home to make pupils, parents and carers aware of the research. The letter went home with 31 Year 4 pupils (aged 8-9) and 25 forms were returned. Of the 25, 12 were eligible for the interview stage of the research and this will be discussed in the ethics sections. From the 12 suitable, six were interviewed.

Intensity sampling was used as knowledge relating to the pupils' attainment was considered when selecting participants for interviews (Patton, 2002). In consultation with the teacher, children of different genders and currently attaining different standards were chosen as they offered the potential for a more representative sample. No child in the sample was eligible for pupil premium or on the school's special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) register. Table 1 provides key information relating to the participants.

Pupils name and age (years)	English as an additional language	School summative data
Anna (9)	Yes, Italian	Working towards standard
Lucas (9)	No	Working towards standard
Ariya (8)	Yes, Polish	Working at standard
Victor (9)	Yes, Chinese	Working at standard
Connie (9)	No	Greater depth
Tom (8)	No	Greater depth

Table 1: Participants Interviewed

I purposefully made the decision to include only one year group in the study to view and provide the perspectives of pupils the same age. Hornby and Blackwell (2018) note that parental engagement changes over childhood and therefore, being able to explore and represent the perspectives of multiple age groups would have been beyond the scope of this research project.

Qualitative Strategy and Design

This research was a small-scale, exploratory case study. Such studies are flexible and allow the "lived experiences of, thoughts about and feelings for" specific things and situations to be researched (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p.377). Through the exploration of multiple perspectives, such studies also allow researchers to access rich data (Bryman, 2012).

I used a combination of qualitative methods; a drawing task followed by semi-structured interviews. The combination of methods allowed me to gain a broader range of data (Wellington, 2015).

It is important to declare that I align myself with the interpretivist approach. Interpretivism places understanding at the heart of studies (Wellington, 2015). Additionally, Wellington (2015) notes that an interpretive researcher "accepts that the observer makes a difference to the observed and that reality is a human construct" (p.26).

Data Collection

Ethics are detailed under 'Ethical Considerations' and were carefully considered prior to data collection. The first stage of data collection involved a drawing task. The participants were asked to draw an adult who helps them to learn and to annotate their drawing. Importantly, I made no suggestions as to who this adult could be to try to reduce researcher bias (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011).

I used the data collected from the drawing task to identify my sample and to develop questions for semi-structured interviews. Then, I constructed an interview schedule to ensure that I did not miss any important questions (Denscombe, 2010). Semi-structured interviews are flexible and the data provided is often rich (Russell Bernard & Ryan, 2016). Most questions asked were open-ended to allow participants the opportunity to respond freely and to provide their perspective in the most convenient way (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). I was particularly conscious that children can be vulnerable to leading questions (Gallagher, 2009; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). I tried to avoid these by not providing the participants with examples of how their parents may help them to learn. Six individual interviews were conducted and all were audio-recorded to aid data analysis.

Data Analysis Techniques

I chose to analyse the data collected using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a popular method in qualitative research as it allows for the identification, analysis and interpretation of themes (Clarke & Braun, 2017). Braun and Clarke (2006) have formulated a comprehensive six-phase guide to thematic analysis which is detailed in Table 2. Importantly, it is easy for novice researchers to follow (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017).

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarising yourself with the process	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes	Checking if the themes work in relation to the codes extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to refine specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report	Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts relating back to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of analysis.

Table 2: Braun & Clarke's six-phase guide to thematic analysis:

Redrawn from Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.87

With regards to the drawing task, I used 'light touch' thematic analysis to analyse the annotations. I then used this data to formulate the questions for the semi-structured interviews.

After transcribing the interviews, I began to code interesting features and after several iterations, potential latent themes began to emerge (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I tried not to code the data to fit into any of my preconceptions and this is representative of an inductive approach to analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2017). However, it is vital to note that one is not able to be wholly free of their epistemological belief (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations must be the prime focus when carrying out research, especially when it involves children. Prior to any data collection, I considered ethics when formulating my methodological approach. Asking children about their parents and how they help them to learn can be a highly sensitive research area (Chapman & Wood, 2009). For this reason, in consultation with my personal tutor, I decided that I would ask children to draw an adult who helps them to learn. Then, if any children drew their parents, I would include them in my sample and potentially interview them. By taking this approach, I hoped to minimise potential ethical issues as the children interviewed had previously stated that their parents helped them to learn. This approach was discussed again with my personal tutor and a proposal form was signed.

After gaining the necessary permission from the Faculty of Education, I sought permission from the school. Firstly, I presented my research proposal to the headteacher and the two teachers of the class where I would carry out my research. The headteacher then signed a permission form to allow me to conduct the research and the class teacher signed my proposal form. The permission from the headteacher was sufficient for me to carry out my research without seeking informed consent from 'those who act in guardianship' (British Educational Research Association (BERA), 2018). However, due to the potential sensitivity of the research and vulnerability of children, I decided to send an informed consent form home (Punch, 2002; Wellington, 2015). After seeking permission from the headteacher, teachers and 'those who act in guardianship', I completed an ethics checklist which was signed by my personal tutor.

If 'those who act in guardianship' gave permission, their child was invited to complete a drawing task (BERA, 2018). Prior to the task, I explained my research and ensured that I was clear that the

children were under no obligation to participate. From the children that drew a parent, the teacher and myself chose participants to interview by using the intensity sampling method discussed in the methodology section (Patton, 2002).

I was acutely aware of the inherent power imbalance between myself and the participants (Karnieli-Miller, Strier & Pessach, 2009). I tried to reduce this imbalance by allowing participants to choose where the interview took place. By doing so, I hoped they would feel more comfortable throughout the interview (Wellington, 2015). Before beginning, I spoke through the participant information sheet and the participant was then invited to sign an assent form. By using this form, I acknowledged that the participants were too young to understand all elements associated with the research (BERA, 2018). Additionally, I followed Cohen, Manion and Morrison's (2011) advice when constructing an age appropriate information sheet.

All interviews were recorded using the school's equipment. The interviews were transcribed and the recordings destroyed immediately. I transcribed all data, not just the data that I thought would be most useful when viewing my research questions. The decision to transcribe this way was an attempt to reduce the reflection of underlying assumptions and thus researcher bias (Bailey, 2008). The transcribed interviews were stored on my laptop using a password protected app to enhance the confidentiality of the study. Additionally, pseudonyms have been used throughout this paper as Crow and Wiles (2008) assert that it is the most effective way to preserve participants' anonymity and confidentiality, both of which are essential ethical considerations.

Presentation and Discussion of Data

Data

Of the 25 children that were included in the initial sample, 48 percent of children chose a parent when asked to draw an adult who helps them to learn. The others all chose teachers or teaching assistants within the school. Of those who chose their parents, 100 percent of girls chose their mother and 71 percent of boys chose their father. These findings were analysed using a Chi-square test in an attempt to determine how likely the participants' choice of parent gender was due chance. Result: $\chi 2 = 6.122$, df = 1, p = 0.0133. The p value (probability) indicates that a significant

statistical relationship was found in the data between the gender of the child and the gender of the chosen parent.

Whilst the finding above is supported in literature exploring children's role models in educational contexts, it is necessary to note that the sample size of my research is small so is unable to confidently contribute to this body of literature (Dryler, 1998).

The data from the drawing task and interviews, following thematic analysis, are presented below in Table 3 and Figure 1. The perspectives of pupils with regards to how adults, specifically parents, help them to learn have been organised into three themes: Perceptions of Learning, Testing and Use of Technology. These three themes are now analysed and discussed both in relation to the research question and more broadly.

Theme	Number of children that mentioned the theme	Number of times the theme featured
Times tables	12	28
Reading/library	7	22
Spelling	6	14
Testing	4	6
Technology	4	5
Personality traits	2	2
Science	2	2
Other	3	4

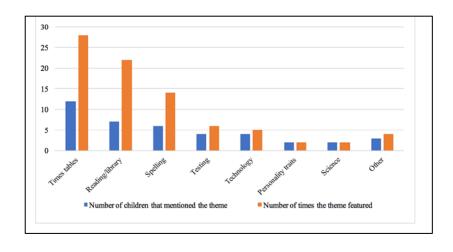**Table 3: Table of themes featured in the drawing task and interviews**

Figure 1. A bar graph to show the themes featured in the drawing task and interviews

Perceptions of Learning

As previously noted, the term 'learning' has multiple definitions that are constantly contested within and across disciplines. It is an extremely broad term and individual's definitions and perceptions of it differ.

Of the 12 children that drew a parent (when asked to draw an adult who helps them to learn), all included annotations relating to the National Curriculum. The data collected demonstrates a strong focus on numeracy and literacy. One child wrote that his mother "helps with reading comprehension [and] helps with my spellings". Another child noted that "she [the child's mother] helps me in spelling and grammar". With regards to mathematics, overwhelmingly, every child wrote that their chosen parent helps them with mathematics and to learn their times tables. This focus was also demonstrated across the interviews when I asked children to explain what they drew, for example:

> *I drew my mum and I drew my mum because she helps me and teaches me strategies and*
> *my curly handwriting. (Ariya)*
>
> *I drew my dad because he helps me to do maths and literacy. (Victor)*
>
> *He helps me in English and when I'm doing my homework. Yesterday, he helped me learn*
> *decimals and factions. Also in English, when we do story writing, he sometimes comes to*
> *check my books. (Tom)*
>
> *Mum, because she helps me practise my times tables. (Lucas)*

To my knowledge, there is no existing literature surrounding pupils' perspectives on how their parents help them to learn. However, Kanyal and Cooper (2010) used a 'Mosaic approach' to explore children's perceptions of their school experience in England. They reported that most pupils drew pictures that showed them engaged in numeracy and/or literacy. Additionally, when they were asked to take photographs of areas and/or things that helped them learn, they most frequently photographed the whiteboard, the book area and the phonics area (Kanyal & Cooper, 2010). These findings, combined with those of this study, appear to indicate that children may possess narrow perceptions of learning and that these perceptions predominately focus on traditionally academic areas.

With the above in mind, it is useful to consider Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory. His theory suggests that a child's development, and therefore perceptions, are influenced by their

surrounding environment. The model consists of five environmental systems that interact: the chronosystem, macrosystem, exosystem, mesosystem and microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The macrosystem refers to the culture in which individuals live and this is underpinned by ideologies, values and beliefs (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In education, macro-level policies and organisations may influence pupils' perceptions of learning. For example, many argue that the 2014 National Curriculum places a greater emphasis on mathematics and English and, consequently, the curriculum has been narrowed (National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT), 2017; Cairns, 2018). Additionally, in a recent analysis, Bloom (2017) highlighted that "subjects other than maths and English are barely mentioned in the key findings of Ofsted inspection reports" (p.1). Bloom further notes that science was only mentioned in three percent of reports and languages, geography and history were referred to less frequently. One interpretation could be that subtle messages, regarding the importance of mathematics and English, are spread by macro-level policies and organisations. These may filter down through the microsystem (parents and teachers) and influence children's perception of learning.

Whilst all 12 participants referred to mathematics and/or English when asked to explain how their parents helps them to learn, only two children mentioned other activities without being explicitly asked. One boy wrote that his mother "helps with Lego and models" and another noted that his mother helps him with "running and swimming". Towards the end of interviews, I explicitly asked children if they did any activities/clubs, for example:

Interviewer: Do you do anything other than maths and literacy with your dad?

Tom: *We sometimes draw pictures and create models like once we made a rocket and we fired it into the air and it accidently landed in the neighbour's garden!*

Interviewer: Wow! Did building the rocket help you to learn?

Tom: *Yes, I learnt some science and DT.*

Interviewer: Do you do any clubs?

Anna: *I do piano on Mondays after school, basketball on Tuesday, swimming and Brownies on Thursday and choir on Friday before school.*

Interviewer: Do you learn in these?

Anna: *I learn lots of tunes that I practise at home and I can do breaststroke.*

Whilst pupils' perceptions of learning and how their parents help them to learn seem to focus predominately on mathematics and English, it appears that the parents of the children interviewed

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are actually helping them to learn in a variety of ways; for example, through joint activities and the facilitation of extra-curricular clubs (Goodall, 2013). Interestingly, a recent study posited that children aged four understood the interconnectedness between play and academic learning (Pyle & Alaca, 2018). Whilst learning environments change as children get older, they may face greater exposure to the macrosystem and interpret messages in a more cognitively advanced way. Using Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model, this exposure may help to explain the narrow perceptions and academic focus of learning that seemed to be demonstrated in the data.

Testing

During the interviews, five children reported that their parents gave them times tables tests at home, for example:

Interviewer:	Ok, so how does she help you with your times tables?
Connie:	She reads out tests to me and I have to do them and she times the tests.
Interviewer:	I see, how does that help you to learn?
Connie:	I get to practise them so I'm ready when we do alls and purple mash speed tests.
Interviewer:	Do you enjoy practising them?
Connie:	Yeah, it's quite fun if I can beat the clock.

Interviewer:	How does she help you with your times tables?
Lucas:	Err, we say them together and then I have tests.
Interviewer:	How do the tests work?
Lucas:	She reads them out and then I've got to try to answer them.
Interviewer:	Ah, how do you find the tests?
Lucas:	They're ok, I need to practise them because [named teacher] has told me to.

The school in which this research was conducted placed a strong emphasis on times tables. Children were asked to practise at home and were tested and timed every Friday. It is widely agreed that times tables are an integral part of mathematical knowledge as they form the basis of much of what children learn in mathematics throughout their school life (Haylock, 2014). Consequently, from June 2020, Year 4 pupils will be required to sit a mandatory multiplication tables check (DfE, 2018). The children interviewed did not appear to be overly concerned by the tests that their parents gave them, with Connie even reporting that they can be fun. This may reflect that they understand

the importance of practising their times tables and see their parents as a useful facilitator/resource in this process.

Whilst attitudes towards times tables tests at home seemed to be relatively positive, two children appeared to speak less positively about the impact of other tests their parents gave them:

Ariya:	Sometimes they [her parents] just push me so hard and give me so much to do because they want me to succeed and want me to get the idea and get used to it, to how a test would be in, like, SATs or something. They're just trying to make you get the idea in tests.
Interviewer:	Do you think these tests help you to learn?
Ariya:	Maybe sometimes but they are so hard. Dad just pulls a random number out of his head but he makes it as complicated and random as he can so they can push me to the idea that these are they type of questions I will get when I'm older.

Tom:	I did a bar chart test after we finished our chapter but it was too hard. I'm doing a fraction test with dad in 15 days.
Interviewer:	Did the bar chart test help you to learn?
Tom:	I couldn't do it, it was too hard.

It is hard to determine how affected, if at all, Ariya and Tom are by the administration of tests by their parents. However, Raufelder, Regner and Wood (2018) note that due to the competitive nature of the current education system and the number of tests that are conducted, many pupils report feelings of both stress and anxiety and the children both hinted at this. Similarly to its application in the analysis of pupils' perceptions of learning, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model may shed some light when discussing these extracts. Summative assessment data is central to macro-level policies and organisations and the lives of individuals can be, in part, determined by their performance in these tests (Putwain, 2008). It may be that the perceived importance of these tests is filtering down from the macrosystem to influence parenting decisions. Whilst the purpose of this paper is not to critique parenting, it is interesting that pupils appeared to suggest that the times tables tests helped them to learn but that tests not directly encouraged by the school did not. Upon deeper analysis, it may be that they can see the importance and use of times tables test as they use them almost daily and are encouraged to practise by their teachers. This may provide an explanation as to why the pupils appeared to suggest that the administration of times tables tests by their parents help them to learn whereas the administration of other tests did not.

The Use of Technology

Technology is fast becoming an essential and ubiquitous part of education in the UK. In 2015, it was reported that there were 83,885 'educational' apps available to download (Olmstead & Atkinson, 2015). Furthermore, there are many websites that solely provide educational resources for primary school aged children. During the interviews, four children spoke about how their parents help them to learn through the use of technology, for example:

> Anna: So, we were together doing a PowerPoint and she was helping me to learn and we were talking together about it and we were discussing about how we could add things in.
>
> Connie: When I was doing the home learning grid on the Tudor sailors we went on the Golden Hinde website to look up what life was like for the sailors and to see their punishments.

Both Anna and Connie used the word 'we' when referring to the use of technology in their learning. It may be that due to their age, their parents supervise and choose to facilitate their use of technology through joint activities. Goodall and Montgomery (2014) note that joint activities are a key characteristic of parental engagement and that they are effective in increasing children's own engagement with learning. Furthermore, joint activities provide openings for dialogue, as Anna's response explicitly highlighted. In relation to this, it is interesting to briefly consider the perspectives of Vygotsky and Piaget. For Vygotsky (1978), dialogue allows children opportunities to interact with more able members of society and consequently for higher order functions to develop. For Piaget (1932; 1985), through dialogue, children may experience sociocognitive conflict that they must assimilate and accommodate which enables learning to occur (Doise, Mugny, St-James-Elmer, Elmer & Mackie, 1984). With these perspectives in mind, it may be that the children stated that technology helps them to learn as they often access it jointly with their parents and engage in dialogue with them.

Critical Analysis of Methodology

Firstly, it is essential to note that the findings of this study cannot be generalised as the research had a small sample size and was only conducted in one school (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Furthermore, the study only focused on the perspectives of Year 4 pupils. Although efforts were made to represent different attainment standards and genders, the findings do not represent the

perspectives of those who are eligible for pupil premium, on the SEND register or of different ages. Additionally, this research was not longitudinal so is only able to provide a 'snapshot' of the current perspectives held by pupils (Bryman, 2012). In answer to the above, future research should include a significantly larger sample size and explore perspectives in multiple schools and across a more diverse range of pupils. As noted earlier, Hornby and Blackwell (2018) argue that parental engagement changes over childhood so the use of a longitudinal study would also be beneficial to this area of research.

With regards to methods, the use of drawings and semi-structured interviews were successful in eliciting pupils' perspectives surrounding how their parents help them to learn. Elden (2012) notes that drawing tasks can be a fun way of "revealing experiences and perspectives while at the same time democratically involving children as producers of knowledge" (p.68) and I feel that this was the case in this research. Additionally, the use of semi-structured interviews allowed access to rich data through freedom of expression (Denscombe, 2010). Whilst the combination of methods allowed me to gain a broader range of data, I believe that the use of a questionnaire could have been beneficial. Questionnaires would have provided me with quantitative data that could have been triangulated with the qualitative data I collected. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) note that triangulation allows for a fuller "view of the complexity of human behaviour and of situations in which human beings interact" (p.195). Additionally, the greater the number of contrasting methods, the greater the confidence in the findings (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011; Wellington, 2015). Whilst the use of a questionnaire would have aided triangulation, it is essential to note that they have significant drawbacks. It is well supported in research methodology literature that questionnaires provide limited insight into participants' thoughts and feelings as they do not allow freedom of expression (Bryman, 2012).

During the interview process, some children found a few of the questions difficult to respond to. As a result, I had to reword some questions and this may have led them to a certain answer. This could be representative of researcher bias in the form of leading questions and question-order bias (Jackson & Greene, 2017). Furthermore, when following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase guide, I occasionally found it challenging to organise themes in a meaningful way. This is supported by Nowell, Norris, White and Moules (2017) who note that thematic analysis' "flexibility can lead to inconsistency and a lack of coherence when developing themes derived from the research data" (p.2). Due to the challenges, it is possible that elements of confirmation bias may

have occurred (Wellington, 2015). Additionally, there were a number of intriguing themes that emerged when analysing the data however, regrettably, I was unable to explore these due to the constraints of the paper.

As an alternative to 'validity' and 'reliability' which are commonly used in quantitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) developed 'trustworthiness' for qualitative research. There are four key elements to consider when analysing the 'trustworthiness' of one's study: credibility, confirmability, dependability and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As mentioned above, although triangulation (a drawing task and interviews) was used, the study may have had enhanced credibility if a questionnaire had also been included (Patton, 2002). When considering confirmability, I have been open with the approach that I align myself with and have been critical of the methods used. Furthermore, I have included frequent direct quotes from participants when presenting the data (Wellington, 2015). With regards to the study's dependability, I tried to ensure that the methodology section was comprehensive so that replication could occur. Finally, I found it challenging to enhance the transferability of this study. It has been difficult to determine which aspects of my research could be transferred to other contexts and this is a well-rehearsed challenge in research methodology texts (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

Conclusion and Implications for Professional Development

Through the use of qualitative methods, this study aimed to explore Year 4 pupils' perspectives surrounding how their parents help them to learn. The findings appeared to indicate that children may possess narrow perceptions of learning as they predominantly focused on traditionally academic areas when asked how their parents help them to learn. When considering this finding in relation to my future practice, I hope to broaden children's perceptions of learning. I aim to help my pupils understand that learning occurs in all the experiences they gain, both inside and outside school. It was challenging to provide a plausible explanation for the data presented within the theme of 'testing'. However, the type of tests given to the children by their parents appeared to determine if they thought they were learning or not. From this finding, I will carefully consider the use of tests within my classroom. Furthermore, if appropriate, I feel better informed to advise parents with regards to home testing. When analysing data relating to the use of technology, it appears that children thought they learnt through collaboration and dialogue with their parents. This finding has further highlighted the importance of using talk partners and creating a dialogic classroom.

Additionally, I will consider providing children with access to the internet more frequently to increase their engagement with and enjoyment of learning.

Whilst this research has a number of limitations, overall I believe that through the use of qualitative methods I have gained valuable insights into children's perspectives surrounding how their parents help them learn. The findings summarised above may help parents to better understand their children's perspectives. Additionally, educators may be better informed to provide support to parents. Most significantly for me, this research has further highlighted the importance of gaining pupils' perspectives. I believe that it is vital to provide children with a voice whilst they are young if we expect them to become active participants within a democratic society (DfE, 2014). Therefore, I will encourage pupils to share their perspectives within the classroom, the whole-school, the community and wider society.

As previously noted, the contribution of this research paper to the field is modest. However, to my knowledge, it was the first qualitative study in the UK to explore pupils' perspectives relating to how their parents help them to learn and it has provided intriguing data relating to the research question. Future research could consider the further use of qualitative research methods and a larger sample size to better capture pupils' perspectives of how their parents may help them to learn. This research may help to shape interactions between schools, parents and pupils and could ultimately improve the educational outcomes for some children.

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